



SOCIAL IMPACT OF UBERIZATION: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE LABOR MARKET IN THE CITY OF IMPERATRIZ-MA¹



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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the social impacts of the uberization of work, focusing on the transformations that occurred in the labor market in the city of Imperatriz-MA. The research aims to understand how digital platforms have been changing traditional forms of employment, directly influencing the living conditions, labor rights and psychosocial health of workers. The phenomenon of uberization, although it offers flexibility and autonomy, reveals a new logic of job precariousness marked by the absence of guarantees, income instability, and algorithmic subordination, even under the discourse of autonomy. The research has a qualitative and exploratory character, based on a literature review and application of a structured questionnaire to 40 workers by app in Imperatriz. The data show long working hours, economic insecurity, absence of social protection and high level of stress among workers. In addition, contradictions are evident between the declared autonomy and the reality of subordination imposed by the platforms. The article also discusses the regional specificities of the labor market in Imperatriz and the legal challenges of the absence of regulation. Uberization, although it represents an innovation in the work model, reinforces social inequalities and demands the creation of legal mechanisms that guarantee decent working conditions for those involved.

Keywords: Uberization. Work by application. Precarious. Labor rights. Imperatriz-MA.

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INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the social impacts of the uberization of work, focusing on the transformations that occurred in the labor market of the city of Imperatriz-MA.

Today, due to its great performance in the sectors of commerce and services, Imperatriz occupies the position of the second largest political, cultural and population center in the state, second largest GDP in Maranhão and 165th in Brazil, with a GDP of R\$ 7,200,694.508 billion, surpassed only by the capital São Luís. It is also the main hub of the region that brings together the southwest of Maranhão and north of Tocantins (MARTINS; POLLETE, 2025).

Thus, the research proposes to analyze how digital platforms have been changing traditional forms of employment, directly affecting the living conditions and rights of workers inserted in this new labor model.

Uberization can lead to a significant reconfiguration of the local labor market. According to Viana (2022), the social impact of uberization includes the deregulation of traditional labor standards and the redefinition of what constitutes a worker. This can result in a fragmentation of labor protection and increased economic vulnerability of workers.

This way of working shows itself as a new mode of operation, which allows drivers to earn income by offering their service and using their own personal vehicles. Uber takes a percentage of the final amount paid by the customer and the service provider receives the rest. The main benefit of having your own car and becoming an Uber driver is the characteristics of self-driving, where he can have more time and freedom (CASTRO, 2020). However, it is important to highlight some nuances in this context of employment relationship,

such as the lack of guarantees for the service provider, from the demand of customers he will be able to meet to even having social and social security support. Where this person is exposed to a zero-hour contract that can have one hour, two hours, ten hours, without any guarantee. This is gaining a growing dimension in services, but it should not be limited to them (RAMALHO; RIGO; GRANGEIRO, 2020).

Therefore, the research objective of this theoretical essay is to analyze the context experienced by workers in the midst of the era of uberization and new forms of work and also to verify the diversity present in this new context. This study becomes relevant, because the new work arrangements, especially uberization, are gaining more and more space and notoriety in people's working lives and consequently impacting it in various ways (CARDOSO; SILVA, 2020).

Imperatriz, one of the largest cities in Maranhão, has seen a growth in the adoption of uberized services, reflecting national and global trends. The labor market in Imperatriz is influenced by specific regional factors, such as the availability of formal and informal employment, local economic conditions, and public policies.

According to Viana (2022), the insertion of digital platforms in the city offers both new opportunities and significant challenges for workers.

The general objective is to analyze the social effects of the uberization of work in the reality of Imperatriz-MA. As specific objectives, it is intended: (i) to understand the profile of app-based workers in the city; (ii) to investigate the working conditions faced by these professionals; (iii) identify the main legal and social challenges arising from the absence of an employment relationship; and (iv) to evaluate the psychosocial repercussions of the activity on these workers.

The methodology used in this research is qualitative and exploratory, with an empirical approach. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with closed questions, applied to digital platform workers in the city of Imperatriz-MA. In addition, the research is based on a bibliographic review of contemporary authors who discuss the theme of uberization and its social and legal implications.

UBERIZATION AS AN ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL PHENOMENON

In the current scenario experienced by Brazilian society, in the face of a structural crisis based on politics, where the class struggle of workers has become something more palpable and visible with the great advance of the antiquated and conservative thoughts of the elite, work is gaining new arrangements resulting from the needs of individuals (CARDOSO; SILVA, 2020).

This new form of work brought about by a flexibilization in the capitalist model, which proposed a decrease in the number of workers in companies and the emergence of new technologies, brought some changes in the world of work (DA SILVA, 2019).

"Uberization" refers to the phenomenon by which business models based on digital platforms, such as Uber, transform various economic sectors. These models directly connect service providers to consumers through applications, promoting flexibility, convenience, and efficiency (ROSÁRIO; DE SOUZA; CARITÁ, 2020).

However, uberization also has significant implications for labor relations and the social conditions of the workers involved (LEITE; RODRIGUES; DE SOUZA, 2022).

As in the industrial revolution, the digital revolution is changing labor relations, a clear example is the process of uberization, which demonstrates how the concept of work is

changing its form. Uberization is the process of changing from a centralized approach to work to a decentralized approach. This occurred as a response to changing work requirements and challenges, both by small and larger companies (CARDOSO; SILVA, 2020).

Uberization is a term recently created to refer to an autonomous person who sells his services to a certain company without the help of intermediaries (FRANCO; FERRAZ, 2019).

Labor flexibility theory suggests that workers' ability to manage their own schedules can lead to a better work-life balance. However, critics argue that this flexibility often translates into precariousness, characterized by a lack of job security, absence of benefits, and income instability (CASTRO, 2020).

For Cardoso and Silva (2020), throughout the trajectory of humanity, work has proven to be an essential activity for the constitution of the social being. Men and women have always depended on work to ensure their own survival and continuity as human beings. Although the instruments, forms of organization and social relations of production have been transformed over time, work remains a central element in the actions — both manual and intellectual — developed by the human species to sustain its existence.

In the analysis of this issue, it is important to understand that one cannot reduce employment to work, but understand the double dimension of the category of work in capitalism: concrete work and abstract work, as discussed by Cardoso and Silva (2020) apud Antunes (1999, p. 96):

The revolution of our day is thus a revolution in and of work. It is a revolution in work insofar as it must necessarily abolish abstract labor, wage labor, the condition of commodity subject, and establish a society based on human self-activity, on concrete labor that generates socially useful things, on emancipated labor. But it is also a revolution of work, since it finds, in the wide range of individuals (men and women) who comprise the working class, the collective subject capable of promoting actions endowed with an emancipatory sense.

In contemporary society, capital rescues old forms of production, now clothed in new appearances. This does not mean the elimination of living labor; on the contrary, it remains essential to the productive process. The capitalist logic, by fragmenting, externalizing and precarious labor relations, continues to exploit the human labor force, intensifying the articulation between absolute surplus value (through the extension of the working day) and relative surplus value (through the intensification of pace and productivity) (CARDOSO; SILVA, 2020).

The uberization of work represents a modern expression of this logic. Through digital platforms, workers are converted into autonomous "partners", without a formal employment relationship, subjected to goals, algorithms and constant evaluations.

This new guise of labor relations disguises exploitation under the discourse of flexibility and autonomy, while hiding insecurity, the absence of rights and the intensification of the exploitation of workers' time and energy.

Thus, uberization, far from being a rupture with the traditional mechanisms of capital, reaffirms and updates old practices of value extraction in digital and deregulated forms.

PRECARIOUSNESS OF LABOR RELATIONS ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

The Uber way of organizing and remunerating the workforce distances itself from the regularity of formal wage-earning, generally accompanied by the guarantee of social and labor rights (CASTRO, 2020 apud POCHMANN, 2016, BIANCHI; MACHADO, 2017).

This is because the company, which considers itself a partner of the driver by assisting the supply and demand relationship between the driver and the user, in addition to not establishing any formal employment relationship, imposes long and unpredictable working hours so that the driver can earn a satisfactory remuneration.

Thus, there is no guarantee: there is no minimum payment, the contribution to the social protection system is individualized and uncertain, despite the long working hours there is no overtime payment, no paid weekly rest, vacations, or their respective legal third. It is a situation of instability (CASTRO, 2020).

For the author, the Uber app has become a key to analyzing the contemporary transformations of the world of work. According to him, the application is just the "tip of the iceberg" of a process that has been characterized as the uberization of the workforce: the generalization, to numerous sectors of economic activity, of forms of hiring along the lines that Uber popularized in the transport sector. The neologism "uberization" is explained by the author:

What we are calling uberization is a new phase, which is practically the autonomization of employment contracts. It is the worker individually negotiating with the employer his remuneration, his working time, bearing the costs of his work (CASTRO apud POCHMANN, 2016).

According to Da Silva (2019), Uber has made visible a new stage of the real subsumption of work, which has been spreading globally through the labor market, currently involving millions of workers around the world. The researcher understands that uberization represents a process with the potential to expand to different economic sectors, profoundly modifying traditional labor relations, citing her:

(...) It refers to a new stage of labor exploitation, which brings qualitative changes to the status of the worker, to the configuration of companies, as well as to the forms of control, management and expropriation of labor. Uberization consolidates the passage from the status of worker to that of a nano-entrepreneur permanently available to work; it removes minimum guarantees from it while maintaining its subordination; it also appropriates, in an administered and productive way, a loss of publicly established and regulated forms of work (DA SILVA, 2019).

The lack of legal regulation at the federal level generates debates and legal uncertainty. Regarding the doctrinal position of the characterization or not of the employment relationship between cybertaries and their respective digital platforms, a theme that almost undoubtedly refers to Uber, but is not limited to it, as already mentioned, it is important to emphasize that not only issues related to the labor and employment relationship foster discussions (GOUVEA, 2021, p. 01).

In this sense, in order to remain configured, the employment relationship is essential to meet some requirements that are provided for in the CLT itself, in its articles 2 and 3. As this infra-constitutional rule cites:

Article 2 – An employer is considered to be a company, individual or collective, which, assuming the risks of economic activity, admits, salaries and directs the personal provision of services. (...)

Article 3 – An employee is considered to be any individual who provides services of a non-occasional nature to the employer, under the employer's dependence and for a salary. (BRASIL, 1943, p. 1).

As mentioned, for an individual to be legally recognized as an employee, it is essential to comply with the requirements established by labor legislation, namely: personality, onerousness, subordination and habituality (or non-eventuality).

In the academic and doctrinal spheres, there are intense debates regarding the framing of labor relations mediated by uberization in these criteria, especially with regard to habituality and subordination, points considered fragile or ambiguous in these new forms of work organization.

Work mediated by digital platforms tends to exclude the obligations provided for in labor legislation, alleging the autonomy of the service provider as a justification for the absence of an employment relationship. However, Labor Law, historically, is based on the principle of the primacy of reality, that is, what actually occurs in practice must prevail over what was formally agreed between the parties (VIANA, 2022).

From this perspective, it is observed that the autonomy propagated by digital platforms is, in fact, illusory. Even if the subordination model does not follow the traditional molds, the worker continues to be subject to external rules and guidelines. Recent research highlights the concept of algorithmic subordination, in which the dynamics of work are

controlled by computerized systems – algorithms – that determine, without the direct intervention of the worker, aspects such as time, location, goals, and conduct during the provision of the service (CASTRO, 2020).

According to Viana (2022), the precariousness of labor relations characterized by the reduction or absence of rights has been disguised by a discourse that exalts informality under the label of entrepreneurship. Although the way in which the work is provided does not interfere with the demand for these services, the author emphasizes the urgency of rethinking the distribution model between workers' remuneration and the profits obtained by the platforms.

In this sense, the author points out that the strong campaign to maintain these links in informality is not by chance: the more informal the labor relationship, the greater the profit margin of companies, since fewer rights will need to be guaranteed.

UBERIZATION IN IMPERATRIZ-MA: LOCAL OVERVIEW AND WORKERS' TESTIMONIES

In order to understand the social impacts of the uberization of work in the context of the city of Imperatriz-MA, a field research was carried out with 40 workers who work on digital transport and delivery platforms. The questionnaire, applied in google forms, composed of closed questions, sought to map sociodemographic aspects, working conditions, financial stability, perception of rights and mental health of these workers. The questions were:

1. Do you currently live in Imperatriz-MA?
2. How old is you?
3. Which platform(s) do you work on: Uber, 99, iFood, Rappi and Other?
4. Have you ever worked with a formal contract before entering this type of work?
5. Does your workday exceed 8 hours a day?
6. Do you feel like you need to work more hours than you would like to ensure a good income?
7. Have you ever stopped working due to illness or accident without receiving any type of aid?
8. Do you find your monthly income unstable?
9. Have you ever had difficulty paying basic bills (such as water, electricity or food) due to income instability?
10. Can you make some kind of savings with what you earn working through apps?
11. Do you consider yourself a self-employed person?

12. Do you believe that you should have the same rights as a worker with a formal contract?
13. Have you sought legal help or guidance on your rights as an app worker?
14. Have you ever felt stress, anxiety, or extreme fatigue related to app work?
15. Do you miss social interaction in your work environment?
16. Do you intend to continue working with applications in the coming years? Would you recommend this type of work to others?

The first question revealed that the majority of the interviewees, 75%, currently live in Imperatriz-MA, which reinforces the local relevance of the uberization phenomenon and its insertion in the urban daily life of the city. The participants have varied ages, between 22 and 55 years old, which indicates a significant age diversity. This demonstrates that adherence to work by apps is not restricted only to the youngest, but also reaches people in older age groups, possibly affected by the difficulty of reentering the formal labor market.

As for the platforms used, most work on Uber (83.33%), with the predominance of passenger transport being noticeable compared to other platforms such as 99 with 18%, iFood or Rappi an insignificant number. This data reinforces Uber's centrality as the main means of digital work in the region.

When asked about previous experiences, 91.7% of respondents said they had already worked with a formal contract, which shows that most of them know the formal guarantees of CLT work and, therefore, can compare the differences between the traditional model and work by apps. Currently, 83.33% work more than 8 hours a day, which contradicts the idea of flexibility widely disseminated by the platforms. The freedom of schedules, pointed out as one of the attractions of uberization, reveals, in practice, to be subordinated to the need to obtain a minimally viable income.

This situation is aggravated by observing that 75% feel that they need to work more hours than they would like to ensure a good income, demonstrating a pattern of self-precariousness typical of uberized work, in which the workers themselves assume the costs and risks of production. The impact of the absence of formal guarantees is also evident: 83.33% reported having already stopped working due to illness or accident without receiving any type of aid, revealing a structural weakness in the protection of these professionals in the face of adverse events.

Income instability is one of the most striking aspects of platform work. All respondents (100%) stated that they consider their monthly income unstable. Although 58.3% did not report difficulties in paying basic bills, this data does not cancel out the

perception of vulnerability. This is because instability does not necessarily translate into immediate default, but into constant uncertainty about the future.

In addition, 66.7% said they were unable to make any kind of savings, which compromises financial planning and security in the medium and long term. The absence of a fixed income, combined with the costs of fuel, vehicle maintenance and food, puts workers in a position of constant economic insecurity.

Although 91.7% consider themselves self-employed, there is a paradox revealed by the survey: 100% of respondents believe that they should have the same rights as those who work with a formal contract. This demonstrates a critical awareness of the ambiguity of the relationship with the platforms: although formally there is no employment relationship, in practice there are elements of subordination, control and economic dependence.

For Castro (2020), the uberization of work has provoked intense debates about the boundaries that separate self-employment from formal employment. As these limits become increasingly undefined, there is the consolidation of a new strategy adopted by companies to disguise employment relationships and promote the precariousness of labor rights.

Corroborating this perception, 83.33% of the workers have already sought legal guidance on their rights, which indicates a relevant level of concern and search for legal recognition. This data reinforces the urgent need for clearer and more protective regulation for digital platform workers.

The research also investigated the impacts of work on the mental health of workers. 75% reported having already felt stress, anxiety or extreme tiredness related to the activity performed. The absence of fixed schedules, the pressure for productivity, and prolonged exposure to traffic and urban insecurity contribute to the emotional exhaustion of these professionals.

On the other hand, 58.3% said they did not feel a lack of social interaction, which can be interpreted in two ways: a possible appreciation of autonomy at work or, even, a forced adaptation to the solitude of individualized work, characteristic of the platforms. Regarding the future of the profession, the data show some division: 58.3% intend to continue working with apps in the coming years, while 91.7% would recommend this form of work to others. This contrast suggests that, despite the difficulties, many see app-based work as a viable alternative in the face of the scarcity of formal jobs, especially in economically fragile regions such as the interior of Maranhão.

The research carried out with uberization workers in Imperatriz-MA shows a reality marked by intense exploitation, absence of guarantees, economic instability and significant emotional impacts. The promise of freedom and autonomy, often associated with the

platform economy, is not confirmed when confronted with the reports of the workers themselves, who, for the most part, operate under long hours, volatile incomes and without legal support.

In addition, the perception that they should have rights equivalent to those of a formal worker reveals a legal and social conflict that is still open. The survey reinforces the importance of specific regulations, which consider the particularities of this new work configuration, but which also ensure dignity, protection and legal certainty to those who live from digital intermediation.

CONCLUSION

The present scientific research aimed to analyze the social impacts of the uberization of work in the city of Imperatriz-MA, based on the reality experienced by workers of digital platforms, such as Uber, 99 and iFood and others. The data collected through closed-ended questions on google forms reveal that, although app-based work is often promoted as a flexible and accessible alternative, in practice, it has been characterized by a deep precariousness of working conditions.

The results showed that most workers work more than eight hours a day, face income instability and do not have access to basic guarantees in situations of illness or accident. Although these workers identify themselves as self-employed, all of the interviewees recognize the need for rights similar to those of employees governed by the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), which shows a contradiction between formal autonomy and the practical subordination to which they are subjected.

This scenario highlights the presence of algorithmic subordination, in which workers are controlled by digital platforms that, through algorithms, establish standards, goals, and expected behaviors, without transparency or the possibility of negotiation. Added to this is the ideological discourse of self-entrepreneurship, which masks the absence of social protection and transfers to the individual all responsibility for his or her working condition.

In this way, the research contributes to the understanding that uberization, in Imperatriz-MA, reflects a broader reality of labor restructuring in contemporary capitalism, in which social rights are weakened in the name of flexibility and economic efficiency. Such transformations demand urgent responses from the State, the legislator, and civil society, in order to guarantee a regulatory framework that recognizes the specificities of app-based work and ensures minimum conditions of dignity, safety, and stability for these workers.

It is concluded, therefore, that the uberization of work, although it represents a new configuration in the mode of production and provision of services, cannot dispense with a



critical analysis and a collective effort for its regulation, under penalty of deepening inequalities and promoting an informality disguised as autonomy.

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