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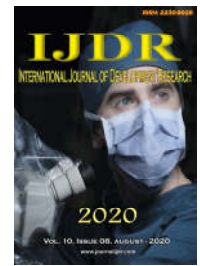
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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REFLEXIVITY AND MEDIA: THE COVID-19 AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the Jornal Nacional (JN), the most-watched television news in Brazil. We used two guiding objectives; the first seeks to analyze information broadcast by JN; the second aims to discuss the gaps in the program's report and how the lack of clarification to the population can impact local development. We collected the data during the prime-time of Brazilian television, between 8:30 pm and 9:30 pm. We analyzed all programs in April 2020. In this period, the Covid-19 pandemic advanced in Brasil, and the National Congress amended the Brazilian Constitution. The finds show the negligence of issues related to changes in the Brazilian Constitution and the transformation of coronavirus in a spectacle.

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INTRODUCTION

Postmodernity raises in us the idea of overcoming modernity, which, due to exhaustion of alternatives, projects, and values, would not have been able to maintain the nucleus of representations of its historical moment. However, the conservative practices are maintained and even reproduced overwhelmingly, leading to exclusion processes that cause stances of resistance by stigmatized groups. Beck, Giddens, and Lash (1997) proposed a new critical theory about the modernist utopian metanarrative and the postmodern deconstruction, with the idea of reflexive modernity as a "third space." The view of reflexive modernity is not univocal. The three authors mentioned have different perspectives and different theoretical conceptions. In this work, we will privilege Scott Lash's vision. Lash criticizes the action theory and its emphasis on individualism and cognitivism, understanding reflexive modernity as a theory of structure, aesthetics, and community. The revolution in communication technologies has caused profound changes, among which the use and appropriation that young people make of ideas, concepts and stereotypes and the consequent construction of their reality to starting from the said approach (Rodríguez and Pérez, 2020).

This study firmly observes Zucker's (2017) considerations against the common reflective social science community that the media has little influence on public opinion. Zucker (2017:1) presents a theory of the variable impact of the news media, "stating that the less intrusive an issue is, and the less time it stands out in the media, the greater the influence of the media in the opinion on this issue." The reflection made considers the possibilities of a consequent socio-cultural manipulation, transforming certain phenomena into spectacularization of reality. We will focus on the coronavirus phenomenon, based on two objectives. The first seeks to analyze the news broadcast by Jornal Nacional (JN), the most-watched television news in Brazil. The second objective aims to discuss the gaps in the program's information and how the lack of clarification to the population can impact local development. In reflexive modernity, we are using the particular to promote a critique of the globalization of values. The JN still is a powerful communication medium that directly influences national politics and popular perceptions in Brazil.

Globalization and Universalization: Globalization and universalization do not go hand in hand given. Globalization concerns information, the market, technocrats, while universalization concerns values, culture, democracy. For

Baudrillard, the first seems irreversible. However, the universal values would be on the way to extinction due to globalization. "The universal perishes in globalization" (Baudrillard, 2005: 112). Baudrillard points out the danger of the globalization of values without respecting its uniqueness. With a certain nostalgia, he sees universal values, such as democracy, human rights, and even the concept of freedom, become paler in the face of this globalization. He already warned us of the globalization of values and the consequent death by losing uniqueness. Lash, and Baudrillard finds themselves because the us-revenge, to which the first refers, is linked to the resistance. Lash (1997) proposes a critical theory for the 21st century, whose elements it found in reflexive modernity. However, he says that the way Giddens (1997) and Beck (1997) elaborate reflexive modernity constitutes, in the first place, a theory of the ever-increasing powers of social actors about structure. Second, reflectivity is assumed to be primarily cognitive. Third, the approach is a robust program of individualization. Lash seeks a critical vision of reflective modernity, expanding the elements' scope, and transcending them. The first element, the empowerment of social actors (the activity) concerning the structure, is, in a way, modeled by Lash. The second element, the cognitive dimension of reflectivity, is replaced for the aesthetic dimension. The individualization, third element, is treated by Lash in an opposition way proposed by Giddens and Beck. Instead of understanding that modernization reflects an appreciation of the "individual"; he argues that when it is impossible to reach the "individual" of the market economy, what one witnesses is a resurgence of certain groups, whether ethnic, stigmatized or excluded. According to the author, more than ever, what one sees is a revenge of the "us." The thesis that the transition from homogeneous to heterogeneous is only one of the phases of evolution, and it is the inverse thesis that prevails; that is, the "assimilation principle" (Lalande, 1999) seems to indicate that there is no way out for the survival of local values. However, if assimilation dominates differentiation, how to explain the growing number of tenacious insurrections of singularities?

Some of the most important contemporary events are ways of resistance to assimilation and globalization. When dealing with aesthetic reflectivity, we refer to the non-identical. Lash, commenting on Adorno, says that the abstract subject of identity thinking cannot exist in aesthetic reflectivity. Even in late capitalism, with its logic of identity, standardization, and uniformity, there is room for non-identical criticisms. The problematic character of information and mass communication structures is mainly due to the media's use to prevent or even obstruct the dialogue that would allow individuals and groups to monitor themselves (Debord, 1997). Freire Filho (2008:37), studying Debord, says that the concept of spectacle refers to commercial reason designs and "The new government techniques used to promote impoverishment, subjection and the denial of real-life." In his analysis, he states that, for Debord, citizens contribute to society's spectacularization as part of the productive forces' gearing. In fact, what bothers Debord most is the freedom and independence of the images, in the sense that they gain autonomy over the construction of "truths" not supported in reality. Nevertheless, they have real status. The signs establish this "truth." Baudrillard says the reality is dead.

The signals now simulate reality; that is, we have the cancellation of real through hyper-reality or simulacrum. Gane (2006) says that Nietzsche had already predicted this in

Twilight of the Idols. For Debord (1997), more the viewer contemplates, less he lives. The trivialization of violence, by its spectacularization, converts individuals into spectators of the "self-movement of images" (Freire Filho, 2008). In this case, there is no reflectivity. The truth is out of the world. Its production comes from several restrictions involving power. It protects certain types of speech by establishing them work materially (Foucault, 1995). In their daily tasks, Scott Lash shows that individuals are so involved with practical problems that they do not problematize everyday situations, act in an automated way, or "thoughtless categories." (Bourdieu, 1984). Despite the growth of social networks in Brazil, the television program investigated has excellent penetration throughout the country. Therefore, it exerts a significant influence on the formation of opinions with the population.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The results presented in this article come from 240 hours of recordings of the leading news on Brazilian television. This research is part of a broader study that examines the population's levels of perception about the influence of the media in the participation of discussions that affect the primary Brazilian legislation. The study is based on the qualitative reports of the anchors of the investigated television program. Researching the occurrence of themes in the broadcasts, held during the prime-time of Brazilian television, between 8:30 pm and 9:30 pm, we analyzed all JN programs in April 2020. In this period, the pandemic advanced in Brasil, and the National Congress amended the Brazilian Constitution. All editions of JN was recorded and analyzed utilizing two forms: 1) with a perspective quantitative, we measure the frequency dedicated to issues; 2) with a perspective qualitative, we use the concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis to comprehend the ethos of discourses (Fairclough, 2003; Keller, 2011). The interdisciplinary approach to critical discourse analysis allows us to observe spoken and written language as a social practice, or rather, a social activity. This social activity is constituted from written texts, but mainly from the tradition of the spoken language. These languages are mutually edifying. For the critical discourse analysis, the notion of ideology is implicit in social activity, which anchors the ideas, beliefs, and actions of social groups. In this way, power relations are established, reproduced, conserved, and reinforced by language use. Therefore, languages can manipulate, seduce, explore, persuade, coerce, and widen the asymmetries of power existing in society; the relationships established there in a structural way often go unnoticed by the majority of the population. One conveys such structures through politics, education, social networks, and the media. In this study, we focus the television media. For van Dijk (2001: 136), depending on their social position, the group selects specific values to apply to their action strategies to achieve their goals. Members of different groups recognize each other using codes that express their natural language and generally maintain or challenge power. "In a trivial way, as groups and institutions, as such, do not write, speak or understand discourse, there is no way for the social structure itself to directly affect text and speech, except through the communication of individuals as members of groups or social categories." In this way, we base the selection of the JN on this idea that the structure manifests itself through specific individuals who clandestinely express their ideology. We recorded and organized the news carefully into categories, following the aspects mentioned by Bardin (1977), namely: 1. Mutual exclusion: The idea could not be capable of composing

more than one category; 2. Homogeneity: The categories' construction did not allow thoughts with different meanings to be part of the same type; 3. Relevance: The categories' created after the analogous classification of the ideas conveyed, so that we adapted to the data; 4. Objectivity and fidelity: An image cannot be categorized differently, establishing the criterion of confrontation and entry into the category.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The principal theme encountered in the media coverage was coronavirus. The phenomenon coronavirus covers a series of tensions, such as innovation and conservatism, ruling people and classes, liberation, and colonization. In a way, the media tries to harmonize these contradictions. However, the JN ignored some of the fundamental aspects of de Brazilian people. After analyzing the videos, we were able to establish the following categories. When we analyze the characteristics common to the texts in each category, we see that only one insertion occurred about the change's Brazilian Constitution. News about the pandemic took up almost all the hours of the television program analyzed. However, fundamental issues for the lives of Brazilians has addressed in the National Congress. One of these issues was Constitutional Amendment Proposal number 10 (PEC 10). While the public watched all the media coverage on the coronavirus on television, the National Congress streamlined the approval of PEC 10, entitled "War Budget," without the television program making any mention of these actions. The legislation prohibits any amendment to the Constitution in periods of State of Defense and the State of Siege, precisely because the country is in social isolation, and there is no popular participation. There was no mention of this analogous situation. In Brazil, the legislative system used is bicameral. The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate make up the National Congress (the Legislative Power of Brazil).

Table 1. Categories of themes

Occurrences	Themes
25	Issues that followed the numbers of pandemic cases
23	Issues whose main objective was to present the repercussions of the disease in different countries
23	Population social actions - solidarity network
22	Issues designed to present and describe the disease
21	Issues that highlighted the dimension of disease prevention
21	Issues that highlighted government actions to combat the disease
21	Government financial aid (Emergency aid, Business aid, postpone irpf)
20	Side effects not related to the disease (unemployment, lack of other services / supplies, crises)
11	Public spending
7	Tests not performed
5	Issues of violence in Brazil
5	Fake news
1	Issues related to changes in the Brazilian Constitution

Law proposals, when they are born in the Chamber of Deputies, it sent to the Senate, and after approval, they return to the Chamber of Deputies. In early April, the Chamber of Deputies president filed the text of PEC 10, and a week later, the Senate had already approved it; that is not common in Brazil. On May 7, amendment 106 (old PEC10) came into force in the country.¹ During data collection in April, the

investigated media did not discuss, problematize, or even establish any debate. The dominant logic tries to pressure all activities to fit into narrow definitions (Eichberg, 1995). A question to be asked is under what conditions does the JN influence public opinion? Despite the growth of social networks in Brazil, JN is still the first news by many of the population. JN is the most influential television network in Brazil. The influence it has had since the 1960s is substantial in shaping public opinion. Amendments to a country's Constitution require effective participation by the population. The "top-down" model is a conservative practice that insists on perpetuating itself. In general, television media is part of the set of powers that seek to influence the population to maintain the status quo. In Lash's perspective, reflective modernity seeks to observe the strength present in social structures and not only in individual action. Power structures are reinforced while a discourse that prioritizes individual action tends to weaken people's networks. The empowerment of social actors cannot occur in an individualization process. In claiming that many social structures are in decline, Lash understands that others are instead of them taking place. In general, the newly dominant social structures will seek social control in different ways. Among these forms are those used by the media for the inculcation process.

Conclusion

This study focuses on news coverage carried out in a critical period in which the coronavirus is spreading across the planet. Our focus on the most-watched television program in Brazil revealed the concealment of changes in the Brazilian Constitution and a spectacularization of the pandemic. We are not minimizing the pandemic. However, it is necessary to reflect on this group's strategy that is part of the country's dominant structures. The 21st century presents enormous challenges in work, inequality, human rights, and human and social development. The exponential growth of the different technologies implies ethical reflections deepened by all. A media outlet cannot ignore a constitutional amendment that will cause substantial changes to the Brazilian Central Bank, e.g., allowing it to use trillions to purchase rotten papers with public money. The PEC10 was approved, becoming Constitutional Amendment 106. The text approved by the Chamber of Deputies gives scope for the purchase of any title by the Central Bank of Brazil. The Senate created a specification for the securities that the Central Bank could buy; this one omitted when the text returned to the Chamber. Constitutional Amendment 106 authorizes the Central Bank to purchase securities from banks. The Central Bank can buy any bond, including bad bonds.

The senators voted in one direction, and when the text returned to the Chamber, one erased the specifications of the securities that the Central Bank could purchase. Article 7 of 106 Constitutional amended authorizes the Central Bank to trade on the secondary market, the informal market. These operations can reach trillions. We talked about the rotten bonds and what the Central Bank can buy now are bonds accumulated in banks' portfolios for more than 15 years, even prescribed. When purchasing these bonds, the nonperforming loan (NPL), the Central Bank will use public money. These actions will lead Brazil to increase its debt exponentially. What disgusts us is that the program most seen on Brazilian television dedicates only one insertion in April to this Constitution's change. We no longer tolerate such mechanisms

¹ http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/Emendas/Emc/emc106.htm

as those applied by this media. Brazilian monetary authority is has demoting. How can the Central Bank trade with public money on the secondary market? A market without regulation, without monitoring, without auditing. An unconstitutional action is underway in Brazil. Article 7 could not change after leaving the Senate and going to the Chamber. Although there is a discussion of unconstitutionality, the market does not wait and is in full swing. In Brazil, there is a spending ceiling, according to Constitutional Amendment 95, for direct expenses, such as health, education, social assistance, state maintenance, keeping everything frozen. However, there is no limit to paying the financial debt and purchasing the rotten bonds under Amendment 106. The Brazilian media did not address the privilege of the financial sector. The *JN* ignored this change in the Constitution of Brazil. The impacts on the development of regions will be immense in Brazil. The emphasis on individualization, growing power of activity in the face of social structures and cognitivism, does not correspond to what society needs. In our view, communication structures are based on forces that dominate most spaces to create and disseminate ideologies that keep the population culturally sedated, distracted by the spectacularization of certain phenomena. We need actions that highlight the community instead of the individual, aesthetic understanding instead of instrumental and cognitive rationality, and the organization of new social structures that allow free expression and the challenge of oligarchic and despotic models.

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