

Volume 43
issue 2 / 2024

Contracampo e-ISSN 2238-2577
Niterói (RJ), 43 (2)
may/2024-aug/2024

Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication is a quarterly publication of the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies (PPGCOM) at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). It aims to contribute to critical reflection within the field of Media Studies, being a space for dissemination of research and scientific thought.

Preferred meanings and cultural mediations: relevance of family, work, and religious institutions in the reception of journalistic contents¹

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¹ This article is a revised and expanded version of the work presented at the WG Reception, Circulation and Social Uses of the Media, at the 31st Annual Meeting of Compós, held in 2022.

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TO REFERENCE THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Winkes, K., André, H. A. (2024). Preferred meanings and cultural mediations: relevance of family, work, and religion institutions in the reception of journalistic contents. *Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication*, Niterói, 43(2), may/aug.

Submitted on 08/13/2023 / Accepted on 06/05/2024

DOI – <http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v43i2.59541>



Abstract

Being the result of two theses (André, 2018; Winques, 2020), this article aims to understand the strength of family, work, and religion institutions in identifying preferred meanings — frameworks that the reader uses to link to a message — in the reception of journalistic narratives. From biographical fragments — memories triggered during in-depth interviews — extracted from a question about life history, which coincides in both theses, the relevance of the three institutions in the daily lives of 34 participants is discussed. The results show that these reference communities are already identified in the life stories by: a) spontaneous association; b) stimulated association; c) spontaneous dissociation; and d) stimulated dissociation. Through these categories, it is possible to identify the constituent bases of cultural mediations — the dimensions in which meanings originate and are constituted through media consumption.

Keywords

Reception; preferred meanings; cultural mediations; life stories; journalism.

Introduction

Experiences of media reception encompass various angles. Combined, they range from access and media type to the audience's repertoire and cultural references. This set of *multiple mediations* (Gómez, 2005) helps shape audiences and how meanings are produced. In the reception of media products — devices that expand sensory capacities and, consequently, the complexity of the world — it can be seen that the media dialog with the context in which individuals are immersed.

By proposing that life stories are lenses for outlining *cultural mediations*, dimensions in which meanings originate and are constituted via media consumption (Jacks, 1999; Hall, 2003), the text aims to understand the power of the institutions of family, work, and religion in identifying *preferred meanings*, framing lenses that the reader uses to connect with any message.

Being the result of a dialog between two sociocultural reception studies (André, 2018; Winques, 2020), this article compares the results of 34 in-depth interviews carried out in both studies (18 in the first and 16 in the second, which exceed 40 hours of raw material), based on a key question that served as the basis for both studies: *If you had to tell your life story about who you are, from your earliest memories to the moment of this interview, what should we know?*¹

Although in the first study (André, 2018) the participants were selected from two television crime news programs (*Balanço Geral*, RICTV Record, and *Tribuna da Massa*, Rede Massa/SBT) and in the second study (Winques, 2020) based on teachers linked to the Paraná Public Education Workers' Union (APP-Sindicato) and neo-pentecostal evangelicals from the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God who use digital platforms (Google, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.) as their main means of journalistic consumption on online networks², both theses show that institutions such as family, work, and religion are already ingrained in the interviewees' perception of themselves.

This similarity could be empirically verified from *biographical fragments* — potentially and rationally accessible memories during the in-depth interviews - found in the two studies and analytically organized into four types: a) *spontaneous association*, when a particular social institution was brought into the discourse directly by the interviewees; b) *stimulated association*, when it was recognized through the intervention of the researchers; c) *spontaneous dissociation*, when it was rejected directly by the interviewees; and d) *stimulated dissociation*, when it was rejected even after the intervention of the researchers. These markers guide interpretations of the relevance of reference communities in media reception. In this sense, this work seeks to provide methodological guidelines that can make it possible to find, in different reception studies, meanings rooted in culture that, in turn, interfere with people's relationships with the media.

To consolidate the reflection, there is an initial discussion to assess the strength of reference communities (Jacks, 1999; Gómez, 2005) as a prominent type of mediation. The debate revolves around how biographical fragments are triggered by memory based on family, work, and religion. After presenting each of the two studies and the methodological parameters, the interference of the reference communities in the construction of the life stories of the 34 interviewees is discussed.

The results show that family and work appear more clearly in both surveys in the spontaneous association of memories and have denser links with the consumption of the journalistic narratives studied in both investigations. Religion, on the other hand, despite needing a stimulated association in the participants' reports and being more linked to a social temporality of more recent memory, is effective as a

1 In the first study, the question was used as an approach strategy. In the second, in addition to engaging with the interviewees, there was already an indication that there would be demonstrations from the reference communities.

2 The detailed description of the direction adopted and the objectives in the investigations that serve as a reference for the construction of this article is explained in the item *Methodological procedures*.

mediation that helps with the preferred meanings, especially in the group of neo-Pentecostal evangelicals.

Biographical fragments and reference communities

Each person is the protagonist of their own story and builds up a sequence of events throughout their life that establishes what Goffman (2008) calls *biographical uniqueness*, something that prevents two biographies from being identical. However, any *biographical fragment*, understood here as a type of memory that is potentially and consciously accessible because it has a social genesis, permeates the others. This makes it possible for life stories, which are necessarily linked to systems of identification and social representations (Moscovici, 2015; Woodward, 2014), to be linked to collective events and experiences.

Institutions such as family, work, and religion, although not the only ones, are among the most powerful *reference communities*, a force capable of outlining more or less shared meanings, which together constitute cultural mediations, "the terrain in which all information originates, where consumption takes place and meaning is produced" (Jacks, 1999, p. 57). In the reception process and, above all, in the subject's interactions with a media product, various referents come into play (Gómez, 2005). When viewing a news item, for example, a person can compare it with their own personality and with other reference communities, accessible analogically and/or digitally, such as the area where they live, the church they attend, their work environment, and the bonds they have formed in friendship. Therefore, cultural competence (Martín-Barbero, 2015) is built around the repertoire that individuals acquire during their existence.

These reference communities, therefore, come to constitute ways of making sense of the world and social relations. With the massification of society, which, according to Martín-Barbero (2015), began in the first half of the 19th century in Western Europe and was consolidated by increased access to the media, even with discontinuities in other regions of the world (Canclini, 2019), these institutions became more organic. Media, linked to the field of culture, reinforced and reconfigured perceptions of family, work, and religion, while they were reinforced and reconfigured by these references.

If these institutions rearrange themselves as reference communities linked to the media, the logic of reception cannot be restricted to the moment of consumption. Rather, it must merge "with the daily practices of the receivers, an action in which it gains meaning and significance, or not, through negotiation with the meanings proposed by the family, school, religion, political party, company, etc." (Jacks, 1999, p. 57). In this way, an individual is no longer seen as a consumer of superfluous things just "because they are exposed to the media, which also gives them a space for cultural production" (Guerin, 2000, p. 29).

These culturally-based arrangements show that no media product has any reason to exist if it is detached from other reference communities, in other words, from the field of culture that precedes it and is capital, before the economic sphere, for its existence. These arrangements are organized by memory, a type of individual and collective action (Bosi, 1994; Halbwachs, 2006) that triggers biographical fragments of representations of the past. They will always be traces anchored in social representations; after all, the past cannot be accessed in its entirety.

Since it is a dialectical articulation of biographical fragments from the past translated into actions in the present, memory can take on new connotations depending on the passage of time for the reference event and/or the contextual situation in which it is reactivated. This means that the same event can produce different meanings in specific spaces and times of mediation. This would explain why people can remember bad events with a certain nostalgia and sometimes relate them to comical versions.

The existence of matrices under which memories are formulated is a facilitating element for the activation of memories, which makes it possible for biographical fragments to be readily available. "In the movement of working memory, this initial scheme serves as support for a laborious process that allows

pure memory to cross different planes of consciousness and condense into the form of memory-image, the intermediate form of the process" (Bonin, 2010, p. 6). From this activation, the recognition of a memory is built. For this to happen, the individual needs to make a kind of abstraction from the present, in other words, activate the possible representations of the past fact - which leads to acts of recollection based on memories that will always be a vision or a narrative "about" the past, never the past par excellence (John, 2014).

Talking about life stories, then, means finding coherence in what has been remembered and chosen to materialize the narration in the triggering of memory, an operation that seeks to select, constitute, and safeguard events from the past. This process "is part of more or less conscious attempts to define and reinforce feelings of belonging and social boundaries between collectivities" (Pollack, 1989, p. 9).

Franco and Levin (2007) note that memory involves a range of discourses and experiences. It can refer to the potential to preserve or retain previously acquired ideas, as well as to an active process of symbolic construction and elaboration of meanings in the past. It is also possible to refer to the term as a dimension that concerns both private space and public and intersubjective life (Bosi, 1994; Franco; Levin, 2007; Halbwachs, 2006). The notion also allows us to trace an invariable link between the intimate and the collective, as the meanings sedimented in culture interfere with memories.

Places of memory and preferred meanings in reception

The shift in the understanding of reception beyond the momentary act of media consumption does not exclude the presence of the media; it simply evaluates them as one of the elements at play (Escosteguy; Jacks, 2005). Treated from a diachronic perspective, the production of meanings can only be intelligible if their production and reception practices are considered through the marks of the media and the social, cultural and experiential trajectories of the subjects and groups investigated (Bonin, 2013; John, 2014).

The interest in consuming a media product is related to the identification of *preferred meanings* — frameworks that a reader uses to connect with a message — whether they coincide with *preferred readings*, a suggestion of framing that, when successful, is configured as the "point where power crosses discourse" (Hall, 2003, p. 406). Both readings and preferred meanings are linked to a dialectical relationship that is, above all, interdependent between producers and audiences. Just as there are tactics for addressing messages (Gomes, 2011) that guide preferred readings, there are also strategies for reception experiences related to cultural competences (Martín-Barbero, 2015). Preferred meanings and readings are therefore linked to reference communities that help individuals understand themselves and the world through agreement and disagreement. For this reason, even if a message is anchored in hegemonic values, it will always be polysemic.

By adopting a historical perspective, Bonin (2013) understands that it is necessary to understand, among other factors, how media competencies are crystallized in reception based on the trajectory established with media narratives in everyday life, as well as how these same narratives can create ruptures and displacements in the public's way of thinking and acting. Therefore, when dealing with the issue of memory in reception studies, it is essential to consider that one of the characteristics of modernity, with its particularities in Latin America³ (Canclini, 2019), is the space-time disengagement provided by media and technology (Giddens, 1991).

To understand the transformations of memory, it is necessary to approach them to the phenomenon of the transformation of social temporality and the experience of time, resulting from the complex intersection between technological change, media, and new patterns of consumption, work, and

³ The value of modernity is increased in the region by the intersections between modern and traditional.

global mobility (Bonin, 2006). It is also essential to consider the planned obsolescence of objects by the market and the weakening of identity indicators, which often end up generating symptoms of cultural discontent and an irrepressible desire for the past (Martín-Barbero, 2018).

Memory is responsible for allowing individuals to elaborate on and negotiate media content, to the point of reconfiguring impressions, reconsidering opinions, producing experiences, or, in other words, transforming themselves positively or negatively. Therefore, memory needs to be a reference point for anyone thinking about mediation because it is a work of the present, and texts are not exogenous to readers.

In addition to understanding that the media acts as an agent for configuring places of memory and forgetting (Bonin, 2006), the components of media memory also articulate collective and/or individual marks manufactured elsewhere, especially in cultural mediations, "constituted from their social place, the contexts of their world of life, and the networks of relationships that are established there" (Bonin, 2010, p. 4). Thus, a final aspect of reception is that the procedure does not shed light directly on facts but allows us to trace the trajectories of memories.

Unlike the work presented by Bonin (2006; 2010; 2013), which deals with *media life* stories — apprehensions of the dimensions of the subjects' lives that allow us to understand their relationship with the media — we chose to adopt the term *biographical fragments* in this study, understood as a type of potentially and consciously accessible memory that, because it has a social genesis, permeates *the other*. This ensures that *life stories*, necessarily linked to systems of identification and representation, are connected to shared events and experiences. These fragments, based on the theoretical scope presented so far and on reports that emerged from the key question of the empirical phase of the two studies, are also important for thinking about the link between preferred meanings and the consumption of journalistic narratives. Especially in the case of this study, when it comes to news broadcast via television and traditional and independent news portals. These points will be addressed in the final section.

Methodological procedures

The approach centered on the speech of the subjects is no coincidence, as Jacks and Escosteguy (2005, p. 93) warn, because "the theoretical claim of the existence of action in the space of reception requires, at the time of empirical reconstruction of this reality, a methodological option that facilitates access to such participation in the process of producing meaning." The interview, the most flexible collection technique (Gil, 1999), provides data for a "detailed understanding of beliefs, attitudes, values, and motivations in relation to people's behaviors in specific social contexts" (Gaskell, 2002, p. 65). Researchers can use it to re-establish segments, which has been done in this text based on the two reference theses.

In the first case (André, 2018), the study included two phases: a) content analysis of 80 editions of the news programs *Balanço Geral* and *Tribuna da Massa*, from October to December 2017 (950 news insertions); b) a reception study with 18 viewers (September 2018). The group is made up of people who live in one of the three regions where there was a higher incidence of crime analyzed in the first phase: the metropolitan municipalities of São José dos Pinhais and Colombo, as well as the Industrial City of Curitiba (CIC), a district located in the capital of Paraná. The aim of the study, based on in-depth interviews, was to understand the appropriation of TV news in viewers' daily lives. To achieve this, the interviews were divided into three parts. In the first, a profile of the participants was drawn up based on biographical fragments linked to childhood and youth, as well as links to the neighborhood or region where they live and the world of work. In the second part, the focus was mainly on media consumption habits, with an emphasis on television (which programs, regardless of genre, the person watches, with whom, at what times, etc.). Finally, in the third part, the group's worldviews were explored by comparing the two previous moments, which helped to validate the implications of violence and, as a complement,

journalistic narratives in everyday life.

In the second study (Winques, 2020), the aim was to understand how algorithmic mediations, present on platforms such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, and others, interfere in the mediation and reception of news by members of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and the Paraná Public Education Workers' Union (APP-Sindicato). The investigation started with well-defined institutions, the church and the union, and included two phases: a) application of a questionnaire to select participants for the subsequent phase; b) in-depth interviews (from August to October 2019) with 16 people, eight from the religious sphere and eight from the union sphere. The group of interviewees is also made up of people who live in Curitiba, most of whom live in the neighborhood studied in the first thesis or neighborhoods closer to the city center. In the case of the interviews, the script was divided into eight parts. In the first two parts, the aim was to draw up a profile of the participants based on biographical aspects related to childhood, youth, religion, education, and experiences in the work field. In the following four parts, the focus was mainly on media consumption habits, with emphasis on the digital platforms used by the interviewees (including news sites and social networks), the level of trust in these sources, and the types of content most accessed and searched for, among other aspects. Finally, in the last two parts, the group's worldviews concerning journalism, disinformation, and algorithms were explored, based on a comparison with the information collected in the previous parts. This contributed to understanding the implications of algorithmic mediations and journalistic narratives in the participants' daily lives.

Considering these contexts, it is important to note that the first survey was conducted shortly before the 2018 elections, a period marked by the discursive and narrative growth of a conservative concept, linked to a far-right political spectrum. The second was carried out six months after the election, which gave electoral endorsement to this process. The context in which the studies were carried out — notable for the pre- and post-election phases, the spread of rumors, polarization, and the use of communication technologies — is a significant aspect, especially given the biographical fragments that touch on the lives of the interviewees (such as family, work, and religion) and which have considerable implications for their media consumption.

These clarifications are indispensable because the participants in the first study were drawn from two crime news programs, and in the second from unionized teachers and neo-Pentecostal evangelicals who consume information on digital platforms⁴. Despite the differences between the groups and the fact that the questions asked during the interviews sought answers to their objectives, the link between the authors made it possible to construct a common key question: *If you had to tell your life story about who you are, from your earliest memories to the moment of this interview, what should we know?* Since the second survey included a group selected for their religion, in addition to the first question, a supplementary one was added, also present elsewhere in the questionnaire for the first study: *Do you follow any religion?*

Based on this questioning, it was possible to parameterize the answers by gathering them into a single document and examining them using content analysis, a method capable of helping to identify symbolic constructions and narrative strategies (Herscovitz, 2010). Table 1 shows the socio-economic profile of the 34 participants. The first 18 are part of André's study (2018), the last 16 are part of Winques' research (2020):

4 The choice for the church was due to the prominence of discussions on religion and politics during the election, and the decision for the union was due to the debates on school, teaching, and ideology during the period.

Table 1 - Socio-economic profile of interviewees

Criteria	Classification	Interviewees
Gender	Male	P1, P3, P5, P7, P9, P11, P13, P15, P17, P19, P21, P23, P25, P27, P29, P31 and P33
	Female	P2, P4, P6, P8, P10, P12, P14, P16, P18, P20, P22, P24, P26, P28, P30, P32 and P34
Race/ethnicity	White	P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15, P16, P17, P20, P22, P24, P25, P26, P27, P28, P29, P30, P32 and P34
	Brown	P1, P6, P7, P13, P19, P21, P23, P31 and P33
	Black	P18
Age range	18-29 years	P5, P11, P15, P16, P19, P20, P25 and P26
	30-39 years	P14, P17, P23, P24, P29 and P33
	40-49 years	P4, P5, P7, P8, P21, P27, P28, P30, P31 and P32
	50-59 years	P2, P6, P13, P18, P22 and P34
	Over 60 years old	P1, P3, P9, P10 and P12
Education level (complete/ incomplete)	Elementary	P1, P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P18 and P22
	High School	P2, P4, P7, P12, P17, P19, P21, P23 and P26
	College	P15, P16, P20, P25 and P28
	Post-graduation	P24, P27, P29, P30, P31, P32, P33 and P34
Income	Non-fixed income	P4 and P14
	Up to two salaries	P3, P6, P9, P11, P12, P15, P20 and P24
	2 to 4 salaries	P2, P5, P10, P13, P16, P18, P19, P21, P22, P23, P25, P26, P31 and P33
	More than 5 salaries	P1, P7, P8, P17, P27, P28, P29, P30, P32 and P34
Employment	Unemployed	P4, P8, P14, P16, P22 and P26
	Retired/pensioner	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P9, P10 and P12
	Formal market	P11, P13, P15, P17, P18, P19, P24, P27, P28, P29, P30, P31, P32, P33 and P34
	Informal market	P7, P20, P21, P23 and P25

Source: André (2018) and Winques (2020).

The following analysis is divided into three sub-items: a) family; b) work; and c) religion. This is a way of organizing the text, but during the interviews, there were moments when the reference communities intersected. The answers to other questions were taken into account whenever there was a need to understand how the preferred meanings are consolidated in the relationship with reception.

Finally, it focuses on the empirical construction of memories, which, far beyond an individual act, go through various social dimensions. By convention, these biographical fragments were classified into four types based on their relationship with the reference communities of family, work, and religion: a) *spontaneous association*, when a certain institution was directly triggered by the interviewees; b) *stimulated association*, when it was recognized after the researchers intervened; c) *spontaneous dissociation*, when it was directly rejected by the interviewees; and d) *stimulated dissociation*, when it was rejected even after the researchers intervened.

Construction of preferred meanings via reference communities

The biographical fragments of the interviews were gathered and parameterized to understand

and highlight aspects of the life experience of those who narrate their stories and how, to some extent, these narrations consolidate preferred meanings in media reception.

a) Family

The family-related biographical fragments exposed in the interviews came about through spontaneous association, i.e., by highlighting aspects linked to family issues, in three out of every four interviews⁵. The participants tended to highlight the confrontation and, in most cases, the overcoming of issues linked to poverty and the building of *honesty*. Except for P28 (teacher, 45 years old), who dissociated herself from this community even when asked, some participants emphasized aspects linked to the work field, which put family issues in the background through spontaneous focus but did not prevent the institution from appearing through stimulated association (P3, P6, P9, P16, P17, P19 and P31).

A feature of the first study (André, 2018) is that the interviewees have strong ties to news programs, both in terms of *frequency* of consumption and length of time they have been watching them. In the first case, except for P2 (pensioner, 53) and P16 (university student, 19), the rest watch at least one of the two programs at least three times a week. In the second case, P11 (locksmith, 22) has been watching for less than two years. P5, P7, P8, P15, P16, and P18 say they have watched between two and five years. P4, P12, and P17 have been watching the news for between five and ten years, while P1, P2, P3, P6, P9, P10, P13, and P14 have been watching for more than a decade.

Engagement makes it possible to identify a *community of interpretation* — a group united "by a sphere of signification from which a special meaning emerges for their social action" (Jacks, 1999, p. 60) — with dense similarities between readings and preferred meanings. In this case, the meanings produced are hegemonically derived from cultural mediations related to a perspective of *family destruction*, understood by the participants as an arrangement that, ideally, should have a heteronormative logic linked to the world of wage labor and a Christian conception of religion. The prevalence of this model is directly related to the narrative strategies suggested and incorporated by the two newscasts identified in the content analysis carried out in this thesis, which demonstrates a close relationship between preferred readings and meanings in the consumption of these narratives. In this context, the history of violations of fundamental rights combined with the dense consumption of the news programs studied led to biographical fragments being triggered during the interviews that denote something that goes far beyond the feeling of insecurity: they refer to a collective memory based on the sense of impunity to which hegemonic representations of the family are tributary.

As an example, one out of every ten news items about crime on the news brings together victims and aggressors related to the family nucleus. Dialogues with the notion of the family, however, are even more constant. The closer a news item gets to a perception of a crisis in this institution, the more likely it is to be broadcast. Within this dense aesthetic economy of sensationalist narratives, crimes sometimes lose prominence to moral complaints about the decay of a family model considered hegemonic, and this aspect has been widely identified in reception studies and explored in previous work (André; Vogel, 2020).

In the second study (Winques, 2020), the family dimension in the group of neo-Pentecostal evangelicals is a milestone that permeates changes in the city and ways of seeing the world and is the basis for *moral* and *good behavior*. Based on a spontaneous association, the family is the reference for continuing with studies (P20), a dignified life through work (P20 and P21), getting away from drugs (P23) and the world of crime (P25), entering higher education (P20 and P24), and also an environment of love (P25 and P26). As for the question about religion, which stimulated association responses, the family is the main source for establishing spiritual relationships (P19, P20, P22, P23, P25, and P26).

The preferred meanings in the relationship between media and family among evangelicals appear especially in the choices of social media pages and television programs. P20 (seamstress, 28), for example,

⁵ P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P18, P19, P21, P22, P23, P24, P25, P26, P27, P29, P30, P32, P33 and P34.

follows the *Banda B* portal page on Facebook because she grew up listening, with her mother, to the radio station of the same communication group. P21 (a self-employed house painter, 44), on the other hand, follows *Record News* on Facebook and watches the portal's videos on YouTube. His choice is due to the leaders of the Universal Church: "We know that the church has an attitude towards the family. They are right, serious, and honest" (P21). In the relationship with digital platforms, the family is present on the social networks of all the participants, and, in the case of WhatsApp, the majority of those interviewed (P19, P20, P23, P25, and P26) have a link with their family in the app's groups.

In the case of unionized teachers, family is an important part of access to education. P32 (sociologist, 48) spontaneously mentioned the role of family and reading in her education at the beginning of the interview: "I liked studying, with the influence of my older sisters." Another passage also refers to these themes: "My father always read the newspaper near me" (P32). Two interviewees (P30 and P34) trace similar, spontaneous paths when referring to the role of the family in the educational process, an aspect that cannot be disconnected from the profession. Stories linked to a quiet life due to family configuration (P27, P29, P30, and P32), marriage, and children (P30 and P34) were also spontaneous highlights. A teacher (P31) cites the family based on a stimulated association, and another (P28) refutes links with this institution based on a stimulated dissociation. In the question about her life story, she didn't mention her family. When asked about the meaning of this institution, she mentioned that family is built through proximity, "not that of a mother married with children, no, for me, it is whoever is close. It doesn't have to be a blood tie" (P28). Although family appears prominently in the teachers' life stories, the link with education and the profession receives greater prominence in the relationship with the media, as it will be seen below.

b) Work

The biographical fragments linked to the work, in general, are complementary to the family in both studies, which explains the proportion of spontaneous associations in four out of every five interviews⁶. Valuing work effort, almost always as an alternative to providing for the family, is an imperative in interpreting communities, which is why the other participants established stimulated associations with the reference community (P1, P2, P11, P12, and P19), and this factor appears relatively naturally in the presentation of the biographical fragments. As it is a group made up mostly of subjects with a history of violating access to citizenship and/or who found in the profession a space for social advancement, the respondents produce preferential meanings in relation to the work field, even if there is a divergence between the type of craft valued in each research study: in the first study, manual operations are highlighted; in the second, specifically with teachers, there is an appreciation for intellectual activities.

In the content analysis of 80 editions of the two criminal news that preceded the reception research of the first study, there are, in 950 insertions, no news that discusses the theme of public security linked to access to education, and this aspect is central to the note that the public is mostly disconnected from the school institution. Out of curiosity, according to Table 1, nine out of ten people who participated in the first survey (from P1 to P18) completed, at most, high school.

According to the programs' narrative, the profile of the aggressors is almost always detached from the productive sector, as if the public security context were restricted to individual and disconnected actions. As a large part of the study participants had little or no access to formal education and were linked to the job market informally, the preferential readings that deal with the victims' efforts, almost always circumscribed by a work ethic, produce preferential meanings, once again, with a very dense core within the interpretation community studied. Education, for the group, as it is not a reference community, is relegated to the background.

P5 (locksmith, 47), who only started studying formally at the age of 14, mentions that he was

⁶ P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20, P21, P22, P23, P24, P25, P26, P27, P28, P29, P30, P31, P32, P33 and P34.

taught literacy at home by his mother to use his expertise during work hours. As a child, he states, “I already knew how to read and write; I already knew how to sell the chickens; I already knew how to do the math.” P7 (armed escort guard, 40) takes a similar action when he remembers his childhood: “Today, if a child works, the father is punished, right? And we don’t. We met up with several friends and went to collect coffee.” P9 (retired truck driver, 66) says “When I was young, if you knew how to work, it was enough,” while P1 (retired military police officer, 60) romanticizes the precarious work of adolescence right after analyzing the current youth scenario as “lost,” something that is in line with the preferred readings suggested by the television news he watches: “I left school and went to sell popsicles — during the summer, right? — and when it was cold, I took a cart and went to sell fruits and vegetables.”

In the second study, work and its connection with the family appeared spontaneously in the interviews with the group of evangelicals: “I am the daughter of farmers” (P20); “Since I was a child, I worked hidden from my mother” (P21); “My father worked [...], so we had a stable life” (P22); “My father was a truck driver” (P23); “I remember my mother working hard to support us” (P24); “My mother works in a company; she has been there for 20 years” (P26). As in the first survey, for this group, work is a reference community; it is a way of earning a living and achieving dignity. P20 (seamstress, 28) remembers that she always wanted to have her own money without dependence on her parents. Therefore, all the courses she took, in her words, she paid for “with the sweat of my work” (P20). In the case of digital platforms, P19 (Information Technology student, 19) watches YouTube videos about the area of training and uses LinkedIn to read information from the corporate world. P21 (self-employed house painter, 44) prefers to read and likes pages with themes related to painting and decoration — these are the groups that the participant frequents most on Facebook. Two cite the presence of co-workers (P19 and P22) on social media. In WhatsApp groups, work is important for three (P23, P24, and P25).

In the case of teachers, school and work represent the strongest institutions because these dimensions appear by spontaneous association in biographical fragments. P31 (Biology graduate, 47), for example, outlines his proximity to the school at the beginning of the interview: “I’m a student here; I was in the first class that graduated. Then I went and came back, and now I’m a teacher.” Thus, the work dimension and its relationship with the profession become very evident in this group — something expected given the scope. P27, P28, P29, P30, P32, P33, and P34 also trace their biographies to school or education. P27 remembers working as an advertiser before becoming a teacher; P28 chose to be a teacher due to the curiosity aroused at school; P29 immediately mentions being a philosophy professor; P30 and P34 remember the effort of reconciling work and study when they were in higher education. P32 (sociologist, 48) relates education and work: “I took an undergraduate course, a master’s degree, and a doctor’s degree. If I were to say one of my ‘marks’, it would be the importance of studying in an individual’s trajectory.” P33 highlights that his life was transformed when he became an educator. Regarding the union, everyone reveals that they participate in the actions, a perception through stimulated association constructed from questions about participation in the entity. In relation to time of experience, six have been participating for more than ten years (P27, P28, P29, P30, P31, and P33), one has been participating for between three and five years (P34), and one has been participating for a year (P32).

The link with the union and professional activity leads this group to consume or give preference to accessing content on independent media, such as the Curitiba-based Plural (E27 and E29), and websites with a transparent editorial line in relation to party political positioning, such as *Revista Fórum*, *CartaCapital*, *Pragmatismo Político*, *Mídia Ninja*, *Brasil de Fato*, and *Brasil 247* (P28, P29, P30, P32, and P34). P34 (pedagogue, 54) highlights that she likes CartaCapital and Pragmatismo Político “because they bring serious journalism, showing things from the point of view of human rights.” Social networks, in this preferential dimension, are formed by union members (P28, P30, and P34), co-workers (P29, P32, and P34), people from the Central Workers’ Union (P28), the National Confederation of Workers in Education (P28) and the Workers’ Party (P30). The majority of WhatsApp groups are related to the school (P27, P29,

P31, P32, P33, and P34), the university (P27 and P29), social movements (P27, P28, and P34,) and the union (P28, P29, P30, and P33).

c) Religion

In contrast to the first two reference communities, the biographical fragments linked to religion exposed are mostly by stimulated association, i.e., by the valorization of aspects linked to beliefs based on the researchers' questioning, something that occurs in three out of every five interviews⁷. Due to the participation of atheists and agnostics (P27, P29 and P33) and non-practicing Catholics (P1, P3, P4, P7, P12, P28, P30 and P32), this reference community gathers stimulated dissociations (P1, P3, P27, P28, P29, P30, P32, and P33), that is, it was rejected even after the interlocution.

This may be due to the emerging growth of neo-Pentecostal evangelical churches in the country, which produce a more recent social temporality of memory when compared to the previous reference communities. In 1991, 9% of the population declared themselves evangelical (Mariani; Ducroquet, 2017). In the Demographic Census (BRAZIL, 2010), evangelicals represented 22% of Brazilians; 65% were Catholics, and 13% others. In 2023, one in every three Brazilians identified themselves as evangelical (Jornal da USP, 2023).

In the first thesis, three specific cases of people linked to religion who do not attend churches but who have religion as an important reference community appeared: P10 (seamstress, 57) has a work routine between seven in the morning and ten at night, in addition to working on weekends, which, in her words, prevents her from going to church. "He [God] took my husband — it still hurts today — but He helped me raise my children." P6 and P14 do not attend temples due to health problems. The first has been in a wheelchair for a decade, and the second is undergoing treatment for cancer and is barely able to leave the house.

Regarding the meanings produced in the first research, the religious matrix, linked to the family, was cited as an association stimulated by issues linked to the legalization of abortion and same-sex unions. However, it was not possible to perceive, beyond a conception of family based on a heteronormative logic with a paternalistic core, more explicit links between readings and preferred meanings for the religious perspective.

In the second study, the Universal Church represents, in the group of evangelicals, the space where interviewees are united by the same scope of meaning. Everyone, when responding in a stimulating way to questions about religion and church, revealed that they attend weekly meetings. Regarding the time of participation, four have participated for more than ten years (P21, P22, P23, and P25), two between three and five (P24 and P26), one has been participating for two years (P19), and one has been participating for less than a year (P19). P20). Thus, a process of rituality is perceived in the act of always participating, which represents the symbolic modes of existence and a repetition that allows us to glimpse everyday life (Martín-Barbero, 2015). The relationship with routine is evident in P21's stimulated speech. For the interviewee, going to church is "the same time as you go to take a shower, have your coffee, have lunch, dinner, and sleep" (P21). The importance of the church is also reflected in faith, based on stimulated associations: divine laws must be respected (P20); God and the Church are the cure for illnesses (P22); curses (P20); and supernatural things (P24). Faith and family also mix. P23 and P26 remember that, even as children, they were responsible for taking family members to church. P20, P24, and P26 sought the institution due to problems at home.

Concerning the media, P20 reveals that since he started attending church less than a year ago, he has started following the Record Television Network. Regarding the religious soap operas broadcast by the network, she says, "Before, I thought it was garbage. Now I'm going to watch them because I've started to see another meaning." From the religious institution, the participant generated new meanings about the

⁷ P2, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20, P21, P22, P23, P25, P26, P31 and P34.

television channel. Except for P3, who says he doesn't watch TV, and P6, all the other interviewees say they watch programs and newspapers on Record Television Network (P19, P20, P22, P23, P25, and P26), which shows convergence between the reference community, readings, and preferred meanings. The company belongs to the founder and leader of the Universal Church, Edir Macedo. Thus, most of the interviewees respond to the preferential readings that come mainly from the media linked to the church they attend, not always consciously. P25 (Logistics Analyst, 24) recalls that he reads news in general on the site "of the Universal Church, [since] they have the Universal Paper site, which is just news, [and] has nothing to do with the Church." The most cited websites also have links to the institution, such as the portals R7 (P19, P20, P21, and P26), Record News (P19 and P21), and Universal Paper (P25). On social networks, members of the organization are important to almost everyone (P20, P21, P22, P23, P24, P25, and P26), which also applies to WhatsApp groups (P19, P20, P21, P22, P24, P25, and P26).

Religion, however, cannot be considered a reference community within the group of teachers. Only two reported having a closer link with a religious institution by association (P31 and P34). P31 claims to be a Christian and attends church on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. For the teacher, religion fulfills the spiritual part. P34 says she has been an evangelical since she was 15, but has not attended any church. P28, P30, and P32 reveal that they believe in a higher being, but are non-practicing Catholics due to disappointments with the church. For example, P28 reveals that in "2015 or 2016, I became disillusioned with the church. Not just evangelicals, but Catholics too, you know? I started to see some things that I don't want to agree with" (P28). On the other hand, P27, P29, and P33 dissociate themselves from religion in a stimulating way.

Considerations

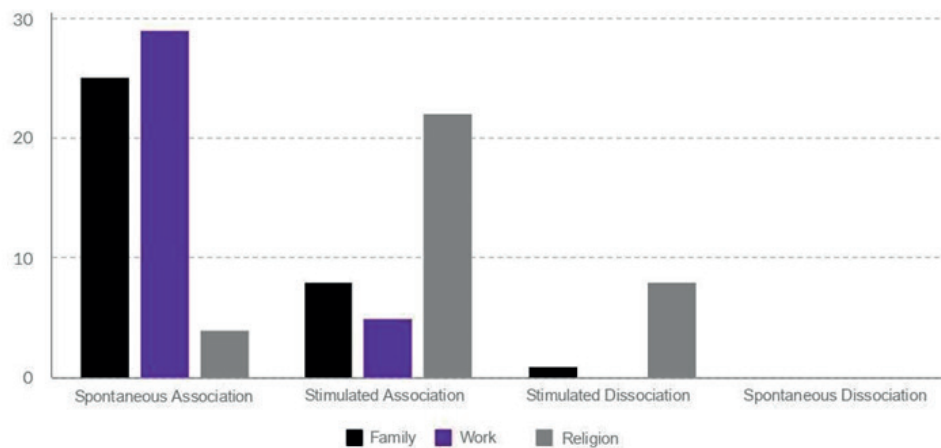
The fi Scientific research into reception can provide insights that distance themselves from media-centric perspectives, which, with rare exceptions, tend to omit the role of the public when it comes to journalistic narratives. Linking journalistic consumption to everyday life is a strategy that can help good journalistic initiatives create processes of identification with audiences, something that can contribute to tackling the recent phenomenon of information disorder (Wardle; Derakhshan, 2017).

In this sense, this article sought to understand the strength of family, work, and religious institutions in identifying preferred meanings in the reception of journalistic narratives. Through biographical fragments extracted from a question on life history in the two theses that served as the basis for this article (André, 2018; Winques, 2020), we sought to discuss the relevance of the three institutions in the daily lives of 34 participants.

Although the life story question was not guided by methods linked to psychology, sociology, or oral history techniques, the speeches produced provide insight into the paths taken by the interviewees, their historicity, and how the past is made present through biographical fragments.

As a result, 25 interviewees mentioned family by *spontaneous association*, 29 mentioned work, and only four mentioned religion. By stimulated association, eight mentioned family, five mentioned work, and 22 mentioned religion. Regarding stimulated dissociation, one repudiated family and eight repudiated religion. In the case of spontaneous dissociation, the result of zero confirms the perception that communities are conventionalized in their discursive formation and in the way they position themselves in relation to the world. Graph 1 shows the results:

Graph 1 – Actions of the reference communities by participants in the two surveys



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

The experiences narrated are inseparable from the symbolic fabrics. And it is in the symbol that family, work, and religion are inscribed. The data collected reveals that the communities of reference studied, although not the only ones, are involved, to a greater or lesser degree, in the production of the interviewees' memories. This is evident from the first question, which guided this article, to the subsequent questions. In the case of memories relating to journalistic narratives, a relevant aspect is that the memories generally evoke episodic singularities or particular events that are somehow intertwined with the preferred meanings based, above all, on family and work.

In the case of the first institution, it seems appropriate, since it is, as a rule, the institution where the socialization process begins, even though the preferred readings (Hall, 2003) identified in the first study (André, 2018) point to a kind of crisis in the heteronormative model idealized as hegemonic. The overlapping of spontaneous associations related to work, however, can reveal opportune facets, including those that can be developed in new research. In a society marked by a scarce perception of citizenship (Souza, 2018) and in which the morality of work is linked to the notion of character (Sennett, 2003), the chimera of ascension through access to manufactured goods (via consumption, in more direct words, and therefore linked to the productive field) naturalizes not only the ideology of capital but also the tacit acceptance of social inequalities and the possibility of ascension of social representations that idealize the individual and, therefore, merit.

It is also clear that social temporality is a notable factor, especially in the religious dimension. An emblematic example can be drawn from the biographical fragments presented by P20 (seamstress, 28): although she has been a devotee of the church for less than a year, she is one of the interviewees who produced the most preferred meanings in relation to the media linked to the Universal Church. Thus, concerning the preferred meanings that, in a way, construct views that seek confirmation based on meanings produced daily, it is possible to consider that they feed on biographical fragments from the past (distant and recent) and the present.

Ultimately, although the two studies analyzed different objects, it was possible to identify that preferred meanings materialize according to experiences, daily relationships, and media consumption. It is possible to consider that the work provides methodological elements that help to identify reference communities that can be useful for identifying/problematising what is sometimes omitted by the participants, a criticism that is so recurrent with interview methodology. In addition, the categories used to parameterize the research — *spontaneous association*, *stimulated association*, *stimulated dissociation*, and *spontaneous dissociation* — help to identify the density of preferred meanings in the construction of biographical accounts.

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