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A mentalidade métrica: vida social em paisagens de mediática[1]

The Metric Mindset: Social life in datafied media landscapes

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Metrics and technologies of measurement have become an increasingly important feature of modern 'media life' (Deuze 2012), indeed having become 'an environment in which we live' (Brighenti 2018: 25). In this environment increasingly many domains have become measurable through social networking media, constantly reminding media users of their metric status when it comes to amounts of followers, friends, contacts, notifications, and constantly prompting media users to respond to metric triggers. It is well established in the sociology of measurement that people react and change behaviour when being measured (Espeland & Sauder 2007), and following from processes of metrification, it has been suggested a shift in the attitudes and mindsets of media users where the algorithmic principles of data capture on the internet and the metrics associated with social networking sites would produce a 'big data mindset' (van Dijck 2014), or a 'metricated mindset' (Author & Co-author 2015). A

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metricated mindset would suggest an increased inclination to quantify human relations, knowledge, friendships, that is, social life as such, and such arguments have been developed theoretically recently (e.g. Grosser 2014, van Dijck 2013), but have not yet been systematically tested empirically for social media. The transformative nature of increased metrification would presumably produce a certain type of disposition to act in relation to others and to the surrounding world, revealing itself in ways of evaluating social actions and relations. The objective of this project is to study these attitudes and valuations through a combination of experimental and traditional methods.

Although metrics, and technologies of measurement, have been around since the invention of writing (Hacking 1990), the rise of statistics in the mid 19th century meant a new phase in the development of measurement (Porter 1986), impacting on how the world is perceived and predicted, producing a mindset against which humans orient and act in social space. Digitization has arguably fuelled this development, introducing real-time algorithmic measurement in online spaces, building on continuously larger datasets, and new ways of calculating data, which have allowed for synchronisation of sets of data on unprecedented scales. Digitization has thus provided with an increased penetration of metrics in all spheres of life (Beer 2016), and to understand the wider social and cultural consequences of this should be of sociological relevance.

Metrics, as used in this application, refer to a 'standard of measurement' (OED).[2] Measurement has an epistemological dimension as it fixates and preserves

[2] There are, admittedly, also other uses of metrics, e.g. in poetry or architecture, but in this context it is used related to the operations and business models within the media and culture industries (cf. Brighenti 2017).

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events in space and time. However, some aspects of reality do not lend themselves to the simplification and reduction measurement requires, and thus they remain invisible. Metrics express *some* dimensions of events, rather than others. They constitute an image of reality, mediated, that media users see and are invited to react to.

Within the culture and media industries metrics have mainly concerned audience measurement. Within the commercial media, the interest in 'knowing one's audience' has been a central part of the business models developed from the traditional mass media (Bjur 2014), but with digitization, new business models developed building on algorithmically processed audience statistics (Bermejo 2009, Buzzard 2012). Traditional mass media has had to adjust to this new situation, while new-born digital media already from their start adopted their workings to the metrically steered production environments (Author 2011, Kennedy 2016), and we have seen the rise of a 'data analytics industry' (Beer 2018), surrounded by new terminologies centred on 'big data' (boyd & Crawfoord 2012, Andrejevic 2013), 'bio-metrics' (Gates 2011), 'gamification' (Whitson 2013), 'social profiling' (Gould 2014), etc. This has privileged new ways for the media to relate to their audiences, with new textual strategies developed, e.g. click-bait journalism (Wahl-Jørgensen et al. 2016), or 'like economies' (Gerlitz & Helmond 2013), and new business models (Author 2011) – all of which are built on metrics.

From the media productions perspective, metrics have most often been used for producing economic value (through, for example, the construction of the audience commodity). Following pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1939), we theorise value in both its essence (what it is) and how it is arrived at (the practice of valuation) – that is, both as a noun and as a verb. Metrics represent a form of valuation, and to produce metrics is to arrive at the 'worth' of something, the measure assumed in the practice of valuation (Magendanz 2003), according to the philosophical principle the 'What counts

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– in the sense of what is valued – is that which is counted' (Badiou 2008: 2). In practices of valuation economic value often has a privileged position, where metrics translates qualitative value forms into numerical (economic) value – the 'currency' that media producers speak of when they translate audience ratings into the worth of the audience commodity, or the 'traffic commodity' that social media platform owners trade in. Metrics is a sort of rationality where most things converge into economic thinking in media production (Baym 2013), and when sociability becomes metricated along nexus of values defined by the social media industries, it motivates research on how media users make sense of these metrics in their everyday media use, which values are produced in this process, and which social actions and relations are privileged.

A mindset is, according to Merriams-Webster, 'a mental attitude or inclination', or a 'fixed state of mind'. It is a specific form of 'cognitive habitat' (Pettitt 2013) forming our perceptions of the world, and hence has impact on our dispositions to act in that world. If we perceive of social relations in a specific way, we will act based on those perceptions, and we will value social relations according to our mindset. We can thus study people's mindsets through analysing how an individual value social relations. In that sense, a mindset is related to an inividual's *habitus*: the set of durable dispositions for acting in the world, acquired over the life-course through formal and informal education, and social experiences more generally (Bourdieu 1980/1992). These dispositions are in themselves based in distinctions, classifications of others in social space (Bourdieu 1979/1989), similar to how Lévi-Strauss (1962/1983) argues that human action is based on classifications. However, we theorise mindset as a more malleable disposition compared to the habitus; weaker and more flexible in relation to changes in social conditions. This is then *a sociological* or *anthropological approach* to study the ways in which metrics impact on people's mindsets (rather than a psychological).

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The aim of this paper is to suggest an approach for analysing metrics in everyday, routinised life, and to give a few examples from a pilot study which has used manipulated software that removes metrics from the users' interface. It is concluded that such experimental methodologies are helpful for revealing some of the no-reflected relations to metrics in everyday life, and that research needs to continue such methodological experiments and development.

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