DIGITAL SOCIETIES 数字社会

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The Galapagos syndrome refers to the occurring phenomenon in several Japanese technologies, which undertake a separate evolutionary process from the rest of the world, strongly specializing in local characteristics and markets, yet never achieving expansion outside its own territory[1]. It was originally coined referring to mobile technologies, given they developed a series of technological advancements[2] that were not exported due to their specificity in protocols, carrier commercial models[3], and design and user experience. The protectionist measures imposed by the Chinese government have allowed national companies to follow a very similar pattern: the phylogenetic evolution of products and services that adapt and respond to local needs, protected from the foreign competition financially and ideologically established. In China, several companies such as *Tencent*, *Baidu*, or *Alibaba*, imitated western tech companies and adapted their functionalities and business models based on the context and local influences, developing and evolving to such extent that they now look outwards to expand outside their technological island (*TikTok* or *WeChat*, for example).

The fact that, given certain conditions, such patterns repeat themselves, might serve as an indication of the inextricable relationship between local culture and technology. Particularly in our case of study, social media imply a series of assumptions regarding

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[1] The term emerges from a metaphor drawn from Darwin's observations about the Galapagos Island fauna, and how it evolved in a very different way from the continental one. https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/20/technology/20cell.html?em https://www.itworldcanada.com/blog/how-galapagos-syndrome-inhibits-japanese-mobile-tech/86364

[2] 1998 – first video call between cellphones, 2000 – first commercially massive cellphone, 2001 – first 3g cellphone, 2005 – widespread implementation of cellphones with live tv signal and digital wallet payment system. From Techaltar, *The rise and fall of Japanese phone Giants* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voyuy1rySX4

[3] In contrast with the west, pone carriers built a proprietary network that provided services such as: email with a separate protocol from SMS, *I-mode* or a mobile special version of the web, weather service, mobile payments, etc. All of these were operated and monetized by the carriers, different from the western standard in which the carrier was a mere bandwidth provider, without any property on software or mobile apps. In 2008, with the iPhone and Android arrival, the systems and services provided were deeply incompatible (and still are, as they continue to survive)

social interaction that prove not to be universal. Despite the fact of their homogenization and standardization may lead us to forget about it, social media profess the ideology of governments, private enterprises, and particular socio-cultural groups[4]; and materialize at the level of network protocols, operative systems, interfaces, and user experience. Although they may seem as emerging from a void of neutral morality, platforms still manifest ideologies regarding the individual, their desire, and motivations. The fact that social media presents itself in an intuitive fashion, without any entry barrier or learning curve, is all a planned decision. Said condition implies that they are assimilated and interiorized, they stop being an external and applied tool, and become a vital infrastructure instead[5], so ubiquitous and intuitive that tends to erase their intermediary layer: patented smart-screen gestures are learned and automatized by our bodies[6], the mobile device with which we access to them is part of our basic expenses[7], becoming a bodily extension.

There are several criticisms[8] to the vertical model of social media between the companies and those who use them. The adoption of social media as a functional part of our every day lives may occlude that their design and algorithmic architecture are determined by

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[4] An example of this can be seen in image recognition through artificial intelligence. By showing an image of Manet's *Olympia*, the machine recognizes a 'burrito'. This is due to 'burrito' being a relevant object class for a young, tech savvy person from the San Francisco Bay area, where the contemporary burrito was invented, alongside the image recognition algorithms. Trevor Plagen, in *Invisible Images (Your pictures are looking at you)*, https://thenewinquiry.com/invisible-images-your-pictures-are-looking-at-you/

[5] Here we refer to the *Pyramid of Technology* proposed by *Koert van Mensvoort*, where technology is organized according to different levels: imagined technologies (such as quantum computers), operational (lab meat), applied (saving lightbulbs), accepted (nuclear energy), vital (cellphones or cars), Invisibles (writing), naturalized (cooking). The progression of technologies through the different levels depending on their success, compatibility with pre-existing systems, and assimilation times. https://www.mensvoort.com/home/pyramid-of-technology

[6] In his performance *What shall we do next*, Julien Prévieux compiles an archive of gestures that have been patented by tech companies, and that are used in relation to interfaces or operative systems of their property. In it, he explores the paradoxical aspect of a gesture both being fleeting yet legally binding, and at the same time incorporated in our body memory. https://vimeo.com/59793317

[7] In Colombia, there are more cellphone lines than inhabitants, with 1,2 lines per person. In China, the ratio is 1,14 per person. https://www.statista.com/statistics/278204/china-mobile-users-by-month/#:~:text=As%20of%20November%202020%2C%20about,had%20been%20registered%20in%20China.&text=The%20number%20of%20mobile%20phone%20subscribers%20in%20China%20has%20been,billion%20users%20in%20November%202019.

[8] *Sad by design* de G. Lovink, *The Exploit: A theory of networks* de A. Galloway y E.Thacker, or *The Filter Bubble* de E.Pariser.

corporations, web developers, and behavioral experts, all of whom abide by shareholder demands: more attention, more dependency, constant return. Although this is the fundamental reality, there are still tensions between the standard features offered by the platforms, and the cultural particularities and individualities that users channel through them. Despite the turn towards hyper-individualization[9] characteristic of *web 2.0* [10], the difference between the algorithmic model and the person that nourishes it has not yet been reduced to zero; there are still personal behaviors that, aggregated across the social particularities, inject diversity in these ecosystems.

Platform functionality determines the type of interaction we have. Before WhatsApp stickers, emojis were enough to convey emotions over text, yet their advent has facilitated the emergence of an entire marketplace of apps devoted to supply curated collections of feelings, and ways to convey them using the hottest memes. Knowing about the everyday routines of family and friends was possible before *stories*, yet their popularization has cemented *influencer* empires as well as increased attention to the mundane and its 24-hour transience. Our way of socializing (on and offline) transforms alongside the pace of these updates, social interaction adapts and configures locally despite its correlation with global-reaching software tools. Personal expression niches resist disappearing despite the standardization of communication media.

These changes, however, are not unidirectional. There are also a series of programs, functionalities, or protocols that are developed by tech companies, and that follow particular social behaviors. Conventions and social etiquette that precede the digital era still permeate the interaction that occurs after its advent. Although it is an unfair game, the millions of social micro-interactions still influence seemingly totemic software. After all,

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[9] On December 4th of 2009, in one of its updates, Google announced a fundamental change that passed as fairly low-key despite its importance: "Personalized search for everybody". Using 57 signals, such as browser type, search history, or physical location; its results would display the websites most likely to be clicked according to personal preferences. There was no longer an "standard Google". From there, the era of the personalized web began. E. Pariser, in *The Filter Bubble*, The Penguin Press, 2011.

[10] In contrast with *web 1.0*, which consisted of read-only, passive websites; *web 2.0* presents a turn towards user-generated content. This includes social media where the user creates and shares text, images, and video. O'Reilly, Tim (2005-09-30). "What Is Web 2.0". O'Reilly Network.

their subsistence depends on our continued use of them, the fact that we still deem them relevant, that they do not cease to be a vital part of our environment. Thus, a tug-of-war consolidates between users and platforms. On one hand, the platform, with its intention of standardization for optimal operativity, and on the other, the user collective, with a set of particularities that continue to demand attention, adaptation, and updating[11].

Up next we identify particular examples that show ideologies being materialized as software, group behaviors that emerge from available functionalities, and platforms being modified due to the undeniable demands of deep social patterns, characterizing cultural manifestations in the digital realm.

Search engines and internet cafes

China and Colombia share a similar history in the early days of the internet rollout. Both had their first internet connections in 1994[12], and most users first accessed the web through internet cafes, with a strong blog culture[13] as means to accessing information and entertainment. From there, their respective difference in speed of economic development allowed for faster adoption of personal terminals in China, as well as a tech sector that developed platforms based in a public whose preferences consolidated on those early days. For example, in China, the use of blogs and their saturated way to display information influenced the preference of a web that looks much more populated with text and links than the later minimalist style of Silicon Valley. It is widely known that Google is not accessible in China, but the fact that companies such as *Baidu* and *Sougou* could focus on better indexing, and the benefit of faster informational intake natural to Chinese characters, are additional reasons for the dominance of local search engines over Google, given they provide information in a more relevant, diverse, and locally compatible way. Is

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[11] The book *Updating to remain the same* proposes a need for constant software updates that is based upon a neoliberal media framework, where a change of habits as means of self-improvement is fostered yet structural or institutional changes are avoided; a revolution within habit that the overall structure. This is expressed by the formula *Crisis + Habit = Update,* where controlled crisis motivates a desire for change, yet not so intense as to overhaul the entire system. W. Hui, K. Chun, *Updating to remain the Same: Habitual New Media*, MIT Press, 2016.

[12] (Chinese Internet Society)中国互联网协会 https://www.isc.org.cn/ihf/info.php?cid=218

[13] https://theasiadialogue.com/2015/08/31/a-decade-of-blogging-in-china/

no coincidence that Google does not have its usual worldwide dominance in markets such as the Korean and Japanese one, having strong competition by search engines such as *Naver* or *Yahoo JP* for similar reasons[14].

In contrast, Colombia does not have the infrastructure or market to develop search engines with local characteristics, and the transition from read-only web to user-centered web went alongside the emergence of platforms such as *Myspace, Facebook,* or *Twitter*. Nevertheless, the importance of the internet café is still relevant locally. Unlike China, where internet cafes (网吧) specialized in providing high-end machines and high-speed connections for gamers, Colombian internet cafes continue to serve a function related to connectivity and its original internet access in isolated populations or without a high purchasing power. They have also become niches of popular visual imagination with a great diversity of ornamentation, expressing in particular ways the different perceptions of the web that therein exist in the local psyche. Internet cafe spaces are mostly extinct in many countries, yet we still have constant contact with them while printing documents or getting enlarged copies of our IDs.

Online payments, manners, and mistrust

Given the speed of mobile infrastructure deployment of local companies, in China, most of the population had a smartphone first before having any desktop computer. Likewise, this deployment was undertaken faster and in further places than those who were able to deploy credit card payment systems. It is because of this that China has the highest number of mobile monetary transactions in the world (400 billion daily payments on WeChat alone). Given the ubiquity of this service, users have developed several social etiquettes around money transfers. For example, when transferring money through WeChat, the receiver should wait a prudential time before accepting the money, and the higher the amount, the longer the waiting time should be (around 5 minutes on the low end). In case of being accepted too fast, it could be perceived as rude and negatively influence future transactions or loans. Regarding local cultural characteristics, WeChat developed the *Red Packet* feature, which replicates the red packets with money inside that are given as

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[14] https://www.link-assistant.com/blog/google-vs-naver-why-cant-google-dominate-search-in-korea/

presents for Chinese new year or marriages[15]. These packets can be sent to the whole family in group chats. In that case, the time to open the packet should be as fast as possible instead, given that the money inside is divided by a pre-determined amount fixed by the sender, one risks getting nothing the wait is too long.

This correlation between local culture and finances manifests in diametrically opposite results in Colombia. The generalized mistrust towards institutions and commercial transactions with unknown people is mirrored by the low usage of mobile and online payment services. Online payments increased sharply (in the period between July 2019-2020 there was an increase of 21% of money traded overall, as well as a 105% increase in the number of transactions), as well as the adoption of online wallets (from 6 to 14,5 million users between April 2019 and November 2020)[16] due to the pandemic restrictions and the increased reliance in online platforms. Nevertheless, this adoption rate is still fairly low given how there are 1,2 cellphone lines per person in Colombia[17]. One of the main reasons for this low adoption rate is the mistrust over the web, distilling from the already popular countryside villa renting frauds, sellers that disappear after the first payment, or personal data impersonation. This unsafety, whether perceived or real, affects trust levels and the adoption rates of these services, despite the proof of being fairly safe[18].

While digital wallets are used by around 30% percent of the population in Colombia, in China the number is closer to 92%. While in Colombia each person made around 8.0 transactions at the height of the pandemic (July of 2020), in China 25.8 transactions were

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[15] In marriages, is the husband that is supposed to give red packets away so as to show the wives' family his financial stability.

[16] https://www.larepublica.co/internet-economy/asi-terminarian-este-ano-las-principales-billeteras-digitales-en-el-numero-de-usuarios-3089036 https://www.ccce.org.co/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/informe-transacciones-2020.pdf

[17] Colombian population is around 50 million, which puts mobile wallet adoption at barely 30%. https://www.statista.com/statistics/278204/china-mobile-users-by-month/#:~:text=As%20of%20November%202020%2C%20about,had%20been%20registered%20in%20China.&text=The%20number%20of%20mobile%20phone%20subscribers%20in%20China%20has%20been,billion%20users%20in%20November%202019

[18] With the payment policies by MercadoLibre and other e-commerce platforms, there are several tools at the consumers' disposal to claim back and recover their money. https://www.dinero.com/opinion/articulo/el-comercio-electronico-en-colombia-es-mas-seguro-de-lo-que-creemos/279766

made per person in July of 2019[19]. Is also very telling that, from all transactions made, 89% of all money was related to obligations collection (Receipt payment), leaving a mere 11% of commercial transactions, thus reflecting not only a late and shy adoption, but a deeper mistrust that lies on a cultural (mis)conception[20]. This mistrust cannot be merely explained by the argument of low technology adoption, as there are more mobile phone lines in Colombia per person than in China (1,2 vs 1,14, respectively)[21], nor because of "underdevelopment" of the economy, given that in Africa there is a very high rate of adoption of mobile payments through platforms like M-pesa[22].

Reality Tv in the era of mobile payments: Digital Societies and marketing

The aforementioned explosion of mobile payments has revolutionized the traditional *music reality tv show.* Different from the model of *The X Factor* or *American Idol*, the popular show *Produce 101* is a music reality in which 101 participants are filtered down to 11 winners that end up composing a K-pop style music group: elaborated choreographies, hyper-produced videos, eclectic music genres, and flawless physical appearance. The criteria to decide who survives each elimination round is not given by the criteria of a specialized jury, but only through tv audience voting.

Unlike the traditional SMS voting system that has been used in other realities to choose candidates, this show expands the power of the audience to participate, even taking in votes for choosing the songs to be performed on the next show, garments to be wear, etc. There is a special type of relationship between contestants and audience as fans are constantly activated with every minute decision being taken in the show. The audience

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[19] https://walkthechat.com/%C2%A5800-billion-wechat-mini-program-transaction-volume-in-2019-tencent-annual-report/

[20] Is worth mentioning here we refer to mobile transactions. This resistance cannot neatly be explained just by means of the "underdevelopment" argument, given that plenty of African countries have a high adoption level of *M-Pesa* or *Jumia*, a mobile transfer service running on SMS.

[21] https://www.statista.com/statistics/278204/china-mobile-users-by-month/#:~:text=As%20of%20November%202020%2C%20about,had%20been%20registered%20in%20China.&text=The%20number%20of%20mobile%20phone%20subscribers%20in%20China%20has%20been,billion%20users%20in%20November%202019

[22] In 2020, M-Pesa was used by 95% of people in Kenya. L. Reed et al., *The adoption of M-Pesa: A percolation approach to Network Goods.* https://www.rose-hulman.edu/mathREU/reports/2020_Reed_Stefanov_Vural.pdf

thus projects and identifies itself emotionally with the group of handsome contestants, voting for their crushes, rewarding their authenticity, or favoring those that better reflect their own personality, effectively leaving the musical criteria in the background. The distance between idol and fan dilutes in this close relationship, and the show's contestants are the embodiment of a game that millions of spectators participate in real-time.

This competition for glamour and talent turns, in fact, into a purchasing power competition. The show does not adhere to the "one vote per person" system, but rather each fan can vote multiple times if they pay for that privilege. Despite the fact that the show is freely available on the IQiYi video streaming platform, all additional votes can be purchased by means of acquiring a premium subscription (this provides some extra votes each week), or by purchasing the products that sponsor the show, such as beverages, clothing, make-up, and the like. These purchases grant additional votes that are perceived as crucial by the fans who see their personal values represented by those of the contestant, and thus shall prevail in the competition[23].

In the age of mobile payments, platforms are agile, convenient, and interconnected enough to make the experience between purchase and voting seamless. The program is produced by IQiYi (Netflix Equivalent), which is owned by Tencent, the tech giant that also owns the payment platform WeChatPay, as well as the e-commerce site JD. These huge digital ecosystems that include entertainment, user data, marketplace, and monetary transactions, all provided and hosted by the same company group, reduce the distance between transaction and participation, purchase and advertisement, audience and customer.

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[23] This tension between game and competition is explored by the historian Huizinga. He considers war to be "the most evident and primitive type of game", pointing out that war is not only waged in the function of confrontation, as there are non-competitive types of war practices such as "ambushes, surprise attacks, crusades, or mass eradication". A dispute only occurs when the belligerents mutually consider themselves as adversaries, fighting over that which they believe to own. Thus, only when two players are on the same condition level is that they can really compete. This premise of "equality" is given to the audience of mass media. All parties in the bloodless reality show war are willing to sacrifice tokens (time and money) to demonstrate their faction is a force of good according to "divine justice", naturalizing the idea of spending money to achieve their goal.

The abolition of the distance between idol and spectator is what has motivated the exponential growth of fame and relevance of *influencers* in Colombia, and how they have progressively replaced in the collective psyche the traditional tv jet-set. Legacy tv channels find it increasingly difficult to produce new content, and musical reality shows are among the few authentically new productions among the endless barrage of re-broadcasted shows from the '90s and foreign soap operas. The issue is that being a type of entertainment that exists isolated from marketing, consumer data statistical patterns, sales channels, and payment platforms, they end up being less relevant, as their content is being decided by a directive board, and not from informed inputs and real-time interaction with the consumer. Thus, the survival of RCN may come in that day they partner with *Epa Colombia*, when they enjoy the deep catharsis she represents in those who criticize her. But beyond including *Luisa Fernanda W* or *La Segura* in vertically decided entertainment, they should learn from their business strategy of shortening the distance between spectator and participant.

Kua Kua Groups

In China, *kua kua* groups are group chats where you can pay to receive compliments or motivation. From one minute and up to half an hour, the user transfers the money to the group administrator, who notifies group participants so as to flood with flatteries the customer upon entering the chat, and then removing him/her when time is up[24]. This phenomenon (not widespread, yet existing), along with artificial intelligence chat-bots[25], might be attributed to high stress and depression levels[26], coupled with the popular perception of psychological therapy as unnecessary, given that traditional medicine perceives depression as internal energy unbalance[27]. An influencing factor is also

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[24] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NC0Yw8pdc2o&t=115s&ab_channel=CasseySoo

[25] https://chinachannel.co/wechats-virtual-girlfriend-app-by-microsoft-xiaobing/

[26] According to the WHO, 54 million Chinese reported depression in 2017, representing 4.2 percent of the population. In contrast, there are only 700 licensed psychological institutions, and around one million professionals, yet only 40,000 certified to have a part-time or full-time practice. https://www.china-briefing.com/news/mental-healthcare-industry-china/

[27] David Y. H. Wu, Psychotherapy and Emotion in Traditional Chinese Medicine
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-010-9220-3_12

personally being labeled as unstable or depressive in a mostly conservative society. Despite the resistance but also because of this stigma, a big part of psychological therapy (even before the pandemic) is conducted online.

Greetings and tweety bird

The morning greeting, the daily prayer, the weekly blessing, are all very particular phenomenon present in social media usage in Latin America. Is impossible to know what consortium profits from the incessant sharing of tweety birds with good wishes, or where does the graphic designer sweatshop with the frenetic production of "good morning" messages for the family chat is located. The motivation behind it is likewise uncertain, impossible to point down to a habit inherited from the command to greet in the Carreño good manners manual[28], or whether if all aunties tacitly conceive the digital user as an extension of the real person, one who deserves the same level of cordiality and deference. Whatever the case, this practice contrasts with cultural traditions where greetings are not associated with sacrality, and that does not conceive any divine entity that can actively alter the daily events because we convey so with our words.

We all hate voice clips

Voice clips are a status symbol in China. Given that one of the most used means of communication for workers is WeChat[29], instead of e-mail, there is certain implicit

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[28] Manual written in the mid-XIX century in Venezuela, with a list of dos and don'ts of social etiquette. IV. — Upon waking up, our first thought must be directed towards God. If we are not by ourselves, we will greet those who are already awake, we will take our garments with the same demure we placed them the night before. Urbanidad de Carreño, Artículo III *Del acto de levantarnos*

[29] It has recently been replaced by *Ding Ding*, an app similar to *Slack*, which is also very popular as an online teaching platform. *Ding Ding* has functionalities particularly catered to bosses and managers such as geolocalization enabled clock-in, or facial recognition to access meetings, lunchtime tracking, notifications when employees see messages, and the function to send *Dings* or incessant notifications via call or SMS until they see the message. Is based on traditional working culture, yet it has faced some backlash from generations of new workers because of its intrusive design.
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-alibaba-labour/ding-always-on-alibaba-office-app-fuels-backlash-among-chinese-workers-idUSKBN1KO0RR

directionality in their use. This is because, unlike WhatsApp, they do not have a controller to fast-forward, pause, or go back in the message. If you missed a part of it, you'll have to repeat it in its entirety. Voice notes cannot be searched through text in the conversation history, nor be forwarded to a different conversation; all of this makes the sending of several voice clips in a row to convey the message of "I'm obviously busier than you", saving time at the expense of the receiver. Although WhatsApp has more flexibility, and thus voice messages are not perceived in an equally negative way, it will certainly cause annoyance or disinterest to send several over-two-minutes-long messages consecutively.

'Chinafication' of social media

Tiktok has been the first Chinese social media app to reach popularity and widespread usage outside its country of origin. Its popularity is due to, on one hand, the highly attractive and addictive content based on short videos that could be described as 'visual candy': an attractive handicraft, time-lapses of long processes or slow-motion of high-speed actions, beautiful faces, beauty tips, funny videos, or any highly attractive content with low demand for attention or intellectual effort.

Tiktok (or Douyin 抖音 in Chinese) is not the only app of its kind in China. Conversely, it has plenty of competition from apps like XiaoHongShu (小红书), *YY* or *Huajiao* (花椒) who also have streaming services, as well as apps that were developed even before itself such as Kwai (Kuaishou 快手). All of these apps have similar user-flows and slightly different niche communities between them. One of the most salient aspects of *Tiktok* is that, in contrast with most services from Silicon Valley (except Youtube), you do not need a user account as a prerequisite to access it: upon downloading you select some interests from a general list, and you're directly introduced to the endless and highly addictive stream of content. A user is only required if you mean to follow an account or like a video.

When thinking of social media as ideology, we might say the individual user profile is one of those almost universally accepted (and thus naturalized) aspects, yet it obeys an

ideological transition of web 2.0 towards the digital persona. Your account profile is an *a-priori* component, necessary to share, create and play[30], and from where a notion of mutual correspondence among participants derives. The virtual individual is a reflection of the physical individual, and there is a presumption of agency on its behalf that gives meaning to its digital presence. *Tiktok* does create a digital and personal profile as well, one modeled by surprisingly accurate predictive algorithms, yet the difference lies in the fact that *Tiktok* does not pre-suppose direct participation on behalf of the user: posting or sharing is not part of the fundamental suppositions about that digital persona, but rather a complementary aspect. There are no assumptions about degrees of separation[31], and its axis is not centered around the activity of each person-node you connect to, but rather on your subscriptions, the algorithmically similar accounts, and what have they uploaded lately. Is hard to characterize this design decision as a direct consequence of a particular psyche of online Chinese youth, but it does serve as a good example of the type of functionality development, and possible divergent directions that can be taken when suppositions about the behavior and desire of the user are not the same.

This is one of the reasons why, recently and increasingly, western social media apps are incorporating functionalities from Chinese social media. In the search to update so as to offer novelty, yet remaining the same[32], they have been incorporating functions from Chinese apps whose original ecosystem was not limited to the conceptual and technical barriers of a technologically saturated environment.

WeChat, the main messaging app, is also a platform for monetary transactions. This may sound somewhat absurd in the west, given that it is banks and their apps the ones

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[30] G.Lovink, *Sad by Design: On Platform Nihilism,* Pluto Books, 2019. de Sad. But before entering, everyone must first create an account, filling out a profile, and choosing a username and password. Minutes later, you're part of the game and start sharing, creating, playing, as if it had always been like that. The profile is the a-priori, a component that the profiling and targeted advertising cannot operate without. It is through the gateway of the profile that we become its subject.

[31] Friendster, the first social network, was based upon the theory of *6 degrees of separation* between every person in the world. Myspace, and Facebook after it, would implement a similar principle under the "people you may know" feature, suggesting friends of friends as possible links.

[32] W. Hui, K. Chun, *Updating to remain the same, Habitual New Media,* MIT Press, 2016.

supposed to handle money, but completely logical in a country where this is the first (and sometimes only) app you learn to use when buying a smartphone. It is after this model that WhatsApp has recently launched *WhatsApp Business*, a special platform for businesses that seeks to take advantage from the high ammount of working and commercial interactions on the platform in order to launch their digital wallet for payments[33], with very similar characteristics to WeChat[34]. Facebook launched *Lasso*, an app meant to compete directly in format and workflow with *Tiktok*, as well as the new Instagram *Reels.* Even within Facebook itself you have increasingly more '*suggested for you*' tabs, publications from viral pages that you have not followed yourself, but that display the same type of 'visual candy'. Little by little, the accounts we follow, our friends or acquaintances are being replaced by content that has algorithmically shown to be more relevant, the one that ensures a higher level of interaction and demands longer attention periods. We could say that even our digital persona does not know what does it want by itself.

This tendency towards the 'chinafication' of social media, of incorporation of its functionalities and design, does not seem to be going away any time soon. This process is the same by which Chinese social media have incorporated ideas from western platforms as well. Closed systems find themselves destined to implode, to collapse upon themselves if they do not allow external agents inside, diversifying and oxygenating the gene pool. With the consolidation and growth of media empires, it will become increasingly hard for the emergence of isolated ecosystems that give room for alternative development routes; there will be fewer Galapagos in a world where islands either become peninsulas or sink altogether. Yet one thing that will inevitably continue to happen despite the convergence in a technological singularity, is the morphology, style, and ornamentation of communication; the type of relationship, approval, or rejection of the society that will occur in our use of this media.

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[33] WhatsApp Payments has already been launched in Brazil, Mexico, and India, despite facing several restrictions that have hindered widespread adoption. https://www.theverge.com/2020/6/24/21301470/whatsapp-payments-brazil-suspended-central-bank-risk-regulators

[34] WeChat has had for a while now business portals, where automated responses can be set, menus with relevant information can be created, or mini-apps allow direct purchases and bookings through WeChat. This allows the user to browse around websites, provide maps, make transactions, post to Friends, all without leaving the app.