

## BOOK REVIEW

# **CONECTADO:** *O que a Internet fez com você e o que você pode fazer com ela.*

JULIANO SPYER

Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editora. 2007, 256 pp.

REVIEWED BY **MARIA JOSÉ BALDESSAR**

An interesting book, although simple and easy to read, is “*Conectado: o que a Internet fez com você e o que você pode fazer com ela*” (Connected: what the Internet did to you and what you can do with it), by historian Juliano Spyer, published by Jorge Zahar Editora at the end of 2007. In the preface by Caio Túlio Costa we find an account of the Web’s origins and how it was used by journalists and researchers. And these origins, in Túlio Caio’s case, go back to the year 1988.

The book is divided into three parts: 1<sup>st</sup> Theory and technology; 2<sup>nd</sup> Practice and virtual communities and collaborative projects; 3<sup>rd</sup> Cases and debates, and in the summary we can already see the diversity of topics which will be dealt with by the author. This quantity of information, however, does not compromise the work’s quality. It gives it a characteristic of exploration and understanding of a phenomenon which has been changing life nowadays and which for many people is still full of secrets and mysteries.

The Web is today an instrument for work, research and entertainment for a variety of users - students, researchers and professionals from all areas. *Conectado* can guide a lay reader or one without any specific knowledge in thinking about how life is or will be in a world interlinked not only by economic markets but invisible social networks. It is a good guidebook for professors and students in the communication area – including journalism, since it goes more deeply into the discussion of the Internet as a “social media”, or as some prefer, a media composed of tools, platforms and practices used for the sharing of opinions and experiences.

Because it has this characteristic, being almost a manual and

being interdisciplinary, the book provides two important elements: a glossary (p. 24) with terms that are already consolidated – such as spam, and others that are arising, such as “netiquette” – a term formed by the association of the words “net” and “etiquette”, which refers to the conventions with regard to respect and behavior among participants of online communities, and a list of suggested readings (p. 246) – so that the reader, if he wishes, could go more deeply into some questions and incorporate other discussions.

### **Donation economy**

What is the donation economy? “It is the one in which the exchanges of presents occur generally in cultural contexts where there is an expectation of return or that the gift will be passed along in some way. The exchanges involve goods or services of comparable value, political support, loyalty, favors and honor for the donor, among other forms.” (p. 30)

What makes people participate in this economy? Among the factors which motivate people to participate in collaborative dealings are: reciprocity, prestige and moral and social incentive. In large groups, a donor of information expects that when he needs it, the whole community can repay him. But what also happens is the existence of “parasites” – people who do not contribute and only take advantage of others’ information. In this economy, people end up by generally seeking recognition and networking. “Search for diversification of social relationships.” (p. 35). Why do projects such as blogs, Youtube and Orkut work?

The book’s objective is to try to understand these new ways of establishing social contact, in addition to presenting original projects that are already on the Web – such as the communitarian loan. This experience, which has been working well in the United States and Europe, consists of the formation of a socio-economic network in which a person has to provide access to his financial and banking situation in order to obtain credit without going through a bank and with interest rates arranged between the parties.

Here is a recommendation: in chapter 3, read and navigate in the sites suggested by the author in the topic “*Negócios em rede*” (Business on the Web). Besides being educational, in the sense of a wide selection of examples, it shows that the collaboration economy already includes a vast range of opportunities – many of which have earned millions for their creators.

### **Journalism and the press crisis**

But the book does not avoid polemical subjects and begins with that which says that the Web is not reliable and that the information offered on it often lacks veracity and is an invasion of privacy, and comes during the crisis of print journalism and the journalists' function based on experiences of collaboration and greater availability of information.

In chapter 3, there is a whole discussion regarding the Web's impacts on traditional media and how the latter act or should act in order to not only consolidate their audiences but also to achieve new ones by means of the participation and interaction between TV spectator/reader/media. For the author the issuer x receptor audience model (or from one to many) is in a phase of exhaustion. We should be in the era of collaboration, based on the paradigm "from many to many". And he questions: "up to what point does the product disseminated by the *Jornal Nacional* (TV Globo's most popular Brazilian newscast) contribute to the formation of an audience with the Homer Simpson profile and also how much does the Internet challenge the communication industry's power to continue manufacturing passive consumers?" (p. 188)

As to the current media market and the behavior of the sector's businessmen with relation to the Web and the prospects for a collaborative model, the author is scathing: "the public area mediated by the media gives its owners the power to form public opinion, a power which they can use to their own advantage or sell for the best price. When the owner of a commercial media chooses not to wield his power in this way, the media tends to promote lighter matters instead of those with a potential for mobilization, and to oversimplify public discussions." (p. 189)

And he supplements this declaring that the Internet is changing our media view of the world and is making us question the agenda of the large communication companies: "the opportunity to 'prospect' sources throughout the world, to filter news according to the interest and to participate in the flow of information makes us more sensitive to what we formerly used to question: why that news item?" (p. 189)

But he goes even further. Paraphrasing Rupert Murdoch, 75, the main stockholder of the News Corporation, an international media conglomerate which controls satellite TV networks, Hollywood studios and other types of media, argues: "Technology is taking away the power of journalists, of editors, of the media establishment and elite. Now the people are taking control." (p. 190). Or, to bring into the dialog another advocate of participation and collaboration, Dan Gillmor: in the book "*Nós, os media*" (We, the media)<sup>1</sup>, Gillmor summarizes the question regarding the functions of the new media professional: "We are going to learn that

we are part of something new, that our readers/listeners/spectators are becoming part of the process. I believe it is true, for example, that my readers know more than I do – and this is a fact of journalistic life which liberates, not threatens.” (p. 145).

And this perhaps is a question which is running through agenda and planning meetings and which has left professionals, researchers and mainly managers of large conglomerates sleepless.

Also with regard to journalism on the Internet, the book discusses the cross-media concept and how this practice could win over young audiences. It is worth recalling that although many researchers are studying the language of online journalism and its possibilities, the above concept is still diffuse and a large part of the companies that maintain news sites do not exploit the possibilities offered by the Internet and its tools – such as flash software for the montage and production of cross-media stories.

Theoretically, the author dialogs with two researchers, Kevin Kelly and Yochai Benkler, who believe that society can lose control of its life to an emerging social organism. For Benkler, the Internet offers society the possibility of facing a freedom of social expression and subverting the corporations’ power, while Kelly sees a “fatal” society, interconnected and a prisoner of the machine. These are views that diverge from those of other researchers, such as Dominique Wolton<sup>2</sup>, who questions the Web’s power and its much talked-about capability of revolutionizing. Juliano Spyer dialogs, but does not compare, and throws us a question: “Internet – destiny or challenge?”

## | NOTES

- 1 GILLMOR, Dan. *Nós, os media*. Lisbon: Editorial Presença. 2005
- 2 *Internet, e depois?* Dominique Wolton. Porto Alegre: Editora Sulina, 2005.

**Maria José Baldessar** is Doctor of Communication Sciences from ECA/University of São Paulo (USP), Professor of the Journalism Course at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), Member of the Interactive Digital Television Studies Nucleus (NTDI) and of the Hypermedia Applied to Journalism Research and Production Nucleus (NEPHIjor) at the UFSC. Visiting Professor of the Knowledge Engineering and Management post-graduate program at the UFSC.