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Untitled. Illustration by Mika Edström

Special Issue

**This Time it's for all the Marbles.**  
**Towards Social Justice in Digital Gaming**

edited by  
Patrick Prax

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# They Will Do Anything to Make You React: Deplatforming Racists from the Brazilian Gaming Community

Mayara Araujo Caetano and Beatriz Blanco

**Abstract:** This article discusses the deplatforming of a racist content creator and streamer from the Brazilian gaming community. It raises questions about the extent of success of deplatforming when platforms are also structurally oppressive. The case being discussed started after racist harassment during #BlackLivesMatter mobilisation after Floyd; and was led by players, creators, and allies aiming for an anti-racist gaming environment in Brazil. Narrative interviews (Rosenthal 2018) were conducted with the victims and articulators to understand the construction of this coalition. Their testimonies, combined with social media materials collected during and after the event, were analysed using the intersectional roulette (Carrera 2021) and show how platform structures, companies, and Institutions present significant obstacles in enforcing their Community Guidelines, Terms of Use, reporting system, and compliance with the Law. Nevertheless, it is still a noteworthy case of social justice, representing how the strategic use of technologies can benefit collective engagement.

**Keywords:** Deplatforming, Racism, Racist, Antiracism, BlackLivesMatter, Xbox, Brazil, gameenvironments

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“They reminded me that I am a black man in Brazil.”  
(Queiroga, Personal Interview, March 2022)

João Pedro, an adolescent, was murdered on 18 May 2020, inside his family’s home in Rio de Janeiro as a consequence of a police operation. A couple of days later, it was

George Floyd. The two Black males were victims of structural racism and police violence in Brazil and the US, respectively. Once again, #BlackLivesMatter was evoked to mobilise people to protest in solidarity with Black people. As Patrisse Khan-Cullors (2016) said, this *platform and organising tool* created in the 2010s has been part of the process of liberation and empowerment. People were quick to adopt the hashtags across social media, and demonstrations of support were abundant. Although the people we mention in this piece and two of our narrators are cis-gendered Black males, #BlackLivesMatter is not only about this intersection. Black female and queer people were responsible for the intersectional thought and strategic elaboration, and we should not forget to remember them (Tynes, Schuschke and Noble 2016, 29).

The opening quote was extracted from one of the narrators interviewed for this paper and is part of the symbolic reminder perpetuated by the recurrence of deaths of Black-Brazilians in a country in which race is one of the historical and sociocultural backbones and yet is treated as necropolitics (Mbembe 2003). After abolishing slavery, this population was left vulnerable to continuous exploitation under different systems. However, social awareness and structural modification are constantly attacked, particularly under the fascist and anti-democratic governance elected in 2018.

One example for this regional and internal structural attack is the former president of the Palmares Cultural Foundation, Sérgio Camargo, a self-proclaimed “right-wing black contrary to victimise and politically correct” (Bergamo 2019), occupied the presidency from November 2019 until March 2022. He resigned the function to be a candidate for the upcoming election, although he demonstrated not being qualified to exercise any political function. Right after his nomination for the presidency, a

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judicial suspension was requested, but his ties with the government allowed him to continue. The UN formally questioned his aptitude in January 2021 because of his racist declarations (Chade 2021). Once again, these concerns were discarded by the Brazilian Government. Therefore, during this period, Camargo had permission to openly reinforce structural racism by making racist public statements using personal and institutional modes of communication, denying not only the structural racism in the country but its impact on the Black-Brazilian population; acting carelessly with the loss of historical documents under the responsibility of the foundation; censoring historical black personalities and publications; among other measures that were denounced by Black-Brazilian movements, activists, and individuals across social media, independent media, national and international institutions (Colaboração Tilt UOL 2020a, Colaboração UOL 2020b, Mazzei 2021, Simões 2021, Nunes 2022, Rodrigues 2022). Still, there are other structures where racism is living.

The case analysed in this paper, to which the opening quote refers, is one example of violence against the Black-Brazilian people in another structure, the digital and gaming culture: the collective mobilisation on social media for the deplatforming of a Brazilian streamers group named MilGrau (after this MG) motivated by its members' racist statements. The movement has been successful in banning MG from some relevant spaces, but this has also evidenced the platforms' lack of efficient measures and strategies for fighting racism.

Platforms need people. They help them to be coded, moderated, have content, become relevant, be profitable, and exist. In this article, we are interested in the following platforms: Twitch (Amazon), YouTube (Google), Twitter (Twitter Inc.), and Xbox Live (Microsoft). Twitch and YouTube hosted videos - live or recorded - and provided monetisation via advertisements, partnership programmes, subscriptions,



memberships, and donations. Twitter kept people updated with the latest information and trending discussions, allowed the maintenance of casual conversations, and acted as an aggregator for other platforms. Lastly, Xbox Live was where games were played by MG members and the community. We aim to answer the following research questions: Why was the collective mobilisation against MG successful? What can be learned from this mobilisation to help future initiatives fighting racism on digital platforms?

### Event Description

MG has had a community since 2014. They started under the name Xbox Mil Grau, self-titled *the video game channel that plays the most in the world* exclusively dedicated to the point of devotion to Xbox (Microsoft). The character Master Chief from the franchise Halo is likely to have inspired the gamertag of the most well-known member of the group: Chief. Although being at the centre of interest is part of being a micro-celebrity, spectators, fans, and community are, in fact, the most valuable assets one could have (Chan and Gray 2020, 356-357). The MG community is known for being edgy, trolling, and being openly and proudly conservative. Even though cis-gendered heterosexual White-Brazilian males appear to be their main demographic, it is also possible to see females, and Black people, supporting their work and behaviour. They also have many followers who go under anonymous accounts.

On 7 May 2020, the Brazilian journalist Luiz Queiroga, a Black male, published a celebratory message about Black representativity in *Valorant* (Riot Games 2020). On the same day, an account screen captured the original tweet to publish its disdainful opinion and added four handles related to MG. In the days that followed, Queiroga

was harassed by the MG fanbase on social media and it drew the attention of Ricardo Regis, streamer and content creator on the channel Nautilus (hereinafter NT). In opposite to MG, NT's creators and followers define themselves as people who like and consume video games and also have a progressist point of view and concerns about issues as cyberbullying, racism, and sexism in the gamer community. Regis confronted MG on social media, supported by the NT fanbase and other Brazilian gamer community members, such as journalists and game developers, many of them victims of MG's harassment in the past.

The mobilisation that followed involved organised posting and sharing of hashtags on Twitter, a protest livestreaming on Twitch, emails to Xbox CEO Phil Spencer, and a complaint to the Brazilian Public Ministry, and resulted in MG being banned from Twitch and YouTube. The timeline of events below helps to contextualise the discussion. The colours were selected in accordance with the platform's visual identity; thus, blue was used for Twitter, purple for Twitch, red for YouTube, green for Xbox, yellow for actions closely related to people, grey to post-deplatforming events and black for #BlackLivesMatter (Figure 1).

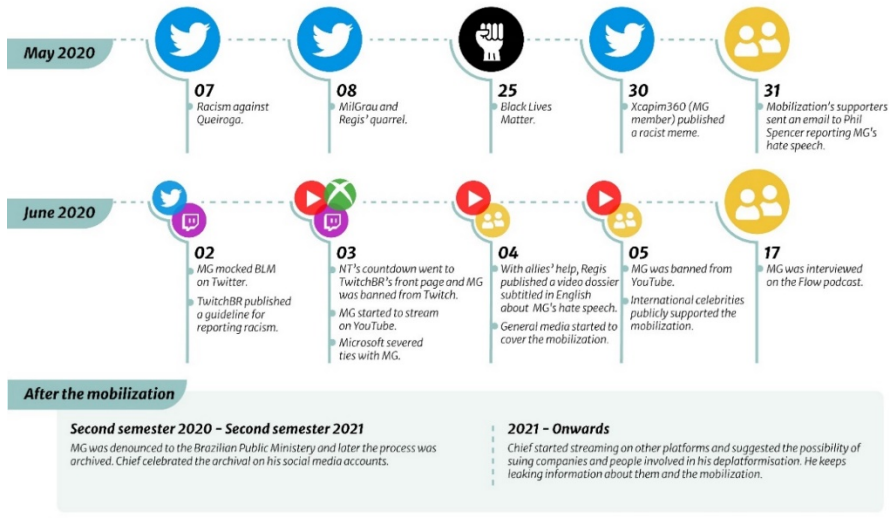


Figure 1: Timeline of deplatforming (2020-2022). Source: Authors.

## Methodology

The methodology used in this research consisted of a combination of narrative interviews (Rosenthal 2018) and intersectional roulette (Carrera 2021). Racialised and marginalised narratives are underrepresented in discussions, so instead of using only fragments available online, narratives were the primary focus. The narrative interview (Rosenthal 2018) was used to gain knowledge about people’s experiences, motivations, and strategies. These narrations happened two years after the deplatforming, which offered a broader timeframe to reconstruct and discuss what was most memorable, what is still problematic, and what has happened since then. The method used allows narrators to speak freely about a subject while answering broad open questions. They were asked to talk about their personal experiences related to the deplatforming of streamers known as Xbox MilGrau and its community, and the following questions were offered to start their narration:

- When did you start experiencing online harassment and what kind before the deplatforming?
- How was the experience related to Xbox MilGrau and its community and followers?
- What happened since the event?

Each narration took between one and a half hours and almost three hours and took place on Zoom with the presence of both authors. There was common agreement to audio and video recording. The process had no major disruptions, with the exception of minor technical issues with connectivity: the recordings were not affected, and the flow of narration was not compromised. Some quotations from the narration were added to the report, and after deliberating with the participants, neither the audio nor its transcription will be made available.

Materials from Twitch, Twitter, and YouTube platforms were collected mainly while the events unfolded. This article will not add them because it would not be possible to refer to the originals, identify or get consent from their creators to republication. Thus, the authors of this article and editors agreed not to include them for ethical and legal reasons.

The discussion of this article privileges intersectionality approaches as it touches on race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality. Thus, intersectional roulette (Carrera 2021), which was inspired by the contributions of other Black feminists such as Patricia Hills Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw, appeared appropriate. This method of enquiry delves into the crossing of avenues of oppression in the creation and spreading of discourses, centring the analysis on meaning-making by contextualising its speeches with multifactorial identity and its entwinements. The intersectional movement gives a lens through which to view events through different positionalities and motivations.

The authors wanted to contribute to the literature about racism, online gaming communities, and platform studies addressing social justice coming from a location and experiences that are not frequently seen circulating in international academic discussion. The work was connected with the respective literature but still preserved its particularities. It was also an opportunity to share the perspective of positionalities portrayed as *Other*. It is important to note that the authors supported the deplatforming campaign directly and indirectly. The second author is also a game journalist; thus, personal and professional networks provided connection and access to the narrators.

The authors share with the narrators the nationality, political perspective, class and appreciation and enjoyment for games and playing. We are Brazilians with a left-leaning perspective, and we, at the time of this text, are part of the Brazilian middle class. However, some of us came from the Brazilian peripheries and still have ties with them. Our differences are related to gender, sexuality, and race. The authors are cis females, and the narrators are cis males. We belong to a variety of positions on the sexuality spectrum. Moreover, the authors and one of the narrators are White, and the other two narrators are Black according to Brazilian racial classification. We decided to adopt Black-Brazilian and White-Brazilian in the text because we are aware that racial/ethnic assessment can vary significantly from country to country.

**Narrators**

The narrators were selected based on their connection to the deplatforming. They were contacted individually in private and presented with information on the research. They gave consent to partake in this research, and the discussions benefited from their time, interest, and contribution. They have also agreed to be mentioned by name and will be referred to by their last name with their text as well as *narrators*. So, this article was made possible by the narratives of Luiz Queiroga, Ricardo Regis, and Erick Santos. They were victims of racism and online harassment and were motivated to promote social justice by mobilising people through platforms and undertook those acts according to the platforms' regulations and public declarations in an effort to combat hateful speech - for example, racism.

All of our narrators have or had experience producing content, being public figures, and, at least at some point, being a micro-celebrity themselves. Queiroga became one of the targets of MG because he was, at the time of the events, a well-known journalist whose working experience included national and international media

corporations and was invited by private companies, including Big Techs and e-sports teams, to give talks and as a consultant. He has a likeable personality, thus has an expanding network of peers and famous and influential people. In addition, he spoke publicly about race and experiences of racism as a member of the Black-Brazilian gaming industry and community, so he was also turning into a role model. Young Black-Brazilians, living in the capital areas, holding positions of social prestige and media visibility, are oftentimes the preferred targets of racism (Trindade 2018). During Queiroga’s narration, it was inevitable that we noticed and heard that the racist events were felt as traumatising. The happiness of playing and being celebrated was simply no longer there. This experience resonates with Trindade’s (2018) argument that putting people in their places, are common racist actions, and gaming culture has turned into primarily White, cis-gender, and heterosexual males (Burrill 2008, Bulut 2021). Considering intersectionality, it is also important to account for class, location, and nationality. For example, MG’s main members would not have the same status if they were compared with a counterpart from the US. It is possible that in such circumstances, MG members would be the targets of prejudice, which is not a position they are used to being in.

Regis is a creator and one of the founders of Nautilus. He wanted to not only create a space for the production of content related to the game but a community that is safe and shares progressive values such as social justice. Thus, from the beginning, he and his co-founders were very careful to moderate and curate what was included and spread through their platforms. Regis told us about his first professional experience as a journalist while being in a pressroom and realising that: “I was the only Black man there. I felt like it was not my place” (Regis 2022). Again, the place was in the narration depicted as isolating and uncomfortable. These displacements translate into feelings of erasure, invisibility, and lack of value and self-esteem, and according to a

report from YouPix from 2021 (Lacerda 2021), Black-Brazilian creators have received less for their work compared to White-Brazilians. However, Regis and NT continued their efforts to be on platforms and at events and help other people to feel welcome, too, which connects to what Chan and Gray (2020, 358) said about the platform value and appropriations by Black men. Thanks to the quality of their work, personality traits, and interpersonal abilities, NT expanded its presence and partnered with Twitch and YouTube, was verified on Twitter, invited to events in the area, collaborated with a variety of other content creators, and was also nominated for awards in the domestic scene. Therefore, NT was able to create a network of collaborations and support, and this network of people was the core force to support the mobilisation.

Silva might not have the same online capital as those mentioned above, although he also produced content about games and culture. He could represent the *regulars* who are part of the foundation that adds to each project. He is an experienced lawyer with an academic background and practice who knows and tries to push the structures from inside institutions. He offered us insights into how a denouncement of the Public Ministry works and its limitations, particularly in online settings. Brazilian justice, like others around the world, has had issues with infrastructure, trained personnel, and a binary perspective - online/offline - which have not supported victims as they should. He was a political candidate from marginalised communities trying to become a representative in a very adverse period in Brazil. Even though he did not get elected, he shared that he had been approached in private with compliments and personal disclosures by people who were considered too encapsulated in conservative spaces.

## Research Background

### Platform Policies and Social Justice

Deplatforming MG from Twitch and YouTube was important because they were sources of revenue, and without this asset, their power became compromised. Money is not only used to improve the quality of content but also to cover living expenses. For example, changes in monetisation, such as the first YouTube Adpocalypse in 2017 (Poell, Nieborg and Duffy 2021), affect content creators. Two of our narrators also work in this sector, and they are more vulnerable because of racially discriminatory practices reproduced by platforms (Silva 2021, Noble 2018). Moreover, MG depends on revenue generated by platforms for its litigations, as its members were suing companies and people or being sued by people for their actions and statements across platforms over the years. Being a platform worker requires constantly revaluations on how to remain on the platform, improving metrics and, consequently, income.

However, platforms became unpredictable for their workers, clients, and general users. Their guidelines and terms of use can be vague and change abruptly. Therefore, content moderation is compromised, added to a lack of training and common background, and the abundance of materials that need to be evaluated, some containing disturbing content. (Gray and Suri 2019) Banning decisions can be made without apparent reason (Poell, Nieborg and Duffy 2021), justification, or consistency. Platform algorithm functionalities are not disclosed or comprehensible to the public. This all creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and lack of safety, mainly processed through people's perceptions and imagination (Bucher 2017). Furthermore, profits are prioritised over investments in robust and effective technology that could minimise platform impacts, particularly in the recurrent cases of extremists' racist attacks performed by radicalised people in the same environments (Bhuiyan 2022).



Notwithstanding this unpredictability, platforms are perceived to favour some content; for example, what is trending. MG members were familiar with setting and reframing trends with *controversial* content. When they mocked Queiroga’s celebratory publication about racial representation, they introduced the *controversy* by asking what the repercussion would be if they were celebrating whiteness, which, according to their logic, is something to be proud of. When #BlackLivesMatter was trending worldwide in May 2020, they felt entitled to post a meme comparing what people were doing and the value and validity of their actions.

The original tweet – now unavailable – had an open provocation against people mobilised by social justice. MG members implied that anti-racist people are tearful complainers that do not act but only talk, which is not valued as an action. In addition, the community pretended to demand changes that they did not believe were needed involving Brazilian representatives of Xbox.

Publications put them at the centre of discussions between supporters and critics, and for platforms, this means engagement. As non-human entities, their content moderation needs to be modelled to notice and remove material that infringes their regulations, but rely on users’ compliance with their rules, which do not allow “repeated and/or non-consensual slurs, epithets, racist and sexist tropes, or other content that degrades someone” (Twitter n.d). Nevertheless, Twitter has not been able to comply with its policies safeguarding its users and still has not been scrutinised as other platforms (Jackson, Bailey and Welles 2020, 149-150). Furthermore, platforms are vulnerable to being exploited by automated bots, through which those who have access and money to afford such technologies artificially modify these ecosystems. Twitter has an issue with bots being used to harass users related to progressive movements (Gray and Adeyemo 2020, 870), and despite there

being no evidence that MG members made use of such an approach, they had the power to influence the opinions and sentiments of their community against people they saw/see as targets.

Despite the policies against hateful content, this sentiment was shared among MG community members. Therefore, non-members were unaware of the recurrence of the racist content, for example. They were not watching their live streaming on Twitch or videos uploaded on YouTube. The materials on Twitter were snapshots of their cross-platform conversations. The combination of tweets in a highly sensitive racialised context – BlackLivesMatter after George Floyd – became intolerable. Silva mentioned that his main motivation for engaging in the deplatforming came from his working experience as a lawyer researching and defending victims of cyberbullying, as he witnessed many cases of negligence from platforms when online harassment was involved.

**Platforms and Social Mobilisation**

Promoting social justice within platforms has been done since early in its initial stages and this has helped modelling technologies. Florini (2019), Jackson, Bailey and Welles (2020), and Tynes, Schuschke and Noble (2016) discussed the contributions of Black-American users – activists or not – to the development of features that became characteristics of Twitter. One of the most used features and conventions of this platform is hashtags, so much so that they are displayed in the interface and can be adjusted by locality and filtered by interest. Nevertheless, it is unknown which and why some of them have proven to be more effective and visible while advocating for social justice online (Jackson, Bailey and Welles 2020, 153). Moreover, the structure cannot evaluate the context of tweets, so trending hashtags can be easily exploited to the point of losing their meaning and purpose. The MG deplatforming movement

used the hashtag relevance factor to a) associate with another trending discussion, #BlackLivesMatter, and b) create and maintain cohesion to hit the trending structure sensors and gain relevance. Furthermore, companies are worried about public impressions and constantly analyse metrics such as hashtags for their strategies and decisions. So, if Twitch and YouTube noticed high values for these hashtags, they would be on high alert and more likely to make public statements and take action.

The mobilisation started gaining traction and allies among closely related communities and individuals. However, they were unable to gain attention from the Brazilian platform representatives even though the representatives were publicly positioning themselves as allies of anti-racism movements. At the event, none of the platforms communicated or expressed support for Queiroga, Regis, or this local anti-racism mobilisation. This situation slightly changed when the US main representatives occupying positions of power (CEOs, for example) and with verified international profiles were made aware of the mobilisation through the same strategies and structures.

As presented in the introduction to this article, the Brazilian racialised context is very hostile. Thus, it is expected to translate, if not increase, racism depending on the structure and environment it finds. Reporting, speaking, and acting for anti-racism is risky, and people experience various forms of harassment, right up to death. This is the case of the Black-Brazilian council-woman Marielle Franco, who was assassinated in March 2018 right after attending a round table titled *Young Black Women Moving [Power] Structures* The investigation of her death remains open and inconclusive because of several irregularities and a lack of political will. At the end of the same year, MG expressed its perceptions in another racist –now unavailable—tweet in which one of its members held a shooting target suggesting it was Marielle Franco.

This example demonstrates how the normalisation of racism in Brazil finds support in the online global structure, thus supporting Queiroga’s opinion that “the companies profit from racism” (Queiroga 2022).

**Pushing the Structure: How this Mobilisation was Organised**

This section is subdivided into successful and unsuccessful deplatforming, discussing each platform's characteristics, including the companies responsible and its regulations against hate speech, for example. It also suggests how the mobilisations used or did not use the technologies and structures in their favour and why these platforms were seen as priorities for deplatforming or not. The first part is dedicated to the successful attempts which happened on Twitch and YouTube, and the second part to the unsuccessful efforts that took place on Twitter and Xbox Live.

**Successful Deplatforming: Twitch and YouTube**

***Platform Governance and Hate Speech***

Twitch is a livestream content platform owned by Amazon. Games-related content, such as people playing, and broadcasting e-sport competitions, were important in their trajectory of relevance and profitability (Taylor 2018). YouTube is a video, social media, and since 2015 also a streaming platform owned by Google. They offer working opportunities to those who want to work with and for them through special programmes open for application.

Although accepting and following the Terms of Use and Community Guidelines are obligatory pre-requirements for everyone who wants to use their platforms, partners are required to become models for their audiences. They should be responsible for what they produce and publish and how they behave and show efforts to regulate

the behaviours of others who come to watch or interact with them and their communities. However, on a daily basis, people consuming and covering these platforms get involved in discussions and altercations, some of them featured in or the subjects of the next stream(s), videos, and publications.

Some of the top content creators of both platforms – mostly based in the US – were involved in those events, and the platforms united in their efforts to not be affected by them. For example, on 05 March 2018, Twitch launched the Off-Service Conduct policies in which “severe offenses committed by Twitch users that may take place entirely off-service” would be subject to their evaluation and indefinite suspension from the platform (Twitch n.d. c). Although this effort acknowledges the impact of Twitch, it is important to consider the limits of its governance. Otherwise, we might have an unproductive overlap of regulations, punishments, and surveillance. The occurrences *off-service* were not restricted to events related to Twitch, for example, TwitchCon.

In addition, as platforms do not consider framing their relations with content creators as work but loosely as mutual partnerships, why could not the platforms limit their governance to instruct people to involve their local regulators and collaborate with them? Technologies are subject to political interest and misuse, so it is worth considering the implications of the effects of these extensive measures on those acting for social justice (Florini 2019).

Considering that this regulation is new, it is not yet possible to understand its impact. However, Twitch is not known for being a good regulator. For example, their description of Hateful Conduct and Harassment (Twitch n.d. b) is ambiguous. It says that:

"Twitch prioritizes minimizing harm to our users over freedom of expression, and we will limit some expression with the goal of preventing, protecting users from, and moderating hateful behaviour and harassment. We support users who express diverse or unpopular points of view, as long as this behavior is not hateful or harassing. When reviewing reported content or activity, we will consider the surrounding context in evaluating whether or not the behavior is a violation of our Community Guidelines." (Twitch n.d. b)

What does unpopular points of view here for Twitch? How is it different from the extremist and conservative understandings and defence of freedom of speech and hateful speech? Who will access the distinction between those? MG members and the community perceive themselves as defenders of unpopular opinions. They often frame discourses and actions as controversial, truthful, and targets of Big Tech companies, leftists, feminists, and anti-racists. While being Twitch and YouTube Partner, MG infringed Community Guidelines and Terms of Use several times and in different categories.

Some of the publications and speeches originated self-defence statement published on Twitter. In the document, they did not recognise their actions for what they are but as jokes. This argument is frequently used to deceive about hateful content and conduct, so much so that YouTube specify that this reasoning is not defensible even in a humorous setting (YouTube n.d. c.). Regardless, these hateful declarations exemplify how the platform regulations are at best followed as a guideline and somehow escape platforms' automated algorithms and filters - if they even exist. Hence, human reporting and moderation were fundamental for the deplatforming.

The mobilisation that deplatformed MG was organised by a group of people who have been direct and indirect targets of the group over the years. The #BlackLivesMatter context and MG's *recreational racism* motivated people to report

their content to the platforms that were responsible for their income. During the process of deplatforming, MG compared their engagement, metrics, audience, and money with those obtained by Regis. MG believes that Regis and allies are jealous of their success and persecute them to gain visibility; otherwise, they would be nobodies. Their community even has a term for this capitalisation: Chief sponsorship. MG shared an edited print-screen chart with their past six-month revenue generated through monetisation to prove their value to one of the platforms they were on at the time. According to the image, they gained from R\$8,000 to just over R\$13,000 - around US\$ 1,600-2,700. This information was only part of their income, so it did not include donations across different platforms and sites, temporary sponsorships, and long-term partnerships. Then, being racist and hateful has proved to be worthwhile. Moreover, MG is partially correct by saying that others can benefit from their presence, because to produce critical discussion, they have to make direct references and follow them. In addition, those criticizing MG are under the same platform structures that require commitment with metrics to continue their work and call for social justice.

**Gaming the Reporting System**

The reporting mobilisation offered instructions according to the platform guidelines and was spread through Twitter. For Twitch, Regis had a bold but risky idea - since it could get NT permanently banned from the platform - to open a live stream where no one was playing or talking, but a Black screen with a timer was displayed, questioning: *How long will Twitch be conniving with racism?* (Figure 2). The live stream occurred at night in the Brazilian time zone after a soft-ban decision against MG - 14 days of suspension - and was featured in the carousel on the front page of Twitch, which is one of the most valuable spots on the platform. According to Regis, at some point, this *black-out* live attracted more than a thousand views, and the broadcast

was interrupted when they were updated about the permanent banning of MG. Ultimately, the inquisitive black screen was a performative action against Twitch colour-blindness, hegemonic narratives, and extensive tolerance (Gray 2020, 91, 93).



Figure 2: Blackout protesting streaming on Twitch. Source: Author.

Twitch expects and encourages users to report irregularities through their system by providing contextualised information such as a description of what kinds of behaviours are the subject of the complaint, when they happened, and links. Those reports are said to be evaluated by humans. In addition, the company says, “the number of reports submitted against a channel has no impact on the likelihood that the channel is suspended” and “having multiple people assist you in reporting a user for the same offense (commonly known as report brigading) will not make any difference to the outcome of your report” (Twitch n.d. a). YouTube also encourages its users to report content that is not in accordance with its Community Guidelines. The platform has two strike systems: Community and Copyrights. The second is more robust and effective, particularly with the automated process. As for Community, users are allowed to report videos, playlists, descriptions, commentaries, thumbnails, external links, and any form of material that passes through the platform, either live



or not (YouTube n.d. b). None of these reporting systems offer information about the time to process, the resolution, or the possibility of appealing. So, there is little to no encouragement for people to invest in these systems, even though they can see hateful content.

People learn to filter the bad from the absurd while liking some material and people. When MG was banned from Twitch, they moved to stream on YouTube. During this shift, they also set their videos to private to avoid being reported. This shadowing strategy was announced to channel members only. It is unclear whether the evaluation process is compromised if the content being reported is set to private. Regardless, the account was terminated by the platform, and this process can be done through automated and/or human deliberations (YouTube n.d. a). Since then, MG has not been allowed to create accounts on the platform. MG has tried to return to the platform and is currently suing Google over the decision.

YouTube measures against hate speech came after severe public scrutiny for having this type of content circulating and being monetised. On 05 June 2019, their policies were updated to “specifically [prohibit] videos alleging that a group is superior in order to justify discrimination, segregation or exclusion based on qualities like age, gender, race, caste, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status” (YouTube Team 2019). Moreover, Google's Transparency Reports (YouTube n.d. d) offers through quantitative data some insights into the types of content produced in Brazil, including the promotion of hate speech.

According to them, Brazil appeared in ninth position in the first report made in July 2019. It moved to fifth place in October-December of the same year, and from January 2020 until September 2021, it was the third country in the world for videos

being removed. Comparing the period of MG deplatforming with the report during April-June 2020, 981,181 videos uploaded from Brazil to the platform were removed. In the same period, only 0.9% (or 108,073) of videos were removed from YouTube based on reports of harassment and cyberbullying. Human-based reporting made by users and Individual Trusted Flaggers were responsible for 382,499 and 167,318 removals, respectively. Finally, 0.5% (9,305) accounts around the world were terminated because of harassment and cyberbullying between April and June 2020. These accounts were responsible for more than 33 million videos uploaded to the platform.

Up until this moment, Twitch has failed in its transparency not only with the public but with its workers. Besides having guidelines that can be exploited for their ambiguities, streamers complain about the suspensions they receive because they feel vague about the specificities of content that lead to the decision, which are considered inconsistent and unfair when different cases and decisions are compared.

The ambiguity that puts streamers in *Twitch jail* can be used as evidence of persecution that aligns with the narrative MG and its community have about themselves. In recent coverage from the *Washington Post*, Twitch VP of trust and safety Angela Hession talked about the directions the platform was taking, and compared its position, diligence, and compromises with Twitter. However, the promises did not have a clear deadline or plan for implementation. What is certain is that streamers and consumers are moving to other platforms, and this implies a significant financial loss, especially when the top earners decide to leave and talk about their negotiations with the platform (Grayson 2021, Grayson 2022).

Even though the mobilisation was motivated by social justice and could prove that

platforms were convenient for the propagation and monetisation of hateful speech and content, we questioned to what extent this organisation is different from what *Twitch* describes as a *report brigade*. Report brigading is understood as one strategy of online harassment. However, by definition - multiple people assisting with reporting - it appears to not be so distant from the mobilisation that was organised. Therefore, would it be possible to argue that this was a *social justice brigade*? Although our narrators said that it was an *organic engagement*, the meaning of *organic* might be better described by its qualities of liveness. The number of people involved in the mobilisation would likely not have been drawn to it spontaneously if the organisers' strategies had not triggered platform structures. As the mobilisation appeared in more timelines, feeds, conversations, and notifications, more people were interested in social justice. So, it is more of a techno-organic agglomeration.

## The Unsuccessful Deplatforming: Twitter and Xbox Live

### *Data-Driven Social Justice*

More than a connector of platforms, Twitter (Twitter Inc) was the alert system of the mobilisation, as it was for many other actions for social justice. In the words of Florini (2019), this platform is an environment of information where there is a "constant stream of ambient information (...) [which] creates a 'monitorial' relationship to the information that allows Twitter to serve as an alert system for events of interest. (...) an excellent platform for instant reactions, evaluations, and commentary on information and unfolding events." (Florini 2019, 138-139). Furthermore, there is the phenomenon of *my timeline is talking about X*, where people are not only looking for information but whether micro-celebrities are expressing their opinions, among other things. Monitoring what is important can become an act of curation and devotion if we associate celebrity culture with streamers. The streamer(s) preferred by the

audience become a centre of reference for guidance, someone people want to see and know their reactions and opinions, and these demands can be complex for streamers to manage.

Our narrators, the domestic gaming industry, and related ecosystems were aware of the dangers of keeping MG and its community circulating and profiting. Even without getting into close contact with them, it was a known fact that they were the people to not be around, involved with, or even less confront. The advice was to avoid, cope, tolerate, and accept. Meanwhile, none of the harassment online and on-site was dealt with the required seriousness. Nevertheless, the mobilisation was determined to, at least, try to limit their reach. During and after the deplatforming, we did not observe key domestic stakeholders publicly opposed to MG, supporting the movement, or compromising to not work with them. The event happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was a different context. So, it is unknown whether or not they will continue to have access in the future.

There were similarities between the strategic use of platform policies and affordances in this case with those of data-driven fandom practices. Fans - the members and allies of the MG or NT communities - collectively use hashtags to position their interests in the Twitter Trending Topics. According to Regis, being featured in this segment of the interface and capable of being pushed by algorithms was a desirable outcome. Therefore, they defined beforehand and adopted hashtags that were directed to the platforms, such as #TwitchApoiaRacista (#TwitchSupportsRacist) and #YouTubeApoiaRacista (#YouTubeSupportsRacism). However, it is worth mentioning that hashtags can be used without meaningful correlation and by opponents, so methods and analysis focusing exclusively on scraping information and providing quantitative and graphical representations and discussions can be quite limited.

**Golden Boys and Bullies**

The celebration and relationship between fans and gaming micro-celebrities are not so different from those that are established with brands and companies. In the case of MG, there was an overlap with Xbox, owned by Microsoft, and both community and brand have a history of how structures are impactful and resistant to change. In a recent journalistic article, Stewart (2022) covered the maintenance of a toxic working culture at Microsoft after eight years of promises of change. The article, which spoke with past and current employees with different occupations within the company, suggested that little to nothing has changed despite the company's discourse, the instauration of Inclusion & Diversity teams, and disciplinary actions, for example. In this context of stagnation, "disrespectful and abusive workplaces have been a hallmark of the tech industry for decades" (Stewart 2022), and in this company, in particular, it is ingrained in its foundations with meritocracy ideas propagated when Gates was the CEO. Successively, Microsoft has had executives who were *talented jerks* or *golden boys* and who were above anything and anyone. Many of the testimonies and feelings relate to the advice and lack of action seen in the Brazilian gaming ecosystem. People knew whom they had to avoid and why it felt uncomfortable to be around them. Still, there are co-workers that will suggest others have a little more tolerance and swallow whatever abuse. An absence of a timeline for investigation and resolution is also familiar to those who report hateful conduct to platforms. The unknowns in those situations increase people's suffering and increase the lack of credibility of any measures, especially if they are perceived to function as tokenism.

As *golden boys*, MG members have values of meritocracy and abusive behaviour. They perceive themselves not only as belonging to the people who play the most in the

world, but also as being excellent in such activity. In Brazilian Portuguese, excellent playing performances and the desire to have perfect scores are called *platinar* or *platinum*. Shining at the top and obtaining pleasure only in such conditions can offer a restrictive understanding of playing and competitive experiences. Their expectations for the games and consoles are also very elevated. Things need to be great and grandiose, as behaviours are excessive, intense, and reactive. Such emotional investment, which has also been found in the traditional interpretation of fans, could also connect with the positive self-identification observed among the MG community (Stanfill 2019). Media companies have become aware of the potential of deploying fans' spontaneous labour as a strategy to reinforce their own advertising and PR campaigns, thus increasingly integrating them into the industry logic.

The MG community exemplifies the complex fan-labour interrelations with gaming companies involving idolisation, co-optation, and copyright infringement. It started as a fan project and gained attention and validation from Microsoft Xbox representatives in Brazil. However, from the beginning, they were infringing copyright, which was - until the mobilisation - considered a problem. Fans consume copyrighted materials as well as infringing these same regulations as part of their fandom. Companies traditionally want to control their ownership, but with contemporary cultural fandom production, they might also feel entitled to co-opt what they have not envisioned but is valuable among the fandom. In this context, platforms can be both valuable means and obstacles for organisation and socialisation among fans. Automated copyright filters are highly effective within the platforms, and they have been constantly improved since technology brought new issues for ownership law, which was elaborated for and in another context of production and circulation. Therefore, fans explore openings they find to engage in fan activism (Amaral 2014) and data-driven fandom (Lamerichs 2020), wherein

support for and opposition to authors, creators, and brands oscillate according to the goals and identities of the fandom.

Besides brand name ownership, there was little friction between the MG community and Xbox representatives. MG gained attention and validation, becoming legitimated to represent the Xbox community in Brazil. MG was offered sponsorships and access to official events, national and international, among other benefits that could be shared with the audience. However, this relationship had to be carefully managed because if the community felt disappointed, the brand could suffer a backlash online. When the mobilisation tagged the Xbox BR account on Twitter, there was no response. If the mobilisation had not contacted the CEO of Microsoft Gaming and the head of Xbox, it is likely that nothing would have changed. After that, the official account declared:

“The content of the account Mil Grau does not reflect our fundamental values of respect, diversity, and inclusion. We already demanded the immediate removal of our brand [Xbox] from their channels, through social media companies.”  
(XboxBR, Twitter 2020)

The note presented the contradiction and tension between this regional representative and MG. If MG and Xbox have never shared fundamental values, how did they get so much endorsement from them? The changes in MG over the time openly disclosed disrespect and disdain for diversity and inclusion. Even in the case of changes, it is the brand's responsibility to reevaluate and cease its commercial relationships with those that can bring *bad press*. Furthermore, the brand reported MG *to and through* the platforms and not judicially. MG used the Xbox brand publicly without their authorisation or being employed by Xbox/Microsoft. XboxBR had its own content creator team, and MG was not part of it. Thus, why was MG not sued by Xbox/Microsoft? Besides, the note does not add the accounts or names of the people

responsible for MG, which they have known for years. The company has not apologised to the people affected by MG nor the mobilisation that was acting by their fundamental values.

Xbox Live as a platform has been studied through an intersectional lens that critically addresses racism, for example. Gray's work (e.g., 2012, 2020) has documented the experiences of players of colour and from marginalised groups while playing on Xbox Live. More than awareness, these players have experienced prejudice first-hand, sometimes more than once, and also nuances among their own groups. Even though Gray (2012) and Ortiz (2019a, 2019b) conducted their research years apart, their findings suggested that the reporting system has not improved players' experiences, and those unrelated to this culture could not recognise that racism online and in the online gaming environment is no different from racism in any other environment. For the mobilisation, there was no difference, and for the platform's regulations as well.

However, unlike Ortiz's (2019b) findings, Black-Brazilians from gaming communities such as Queiroga and Regis do not want to have to cope with racism and perform a masculinity that requires desensitisation and enduring pain in silence and isolation. They wanted and found others who also wanted to share their experiences and sufferings publicly and privately, besides gaining a network of supporters who might have different identities and experiences but are likely more invested in sociocultural change. And these communities of resiliency in games have connected with other because of the deplatforming. So, if MG and its community could not be demoted from their controls, they would be challenged and played.



## Discussion

When asked about what the success of the deplatforming meant to them and being part of the progressive gaming community, our narrators had different insights that were influenced not only by the centrality they occupied in the process but also by race. Queiroga said that during the mobilisation, he had to step aside, get distracted and be supported. Because of his work and the need to produce what was relevant at that moment, he reached out to other Black-Brazilians to hear their experiences, and one of the first things he made sure to do in retribution and solidarity was to check how they were feeling. The mutual support and protection between Black-Brazilian gamers were, to him, “beautiful, but also sad” (Queiroga 2022), because they were reactions to racism.

Regis also accessed the experience and outcomes as ambiguous, but he was grateful that he met and befriended Queiroga. Nonetheless, allies such as Silva might feel more positive, *empowered*, and optimistic about the future or somewhat more detached than the foreign supporters of the mobilisation. Allies were important because they could use their privileges for political and social justice (Jackson, Bailey and Welles 2020, 125), but what can Black-Brazilians expect from CEOs and international celebrities? In this case, being replied to and retweeted by these individuals was vital for bringing attention to the mobilisation because, structurally, they contributed to spreading the initiative to others who would not have been aware of their cause. And they were only able to understand what was happening because of videos. Tweet threads and hashtags were subtitled in Brazilian Portuguese and English. At some point, one ally had to communicate in German with a company that had its name temporarily used by MG. So, it was a collective and creative effort to adapt and communicate with anyone who could join and somehow support the movement.

However, efforts were also made from the side of those being deplatformed, and this was the first time they suffered intense and collective counterattacks. This was another unpredicted but important factor to destabilise them. Until that moment, the MG group had harassed journalists, particularly females, but they did not have the same structure behind them. So, this community was way too familiar and pleased to defend MG from racist actions and declarations, intimidating members of the mobilisation by flooding their posts with aggressive comments, stalking, and collecting information about their opponents, and doxing people after invading NT's private group - which was recognised by Regis as not having adopted appropriate security measures. The MG community has always felt - and will remain - triggered by changes as Gray (2020, 47) states, when led by other racial groups. Meanwhile, the NT community and allies were focused on connecting with key people who could effectively support them and not argue with MG supporters. It was also observed that Regis modelled his behaviour to match MG during their altercations, and this happened to trigger MG's behaviour modulation to become more explicit and insecure.

The lack of response from local representatives was considered a disappointment, although expected. Members of the mobilisation felt that these representatives are often lenient no matter the severity and recurrence of the events and alerts. According to Siciliano (2021), racial and gender employee composition, particularly in leadership positions, provides some insights as to why companies and, consequently, platforms, can act in such ways. Diversity among unpaid and low-level workers does not change and impact decisions because the higher positions are mostly occupied by White men and, rarely, White women.

Ideas and beliefs on absolute freedom, freedom of speech, and neutrality of technologies, platforms, tools and affordances have been circulating online and, since the 2010s, have been used by White supremacists, alt-right, and other conservative-leaning political perspectives. Platform structures happen to align with those ideas, even though publicly stating otherwise, because of the increment in the incidences of microaggressions against - although not limited to - Black people. In addition, victims have struggled to expose aggressions that affect them daily and to find support and solidarity (Gray and Suri 2019, Silva 2021). Thus, when looking at platforms, the ideal would be not to take them as isolated cases and delve exclusively into their content (Silva 2021).

**Conclusion**

The article discussed the deplatforming of a group of racist content creators and streamers from the Brazilian gaming community known as XboxMilGruu. Narrative interviews (Rosenthal 2018) and the intersectional roulette (Carreira 2021) were used, along with materials collected from the platforms during and after the deplatforming. The collaboration of purposefully selected narrators was fundamental to understanding their experiences, motivations, and afterthoughts related to the deplatforming events.

In conducting the analysis, the structures of platforms and country - in this case, Brazil - were considered because they offer the spaces in which racism circulates and reasoning as to why it is not only recurrent but profitable to the expense of the well-being and dignity of Black-Brazilians.

The deplatforming occurred between the end of May and the beginning of June

2020. It benefited from knowledge about prior online activism tactics, #BlackLivesMatter mobilisations, and the pre-existence of committed communities. The deplatforming mobilisation saw an opening when platforms started to publicly position themselves in favour of #BLM to demand that the platforms follow their own statements and regulations.

The local representatives of the platforms and companies contacted through Twitter did not respond to the claims, which made the mobilisation intensify their connections with international representatives and allies, expecting that these could use their privileges to support the deplatforming. The regional representatives then published general statements when the mobilisation managed to get their attention and collaboration. Although they declared support for #BLM, they have not recognised the local mobilisation at any point, which questions the intentionality of these declarations.

Twitch and YouTube were considered successful deplatforming because they ended with the permanent termination and banning of the MG accounts. MG tried to reopen their account without success, at least on YouTube. They also sued both platforms and are currently appealing a negative decision. The mobilisation used the report systems and a *black-out* stream on Twitch as part of their action. Without these platforms, MG was financially compromised and lost their position on important platforms to maintain and expand its community.

Twitter and Xbox Live were considered unsuccessful in deplatforming, although they were not the focus of the mobilisation. Neither of these platforms is capable of generating direct revenue. However, Twitter is still central to MG's online presence and relevance. Through this platform, they continue to inform people about where



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