Three dimensions for understanding communicational mediations of consumption in contemporaneity[a]

Três dimensões para compreender as mediações comunicacionais do consumo na contemporaneidade

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to update a theoretical-methodological reflection on communication to address consumption phenomena and their relevance to communication studies. Our starting point is the communication aspects of sign mediation in consumption. Based on Peirce's semiotic, we situate these phenomena in three dimensions: esthetics, ethics and logic. We focus on the socio-cultural contexts of these phenomena. Consumption is thus seen as a communicational mediation articulating aspects of socio-cultural dynamics, based on a map of mediations. This model is discussed in its intermedialities by addressing the interactions of goods and consumers which for building cultural meaning linkages.
Keywords: Consumption, mediations, semiotics, ethic, esthetics, logic

RESUMO
O artigo atualiza a reflexão teórico-metodológica em comunicação para situar os fenômenos do consumo e sua pertinência ao campo. A condição comunicativa da mediação sígnica no consumo é o ponto de partida, respaldado na semiótica de Peirce, situando estes fenômenos nas dimensões estética, ética e lógica. Busca-se observar essas interfaces nas realidades socioculturais em que tais fenômenos ocorrem. Assim, o consumo é visto como mediação comunicacional que articularia instâncias das dinâmicas socioculturais, baseado no mapa das mediações. Tal modelo é discutido em suas intermedialidades implicadas à dinâmica interacional das mercadorias com os consumidores para a constituição de vínculos de sentidos na vida cultural.
Palavras-chave: Consumo, mediações, semiótica, ética, estética, lógica

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INTRODUCTION

THE AIM OF THIS STUDY is to update a theoretical-methodological reflection on communication and consumption in order to determine the consumption aspects relevant to communication studies. We begin by addressing the communicative conditions of signification in consumption, based on Charles Sanders Peirce's (1995) semiotic, by situating these phenomena in three dimensions: esthetics, ethics and logic – which are at the center of Peirce's philosophy as the three divisions of the normative sciences, which "investigates the universal and necessary laws of the relation of Phenomena to Ends, that is, perhaps, to Truth, Right, and Beauty" (p. 198). That is, the normative sciences aim to distinguish what should and should not be, since phenomenology should observe phenomena and postulate their universal categories.

At the same time, we aim to observe the relations of these consumption dimensions within the sociocultural context in which they occur. In this regard, consumption is a communicational mediation articulating regulatory or intermediate aspects of sociocultural dynamics, according to Martín-Barbero's (2001) model/map of the mediations and its updates. We discuss this model focusing on the intermedialities involved in the interactions of goods, services and brands and consumers regarding the production of signs and meanings in cultural life, as we have already discussed elsewhere (Trindade & Perez, 2013, 2016a, 2016b). It should be noted that these intermediations include mediations resulting from the intersections of constitutive mediations (production and consumption logics, industrial formats and cultural frameworks), which, in turn, give rise to specific manifestations of cultural aspects of techniques, rituals, sociabilities and institutions, according to Martín-Barbero's map of mediations (2001).

We divided our study into two parts: the first addresses mediation terminology and its possible interpretations, in order to address next the ideas of sign mediation, mediation as interaction and consumption-related communicational mediations as theory and methodology for properly addressing the objects of communication and consumption (Lopes, 2018a). The second part of the study addresses empirical experiences and theoretical approaches to consumption regarding the manifestations of these organizational stages of the social production of meaning (esthetics, ethics and logic of consumption).

In this second part, we discuss in depth the three dimensions of signs in order to reveal them as objects of a second theoretical approach, as communicational mediations of consumption in their intermedialities, relating production and consumption, that is, the *cultural matrix* of the social

environment in which the *institutional aspects* of the brands/corporations create their *logics of production*, with their *techniques* and *technicalities*, establishing their *social-technical-discursive industrial formats* of and for media/communicational circulation, which are culturally embedded in the processes of appropriation of these institutional discourses, which are promotional due to their ritualizing of the cultural/media consumption of individuals (consumers). Consumers, in turn, create dynamics related to the cultural matrix they share with the institutions, in a two-way praxis involving the logics of production and consumption expressed in modes of *sociability* and *cognition* of learning, recognition and estrangements in cultural life caused by the *consumption with its own logic and particular attributes* (Martín-Barbero, 2001, p. 16).

From this perspective, sign mediation enables an aesthetic approach to the understanding of communication and consumption phenomena, assuming that these mediations would serve to form conducts/ethics, according to Peirce's approach (1995), which we use here for studying communication and consumption phenomena and consumer behavior, as well as for the purpose of training communication professionals and teaching market practices, which would reveal the logics of consumption and mediatized consumption in social and cultural life.

This is a daring goal, because the fragmentation of trends and research in this field, which does not have its own established theoretical body of knowledge, lead more to dispersal and less to generalization, as they use theories and methods of other fields of knowledge to frame their own objects of study, failing to establish a common epistemological principle.

Even aware of this difficulty, we follow the lead of Muniz Sodré (2014), who understands communication as a science of the common, that is, as "the organization of mediations essential to what is common to all humanity" (p. 15).

Based on this *common organizational principle of humanity*, we seek to address communication and consumption phenomena by focusing on the relations between brands/goods and consumers in order to investigate the logics of social meanings established in these interactions.

FROM THE ISSUE OF MEDIATION TO COMMUNICATIONAL MEDIATIONS OF CONSUMPTION

Using the term mediation is not a random choice. This word is used in many theories of communication, even if theorists do not make it clear. It indicates, regarding the role of language and signs, an ontological feature of

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communication processes as a phenomenon. Its ordinary meaning refers to the connection between one point and another, a mode of linkage/intermediation. It is necessary, however, to formulate the problem and define the limits of its use for communication studies and, additionally, to address mediations as a locus of communication epistemology and theorizing.

In this sense, we use here the contributions of Ferrara (2016) and Lopes (2018a), and of the aforementioned Martín-Barbero (2001) and Sodré (2014), to understand this theoretical path from mediation to communicational mediations of consumption, following an epistemological approach based on Peirce's semiotics.

Ferrara (2016), when discussing the problem of the communication using Pandora's Box metaphor, considers that

> the word middle (from Latin *medius*) refers to what is in the middle as exactly half of a whole or as an equidistant point of two extremes, the noun mediation (from Latin *mediatio*, *onis*) recovers the meaning of the first word and adds another aspect, attributing to it the character of intercession aimed at achieving an agreement due to the action of the mediating. . . . The word interaction, on the other hand, expresses an action or experience that occurs in a determined period of time; a singular event that occurs in a space *between* an interrupted (or, more properly, unfinished) time registering the uniqueness of the interactive action of which it is a constitutive part. This action/experience *between* marks an articulation of its own which, without being an invariable of the space or time in which it happens or occurs, marks them with the emergence and actualization of a multiple singularity. Without definite plans, intentions or paths, interaction is opposed to mediation and, as a singularity of time and space, is an experience that marks a communicative process. (p. 63)

Lopes (2018a) begins his reflections by drawing attention to the fact that Martín-Barbero's theory is not just about reception, since "its scope is understanding the whole process of communication as conceived within each one of the proposed maps" (p. 14).

This position is important in order to rule out a simplistic reading that the author's postulates could be reduced to reception and reaffirms that the issue of *mediations* involves a theoretical understanding of the processes of production, product and reception. We could thus understand that the theory of mediations is aligned with Peirce's fundamental concept of sign, always triadic, therefore mediated, and with the processes of signification that it establishes.

We could infer that it integrates production, product, reception and circulation, taking into account the dynamics and interactions typical of the communicational society in which we live. Although we will not address these specific propositions here, they enable other possible readings of the mediations' maps recently proposed by Martín-Barbero and of the possible interpretations proposed by Lopes (2018b).

Sodré (2014), in turn, reflects on the term sign mediation approaching the concept in a Hegelian perspective, because

> Mediation is a typically Hegelian concept. For Hegel, who rejects the hypothesis of an intuitive or immediate concept, mediation (*vermittlung*) is the original act of any cognition, because the being is necessarily mediated. . . . Peirce's semiotics is openly Hegelian in conceiving of mediation as a symbolic transit or a "communication" of properties from one element to another through a third term. (p. 107)

Based on this line of reasoning, we justify the philosophical-theoretical conjunction of Peirce's semiotics and mediation theory, because we identified in the term mediation a paradox that constitutes its dialectical (Hegel) or abductive (Peirce) character. That is, while mediation is a negotiation link established to enable the interaction between subjects seeking balance or understanding, the perspective of mediation as interaction in a given time and space reveals a mismatch. A characteristic that Ferrara (2016, p. 63), based on Michel Foucault, considers as a heterotopia, because interaction as a mediating instance presupposes recognizing the uniqueness of an event with its contradictions intrinsic to the different places that the subjects occupy, which, in the face of interactive modes of social-technical-discursive circulation, may gain or not relevance in social life.

Ferrara (2016), thus, sees mediation as an aesthetic dimension, a phenomenon, taking into account certain implications/causal relations and conducts, in the sense of Peirce's ethics and his understanding of communication phenomena.

Given the above, we understand that what has been called mass communication, roughly speaking, is precisely the mediation established as interaction with the commercial production of messages for the consumption of society, whose socio-technical-discursive modes widely reverberate within cultures, creating a mediatized culture.

Products and services produce their institutional and promotional discourses through brands to move capital by selling goods and services, acting not only

politically and economically, but, above all, as intermediaries in the regulation of cultures, according to commercial-productive interests, which clashes with the logic proper to consumption. Although the relations of production usually tend to over-determine consumption, it does not necessarily follow the logic of production, taking its own logic. Studying these clashes is urgent in order to deepen knowledge and build a framework for understanding the objects of communication and consumption, as well as for establishing the methods and techniques for addressing them.

Mediation as the intermediation of a third party between two separate/interconnected elements in some way has always been part of the theoretical approaches to communication. It was one of the foundations of Charles Peirce's semiotics in the nineteenth century and was present in various functionalist communication researches up to Cultural Studies, even if not explicitly, as Sodré has argued (2014, pp. 107-108).

In his theoretical approach to mediation, Sodré (2014) sees the concept as an analytical category as proposed in Jesús Martín-Barbero's study – originally published in Spanish in 1987, we use here the 2001's edition – to understand the intermedialities in the relations and clashes of the logics of production and consumption of messages between subjects/consumers and institutions.

Today, more than thirty years after its publication, what we propose as a contribution to this discussion is a detached and analytical look at the interactions between brands and consumers; a necessary consideration, in the philosophical-theoretical perspective of Peirce's semiotics, of the esthetics, ethics and logic of sign mediations in consumption, with a view to understanding the intermedialities within the socio-cultural fabric.

It is an experiment to establish a scientific approach proper to communication through mediations, such as the debate on the concept of mediatization as a theory of communication, which does not solve the issue of communication by choosing media phenomena and their presence in culture as privileged objects of study. We highlight that we do not discuss here the differences between mediations and mediatizations, nor the application of these concepts to consumption studies, which already have been discussed elsewhere (Trindade, 2016; Trindade & Perez, 2016a, 2016b).

Mediations and intermedialities are present even in mediatization processes. Of course, we will not resolve the matter here, but we will cast some light, from a Brazilian and Latin American perspective, on an approach to communication capable of addressing our social dynamics, within a production/consumption/circulation context, and also the phenomena and interactions

of brands and consumers that establish, in their heterotopias, our society's communicational strategies and regularities, which deserves our attention, in this case based on Peirce's semiotics.

THE THREE COMMUNICATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF CONSUMPTION

Based on Peirce's philosophical system (Peirce, 1995; Santaella, 1983, 1992; Nöth, 1995), especially the normative sciences, let us address the three dimensions of the communicational mediations of consumption, which underpin consumption research, training, production and marketing practices: the esthetic dimension, the ethical dimension and the logical dimension.

Esthetic dimension

Knowledge arises from signs, the founding elements of language mediation in human life, which also enable the perception of reality. With regard to consumption, the character of sign of its manifestations, by itself, would be communicational in nature. However, we are interested here in the relations between sign and consumer trends, considering a social logic of aestheticization of the world, as Lipovetsky and Serroy address (2015), and in the esthetics that mix and transmute themselves, always shifting supports and points of contact.

Esthetics as a normative science, following Peirce's terminology (1995), is understood not as the science of the beautiful, but as the admirable, or the "science of that which is objectively admirable without any ulterior reason" (Santaella, 1983, p. 29). In this sense, Peirce's esthetics is the continual search for the *summum bonum*, the ideal of ideals, which, according to Santaella (2000), "has the function of determining what fulfills the requirement of the admirable, desirable, in and of itself, without any further reason" (p. 126). Esthetics, understood by Peirce (1995) as the science of the admirable, is not limited to the understanding of the beautiful and, thus, challenges the relations of perfection, symmetry, proportionality and many others implied in the classic understanding of beauty and the beautiful.

Based on this theoretical approach to esthetics, we expose next our understanding of the issue and its relations to the theories and manifestations of consumption, divided in three main topics: a) esthetics of products and services; b) esthetics of advertising and c) esthetics of expressions and sensory branding.

Studies of product design have always shifted between industrial and market dimensions. Only recently has design, as a professional and research area (scientific and artistic), had its relevance recognized for product design, production and marketing, including services. Studies of merchandise, given its materiality, made important advances regarding both the functional and communicative impacts of a variety of materials – especially the technological revolution of plastics, fabrics, wood, aluminum, glass, metals, etc. – and the design itself. There has been an evolution in the functionalities of aspects such as products' opening, closing, ergonomics, handling, sizes, weights, presentations, etc., not only regarding their impacts on use, but in their ability to communicate meanings. A rectilinear design is more likely to be linked to rationality and the classic masculine. Similarly, an organic design has a better chance of evoking dynamism, affections and the feminine.

Another important advance was the developments in product packaging, integrating form and content with creative solutions, such as fruit juice in tetra brik packaging, which stopped being standardized and started to express the fruits themselves, with simulations of color, shape and texture. Products are launched in special editions with references to the past and a nostalgic appeal, or even in media-packaging, which convey information and meanings that help in brand expression. In each of these cases we highlight what is communicational, even though they may have originally been production designations.

With regard to services, communication strategies have become the most effective way to build trusting relationships, since the essence of services is a promise devoid of materiality (which hinders experimentation, for example). Services need to communicate their full potential and build a relationship of trust, and it is in this context that esthetics matters, for both increasing acceptance and enabling a sensory, and thus credible, experience.

Digital services, in turn, shifted to interface design, with fruitful studies on immersive environments, taxonomic levels, information hierarchy, as well as on attractive and friendly iconography, that is, simple and beautiful. All of these studies have recently been enhanced in app design and marketing projects, which at least ideally add functionality and relevance, lightly (do not take up a lot of smartphone memory) and with an attractive design, even though the visible dimension is *just* a symbol on the virtual *shelves* of digital stores, and later on consumers' phone screens.

The second esthetic topic is advertising, regarding every sensory dimension within what we currently call *advertising ecology* (Perez, 2016). Advertising ecology involves all strategies, agents and actions aimed at connecting people

and brands. In this sense, an esthetic investment ensures attractiveness and engagement with target audiences, both to facilitate understanding and to stimulate the purchase and use of products and brands, but also to incorporate consumers into the processes of production and consumption, providing the legitimacy and promoting the circulation of meanings. The displacement of advertising focusing on communicating information intrinsic to the product or even its functionalities, price and marketing conditions with emphasis on persuasive strategies, by the communication of social values appealing to the imagination (Rocha & Pereira, 2013) and to the contemporary experiences of its audiences has provided advertising with a privileged sign mechanism for building better social values and not simply for reflecting society's mores. Advertising thus shifts from a certain accommodation to a committed activism, towards a social protagonism, which is a great responsibility for this communicational mediation.

Advertising ecology has multiplied formats, which have become so diverse that the idea of format itself, always linked to the vehicle, has lost relevance. Communication solutions overflowed the media (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013), and thus fixed marketing strategies no longer make sense. The ad still exists and can be printed, digital or holographic, but a flash mob or drones flying over parks in search of potential consumers are also advertising, but their design and realization no longer have the classic character of media. This advertising overflow was also addressed elsewhere (Perez, 2018; Perez & Barbosa, 2007).

The third topic is the esthetics of brands. From theoretical reflections on brand expression (Perez, 2017), to brand signification (Batey, 2010; Semprini, 2006), brand emotions (Gobé, 2002), sensory branding (Lindstrom, 2007; Perez, 2017) to brand trends (Perez & Trindade, 2014), the brand is at the center of marketing studies of consumption, with research on brand equity, branding, brand value, etc. (Aaker, 2007; Keller & Machado, 2006; Tybout & Calkins, 2006) and marketing practices. The brand acquired importance as a sign, penetrating the interstices of sociocultural life, which gave it primacy and at the same time posed new challenges for brand managers. Until recently, a brand was owned by someone, by an entity that held the rights (formal or otherwise) and determined all actions and protections. Trademarks have continued to exist, but the strength of consumer rituals, favored by an increase in consumers' knowledge, as well as their greater commitment to activism (which gave rise to consumer actors, prosumers, fans and many others), have demanded a daily dialogue with consumers, in a negotiation of meanings and actions. Brand managers have lost power

because they need to share it with consumers and citizens. Brands are not only owned by an entity, they are cultural icons; in line with Douglas Holt's (2005) iconic brand studies and researches on consumer rituals (McCraken, 2003, Perez & Trindade, 2014, 2016; Trindade & Perez, 2013, 2016a, 2016b).

The tradition of brand esthetics has long been related only to its visual dimension, from brand identity building, with logo and symbol, to the studies of its application in different supports and media. With the expansion of digital technologies and of the knowledge about materials associated with the relational aspect of things in response to the growing demand for participation from consumers, brands stimulate the most diverse senses, incorporating fragrances, textures, sounds an flavors.

These investments are made both in brand identity, as a sound signal identifying a particular brand, and in the creation of unique immersive spaces. The experience is essentially esthetic, as it allows grasping an idea or concept through the senses. Brand experiences have become much widespread over the past two decades and have also diversified. Sometimes called concept or flagship stores (Galeria Melissa in São Paulo, London or New York); sometimes simply called brand experiences, which may be ephemeral and commemorative (Magnum Day), itinerant (Truck Brahma or Heineken Block in various cities), pop up (Veuve Clicquot Pop Up Store in Vienna), temporary exhibitions (Victoria's Secret: A Retrospective in Paris), permanent exhibitions (Heinken Experience in Amsterdam) or branded museums (Fondation Louis Vuitton , Christian Dior Museum, both in France, and Amsterdam Sauer Museum in Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro). Regardless of the diverse formats and varied duration, all of these experiences seek to broaden the interaction between brands and people (not just consumers) through sensory immersions, enabled by digital technologies, sophisticated materials, relevant content and competent curatorship. Even more conventional and multi-brand outlets aim for sensory experiences, albeit shyly, with visual merchandising, sampling and tasting actions, for example.

Unusual trips and experiences are also on the radar of brands. Promotions offering free trips are not new, but now the destinations are the most unusual, promising exotic experiences with distant peoples, unimaginable rituals, unexpected meals, paradisiacal locations (on the heights, at the bottom of the sea…). Extreme experiences are part of certain brands' esthetic experience; one of the best known is Red Bull, with unconventional car races

headed into space, for example, always in line with the global slogan "Red Bull gives you wings."

Ethics dimension

For Peirce (1995), the ethical dimension, called the science of action or conduct, must appeal to esthetics for its principles, that is, "it is esthetics that determines the direction that ethical commitment should follow, and of what should be sought as the highest ideal" (Santaella, 1992, p. 126). This is another innovative aspect of Peirce's theory: it is esthetics that offers ethics its founding principles, creating a certain submissiveness based on the understanding that an ethical conduct is at the same time aesthetic.

Considering the reflections and phenomena related to the esthetics of consumption presented above, we understand that design and product, advertising or brand, involve behaviors that reveal consumption's ethical dimension. Thus, the aesthetic manifestations of the signs of consumption dictate conducts, because they manifest and create social values.

Phenomena that are essentially aesthetic establish similarity, cause-and-effect or symbolic relations in lived experience. Theses relations appear as events, singularities, aiming for an aesthetization of consumption, adoption/purchase, market segmentation, taste stratification, image building and support, etc., thus creating consumer behavior. In this regard, we highlight the studies of consumerism, both in the critical, typically sociological, approach and in that of psychoanalysis, which understands consumerism as a symptom, strongly marked by the expansion of capitalism in contemporary times. The cases described involve the imposition of conducts by the esthetics of the sign.

This ethical perspective embedded in the sign encompasses moral issues and the correct and true positioning of institutions and their brands. Notions of suitability, renown and, especially, reputation are within the scope of studies of the ethics of production/consumption in the areas of public relations and organizational communication. They are based on truth and honesty as parameters for the conduct of institutions – which includes their agents, with their interpretants – in the actions aimed at mobilizing the meanings/values of these organizations, that is, their executives and employees.

Developing productive processes within legal parameters, selecting the best equipment inputs and considering the labor relations involved are all ethical issues. Threats to the environment, devastation of forests and

depletion of other natural resources, predatory agriculture, excessive use of non-renewable energy, use of inputs of unknown origin or without security guarantees are important examples. Many of these reflections are within the scope of production (lean manufacturing, Fairtrade products, etc.), but are also directly related to consumption and its intrinsically communicative nature, involving relatively recent debates and concepts such as sustainable, conscious, responsible, friendly and green consumption, as well as non-consumption and others.

Cause-related marketing and the search for purpose (Kotler & Lee, 2010), recurring themes in recent years, are within the scope of ethics, even though the practices involved sometimes are not quite in agreement with an ethical perspective. Ideally, however, they should reflect a proper conduct of managers and brands. Linking a brand to a cause in conformity with its values and at the same time relevant to people can only make sense if such a practice is honest, as only then the brand will be recognized by consumers and citizens in general. Much has been said about greenwashing (the deceptive use of green values without actual commitment), particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s, when environmental issues emerged and many institutions and brands sought easy solutions to appear up to date with environmental sustainability values, but without truly putting them into practice. They replaced their identity colors with green, an icon of environmental sustainability, applied leaves and branches to their communication materials, or simply propagated empty verbal signs like *sustainable*, *green* and *recyclable* without any real practice. Boycotts of products and brands have recurred in the last decades and have given rise to heavy critical reflections, notably Naomi Klein's (2000) best-selling and widely translated book *No Logo*, which vigorously denounced how companies and brands are implicated in environmental damages, slave labor, corruption, illicit enrichment and many other issues. A few years later, Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2007) published *Pro Logo*, aiming to rethink the criticisms, minimizing them, as it really should be done, but evidently the book did not have the same repercussion.

Studies on consumers' *guilt*, often resulting from the oppressive logic of consumption itself, are recent developments in marketing and social psychology. Feeling guilt has varied consequences, ranging from total regret and denial of consumption to overconsumption with unbridled debt and deteriorating social and affective relationships – this, indeed, is a true symptom of a disturbed society.

Philosophy is timidly opening itself to reflections on consumption, pondering ethical implications from more innovative perspectives, such as Pondé's (2017) recent reflection on existential marketing and the production of meaning goods as a possible path to completeness.

Logic dimension

Logic, the last of Peirce's normative sciences (1995), is also called by him *semiotic* and has the function of classifying and describing all kinds of logically possible signs, being related to the ideas of reasoning, interpretation and representation. This has always been the focus of Peirce's (1995) investigations; even his truly original discoveries regarding esthetics and ethics were consequences of logic not being self-sufficient (Santaella, 1992, p. 155). Logic therefore implies art or the ability to reason. How do people think? How does reasoning work? How are inferences drawn? These and other questions guided Peirce's entire intellectual production until the end of his life, which made possible his most significant synthesis as a philosopher: "all thought, all reasoning is in signs" (Peirce, 1995, p. 211). Logic thus reveals to us the functioning of the signs. Regarding the logic of consumption in particular, it can subdivided into the logics of: a) production; b) market and business; and c) training and research.

The logics of production react to the dynamics of classical capitalism, which were only strengthened and diversified by technological advances, especially digital technologies, which impose an increasing robotization, dispensing with human presence. Rationality, productivity and competitiveness are together the focus of most of the studies that impact consumption in various aspects, from design to price formation and distribution possibilities. In digital services and applications, production is focused on user-friendly programming, functionality and interface design.

Market logic develops in transactions, profit maximization, promotional and sales techniques, seasonal offerings and pricing, as well as in studies of location, point of sale, visual merchandising and window dressing.

More recently, the expansion of innovative business models, completely different from existing ones, has drawn the attention of researchers, consultants and entrepreneurs. These models subvert the logic of trade linearity, profit maximization, broad and unrestricted product availability, segment domination, and so on. They also completely alter the traditional logic of media business, since they are based on cooperation, sharing, active

consumer participation, consignment, shared remuneration, reuse, recycling and upcycling. The logics of the media business have greatly expanded and diversified, which we can exemplify in many ways, but there is one particularly significant: encouraging continuous consumption. Big creators of audiovisual products, such as Netflix, have developed a mechanism for continual engagement that puts their viewers in total passivity: every nineteen seconds a new episode of the series begins without the consumer-viewer doing anything – which explains, in part, the phenomenon of binge watching, so recurrent today.

The logics of so-called consumer products encompass all forms of marketing and trading, including wholesale-retail relations; whole retail; self-service machines; e-commerce and the sophisticated logistics it requires; cooperative purchasing; buyers clubs; purchasing by applications; as well as direct sales (in person, by catalog and by phone), still very common, in which mediation is prominent. Value mediations are at the core of business and market functioning. Recently, digital currencies or cryptocurrencies, such as litcoin or the better known bitcoin, are being increasingly discussed and widely used. They have created a completely new trading market, exhibiting exorbitant profits – although there are doubts about their continuity and an urgent need for regulation – suggesting opportunities for transforming the logic of financialization of the world in trade relations.

With regard to training in logic, the main observation is that there is no institutionalized university curriculum for training consumer experts. Sales training, for example, was largely left to practice rather than schooling. With varying knowledge, salespersons were trained in sales techniques and persuasion. They were trained in administration and marketing, those who wanted to become managers, and in advertising and public relations, those interested in creation and communication. Training in product and even service development has always been and remains closely linked to various engineering qualifications, and has only recently incorporated design, computer science and a variety of other technology-based courses. However, there are little awareness of the communicational dimension of product design and manufacturing.

The logics of research and production of knowledge about consumption are still being established. It is noteworthy that research on consumption usually has been integrated into communication studies, and the explanation

for this is relatively simple: work and production have always been studied in depth, but consumption has been forgotten or, even worse, has been stigmatized as superfluous and degrading, neglecting that Marx himself (2017) explained that production only acquires legitimacy in consumption. The major scientific fields were not interested in consumption or have only addressed specific issues: economy was concerned with macroeconomics or with price and demand formation; social sciences focused on the exploitation of work and the influence of technology on society (socio-technical paradigm); anthropology understood for a time that it had nothing to do with consumption, focusing on other human dimensions; psychoanalysis has focused on consumption as a symptom of a sick society.

This movement of neglecting consumption as an object of research is global, and Brazil is not an exception. Graduate research on the topic is concentrated in some universities and prominent research teams in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul and Pernambuco. Developing a consistent production over the last fifteen years, these efforts involve experts with Masters' degrees and PhDs, scientific journals, quality works and extension projects, dialoguing with undergraduate marketing education. However, communication and consumption education and research need to expand and deepen in order to consolidate the field.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The three dimensions for addressing the communicative mediations of contemporary consumption were based on Peirce's (1995) normative sciences –

esthetics, ethics and logic – and allowed us to map the processes of production-consumption-circulation. From a perspective of an abductive/dialectical reasoning, articulating the synchronism and diachrony of Martín-Barbero's map of mediations (2001, p. 16), these dimensions allow us to understand, in a first (synchronic) approach, how cultural phenomena lead to cultural production formats, the esthetics and ethics of the communicational mediations of consumption, which have already been discussed and can be better understood by focusing on the intermedialities of institutions, communicative techniques and technicalities. In a second approach, a historically and socially located (diachronic) perspective can reveal the meanings related to the logics of production and consumption, considering the intermedialities

of modes of sociability and cognition that these different actions establish as ethical possibilities in the relations involving brands, products/services and consumers, but which can only be truly verified by further research on the processes of consumption ritualization, when the actual meanings appropriated are revealed. This is the focus of our epistemological effort of situating communication and consumption and their objects of research by addressing the communicational mediations of consumption, considering the specificities of their three-dimensional aspects. **M**

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