

The rituals of mediatization playing: a reflection on the articulation of meanings in the production and consumption of the online play by connected kids

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Abstract

The children are increasingly appropriating digital devices not only to communicate and socialize but also to play. As a cultural practice strongly linked to childhood, the play is modeled and even resignified as communication possibilities change. In this sense, this paper aims to think about the crossing resulting from the mediatized context in which we live, to understand the constitution of others and, perhaps, new ways of playing for the connected child. For this, we look at the consumption rituals of Maria Clara e JP to understand how such ritualistic actions contribute to these mediatized ways of playing. Therefore, thinking about YouTubers kids' games as devices able to articulate senses, as a helpful way to understand the child's place in its mediatized dimensions, since such practices can promote consumer goods, guide and shape tastes, as well as worldviews.

Keywords

Rituals of playing; Mediatized consumption; Child Youtuber; Mediatization.

Introduction

Working with the theme of childhood and its particularities demands precise positions on the child we take as a point of analysis because there are different approaches and contexts through which the social actor can be observed. In this paper, we defend the idea of childhood as a social construction (Buckingham, 2007), a stage that is in constant and intense transformation, thus revealing a pluralization of the ways of being a child (Corsaro, 2011; Sarmento, 2004)

As a cultural practice strongly linked to childhood, the play is also continuously negotiating, shaping, and even resignifying itself as society and children's communication possibilities change. That is, it is a play whose dimensions are mediated mainly. When we observe, for example, the channels on the YouTube platform whose protagonists are children, we will see significant changes in the ways of playing online.

Before we proceed, it is relevant to mention our starting point regarding the concept of mediatization because it does not have a single definition. Although the first formulation on mediatization appeared in the mid-1980s, it was from the 2000s onwards that such an approach gained its first attempts to develop systematically. Aiming to apprehend the extensive presence of media amid the processes of transformation, organization, and (re)structuring of social, political, cultural economic practices, the mediatization seeks to encompass the social changes resulting from the dissemination of media content and platforms that are intertwined with the practices of everyday life (Couldry & Hepp, 2013), including amid the games of contemporary children.

There are two more concrete traditions within this formative phase of research on mediatization: institutionalist and social-constructivist (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). The first understands the media as an independent social institution with its own rules. In this case, the media influence would be linked to the fact that it has become an integral part of the functioning of other social institutions and reached a degree of authority that would force institutions to submit to their own media logic (Hjarvard, 2012). On the other hand, the social-constructivist tradition comprehends mediatization as part of the communicative construction of social and cultural reality, seeking to understand the consequences for social life (Couldry & Hepp, 2013).

In the Brazilian context, the concept of mediatization, especially from the social-constructivist tradition, finds dialogue in the reflections of authors like José Luiz Braga (2006) and Fausto Neto (2010). Braga proposes thinking of mediatization as an interactional process, still incomplete, but in the process of constituting itself as a process of reference, which has happened. In this case, the author considers reference processes apprehended as central, dominant, and hegemonic tendencies so that the other processes – not considered reference processes – would have these as orientation. Fausto Neto, in turn, observes the mediatization of society from the idea of circulation. Having as background the communicational architecture and its mediatization processes, the author argues that the circulation provides new forms of interaction between producers and receivers so that the actors' roles become complex. That is, circulation is no longer seen merely as a place of passage to be transformed into an instance in which individuals find themselves in complex games of negotiation and recognition.

However, although there are two more concrete traditions about the concept of mediatization, it is possible to say that both seem to move towards convergence because there is no social construction of reality without involving institutions in this process (Trindade, 2019).

To make our argument clearer, we will use the considerations of Stig Hjarvard (2012), for whom every process of mediatization can be defined in two ways: direct (strong) or indirect (weak). In this case, direct mediatization refers to previously unmediated activities transformed into a mediated form only to be performed through interaction with a medium. A current example is an online meeting, so necessary in the pandemic because the meeting only happens if mediated by media devices. On the other hand,

indirect mediatization occurs when an activity is influenced but not transformed and is dependent on media mechanisms.

Considering the purpose of mediatization is to understand the appropriation of subjects through a structure that shapes cultural patterns, sociability practices, as well as beliefs and worldviews, it seems helpful to think about how the ritual of playing by the child is (re)modified and (re)signified in a mediatized context, incorporating the opening to creativity that digital media provide, because all is available at the swipe of a finger, allowing the participation of each one through their content and the most varied ways. The child is a privileged actor in the creation. Thus, on the one hand, it is possible to think of the YouTuber child's play as a process of direct mediatization (Hjarvard, 2012), since the rite of play is modified by the presence of media mechanisms, on the other hand, it is essential to understand the articulation of meaning that manifest themselves through of the online play.

In this paper, therefore, we are interested in situating the play of the connected kids as a ritual of mediatized consumption that, from the communicational aspect, acts as a device capable of articulating meaning between brands and consumers. To complete this perspective, we propose an anthroposemiotic¹ analysis to understand which signs are produced through the rite of mediatized play – a kind of play whose fun is not often the only interest placed in the background.

Children's consumption rituals in their mediatized dimensions

In recent years there has been a progressive growth in the number of children using the internet and, consequently, experiencing new forms of interaction, sociability, and entertainment through the screens (CGI.BR, 2020). Beyond simple content consumption, it is necessary to recognize that these social actors also appropriate digital platforms to produce their texts, videos, and photos. The YouTube platform is an example that denotes such appropriation. However, Google, the company responsible for the web platform, presents in its use policies the information that the minimum age to have an account on the site is 13 years,² what we currently see is the growing expansion of channels starring children: the so-called Child YouTubers.

In this paper, we use the term Child YouTuber not to represent any children who produce and publishes their videos on the YouTube platform, but a child who has become a professional content producer, creating according to the logic of the platform, with appeals to visually attractive and well-edited videos, content that values authenticity and intimacy, which attract the attention of the advertising industry and capitalize on the engagement of audiences (Jorge et al., 2018). These kids who professionalized in the production of their YouTube channels attract hundreds of thousands of viewers, achieving celebrity status.

According to data from the Social Blade³ platform, among the ten most popular channels on YouTube Brazil (regardless of the age of its protagonists or category that they fall into), the channel of sibling Maria Clara & JP occupies the fifth position,⁴ overcoming 29 million subscribers and more than 16 billion views. These impressive numbers reveal the popularity of these children's characters whose production uses digital devices and consumer goods to put another meaning in their ways of playing online.

However, it is essential to say that children's YouTuber games are not new practices, which would have emerged after the consolidation of the internet. Past generations already performed similar games

¹ It is based on the union of the semiotic method (PEIRCE, 2017) with the Visual Anthropology (RIBEIRO, 2005) so that audiovisual production reveals itself as a place from which it becomes possible to understand society and culture.

² Retrieved 2021, December 03 from: <https://www.youtube.com/t/terms>

³ Retrieved 2021, December 03 from: <https://socialblade.com/>

⁴ Data was collected on December 03, 2021.

with their toys, in which they created stories and demonstrated to their peers how to handle and play with a particular object. The big difference is that now the game is performed in front of a camera, transmitting through the internet practices that were restricted to the family and private environment or mediated in children's programs on television channels, where the child did not participate in the process of capturing and broadcasting, but a mass media institution. Today, the act of sharing a video with hundreds of friends has become a way for children to play and interact with the world around them. Like so many others that make up culture, an activity is socially learned.

For the French educator Gilles Brougère (1998), the act of playing is a dynamic endowed with social meaning that needs learning. From this perspective, the playful activity would not be the source of culture but the result of a preexisting culture. Through it, the different contributions would be provided to the subjects that would enable them to understand some things like a game. In practice, the subject needs to share this same culture to play.

So, assuming that the act of playing is socially constituted and comprises certain sets of rules, sequences, and patterns that must be shared by those who play, would it be possible to think of playing as a ritualistic process? We argue that it is.

According to Mariza Peirano (2003), ritual is a cultural system of symbolic communication constituted of ordered and standardized sequences of words and acts. In Peirano (2003), we find an effort to offer an operative definition of ritual. For this, the author lists five essential points: 1) there is no absolute definition of ritual because the understanding should be ethnographic, that is, the researcher is the one who should apprehend the ritualistic moments; 2) the nature of the rituals does not matter. What matter is that they have a specific form – a certain degree of conventionality, redundancy and that they combine words and actions; 3) the ritual is not characterized by an apparent lack of rationality, because rationality is a criterion of our society and transforming it into a universal consensus tends to interfere; 4) since society has a shared repertoire of categories, classifications, forms, and values, what is found in ritual is already found in daily life; 5) because we live in society, all our actions have an implicit communicative element (Peirano, 2003).

In complement, the author defends that the ritualistic action, in its constitutive features, can be seen as performative in three senses. The first to say is also to do something as a conventional act; the second is the importance that the participants experience a performance which makes use, at the same time, of various media; and the third in the sense that the actors create values during the performative act (Peirano, 2003). Thus, all ritual is a cultural system of symbolic communication, and the ritualistic action is always performative and currently widely mediatized. So, the rituals are present in several moments of everyday life, especially in those where the performance happens. The soccer game, the religious act, the game performed by a child in front of the camera, and consumption are examples of rituals that cross our lives.

When we talk about consumption, it is essential to highlight this phenomenon's central position in contemporary society. To consider consumption simply from an economic point seems to us an overly simplistic view to encompass a practice of such magnitude. So, beyond its financial nature, commonly related to acts of buying and selling, the idea of consumption is constituted as "a sociocultural process in which products are appropriated and used" (Canclini, 2015, p. 60). Like so many other activities that make up culture, consumption is not natural but socially learned. A practice whose material and symbolic dimensions are inseparable. That is why "ways of being, lifestyles, values, and speeches are socially learned, as well as tastes and habits that make up the daily routines" (Castro, 2012, p. 61).

We acquire new interests, confer values on specific issues, and even elect certain lifestyles as the ideals through consumption. Strictly speaking, consumption must be understood as a social practice and a process of building relationships between people and material culture, which assumes a prominent place as a structure of values that regulate social relations, develop identities and define cultural maps (Rocha,

2005), and a process of building bonds of meaning between brands and people.

By outlining a connection between consumption and rituals and then working with the idea of consumption ritual, the anthropologist McCracken (2003) argues that consumer goods have qualities and meanings that are beyond their utilitarian and commercial character. For him, meanings are always in transit, transferring from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods and then moving to the individual consumer. Therefore, the meanings present in the culturally constituted world are assigned to consumer goods through mediations of fashion and advertising systems. From the moment the meanings are allocated in consumer goods, they are transferred to individuals through a ritual which, for McCracken, are rituals of possession, exchange, grooming, and divestment.

Although McCracken's proposal reveals the competence of consumption rituals in the transference of meanings, we must consider that the author observes this phenomenon through an anthropological bias. Therefore, the proposal of the Canadian author can have a new interpretation, to contemplate regular sequential acts more simplified, such as rituals of search, purchase, possession, uses, and discards (Trindade & Perez, 2014). This new interpretation of rituals enables us to understand that consumption does not begin only in the possession, as seen in McCracken, but it is a process that starts before the purchase. So, searching for information, leafing a magazine, the test drive at a dealership, and even the sliding fingers through Instagram stories of brands, all is consumption.

In this sense, it opens up an important research spectrum that allows apprehending the consumption rituals not only by an anthropological bias but also from a communicational view, allowing us to think about the consumption rituals in a transdisciplinary way (Trindade & Perez, 2014). This means that the rituals manifest themselves from the anthropological view, which allows understanding how they operate in a person-goods dimension, as well as from the communicational perspective, which perceives the consumption rituals as media devices (Agamben, 2009; Foucault, 1979) able to articulate meanings of products and brands in people's lives.

In this paper, from the communicational perspective, we seek dialogue with the child's play in its mediated dimensions. We propose to reflect on how the rite of online play is constituted in a device that, through the advertising system, can propagate specific ways of playing, shape the behaviors, and articulate meanings between brands and consumers.

Child's play as a media device

In the current media context, children YouTubers reveal themselves as characters with a great capacity to aggregate followers and propagate content. Due to abundant follower numbers attracting the attention of different companies and their brands, children's cultural productions are appropriated to meet their commercial interests. As Casaqui (2009) explains, advertising, in a broader sense and seen from the consumer society, is a phenomenon that spreads through the contemporary cultural production itself.

It has known that several YouTubers monetize their channels while playing in front of the camera. The YouTuber Ryan5 is perhaps the most representative in this sense. This is an American boy of just nine years old who has about 31 million followers, and these videos have been viewed more than 48 billion times.⁶ In 2020, the little one topped the list of the highest-paid YouTubers in the world for the third consecutive year. According to the survey conducted by Forbes magazine,⁷ Ryan earned about \$29.5 million from videos. He demonstrates and analyzes new releases of the toy industry while playing and

⁵ Retrieved 2021, December 03 from: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChGJGhZ9SOOHvBB0Y-4DOO_w.

⁶ Data was collected on December 03, 2021.

⁷ Retrieved 2021, December 03 from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maddieberg/2020/12/18/the-highest-paid-youtube-stars-of-2020/?sh=5e57fae26e50>.

having fun with them.

In addition to promoting consumer goods quickly and creating an identity connection between viewers and protagonists, the videos starred by kids YouTubers stand out for the performance practiced by children in front of the camera. In a video⁸ whose format is commonly recognized as unboxing, the YouTuber Luíza, the protagonist of the channel *Crescendo com Luluca*, strives to demonstrate how the simple unpacking of a toy seems fun. While the product is unpacked, it becomes possible to identify aspects of the YouTuber's performance, which invariably follows the same patterns and sequences of acts to confer spontaneity, amateurism, and, especially, fun to the production.

To reflect on the performance undertaken by YouTubers, the distinction between stage (*front region*) and backstage (*background region*) presented by Ervin Goffman (1985) seems to us a fundamental argument to understand the constitution of such characters. According to Goffman, the performance always happens inside an interactive structure. The individual will adapt his behavior to it to project an image compatible with the one he wants to transmit. Thus, as a particular activity is performed in the presence of other people – such as playing in front of the camera – some aspects of this activity are accentuated and brought to what Goffman calls stage. In contrast, other elements that could discredit the favorable impression are suppressed and put backstage, where the subject can leave his facade and get out of the character.

In the case of kids YouTubers, from the perspective of Goffman, we can infer that the image brought to the stage mainly concerns a relaxed and irreverent child who presents different consumer goods with such spontaneity while playing in front of the camera. Everything that is not compatible with such a fun and playful appearance is carefully allocated backstage. Moreover, what makes the performance of the kids YouTubers disturbing is linked to the fact that the image brought to the stage paradoxically has more success as the impression encouraged approaches what would be, at other times, left only behind the scenes that are, the informality of everyday life. In this case, the persona brought to the stage is presented as an ordinary child who plays, makes mistakes, gets it right, and has fun in his intimate and informal life, and the more natural it seems, the better for the performance and consequently for the identification with his followers.

Therefore, when creating the child's persona that embraces extraordinary resourcefulness in dealing with consumer goods and in the ways of playing, it is essential to note that the child who plays to intensify the promotion of certain toys becomes itself a product to be consumed. Furthermore, the advertising practice, taking advantage of the popularity of such children, is almost always inserted in an opaque way amid these productions, making it evident that advertising is not limited to traditional forms but manifests itself through different formats of advertising (Casaqui, 2011). One of these formats, and perhaps one of the most persuasive, is entertainment since the commercial appeal is disguised as entertainment but still carries its influential function (Covaleski, 2010; Viana, 2017).

Not surprisingly, the intertwining of advertising and entertainment is a practical strategy for companies that seek to interact with children as consumers, especially if we consider the restrictions in Brazil regarding advertising targeting children (Craveiro & Bragaglia, 2017; Henrique & Vivarta, 2017). Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, in many cases, the child YouTuber who plays and has fun in front of the camera acts concomitantly as a brand spokesperson, contributing to the articulation of meanings between the products and consumers in their ways of playing online.

Resume some concepts discussed throughout the text to support the argument proposed here, that is, to think of the online play as a ritual of mediatized consumption able to articulate meaning between brands and consumers. The first concept concerns the idea of ritual in Peirano (2003), which considers the ritual as a cultural system of symbolic communication consisting of ordered and standardized sequences

⁸ Retrieved 2021, December 03 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmNyByolqaM>.

of words and acts, which in its constitutive features, is always performative. The second is related to the perspective of Grant McCracken (2003) on the rituals of consumption that act as places of intermediation, transfer of meanings. Consumer goods do not have fixed meanings but changing and constantly in transit. This process influence new apprehensions uses, and identifications in a constant circulation of meaning. Moreover, the third perspective concerns the mediatization that, according to Couldry & Hepp (2013), seeks to apprehend the extensive presence of media in social life to embrace the transformation resulting from the dissemination of content and media platforms that are molded to the contexts and everyday practices.

We argue that the game children YouTubers perform in front of the camera progressively becomes a ritual of mediatized consumption. It is a ritual because there is a specific way to make videos recognized as productions of child YouTubers. It follows certain conventionality, redundancy, and sequence of words and acts to confer meanings as the game – performance – happens (Peirano, 2003). It is also a consumption ritual because, through the advertising system, the apparent and unpretentious game can transfer meaning to the symbolic construction of the relationship among consumer goods, the brands involved, and the children. Therefore, it is created consumption habits that are transformed into rituals.

Moreover, it is a mediated game because there are essential changes in the ways of playing due to the presence and intensification of media platforms in children’s daily lives (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). From the perspective of Hjarvard (2012), we understand that there is a process of direct (strong) mediatization because it is only possible to play at being a YouTuber since it is done within a particular media space, with specific equipment, and according to a set of rules, sequences and patterns that will set the tone so that the production is recognized as such.

There are two initial perspectives to understand the consumption rituals as devices (Trindade & Perez, 2014). The first concerns the consumption rituals represented by the brand’s messages through advertising systems; the second is related to the consumption ritual experienced in people’s contact with the goods or products. This paper treats the rite of playing online as a device through the first approach. Thus, we argue that the game in which children demonstrate consumer goods in front of the camera and, at the same time, play and have fun with them, reveals the mediatization of consumption through the advertising system, which allows the articulation of symbolic practices and the constitution of bonds of meaning between brands and consumers.

The Maria Clara & JP Channel: an anthroposemiotic analysis

This paper proposes that the connected child’s game is revealed in a ritual of mediatized consumption that, from the communicational perspective, acts as a device that can articulate meanings between brands and consumers. We present an analysis through the anthroposemiotic methodology, which is based on the union of the semiotic method (Peirce, 2017) with the teachings of Visual Anthropology (Ribeiro, 2005) so that the audiovisual production reveals itself as a place from which it becomes possible to understand society and culture. Thus, through the protocol presented below, we know it is possible to embrace the aesthetic manifestations present in the constitution of the films, as well as the verbal and nonverbal content revealed by the children YouTubers.

Table 1: Protocol for anthroposemiotic analysis

Assembly	How the story is told. Analysis of how sequences convey content.
Sounds	Analysis of music, vignettes, and ambient sounds.

Voiceover	Consideration of voiceover and the voice of the characters.
Body Analysis	Analysis of the gestures, posture, expression, clothing, and appearance of the characters of the film.
Colors	Analysis of the chromatic choice of vignettes and the predominant colors.
Graphical Analysis	Drawings, shapes, and volumes. Including the channel logo.
Visual Analysis	Choice of framing, zoon, camera position, etc.
Location	Indexes of time and space. A highlight for nostalgic, contemporary, or future positioning.
Verbal Analysis	Analysis of the verbal content conveyed.
Profile Association	A person's profile would fit the effects of meaning generated by the set of analyses.
Effect potentially generated	

Fonte: Perez, 2005

As the object of analysis, we elected the channel starred by siblings Maria Clara e JP⁹ on the YouTube platform. The choice is justified since the channel occupies a prominent position among the most popular in Brazil, being the leader among the children YouTubers in the country.

We selected the two most popular videos¹⁰ present in the playlist entitled *Os Novos Bonecos de Maria Clara & JP*. The playlist is composed of videos in which the protagonists tell stories to insert toys into the narrative. Although most YouTubers present consumer goods on their channels and even monetize their productions through advertising, as demonstrated earlier, the playlist caught our attention because, unlike the others, Maria Clara & JP present and play with their line of toys. Therefore, we can infer that it is a playlist strategically articulated whose primary purpose is to promote the toys.

It is important to say that the brand Maria Clara & JP is currently licensed by Ziggle Licensing, a company specialized in licensing brands for YouTubers. The YouTuber Luccas Neto,¹¹ also known by the children in Brazil, was the first to have his brand licensed by the company. Such professional support as the background clarifies that, although there is apparent amateurism, the videos have as a premise the promotion of licensed toys and strengthening the brand of YouTubers.

Image 1: Maria Clara & JP licensed products



Source: Canal Maria Clara & JP (image produced by the author)

Similar to other videos of child personalities, it can be said that the productions of Maria Clara &

⁹ Retrieved 2021, December 03 from: <https://www.youtube.com/c/MariaClaraeJP>.

¹⁰ We consider the videos with the highest views to be the most popular.

¹¹ Retrieved 2021, December 03 from: <https://www.youtube.com/c/luccasneto>.

JP always follow the same narrative, investing in the demonstration of games and all practices commonly related to children's imagination. In addition, the presence of family members integrating the videos is something constant. This approach is not exclusive to Maria Clara & JP because it is easy to find other videos of children whose family members participate and even assume the role of protagonists.

The productions have premised an informality, irreverence, and especially aspects that denote certain amateurism to generate proximity between YouTubers and their consumers. However, in the analyzed videos, although there is a certain amount of informality, it is noticed that the image brought to the stage (Goffman, 1985) follows a script designed to promote the products, the channel, and its protagonists. The productions make use of professional editing, making use of more elaborate graphic resources, including the presence of mascots, logos, and symbols, their visual identity.

It is worth highlighting some crucial points for the channel's visual identity analysis, especially in what concerns the unspoken. Starting from the assumption that the visual identity is the basis for the story that a brand wants to tell, it's interesting to note how the story told is embedded in a gender deterministic notion, to the tone of girls wearing pink and boys wearing blue. In the Logo, on the letter that integrates the name of Maria Clara, there is a heart and, just in the background, a rainbow; both images are strongly linked to the normative imaginary of what would represent the qualitative signs of classic girl. On the other hand, the construction of JP is different. Supported on an orange star, the initials that represent JP practically divide themselves from the rainbow, moving as a way to distance themselves from the symbols linked to the imaginary of things girly.

The same goes for the mascots that represent the protagonists. The figure of Maria Clara wears pink clothes tones, a color belonging to the socially normative vision of clothes and aesthetic values for girls. The figure that represents JP, on the other hand, has clothes with red and blue tones, reinforcing the dressing ideal and the chromatic codes of the ambiances for boys.

This seems to us a substantially critical discussion because, from the signs that are placed in the ways of playing, in the clothing, as well as in the ways of being and ambiances, it becomes possible to question which are the childhoods and worldviews that are being placed in front of the contemporary children as they play and has fun through the screens.

The voices and sounds that contextualize the productions analyzed seek to accentuate a childlike ambiance. In the intention to give shape to this ambiance, the protagonist's excessive effort in elaborating voices and sounds excessively infantilized, mainly performed by the dad (adult) and the older brother JP.

The structural aspect of production (sounds, languages, and visual effects) is similar; they follow the same tone. The change is the narrative proposed in each video. In the first one¹² the narrative unfolds around Maria Clara's 9th birthday. When she remembers that it's her birthday, she spends most of the ten minutes of the video getting ready for what would be her party. She chooses clothes, fixes her hair, puts on makeup, and paints her nails. However, she is surprised by three gifts in commemoration of her birthday after she is ready. The first package contains a baby carriage. The second and third packages include licensed dolls of Maria Clara & JP.

From the signs that manifest themselves in this production, it becomes clear that the film was strategically articulated because, while the gifts are unpacked, it's observed that both Maria Clara & JP wear clothes and accessories identical to those of their dolls, making evident the transfer of meanings on which McCracken (2003) addresses, by mimicry. The symbolic construction around the duo of YouTubers is transferred to the dolls that represent them.

It is confirmed, therefore, that all elaboration of the video – the party, the participants, the games, as well as the toys demonstrated -, are part of a strategy carefully designed to promote the channel and its characters, as well as the licensed dolls and the heteronormative gender values, highlighting the place of

¹² Retrieved 2021, December 03 from: <https://youtu.be/pGZH5xWH7bE>.

the girl as a mother. Beyond promoting the products, what is at stake is the promotion of the YouTubers, which are symbolically represented as models of good living childhood and glimpsing the future.

Unlike the first video, the second¹³ analyzed does not openly promote the dolls but also weaves a narrative to insert the toy. The narrative unfolds through a story in which the dolls represent Maria Clara's children. It's worth noting that only Maria Clara appears in the production, whose play demonstrates parents' care (Maria Clara) with their children (licensed dolls). We can see that the little YouTuber strives to accentuate aspects that can convey the idea that now her persona is another: she stopped being the child and assumed the role of the mother. To contemplate this transformation, Maria Clara uses symbolic aspects consistent with the notion culturally linked to the idea of a mother. That is, she changes the tone of her voice, uses expressions of concern about the welfare of her children, as well as demonstrates patience, care and affection. On the other hand, all that can discredit the impression encouraged by Maria Clara is left out.

It is important to point out that games like this are not new. Children have long played at assuming the role of adults, be it their parents or even professionals such as a doctor, teachers, or firefighters. Meanwhile, currently, the game is systematically mediatized. It leaves to be an intimate activity and becomes a production that combines playing with the promotion of consumer goods, lifestyles, and worldviews.

If we consider that playing is a ritual and that rituals can be defined as behaviors established by society and provide a context for the individual to affirm, attribute or review meanings, JP's absence in the production becomes disturbing. Although the play may seem an innocent and commonly seen practice, we can infer that by assuming all tasks of caring for the children and not counting on the participation of the brother JP, an outdated and retrograde worldview is reinforced in which it would only be a woman's task to take on the exhausting work of caring for the children.

After analyzing the two productions, it is clear that the child's play in front of the camera is built to intensify the presence of certain consumer goods in the mediation of brands and particular worldviews. It reveals a joint between advertising and entertainment that is evident in the description of the videos analyzed, namely: this video, besides a lot of joy and fun, contains advertising products of Maria Clara & JP.

Although there is the information of sponsored video, the highlight of the sentence above refers to the environment of much joy and fun and, in turn, the advertising report itself is placed in a supporting role, as a kind of necessary evil, a price to pay for all the fun that the videos would provide. Therefore, YouTubers are built based on what Khamis, Ang, and Welling (2017) call self-branding. A self-promotion strategy that uses intimate rhetoric and an authentic performance to attract the attention of the public and the advertising industry. In this case, child YouTubers, like commercial brands, benefit from having a uniquely charismatic public persona sensitive to the needs and interests of the public (Marwick, 2013).

Final considerations

The numeral aspect has become a central point of reference on the popularity of the characters that succeed on the internet, including YouTubers. There is always an occasion in which the protagonists call on their followers to say connected, repeatedly calling them to watch, like, comment, and share their productions, encouraging quantitative expansion. So, it is clear that the dispute occurs to acquire the most significant number of likes and views because the numeral aspect contributes predominantly to seal that personality as someone of apparent success and therefore deserves attention, including as spokespersons of brands.

Throughout this paper, we propose that the child's play is constituted in a progressively mediatized

¹³ Retrieved 2021, December 03 from: https://youtu.be/Y-Gb_ZeiLTA.

activity since the media aspect reveals itself as a fundamental point for play to happen. If before the rite of play was restricted only to the private sphere, now it extrapolates the barriers of intimate life and gradually places itself as a public activity that must be seen, shared, and mediatized.

The advertising practices use children's cultural production to circulate many consumer goods and brands. A timely strategy, since, through the apparent play, it becomes possible to talk with an audience challenging to access due to the restriction existent in Brazil.

When exploring videos in which children YouTubers appear playing with consumer goods, we seek to propose that the game in front of the camera is a ritual of mediatized consumption because the productions follow certain conventionality, redundancy, and sequence of acts and speeches, so that the meaning is transferred through media platforms and grounded in advertising discourses. In its communicational bias, a ritual that acts as a media device capable of constituting bonds of meaning among brands, YouTubers, and consumers. It is noteworthy that this view does not take the productive and creative dimension that the media devices have, especially in the perspective provided by digital technologies, due to the objectives presented previously.

So, we conclude this paper with the conviction that thinking about the games of children YouTubers as media devices capable of articulating meanings seems a valuable way to understand the child's place in its mediatized dimensions. The fun and casual game reveals itself as a device that promotes consumer goods, transfers meanings, and determines and shapes tastes, practices, and worldviews while the child plays and consumes such productions.

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