Práticas de consumo de smartphones no contexto de pandemia de Covid-19: um olhar etnográfico para as apropriações das mulheres de Maputo – Moçambique

Smartphone consumption practices in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic: an ethnographic look at women's appropriations in Maputo – Mozambique

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Resumo: *O presente artigo é resultado de uma pesquisa etnográfica realizada com mulheres moçambicanas moradoras da cidade de Maputo. Como objetivo, buscamos compreender algumas mudanças nas práticas de consumo de smartphones no contexto de pandemia de Covid-19. Ao longo da pesquisa, que iniciou com trabalho de campo presencial, em 2019, e passou para um segundo momento de etnografia para a internet (HINE, 2015), foram realizadas observação participante, observação nas mídias sociais e entrevistas em profundidade. Nossa análise compreende que, em um cenário de pandemia, os smartphones tornaram--se possibilitadores do ensino remoto para as estudantes universitárias – mesmo com a desigualdade de acesso – e auxiliaram as interlocutoras da pesquisa na construção de novas fontes de renda.*

Palavras-chave: *consumo; smartphones; Moçambique; pandemia; Covid-19.*

Abstract: *The article is the result of an ethnographic research carried out with Mozambican women living in the city of Maputo. As an objective, we seek to*

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understand some changes in smartphone consumption practices in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Throughout the research, which began with face-to-face fieldwork, in 2019, and moved to a second stage of ethnography for the internet (HINE, 2015), participant observation, observation in social media and in-depth interviews were carried out. Our analysis understands that in a pandemic scenario, smartphones became the enablers of remote learning for university students – despite the inequality of access – and that they helped the research interlocutors to build new sources of income.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to understand some changes in smartphone consumption practices in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic through the accounts of Mozambican women, who reside in the city of Maputo, the country's capital. This work results from ethnographic research that began in 2019 with a six-month internship in Mozambique at the Pedagogical University of Maputo through the Projeto Educomunicação Intercultural, sponsored by the Programa Abdias Nascimento – Capes. The research, which started with in-person fieldwork in 2019 and then, in a second ethnography moment, moved to the internet (HINE, 2015), involved participant observation, observation through social media, and in-depth interviews (in-person and remote over Google Meet and WhatsApp). This article presents the accounts of eight research interlocutors whose names are changed here to preserve their image and privacy. Five of them are university students, who live at the student residence hall, and three are workers: a cleaning assistant, a secretary, and a residential concierge guard. Contact with students began at the university residence hall during the research internship, and communication with the other interlocutors happened through referral.

Studies on smartphone and social media consumption are emerging research themes, especially at the interface between the areas of Communication and Anthropology (SILVA; MACHADO, 2020). Comprehending the different uses of smartphones and the distinct forms of social media appropriation is a path to increasingly understand our world's cultural diversity since contents shared on these media (MILLER et al., 2019) and the way people transform smartphones' functionalities (MILLER et al., 2021) reflect our society and show how the world can subvert programmed features of devices.

We understand consumption as a cultural process (SLATER, 2002) responsible for establishing and maintaining social relationships and giving expression to people, their localities, families, and cultures (DOUGLAS; ISHERWOOD, 2013). We live in a society of consumption (BARBOSA, 2004) where consuming goods is crucial not

to satisfying our physiological needs and fulfilling everyday demands but to communicating with others, maintaining relationships, and defining and sustaining our identities (ROCHA, 2009).

Archambault (2017), when writing about cell phone consumption in Inhambane, Mozambique, highlights that the feeling of everyday uncertainty is very present among young research interlocutors – material uncertainty, related to subsistence and the future, and uncertainty related to doubts concerning everyday relationships, culturally and historically shaped by the marginal position the region occupies in the global economy. In many cases, this uncertainty arouses improvisation in subsistence practices and new ways of being and relating through cell phones.

In the present research's case, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic increased uncertainties among youths, though not exclusively so, related to health and sociability issues, especially regarding the continuation of studies and finding income sources. The first recorded case of Covid-19 in Mozambique was on March 22, 2020. After a few days, on March 31, President John decreed the country was in a state of emergency, even though there were only eight confirmed cases of the disease. With this decree, schools, universities, some businesses, and other services shut down, and people's circulation and social contact became restricted. Decisions in the country were swift as a form of prevention since Mozambique's health system has many limitations. There are few hospitals and even less equipment, like ventilators that patients who reach the disease's severe stage need.

Mozambique is in the South of the African continent and has borders with South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania. In many moments during the period of the pandemic, borders were closed. The country's capital, Maputo, is in the extreme south of Mozambique and has 1,122,607 inhabitants, according to demographic indicators in the Boletim de Indicadores Demográficos da Cidade de Maputo (2019).

In Mozambique, like in many other countries, people's lives had to change suddenly. They had to reconfigure traditional forms of social interaction, adopting social distancing and mask use (CAMBRÃO; JULIÃO, 2020). Without classes in schools, Mozambican television channels began airing educational content in the mornings to assist in children's learning. In some higher education courses, university lecturers sent readings and exercises over WhatsApp and in class groups created on social media. With churches' doors shut, some ministers began holding their service online, while some religious organizations acquired space on television. However, implementing online activities and work-from-home in the country is hard because less than 7% of the population have access to the internet, and only 4.4% to a computer (CENSO MOÇAMBIQUE, 2017). Access to the internet and social media is unequal. Telecom companies charge high prices, and connectivity is still a reality accessible to few.

During the period of social isolation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the smartphone became, for many people around the world, the entirety of their social communication (MILLER et al., 2021) and a school, a home, the place where we live and learn. Moreover, we highlight that, to the Mozambican women who participated in this research, the pandemic meant changing their smartphones to models with more storage capacity, an increase in internet use and spending, besides needing to make extra income through their own enterprises, having the smartphone as a collaborator.

The present article has three sections, besides the introduction and final considerations. In the first section, we approach perceptions of another time, interlocutors' smartphone uses in 2019, before the arrival of the new virus, and the first changes in the context of the pandemic. In the second, we point to the smartphone's relationship as an enabler of remote learning during the isolation period caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. And in the last section, we approach the new enterprises and ways of learning and making money thought by research participants during the pandemic.

Perceptions from another time: smartphone uses before and at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic

In 2019, the streets of Maputo had crowds, its collective transports (called "*chapas*") were full, and schools and universities had plenty of children, adolescents, and adults studying. Smartphone users were, in part, concerned about getting internet megabytes to communicate with friends and family, especially on WhatsApp and Facebook, and worried if megabytes would be enough to listen to music and watch some videos on YouTube. Though the last Mozambique Census (2017) indicates that only a small portion of the population has access to the internet, the number of people connected has been increasing in recent years, above all, in the province of Maputo.

The university students who were our research interlocutors used the internet relatively little, accessing it for only a few hours per week. They dedicated a good deal of their days to college, commitments related to church, their university residence, and everyday activities like going to the supermarket, cooking, meeting friends, and so forth. Smartphones were used more for entertainment and communication, for listening to music on YouTube, looking at and exchanging photos, and chatting with friends and relatives, especially those living in other provinces of the country.

Most research participants did not feel the need to be constantly present on social media. Some interlocutors spent days without internet on their cell phones either because they did not have metical (Mozambican currency) to "feed" their phones or because they did not feel the need to be connected. They had other work routines that occupied their days, during which smartphones emerged as a complement for limited communications, leisure, and finding specific information.

Eugenia, a 23-year-old university student, used just WhatsApp on her smartphone to chat only with friends (many of them living in the province of Zambezia) because it was more economical. According to her, she did not make audio or video calls: "In these conversations, we used just texts or shared images. I could go days without using

it and without worrying about the news I'd find as soon as I opened [WhatsApp]."

WhatsApp is one of the most used social media in the country because it requires less mobile data. Some telecom companies even create special offers that allow consumers to use the app even after their internet megabytes are over. The second social media research participants most use is Facebook. Few of them had Instagram, reporting they would need too much internet to use it.

Before the pandemic, interlocutors who worked, like Alima, 38 years old, would often connect to their workplace's Wi-Fi network, which allowed them to access social media without spending their data plan. Not many establishments have a Wi-Fi connection in Mozambique, and it is not common among most of the population, especially lower-income people, to access wireless internet at home. Since there are few Wi-Fi networks in the country, most users access the internet through mobile data usually offered by telecom companies such as Movitel, Mcel, and Vodacom.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, many working women had their routines changed, and many lost their jobs. Barbosa and Paiva (2020), researching working women during the pandemic, identified that, in this world scenario, social inequalities intensified, and work insecurity increased. Moreover, the authors also point to a loss in sociability and an increase in domestic work on the part of women (BARBOSA; PAIVA, 2020). In the present research case, we lost contact on WhatsApp with some of our interlocutors in determined moments after the arrival of the pandemic.

Other research participants who worked before the beginning of the pandemic - like Genifa, a 33-year-old concierge at a private security company, and Soninha, a 43-year-old cleaning assistant and secretary - also used smartphones to exercise maternal care and control (NICOLACI-DA-COSTA, 2006; SILVA, 2011; MADIANOU; MILLER, 2012) when they could not be home with their kids. Genifa worked in shifts of 24 hours and took 24 hours off. This workload made

her stay away from home and her kids for very long. In this case, she used the smartphone to be present in her family's everyday life even when she was physically distant.

For some Mozambican women, the arrival of the pandemic meant losing their jobs, lack of metical for subsistence, and, therefore, less internet and social media use. Other women, like the university students, had to use their smartphones more, especially to take classes. They reported changing cell phone carriers or buying extra chips from different carriers: "I changed my carrier. I saw that the one I was using, Vodacom, had expensive offers and that Movitel, the one I'm using now, has better offers that last longer." "Vodacom offered me free text messages on WhatsApp." "I use more or less three [chips]. But lately, I use Movitel more for the internet and Vodacom for communicating."

Rosália, a 22-year-old student, believes that, at the start of the pandemic, phone carriers changed their prices significantly, providing special offers to unburden their clients' pockets so that consumers could balance their economic life and continue using the internet. However, after a year of pandemic, companies began to triple their prices. For that reason, the interlocutor started to use the services of two carriers: "For the internet, I use Movitel. Vodacom is too expensive currently. Especially for the internet, one is more accessible than the other."

Caila, a 24-year-old university student, says that scams on social media and cell phone thefts increased a lot with the pandemic: "People now stick at nothing to get money." Her cell phone was stolen in January 2021, but she had to create the conditions to get a new one in three days since, "without a cell phone, I could not do my things or even continue to take the online classes I was having. Everything stopped."

"No cell phone, no classes": smartphones as enablers of distance education

With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic and the shutting of the collective spaces of schools and universities, smartphones acquired

extreme importance and served as allies of distance education. In Mozambique, according to research participants' accounts, WhatsApp was the most important social media for the continuity of undergraduate studies. Lecturers created WhatsApp groups for each class in each discipline. Everyone joined the group at the scheduled time and started interacting about the content, "like a normal conversation in a group of friends," as a research participant described. Contents, books, and class themes were previously sent to the WhatsApp group and over email. Students had to read the text beforehand to discuss the theme during class in the group. Sometimes lecturers also sent audio messages with instructions, but that required students to have more internet megabytes to access the recording.

Telecom companies, like the previously mentioned Vodacom, created special offers with free text messages on WhatsApp, which allowed consumers to use the media, sending and receiving texts, even after their credits were over. For this reason, many lecturers agreed that communication should be mainly through text to guarantee more participation. However, according to a student, groups sometimes became messy: "It was a mess, because [students'] comments sometimes were the same, so many messages that entered had the same content." Video lessons had little acceptance because of costs and were regarded, according to a research participant, as non-inclusive.

Caila says online classes differed according to each lecturer. Many preferred using WhatsApp and sending PDF files to groups, but some used Zoom or Google Meet. However, these video and audio platforms, which all students were supposed to access at the scheduled time, ended up excluding many of them. According to Caila, besides internet expenses, some cell phones did not support Zoom and Google Meet due to storage space. Some students gave up on these disciplines, and others tried to borrow cell phones from neighbors, friends, and relatives to follow classes.

WhatsApp's ally was email, which lecturers and students also used for sending and receiving materials. Sometimes, lecturers sent a book, a text,

or an activity on WhatsApp but asked students to send their assignments – which varied between summaries, tests, and other forms of evaluation – over email. Even if assignments were sent over email, a student says lecturers always chose to make the material available on WhatsApp too because every student could have access to it on the app.

Eugênia highlights she had trouble adapting to online education at the beginning of the pandemic since she was not used to staying "connected to the internet." Her smartphone used to remain off or without internet access for days. She used to credit 80 meticals per month on her device's account. With the need to be online, especially for college classes, she started recharging her smartphone with about 400 meticals per month, spending five times more on internet costs. Furthermore, Eugenia had to buy a new smartphone because her old model did not let her follow classes in real-time, even on WhatsApp.

> Since classes were online, because of the slowness of my old cell phone, I lost some of the things that teachers said. I got messages from groups, friends, and also messages from the class. So, because of the high number of messages that my cell phone received at the same time, it could not take it, and it got slower and slower. So, when I read it, my colleagues were already in other questions. Once, in one of the classes, the teacher asked me to answer a question, she directed it to me, and I only read it after she had passed it on to three other colleagues, and they had answered it. It looked like ignorance on my part, but it was because I really hadn't seen it. And there were many other times when my cell phone turned off in the middle of class. (Eugênia, 23 years old, June 2021)

In the second semester of 2020, Eugênia says some lecturers had already started using university platforms to make materials and activities available, seen as students had become more acquainted with online education and more responsible to look for content on their own in the platform without needing the constant interaction with the lecturer.

Dayara, a 26-year-old student, says that what most changed for her during the pandemic was her relationship with her college and studies. "Before the pandemic, we didn't use these apps [Zoom and Google

Classroom] I mentioned to study. Classes were only in-person." At the beginning of the pandemic, Dayara says it was quite hard to use apps; it took her some time to learn how to use them, and she is still learning. Her lack of technology skills was a negative aspect of distance education. Nevertheless, the student sees some positive aspects of online studies: "We saved the money from making photocopies, printing assignments, and transportation." Miller et al. (2021) understand this ambivalence between negative and positive aspects in the use of technologies exists since accounts generally point out that smartphones simultaneously create benefits and problems.

Susilawati and Supriyatno (2020), researchers in the city of Malang, Indonesia, carried out a study with university students in the context of the pandemic and confirmed that WhatsApp groups gathering students and teachers during that period brought pedagogical benefits. Besides supporting online discussions (and, as in the present research case, enabling them), authors examined how WhatsApp groups are capable of increasing students' motivation in the online learning process and accelerating knowledge construction through collaborative learning. Some of the principal motivators for using this social media to pedagogical ends, as examined by Susilawati and Supriyatno (2020), were that most students could download class materials since downloading is free; WhatsApp can be used to share comments, texts, images, videos, audios, and documents; and it allows the easy creation and dissemination of information and knowledge through multiple resources.

Research in Brazil in the pandemic scenario, like Stevanim's (2020) and Santos and Santos' (2021) works, points to social and digital inequalities that ended up causing even more exclusion in education for many youths in the period of distance learning. Though a larger portion of the population in Brazil (74% according to the 2019 TIC Domicílios survey) has internet access compared to the reality in Mozambique, millions of children and youths still live in households that have no internet access, no computer or smartphone, and in areas with no cell phone connection.

Moreover, some students do not have an appropriate space to study or need to share mobile devices with other people in the family (STEVANIM, 2020). Therefore, even if smartphones are essential to enable education or the only way available to meet this emergency demand, we must stress this form of teaching should not be seen as a "savior solution" (STEVANIM, 2020) as it remains exclusionary and unequal.

Santos and Santos (2021) analyzed the implications of teachers and students using WhatsApp as an education and communication tool during the pandemic in Brazil and, in their results, pointed to the benefits and disadvantages of using the app. Among the pros are increased student engagement, the app's easy accessibility in financial and technical terms, students' quick access, and convenience in the exchange of pedagogical materials, topics, and assignments, among other things. Among the disadvantages they mentioned are the negative impact on teachers' quality of life – overburdened by work – and access inequality because some of the students still do not have any device connected to the internet or do not have mobile data and Wi-Fi available (SANTOS; SANTOS, 2020).

When there were fewer Covid-19 cases in Mozambique in the first semester of 2021, in-person classes at universities returned interspersed, for a limited number of students, and for shorter hours. Nura, a 21-year-old student, says, "According to preventive measures, we cannot spend much time in classrooms." So, most teaching continued to be remote. Students had to study at home, and classes were more objective, with limited-time sessions for questions and answers.

However, with the arrival of the Covid-19 Delta variant in the country, confirmed in June 2021, cases increased alarmingly, and universities once again suspended in-person classes. In July 2021, Mozambique had a record number of confirmed Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations, according to news reported by DW[3]. Furthermore, a study carried out

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3   News published on July 11, 2021, by DW. Available at: https://www.dw.com/pt-002/covid-19-mo%C3%A7ambique-com-n%C3%BAmero-recorde-de-infe%C3%A7%C3%B5es-e-internamentos/a-58230399. Access in July 2021.

by the Tony Blair Institute (also reported by DW), published on July 6, 2021, showed that Mozambique was the African country with the highest growth in Covid-19 cases in the last two weeks of June, with an increase of 172%. This reality made uncertainty about classes take on a new proportion, returning smartphones to the role of enabling education in the pandemic (without losing sight of the exclusion they also entail).

"The internet is the basis of my business:" learning and selling through social media in Covid-19 times

When Mozambique declared a state of emergency for the first time in March 2020, and diverse sectors drastically stopped, many people had to create different forms of making money, supplementing their incoming, and supporting themselves. In this scenario, smartphones and social media access also allowed them to learn new services, as research interlocutors described.

Despite being a university student and living in a student residence hall, Caila used to make Mozambican sweets to sell since 2019 (I tried her *gulabos* and *malambe* yogurt while in Maputo). However, after March 2020, Caila expanded her sales, moved on to making sweets and savories on demand, began thinking about a career as a pastry chef, and even started selling clothes, shoes, and accessories via WhatsApp and Facebook.

> As they say, "every cloud has a silver lining!" The pandemic had a significant impact, but I'll look at the positive part. Thanks to the pandemic, I realized I have a talent for business. I realized that "yes, I can be an entrepreneur." I realized that I could use WhatsApp and Facebook to publicize my business. Thanks to the pandemic, I started thinking about becoming a pastry chef. I started spending more time on WhatsApp to assist my clients, and it has been like that till today. (Caila, 24 years old, July 2021)

Because of her sales, Caila started using her smartphone and social media more. She said her clients sometimes call her early in the

morning, around 7 a.m., asking her to log on to WhatsApp because they want to order something or need information. During the pandemic, internet expenses increased to up to 300 meticals per month (excluding expenses with phone calls and text messages). In the interlocutors' words, "I started using the internet more. The internet is the basis of my business. That's why I must have megabytes always."

Rosália, 22 years old, also felt the need to create a business after the onset of the pandemic.

> Without a doubt, it was a result of the pandemic. The first time our country had a state of emergency, it was a radical stop. I did nothing for a long time. Schools and churches were closed (and these were the places that kept me busy the most). That made me see the need to do something to occupy myself and, at the same time, earn some money. (Rosália, 22 years old, July 2021)

The business Rosália created offers services like flower bouquets, sweet bouquets, sweet trays, and the so-called "party in a box," which is a gift basket with fruits, sweets, cakes, champagne bottles, and wine glasses for birthdays or other special occasions. According to the interlocutor, she had always had the desire to make handiworks involving things like scissors, glue, paper, and so forth. Given her wish to create this business, Rosália resorted to YouTube to learn and perfect skills to assemble her products. On YouTube, she typed "how to make boxes with recycled material" or "how to make artificial flowers" to search for inspiration. Most videos were on Brazilian and Asian channels, which she believed were Korean. She advertised her products mostly on Facebook and WhatsApp. Hence, her smartphone and social media use increased significantly. Before the pandemic, the interlocutor did not like social media and only used them in cases of "extreme necessity."

Currently, she must stay online to see peoples' reactions to posts on her products and to attend to clients. Her expenses acquiring megabytes also increased considerably: "Previously, a 20-metical recharge [per week] was enough for me, and I also didn't mind if I didn't have megabytes. Now, getting 50 MT for just one day is pretty normal."

Studies by Guimarães et al. (2020), Santos (2020), and Abreu et al. (2021) analyzed the Brazilian entrepreneurial scenario in the pandemic context, pointing to the steep growth of the so-called "entrepreneurs by need" and "subsistence entrepreneurship." Amidst a scenario of health and economic crisis, poverty, and unemployment, many people had to start their own businesses to try to cope with financial difficulties and have a source of income for their subsistence.

In turning to entrepreneurship as a possibility to overcome and solve problems (GUIMARÃES et al., 2020) during a moment of social distancing, smartphones, the internet, and social media became essential for communicating, advertising, reaching consumers, and selling. Based on Grohmann (2020), Santos (2020) stresses mobile technologies are at the center of transformations in the organization of work, especially in the sphere of services, since the number of app deliverers and drivers grew significantly during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the precarity that characterizes activities in this sector of the informal economy, this was the only form of subsistence for many.

Abreu et al. (2021) underline the fact that the increase in poverty, unemployment, and the impact of Covid-19 was even bigger among the Black population in Brazil. Black entrepreneurs, according to a survey by Sebrae (2020), also had a lower digitization level in their companies and used social media and the internet in their sales less than White entrepreneurs. In a society where platforms produce the social structures we live in (VAN DIJCK; POELL; DE WALL, 2018), we must understand the social inequalities, racial injustices, discrimination, and racism related to technologies and that racialized codes and algorithms permeate many of the difficulties that Black entrepreneurs face (BENJAMIN, 2019).

Silva (2011), researching the impacts of the incorporation of cell phones by women in poverty in a city in the south of Brazil, found that the cell phone was essential for self-employed women to obtain new jobs and generate the necessary income to support their families. At the time of that study, there were no smartphones, and social media use on cell

phones was scarce. But Silva's interlocutors, who worked sewing or re-selling lingerie and beauty products, used phone calls and text messages to inform prices, handle orders, and schedule deliveries. In a distinct way, but also concerning the use of cell phones to obtain income, Horst and Miller (2006) observed that economically underprivileged Jamaicans occasionally used their cell phones as income generators by requesting financial support from friends and relatives in a better economic situation.

Turning back to Maputo, Eugênia, also during the pandemic, used Google and YouTube to learn to make natural oils to sell – coconut, moringa, eucalyptus, and ginger oil, among others. With the help of friends, she created a brand and a logo, took pictures, and started posting images of her products on her WhatsApp status. Moreover, Eugênia also started posting on her status videos and photos of braids because client demand for getting braids done at home increased due to the pandemic situation and social distancing. So, she applied her knowledge and experience braiding, something she has done ever since she was little and that is so cultural, to supplement her income.

The YouTube videos she used for learning were all from Brazil. In fact, Eugênia watched a channel from Angola, but it did not please her because "the lady doing it had a daughter, and, while she was explaining, the daughter kept calling for her and screaming. That bothered me. And I didn't finish it." The student considers that videos from Brazilian YouTube channels are more didactic and teach better.

Hartley's (2009) and Miller et al.'s (2019) studies show a type of YouTube consumption for learning and expanding knowledge. Hartley (2009) understands that YouTube, with all its uncommitted content, often focused on fun and entertainment, "is simultaneously the complex system in which digital literacy can find new purposes, new publishers, and new knowledge" (HARTLEY, 2009, p. 172). The author writes that, in times of YouTube, "we can do it ourselves." Since the number of people publishing content on the platform increased (HARTLEY, 2009), the number of people using YouTube to learn various types of

content increased as well. According to the researcher, now it is possible to have an enabling social technology that can be accessed by a big part of the population, in which individuals can navigate through broad networks, moved by personal reasons and preferences, at the same time as contributing for the expansion of knowledge and possibilities, as was the case with our research interlocutors.

Spyer (2018) and Miller et al. (2019) state that, in their research fields, educational videos on YouTube were routinely used as sources of tutorials for different demands and taught professional skills, especially for low-income youths and workers. This form of learning proved to be quite effective for these populations and sufficient for youths to find jobs and achieve some social mobility. In various countries researched by Miller et al. (2019), YouTube appeared as an important and growing mode of informal education, a fact that we also identified among women in Maputo, especially in the pandemic scenario.

We can also consider research interlocutors' accounts at the interface between creative work and precariousness. In writing about the relationship between work, creativity, and platform capitalism in conversation with Van Dijck, Poell and De Wall (2018), Costa (2020) comprehends that current work modalities have ever more flexible, informal, and precarious categories. During the pandemic, the number of informal, self-employed, freelance, digital, and remote workers increased. Costa's (2020) research shows that digital and communication technologies, like smartphones and laptops, can help "in the solitary enterprise of merit and success" because, through them, we connect and communicate to make our work operational in the internet space, while also increasing informality, making services precarious, and reducing work fees.

However, Costa (2020) indicates the importance of avoiding reductionisms, since the emergence of new technologies and systems is not directly related to precariousness. According to the author, scientific, technological, and communicational advances, in many cases, collaborate to the development of new professions amidst a context of

unemployment, potentializing activities and facilitating joint actions in different spaces. Informal work, learning, and sales on social media become relevant alternatives in a country that has a high unemployment rate and where access to formal education is difficult for women. Over the last years, from 2014 to 2020, Mozambique's unemployment rate varied between 20.7% and 17.5% (INE, 2020). The country's National Institute of Statistics (INE) acknowledges the limitation of its research data, seen as most of the Mozambican population lives off the informal economy and subsistence activities.

Final considerations

Amidst uncertainties, losses, grief, distancing, and growing social and digital inequalities brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, the accounts of research interlocutors show us there are forms of resisting and using smartphones for subsistence and to stay in college. With this work, we looked to understand some of the changes in smartphone consumption practices in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic among women residing in the city of Maputo, Mozambique. Ethnographic findings point to an increase in smartphone consumption caused, above all, by the need to use the device for distance education and obtaining new sources of income.

Furthermore, the internet proved to be, in the pandemic, a basic necessity in our interlocutors' social context, for, without the internet, they do not have access to education nor to sources for generating alternative income. However, even though we understand that technologies can be used in our favor and as our allies in the pandemic scenario, we must mention digital exclusion, which intensified during this period. We also understand smartphone consumption is ambivalent (MILLER et al., 2021) and that algorithmic systems integrate these uses. These themes did not emerge in our research field, but we consider them as possible issues for future studies.

Finally, albeit the internet is a reality for few people in Mozambique, smartphones and social media were (and continue to be) very important

A R T I G O

in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, for those who can pay for it, for the continuance of studies and the building of new income sources by learning skills and advertising and selling products and services. The women from Maputo participating in this research engage in other smartphone consumption practices. However, this paper focuses on analyzing aspects that they considered that changed the most in the context of the pandemic. In this sense, we hope our work can contribute to a broader discussion related to the consumption of technologies in Southern Africa and the appropriations of mobile devices in the years marked by the coronavirus disease.

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