

## CHAPTER 3

# Education in the Age of ‘Corporate YouTube’: Big Data Analytics Meets Instafamous

### Introduction

Media and popular discourses often highlight the negative effects of digital technologies on children’s mental, emotional and physical development, and engagement. However, over the last 10–15 years, educational establishments in ‘the West’ have been increasingly embracing the digitisation of education and e-learning systems in the name of *increasing* engagement. The very architecture of digital educational systems – from Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) to educational apps – rewards ‘good behaviour’ in ways that further encourage digital engagement. Such a digitally mediated process becomes quite literally a technology of the learned self, as ‘good students’ and ‘good teachers’. For example, many VLEs log the exact times, dates and areas that users (which includes both learners and educators) have logged on and accessed content; this is one of the ways in which ‘student engagement’ is monitored digitally and centrally to keep track not just of student attendance, but also to monitor which classes are most effective in engaging students online. A failure to engage digitally is a failure to learn and a failure to teach. Such a correlation ultimately turns both learners and educators into (un)willing digital subjects within a neoliberal context, to be self-responsible for monitoring, assessing, analysing and managing the quantified and performative educational self, captured within institutionalised digital systems of regulation.

Focusing mainly on the increasing implementation of certain educational tools, like the rather aptly named video-sharing platform, ‘Panopto’, in Higher Education (HE) in the UK,<sup>1</sup> this chapter critiques disturbing issues relating to

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<sup>1</sup> In the UK, ‘Higher Education’ refers to tertiary education, following secondary education at school (typically students leave secondary school and thus enter Higher

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the corporatisation and platformisation of education. We argue that teaching and learning increasingly intersect with two forces brought together through digital engagement: on the one hand, corporatised platform culture with its Big Data logic at its analytical and profiteering core; and on the other hand, the neoliberal Instagram culture revolving around promotional and performative online practices. We wish to destabilise this node in order to question the increasing impossibility and lack of space in opting out from such a digitally defined educational structure that has implications beyond pedagogy, including infringements on privacy and the question of intellectual rights.

### **Panopto: The ‘Corporate YouTube’**

Panopto, in the words of the company, is a place to ‘upload and host your videos in a secure “Corporate YouTube”’. As this statement suggests, the idea is that those producing pedagogical content – lectures, training and/or coursework and assignments – can record, edit and upload their educational videos for a specific ‘audience’ within a ‘closed’ internal but integrated institutional system. The whole process mimics the mechanics and design of the popular and mainstream video-sharing platform, YouTube. According to the company website, Panopto was initially a project emerging from Carnegie Mellon University and, at the time of writing, claims to be serving ‘more than 5 million end users in businesses and universities around the world’ (Panopto 2012). Panopto’s educational origin is reflected in its website page dedicated to their list of ‘customers’ which include a range of North American (including Ivy League) and British Universities (including Red Brick), alongside commercial companies (e.g., Nike, General Electric) (Panopto 2015). There might indeed be an eagerness from corporate and educational institutions to implement pedagogical e-tools like Panopto, but their self-defined term ‘Corporate YouTube’ raises two key interrelated issues: the corporatisation and platformisation of education, both of which are presented as improving teaching, learning and administrative practices. We will focus on the various modes of digital engagement these two processes enforce, asking what possibilities of digital disengagement might be available to learners and educators in this corporate and platformised context.

Whilst the pedagogical, organisational, financial and behavioural benefits of e-learning and the digitalisation of education have been studied and their implementation encouraged (Hoyle 2002; Wan et al. 2008; Uskov et al. 2016), the implications of the corporatisation and platformisation of education within a neoliberal context need further consideration, especially in relation to questions of (self)surveillance, (self)discipline and (self)monitoring. What are the socio-cultural, behavioural, pedagogical and economic ramifications for learners and

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Education at 17–18 years old) and comprises of Universities and Further/Continuing Education institutions.

educators in a world where 'Corporate YouTube' is fast becoming the norm? In the following chapter, we explore how a 'Corporate YouTube' culture of education emerges at the intersection of two symbiotic forces working together to affix the learner and educator into a position where digital engagement is the core value of success: firstly, the global, profit-driven digital ecosystem which has designed and consequently shaped modes of digital engagement in ways that place Big Data and user analytics at its monetising core; and secondly, the self-promotional and self-tracking digital culture inhabited by influencers and micro-celebrities which necessitates the quantification of performance. We argue that it is this dual force that makes opt-out difficult, as any acts of digital disengagement become equated with 'failure' at teaching and learning: after all, who would want to jeopardise their education as learners, or their job as teachers?

### **Educational Analytics: Data Mining and Measuring Pedagogical Success**

In *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connected World* (2018), van Dijck et al. dedicate a whole chapter to discussing how platformisation has affected the very idea, philosophy, values and practices of education. The authors discuss the ways in which the dominant global tech corporations (the 'Big Five' consisting of Microsoft, Apple, Google, Amazon and Facebook) have capitalised on and commercialised education. These corporations have done so by providing not only the digital ecosystem to host various digitalised, integrated and synchronised educational practices, but the actual hardware/software to support and facilitate these (e.g., Microsoft provide the computers and other hardware, and MS Office/Education packages, including their video streaming platform, MS Stream). Even an 'independent' company like Panopto is still structured by these same corporate and profit-driven large tech corporations, interdependently relying on integration within their digital ecosystems. For example, making a point that videos 'shouldn't exist in a silo' (Panopto 2020b), Panopto boasts how it operates through unified communication and system integration, listing other popular systems used in educational institutions such as Zoom, Skype for Business and Slack.

Highlighting that educational platforms are corporately owned and propelled by algorithmic architectures and business models, van Dijck et al. (2018) argue that the datafication, selection and commodification of education inevitably 'uproots or bypasses the values that are fundamental' to 'knowledge-based curriculum, autonomy for teachers, collective affordability, and education as a vehicle for socioeconomic equality' (2018, 3). To provide an example, Panopto offers the ability to turn on Google Analytics for 'in-depth' statistics, which unsurprisingly, requires the institution/user to have a Google account. Educational analytics, similar to analytics relating to citizenship (as discussed in Chapter 2), have become intertwined with – or perhaps incorporated and collapsed into – corporate and globalised Big Data analytics. Here, through the normalisation of platform-based digitality, the distinction between learner/

educator and ‘user’ (or even ‘viewer’) becomes blurred into monetised and profitable units of personal data. In embracing the digitalisation of pedagogy, educational institutions may have created a more accessible, streamlined, interactive and ‘engaging’ teaching and learning environment, but only from within the integrated digital and technological systems as designed, situated and ultimately regulated in a corporate and profit-driven globalised network. How does such a ‘Corporate YouTube’ culture impact on pedagogical practices? Where does it leave those who are not engaged with educational platforms?

Taking digital disengagement as our starting point, we want to push van Dijk et al.’s (2018) ideas further and problematise not only the political economy of corporatising and platformising education – which collapses educational analytics into user analytics in the context of a digital capitalism that profiteers from the monetisation of Big Data – but most of all, critique the naturalisation of digital engagement with pedagogical ‘success’. ‘Corporate YouTube’ culture is encouraging an educational system which increasingly only recognises learning and teaching through compulsory digital *engagement*, for it is digitality that forms the basis of metricisation, quantification, datafication and analytics that operates within a Big Data logic of the large tech companies (e.g., Key Performance Indicators, Research Excellence Framework, h-index, National Student Survey scores). Such a configuration measures *digital* and not pedagogical engagement – according to corporate Big Data logic – and inevitably forces digital disengagement into becoming a sign of failed performance. A case in point occurred in early January 2021 when it was reported that, amidst announcements of significant redundancies, some UK universities were planning to decide which jobs should be cut using quantitative ‘new performance measurements’ that were likened to practices found in ‘big city corporate firms’ (Fazackerley 2021a). Here, disengaged learners and educators ‘fail’ because they are not engaging metrically with digital tools or appropriate digital systems of qualification.

As we have seen a myriad of times throughout this book, the solution offered to address learners’ and educators’ ‘failure’ is, of course, digital: for example, the enhanced monitoring of ‘progress’ via tracking platforms is designed to ‘support’ and supposedly ‘help’ both learner and educator to identify problematic areas, not through direct qualitative means, but through assessment of digitally present quantitative data. Whilst the possibility of opting out of digital pedagogy becomes a near impossibility – short of facing expulsion, dismissal or disciplinary action – the disengaging subject is placed into a paradoxical loop of digital solutionism. Furthermore, as shall be explored in Part II of this book, regarding the self-feeding nature of consumption and labour of digital engagement, what begins to emerge here is also a self-perpetuating circuit of self-digital engagement that ensures its subjects remain firmly embedded within compulsory digitality: if digitality is equated to success, this forces the learner-educator subject further into digitality, self-responsible for investing in the search for ways to improve and succeed in their digitality.

This loop of digital solutionism has a profound impact on how educational data and, in particular, learning analytics are shaping the learning and teaching subject. According to Johnson et al. (2016), 'learning analytics' can be defined as, 'analytics aimed at learner profiling, a process of gathering and analyzing details of individual student interactions in online learning activities' (Johnson et al. 2016, 38). Whilst we do not deny the benefits of improving the teaching and learning experience through self-reflective actions that respond to data and pedagogical metrics (Smale and Regalado 2017), what concerns us is the normalisation and language surrounding 'learner profiling' (and 'educator profiling' by extension) as they come dangerously close to the kind of digital profiling practices used by large companies as part of corporate and/or state surveillance. If surveillance indeed consists of data collection with the 'explicit purpose of influencing and managing the data target' (Ball 2006, 297), then learners and educators increasingly become '*data targets*' subject to profiling and both institutionalised and self-surveillance. As such, like all other areas of life which have become quantified within the compulsory neoliberal digital context – from Fitbits, to Uber, to social media hits – the learner-educator subject must not only generate but also respond to educational 'lively data' (Lupton 2017), to somehow 'improve' their digital ac-'count'-ability by altering their behaviour in ways that can be reflected *digitally*. In other words, it is more the datafication of pedagogy – rather than the digitisation of it – that has created a culture of self-responsible self-surveillance, self-tracking and self-monitoring in education.

For example, Panopto offers access to in-house analytics which enable video creators (and their institutions) to view user statistics through numerical data measuring digital engagement (note, not necessarily pedagogical engagement): number of views and downloads of an uploaded video lecture by day; unique viewers; minutes engaged; rankings of videos/folders most viewed across the board. As mentioned earlier, here is an example of quantifying *digital* engagement, not necessarily pedagogical engagement, but nonetheless this digital data becomes a technology of the disciplinary learning and/or teaching self. In discussing the Panopticon, Foucault explores the importance of both visibility and unverifiability; inmates must be induced into a state of conscious and permanent visibility, but at the same time, must never be able to verify whether or not they are being watched at any one moment (Foucault 1977). In the case of Panopto, not only are viewing statistics visible to the video creator, but also to the wider audience of the institution (e.g., the department, School, colleagues, individuals in power); similarly, despite compulsory transparency, the video creator can never easily know how/when/by whom their 'numbers' are being monitored (or not) as there is no equally transparent way of accessing and verifying that part of data visibility. The monitor is being monitored, and thus must self-monitor, all whilst enabling the generation of, and self-generating, big educational data.

It is within this paradox that there lies troubling issues relating to the disciplinary educational self: a docile self whose digitality must be monitored

whilst they must also increase their digital self-engagement in order to be responsible ‘good learners’ and ‘good educators.’ A failure to engage digitally is a failure to learn and a failure to teach. Such a correlation ultimately turns both learners and educationalists into (un)willing digital subjects: on the one hand, (self)-monitored, -assessed, -analysed, -managed and captured within institutionalised digital systems of regulation that rewards ‘good behaviour’ in ways that encourage digital engagement, a process that becomes quite literally a technology of the learned self; on the other hand, a datafied and quantified self, captured into a platform culture, where learning analytics travel beyond the data-generating educational institutions, to be monetised and capitalised. Within this context, because digitality and pedagogy have become so intertwined, it has become an impossibility to opt out of one without the other; that is, learners and educators cannot opt out of the digital without opting out of the pedagogical. This means the forceful and complicit participation within this self-disciplinary digital surveillance culture.

### **Insta-Teacher: Performance Monitoring the Performance of Pedagogy**

In the previous section of this chapter, we explored the ways in which ‘Corporate YouTube’ forces the educational subject into measuring pedagogical success through digital engagement. We argued this problematic process is situated at the capitalist nexus of Big Data and educational analytics that not only encourages a data-responsive culture of self-responsibility, self-surveillance and self-discipline, but ultimately capitalises on the resulting data generated. Beyond profit and analytics, another interrelated consequence of ‘Corporate YouTube’ is how educational platforms – as designed and/or existing within the global, corporate digital ecosystem – also encourage internet- and social media-logocentric behaviour and expectation in teaching and learning: intersecting the corporatised platform culture that revolves around a profit-driven Big Data logic in education is also a promotional culture that operates through a social media logic. Welcome to the ‘YouTube’ of ‘Corporate YouTube’: the world of micro-celebrities, influencers and Instafame in education.

In discussing the proliferation of Facebook beyond its original confines as ‘just’ a social media platform, Helmond (2015) argues that platformisation ‘rests on the dual logic of social media platforms’ expansion into the rest of the web and, simultaneously, their drive to make external web and app data platform ready’ (2015, 8). The same dual logic has begun to permeate through educational institutions. On the one hand, the platformisation of education has seen the increasing use of educational platforms that imitate the social media environment (which we will explore in a moment). On the other hand, there is also an increasing acceptance and normalisation of social media platforms as an educational platform in themselves. A prime example of this is Facebook

for Education, an online resource hub run by Facebook which states that it aims to provide everyone with 'the opportunity to take part in a global learning community. We want to enable people to activate around change, collaborate in more meaningful ways, and explore innovative new technologies' (Facebook 2018). Similarly, there is an increasing use of general social media to formally share knowledge, curriculum resources and/or discussions from both students and educators. In other words, the platformisation of education revolves around a social media logic that is designed to inadvertently and inconspicuously strengthen the digital ecosystem of infrastructural power as held by the 'Big Five' through its reliance and sheer embeddedness within them.

In turn, this very process of creating a 'platform ready' educational environment has encouraged social media technopractices – from language, to culture, to behaviour – to become a dominant and expected part of teaching and learning interactions: from being able to add cute augmented reality (AR) filters to your Zoom profile (originally made popular on Snapchat); uploading socially interactive video content on Panopto or MS Stream (as on YouTube, Twitch or TikTok); or amassing 'followers' who 'like' your uploaded lecture videos and comments posted, just as you would on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. In other words, not only do VLEs mean that teaching and learning become necessarily about *digital* engagement, *digital* participation, *digital* social interaction and *digital* performance of the self as practiced on social media (as shall be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4 on consumer culture), but also, these very social media affordances mean that teaching and learning practices increasingly mimic an internet and social media environment through sheer design and architecture.

For example, video-sharing platforms like Panopto mirror YouTube's social media-logo-centric design, architecture and language: learners ('viewers') can 'give informative feedback' by rating the videos made by educators ('creators') via clicking on a star system (Panopto 2021), much like a buyer might rate a product on Amazon, or an Uber customer the service provided by their driver. Learners and educators are encouraged to share, post comments and participate in discussion posts under the video in a similar participatory manner to YouTube (and most social media platforms). Other educational platforms such as MS Stream even have a like/favourite button (in this case, a heart icon) which also provides a numerical count, and video posters can even amass 'followers' via a 'follow' button, conveniently located under the content creator. Much in the way that educational analytics and Big Data user analytics become conveniently collapsed into one another as a necessary process of digitalising education, here we witness a cross-sector 'context collapse' (Vitak 2012) where the differences between 'social media user' (and thus consumer) and 'learner/educator' have also been collapsed, flattened out into one interactive network using common language and shared practices embedded within the context of a consumer-oriented neoliberal digital culture.

Furthermore, 'Corporate YouTube' is a culture that arises not just from a digital society in which social interaction is practiced through 'like' and



‘subscribe’ buttons, but is also about a very visual performance – for social media and the internet is predominantly a visual realm – of the educational self in a way that is situated within the self-promotional culture of the Instafamous. Such a heavily visual culture can potentially lead to exclusionary practices; for example, those with learning/visual disabilities or different non-visual learning styles (Kent 2015). Ultimately, recording lectures and video content becomes less about the documentation of knowledge and instruction, and instead, more about performance: with ‘likes’ and ‘follows’ to prove it, creating video content is now increasingly about a carefully organised, regulated, edited and staged performance of the educational digital self. Indeed, it is about the corporatisation of not just the platform but of the subject as a commodity, with fee-paying ‘clients’ as students who can review, rate and evaluate in a highly visible and interactive manner.

The VLP [virtual learning platform] is considered to be one of the modern applications of technology in renovating education because it works to increase students’ interactivity and technological competencies with learning process management and performance monitoring (Ahmed & Hasegawa 2019, 365)

The digitalisation of education has meant that ‘student interactivity’ has now increasingly become collapsed into ‘social media interactivity’; similarly, there is a collapse between performance in terms of learning analytics (‘performance monitoring’), and performance in terms of the visual presentation of the self. Whilst there is a tradition of ‘famous academics’ – like Professor Brian Cox, the physicist and TV presenter – who gain scholarly celebrity capital through the presentation of the self via public-facing media, what is also beginning to emerge is a new generation of everyday academics who must step into a digitalised culture of education that is part of a consumer-oriented socio-visual realm of micro-celebrities performing everyday selves through social media platforms.

In discussing micro-celebrities, Senft states that ‘a successful person doesn’t just maintain a place on that stage; she manages her online self with the sort of care and consistency normally exhibited by those who have historically believed themselves to be their own product: artists and entrepreneurs (2013, 347). As influencers and micro-celebrities have taught us, to increase social engagement one must invest time, money and resources into developing online strategies and techniques in digitalised self-branding and self-promotion. Universities in the UK increasingly offer digital media skills – editing, lighting, sound production – with the sole purpose of enhancing student engagement through digital engagement, with similar strategies used by micro-celebrities creating visual and digital narratives that are consistent, ‘authentic’, emotive, intimate and interactive (Abidin 2018; Herskovitz and Crystal 2010; Marwick and boyd, 2011a; 2011b; Senft 2013). In effect, education is increasingly about



managing digital pedagogical content, digital pedagogical analytics *and* the branded digital self as presented online.

Discussing Twitter's 'favouriting' action and its 'heart' icon, Bucher and Helmond argue that Twitter not only standardises 'a mode of engagement across its services ('liking'), but also affected the perceived range of possible actions linked to these features of the platform, or its affordances' (2018, 235). Such features might make these educational platforms user-friendly and potentially engage 'the digital natives' through the use of a popular digital vernacular, just like social media. However, these platform affordances enforce digital engagement through a compulsory sociality that is embedded within an internet-centric culture of the Instafamous generation where the mediated and branded self becomes currency exchanged within a shared attention economy that values digital engagement. How many hits? How many views? How many followers? Am I sufficiently face-tuned for this video? Is my green-screen background sufficiently well lit?

Within this context, pedagogical 'success' is thus not only quantified by pedagogical analytics that monitor performance (the previously mentioned 'performance management'), but also needs to be qualified in ways that require closely monitored pedagogic performativity ('impression management') evolving around a social media logic of branding and popularity that has created a generation of YouTubers and the Instafamous. Situated digitally, culturally and socially alongside this world of social media and Instafame, the educational data subject is increasingly self-responsible and self-(ac)countable for presenting pedagogical 'success' in the form of quantifiable digital engagement – the 'learning process management and performance monitoring' – but they must also *represent* this success through the presentation of a visually appealing, socially interactive, mediated and performative digital self: performance management and impression management have become all but interchangeable.

In the world of social media celebritisation, teaching and learning is thus becoming a carefully calculated digital and labour-intense performance; it is no longer just about work invested into learning and teaching, but an additional and necessary digital performance of this work. This additional labour creates a digital double-bind for the teaching and learning subject: the digital performance has become naturalised to mean pedagogical performance. Within this context, if an educator opts out through digital disengagement, or otherwise 'fails' to perform 'correctly' according to the social media code, this 'failure' also becomes double-bound: a 'failed' educator *and* the 'failed' micro-celebrity, where pedagogy and celebritisation are both collapsed into one another in ways which are monitored and rectified digitally (e.g., training on blended learning, increasing student engagement online and so on). As such, the need for a digital environment to monitor and 'enhance' education thus creates additional labour of pedagogical data management and pedagogical data production in the process of populating these VLE sites and engaging with platforms like Panopto.

## Opting In for Digital Disengagement

As millennials and ‘digital natives’ have been pushed through the education system in the last 10–20 years, the idea of ‘student engagement’ – getting the learner to be active in their learning – has been increasingly tied to the question of digital engagement. From ‘blended learning,’ ‘mixed media delivery,’ to the VLE, educational models have been encouraging teachers and educational establishments to embrace e-learning as being more accessible, pedagogically effective and organisationally efficient, but most of all with the underlying belief that it increases ‘student engagement’ (De La Flor et al. 2018; Papa 2015; Roffe 2002; Seale 2014). As with most spheres in life explored throughout this book, the digital has thus been hailed as the ‘technicolour dreamcoat’ that educators should wear in order to solve the problem of supposedly bored millennials who do not understand analogue or that which is not conducted or delivered through a screen (‘what’s the point of going to the library for a hardcopy book when I can just read it on my phone at home?’).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, this technicolour dreamcoat suddenly turned into an unwanted but necessary straitjacket for many. Furthermore, digitalities that might have been more commonplace in HE (from Panopto to webinars), suddenly became a necessity across all educational levels as primary and secondary school students studied remotely from home. One of the countless numbers of humorous English-language memes and images to have circulated online during 2020 was of a young girl, dishevelled as if straight out of bed, watching a laptop screen and looking overwhelmed, exhausted (her uncombed hair makes her look as if she has had a bad night’s sleep) and bewildered, if not even somewhat distraught. The caption beneath it reads: ‘When you’re 5 yrs old & it’s your 1st day of school ever and they expect you to know how to read, type and send emails.’ Beyond the humour, responses to this post indicate that this image and caption epitomised the travails of digital engagement at home for both adults and children more generally, as well as specifically what the digitalising of education – whether referring to online home schooling through to the solitary use of e-resources – has meant for both students and educators during lockdown.

The very digital tools for education that had previously been celebrated during the pandemic quickly became (and in some cases still continue to be at the time of writing in 2021) a source of exhaustion, bewilderment and anxiety as they replaced not just direct learning experiences, but all the other auxiliary teaching and learning experiences typically part of in-person schooling, including playtime/socialising, support, and graduation ceremonies, right through to physical activities (such as Physical Education, and fieldwork). Student and digital engagement very quickly became frayed at the edges: digitalisation of education only works if there are human actors – in this case adults who are taking care of children, usually within a school environment – who

have the time and resources to support such a process. In this sense, digitalisation is not just about analytics, metrics and platforms, it is about real analogue human labour.

But unlike paid and contracted human labour, pandemic labour, invested in ensuring digitalisation was possible within the home, was both invisible and unaccounted for financially, temporally and even spatially, as people negotiated new divisions within the domestic space. Whilst some specific workplaces and schools may have practiced varying degrees of flexibility during the pandemic, at a nationalised level there was very little discussion of changing (e.g. slowing down, reducing work, replacing activities) school/paid labour workloads and schedules that acknowledged the invisible human labour (and stress) that supported the digital response to the pandemic: from parents/guardians and students having to acquire different and new technologies and/or digital skills – in itself pointing towards problematic issues surrounding privilege, equality and access – right through to the redefining of kinship structures and relations.

Furthermore, even when schools were eventually forced to fully open in the UK after the initial lockdown(s) (unlike universities), there remained a lack of significant discussion and acknowledgement regarding the extra labour needed to attend to both the online and offline temporalities that the pandemic had created. Whilst hybrid and blended learning practices were thus presented as pedagogical 'solutions' that would involve partial digital (dis)engagement, these did not consider the fact that such practices require twice (if not more) the amount of work to support such a negotiated hybrid status. The extra labour that is needed is very much critiqued by the Zero Covid movement, who very much advocate for political engagement through disengagement with governmental policies. In their statement about schools they note:

There is a concerted propaganda offensive against our teachers and parents, with headlines screaming, 'Reopen our schools.' But the schools aren't closed! Teachers have been working heroically, at risk to their own health, teaching at-risk children and the children of key workers, while simultaneously teaching all the other children online (Zero Covid 2021).

In the context of governmental concerns to 'keep the country going' and 'keep the country safe', the continuum of digital disengagement was thus *non*-elastic, unable to flex, or to take into account the various types of extra human labour needed to digitalise survival.

Running concurrently to such popular media narratives surrounding the difficulties of teaching and learning almost entirely through digital engagement, another counter-narrative began to emerge in the UK towards the end of summer 2020. As the UK began to near the start of another academic year, following its first national lockdown in spring 2020, during which most schools closed and universities shifted to remote teaching, people began to ask: will

schools re-open? Will they remain open? Will classrooms run in the same way? What will education in HE look like? In the midst of such questions, student-based activists, politicians and journalists began to question whether school and university students were really receiving a ‘full’ education and learning experience through online delivery. For example, referring to those attending university during 2020 in the UK, British Labour MP Andrew Adonis tweeted: ‘I don’t think students should have to pay £9,000 this year if they are not receiving full tuition’ (Adonis 2020). This received a variety of responses ranging from students agreeing regarding costs, especially those in student accommodation; teachers outraged by the dismissal of teaching and the implications that the teaching provided was below standard; and concerned parents wondering why the British Government had allowed universities to be open at all. Clearly, this was an issue beyond this particular tweet and moment in time: in January 2021 students launched a tuition fee strike, demanding a partial refund; international students similarly refused to pay their tuition fees as ‘learning mostly in their bedrooms has not justified prices of up to £29,000 a year’ (Bundock 2021; Fazackerley 2021b; RCA Action Group 2021).

Such tweets and student responses reveal how, despite the institutional literature and popular perception that millennials need constant digital engagement in order to absorb any information, ‘real life’ is valued not just as an experience of digital disengagement in a world saturated by the digital, but also as an integral part of the ‘student experience’. This point was most notable in heated discussions that took place in January 2021 when many students complained that universities were charging higher fees than The Open University and other online long-distance courses whilst offering what they saw as the same online experience (Ryan 2020) – the irony here being that, prior to the pandemic, the problem of ‘enriching the student experience’ was almost always ‘solved’ through digitality and technology. These discussions clearly indicate that simply throwing digitality at millennials is not a ‘solution’, thus exposing the difference between the digitalisation of education and the digitalisation of educational experience.

New digitalities brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic have subverted and denaturalised – at least during the pandemic – the relationship between student engagement and digital engagement. Similarly, the enforced digitalisation of all areas of teaching and learning – including and especially the experiential aspect of pedagogical practice – has also delineated what had increasingly become a context collapse between user/consumer/follower/student. To ensure survival, the pandemic brought about an all-encompassing process of digitalisation across all areas of life, leading to a context collapse where digital (and physical) boundaries broke down, merging into a form of digital homogeneity. This in turn has led to the need for the re-separation and re-demarcation of boundaries that define our different practices, roles and spheres in life. In this way, the pandemic has not so much opened up a space for opt-out but the *need* for opening up a space for ‘opt-out’: both students and educators now want to

not just 'opt out' of the digital but are actively 'opting-in' to digital disengagement. In this sense, it has taken something as drastic as a global pandemic to explicitly bring to light how the digital and technological are not always the solution, and if they are, that there is always a cost – in time, experiences, emotions, energy and even health.

### **Lecture Capture and the Captive 'Data Double': The Persistence of Data and Digital Rights**

So far, we have explored and critiqued the ways in which educational tools like 'Panopto' bring together the Big Data logic of corporatised platform culture that centralises profit, and the social media logic belonging to a neoliberal Instagram culture that revolves around the presentation of the self-branding, promotional and performative self. In particular, we argued how the problematic collapse between pedagogy and micro-celebritisation has meant that 'success' and 'failure' at educating and learning is increasingly measured through *digital* and not pedagogical engagement, operating through a combination of Big Data and social media logic. Such a process inevitably forces learners and educators to not only undertake the additional labour of performing pedagogy *digitally*, but also forces digital disengagement into becoming a sign of 'failed' pedagogical performance.

We would now like to discuss what might perhaps be the most chilling aspect of the corporatisation and the social mediatisation of educational platforms. In addition to the problematic naturalisation between pedagogical engagement and digital engagement, compulsory digitality in the name of pedagogical 'success' often means the enforced surrendering of not just personal pedagogical data, but also, personal biodata in the form of one's identifiable self as digitally captured by software like Panopto. Unions and academics involved in teaching within HE have raised concerns surrounding lecture capture. The moral, ethical and legal lines that define the regulations around ownership of video content – both in terms of the pedagogical content as well as of the lecturer themselves as digitally captured – are somewhat blurred, making this a very grey area indeed.

For example, Panopto's website states, without a hint of irony, 'Succession Planning: Let Your Experts Retire — Not Their Expertise', where generations to come can supposedly still reap the benefits of recorded content long after the expert has retired, or been made redundant, or is otherwise unavailable (Panopto 2017). Indeed, the chilling example of Professor François-Marc Gagnon from Concordia University is a case in point, still 'teaching' students digitally from beyond the grave through recorded lectures (Kneese 2021). Within such a configuration, the digital educational subject performs and embodies the knowledge, yet ironically becomes obsolete as their body and their data become divorced, expendable yet at the same time individualised to a point of

biometric replication. Even if the individual chooses to opt out of the digitalised education platform altogether, their digitalised self must necessarily continue to perform in the pedagogical afterlife. How can such a subject 'opt out' of having their personal data captured when it is attached to their pedagogical content as determined by the platform and social media logic?

The very practice and philosophy of opt-out is based on a disengagement from the digital, some kind of separation and departure; but in effect, such a process also means the *further* decoupling – and thus loss of control – of the individual from their data. Indeed, as Haggerty and Ericson (2000) argue in relation to 'surveillant assemblages', human bodies are abstracted from 'their territorial settings, separating them into a series of discrete flows' that are 'then reassembled in different locations as discrete "data doubles"' (Haggerty and Ericson 2000, 605). Even after opt-out, our 'data doubles' persist online like digital shadows, deterritorialised and (ab)used by other individuals or corporations that ultimately profiteer from them financially, socially and in other ways that in most cases infringe on the original individual's rights, as 'contextual integrity' (Nissenbaum 2004), inevitably, has been collapsed.

Whether it is the deceased professor (the ultimate 'opt-out') who keeps on working and delivering lectures from beyond the grave through their recorded teaching content, or the self-tracked biodata inputted on a digital health app by a woman who once wished to track her pregnancy until she had a miscarriage, their personal data persists and persists through an internet-centric and platform-ready time-space. Their 'data doubles' are qualitative and quantitative – images, vocal sounds, texts, biometric data to metadata – and indeed, have been both violently generated and removed from an individual, yet at the same time, also forever cruelly connected to the individual in ways that are attributable and trackable if necessary. In other words, digital disengagement might opt the human subject out from compulsory digitality – destabilising and decentring the digital as a normative starting point – but it does not necessarily opt the data subject out of compulsory digitality. In fact, the individual paradoxically may have even less control over their 'digital double' *because* of their choice to opt out. But the question here is not whether digital disengagement is thus a liberation or a trap, it is about the persistence of data: why does it persist? Who benefits from its persistence?

Such questions are in many ways about the social legality of personal data and ownership, for these are ultimately about issues of control and rights. For example, if we return to the deceased professor's recorded content, two issues arise: firstly, the data of their actual teaching content (e.g., slides, ideas); secondly, their personal data as captured by e-tools like Panopto. Socio-legal issues relating to intellectual rights, copyrights and performance rights – and the lack of protection against infringements – have been debated and critiqued as early as 2013 by unions and staff (not to mention, increasing workloads and performance management), especially when lecture capture, 'blended learning' and e-learning came to the fore (UCU MMU 2013; UCU n.d.). For example,

the University of Bath issued guidelines for staff members covering the various legal rights and issues when using lecture capture. The recorded materials are covered by copyright ('Copyright in the words of the lecture (once fixed by the recording) also belongs to you and you have automatic performance rights'), whilst the University *also* 'has a licence to use your lecture materials and the recorded lecture as provided in the IP Policy. Your "moral rights" are also preserved which provides you with assurance that your materials will not be adapted and you will be credited when the University uses them' (University of Bath 2015).

However, such copyrights, intellectual rights and performance rights do *not* take into account the rights over an individual's biodata. Whilst students are protected (they must be informed before a recording begins), the performing lecturer has very little choice to opt out other than to surrender some aspect of their biodata – even if it is just their voice – that will persist as their 'data double' even beyond death, as in the case of Professor Gagnon. His actual personal biodata (voice, face, gestures) had been digitally recorded for educational purposes, but in an age of smart technologies where vocal, facial and gestural recognition are fast becoming the norm, the potential for the reassemblage of a 'data double' outside of the educational context (e.g., for use in opening a secure device, or accessing an account) is an alarming concern. When most of the UK's educational sector has been throwing around buzzwords like 'blended learning' and 'asynchronous learning', there has been very little debate regarding protection from 'data double' identity theft. What are the safeguards against this? Would intellectual rights, copyrights and performance rights protect against the potential abuse of a 'data double'? What we have here is thus the double-edged sword of digital pedagogy that allows very little room for opting out, both as learners/educators whose 'success' is measured through digitality, and as data subjects whose pedagogical data becomes subsumed within the larger analytics that inform and perpetuate platform and corporate culture.

### Conclusion: We Don't Need No Education?

Through an examination of the various e-tools and platforms like 'Panopto' used (or enforced) in Higher Education in the UK, this chapter has investigated some key problematic issues arising from the combined forces of a corporatised platform culture and neoliberal Instagram culture. Using Panopto's own tagline of being a 'Corporate YouTube', we looked at the ways in which education increasingly operates through a combined Big Data logic that is centred on profiteering analytics, and a social media logic that values promotional and performative online practices.

Regarding the 'corporate' of 'Corporate YouTube', we problematised the political economy of corporatising and platformising education, a process which collapses pedagogical and user analytics in the context of digital capitalism.



We critiqued separate key points. Firstly, there is something deeply troubling – philosophically, ethically and otherwise – about an educational system that is defined and underpinned by a Big Data logic which ultimately seeks to profiteer from the monetisation of user data. Here, the same issues relating to surveillance, control and regulation of data within the context of corporate, digital capitalism have made their way into education. Furthermore, what does it say about an educational system that now increasingly relies on and is embedded within the same digital infrastructures and technologies that are ultimately governed by the mega tech corporations?

Secondly, although implemented to enrich educational environments and proven to improve teaching and learning practices, the platformisation of education has led to the increasing naturalisation and conflation of digital engagement and pedagogical engagement, student interaction and social mediated interaction, user analytics and learning analytics. These processes have encouraged an education system and culture which increasingly only recognises learning and teaching through compulsory *digital* engagement. Such processes of pedagogical metricisation have thus led to the (self)disciplining and (self) regulation of datafied subjects, rather than educational subjects. Within such a context, opting out of the digital becomes equated to pedagogical ‘failure’ as a learner and/or educator, with real-life consequences, such as expulsion from a course or dismissal from employment, for failing to ‘perform’ *digitally*.

In conjunction, we also examined the second force – the social mediatisation of education – which arises from the larger context of a digital society that is increasingly ‘platform ready’ and ‘social media ready’. We argued that these two processes have led to the adoption and integration of social media technopractices – from language, to culture, to behaviour – into education, to become a dominant and expected part of teaching and learning interactions. From practices such as ‘like’, ‘follow’ and adding augmented reality filters, this chapter explored how VLEs and other e-tools mimic the social media environment in ways that further reinforce digital engagement, social engagement and the visual presentation of the self. Furthermore, this visual presentation of the educational self increasingly borrows from techniques used by micro-celebrities, part of a consumer-driven self-branding and promotional culture: the ‘YouTube’ of ‘Corporate YouTube’. We argued that within this context, pedagogical ‘success’ becomes equally about performance, not just in terms of quantified and metricised ‘performance indicators’ but in terms of performativity and impression management. The micro-celebritisation of teaching and learning means that the educational data subject increasingly becomes self-responsible and self-(ac)countable for performing their own pedagogical ‘success’ in ways that collapse performance management and impression management into each other.

Finally, we also explored the sinister result of the ways in which learning technologies increasingly capture different kinds of data from learners and educators and thus infringe on privacy, intellectual and other socio-legal rights in ways that still remain a rather undefined ‘grey area’. The question of collecting

biodata – from lecture captures – is one that needs urgent attention, alongside existing discussions surrounding intellectual property and copyright. How much (or how little) control learners and educators have over their own data, and how this may be (mis)used – subject to surveillance, monetisation and even identity fraud – are questions that still need sustained discussion.

Ultimately, as with all other areas in life, opting out of the digital in education has detrimental real-life consequences. Yet what is perhaps more dangerous in the case of education is that historically there is a perception that the very philosophy, values and practices of education are indeed 'something higher' to strive for, beyond politics and money. This obfuscates the problematic issues surrounding institutionalised data collection, surveillance, regulation and datafied control, which are all underpinned by the neoliberal, capitalist drive that propels mass platformisation and social mediatisation in the name of profit and promotion. Within this context, there is very little room for opting out, both as learners/educators whose 'success' is measured through digitality, and as data subjects whose pedagogical data becomes subsumed within the larger analytics that inform and perpetuate platform and corporate culture.

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