Petrobrás in the webs of corruption: discursive mechanisms of the Brazilian media in Operation Car Wash coverage

A Petrobrás nas teias da corrupção: mecanismos discursivos da mídia brasileira na cobertura da Operação Lava Jato

Cintia Rodrigues de Oliveira Medeiros[a]; Rafael Alcadipani da Silveira[b]

[a] *Universidade Federal de Uberlândia*
[b] *Fundação Getúlio Vargas*

Abstract

In this paper, our objective is to explore the construction and design of corruption scandals by the media regarding Operation Car Wash, which made Petrobrás the protagonist of one of the greatest corruption scandals in Brazil. Our analysis was based on the media coverage of the digital edition of two Brazilian publications (Folha de S.Paulo newspaper and Veja Magazine), in a grounded theory in constructivist perspective. As results, we analyzed the case studied in four elements of the theory of scandals, and two discursive mechanisms used by the analyzed media were identified. The first acts in the dimension of the event, initially placing Petrobrás at the center of the scandal, and the latter represents its political nature. The proposition is that the media articulate discourses in order to construct meanings.

Resumo

Nesse artigo, nosso objetivo é explorar a construção e o delineamento de escândalos de corrupção pela mídia no caso da Operação Lava Jato, que tornaram a Petrobrás protagonista de um dos maiores escândalos de corrupção do Brasil. Nossa análise foi feita na cobertura dada, na versão online, de duas publicações brasileiras (Folha de S.Paulo e Revista Veja) em uma grounded theory na vertente construtivista. Como resultados, analisamos o caso estudado em quatro elementos da teoria dos escândalos, e identificamos dois mecanismos discursivos utilizados pela mídia analisada. O primeiro desses mecanismos atua na dimensão do evento, colocando inicialmente a Petrobrás no centro do escândalo, e o outro configura a natureza política do mesmo. Propõe-se que a mídia articula discursos de modo a construir sentidos.

Practical Implications

Corruption events become scandalous due to the repercussion of discourses disclosed Regarding Petrobrás, two discourse mechanisms brought the company to the center of the narrative, which assumed political nature. Scandals as something constructed socially warn the managers about the fact that their ethics and transparency actions may protect the corporative image.

1 INTRODUCTION

In March 2014, the country's main newspapers disclosed an ongoing investigation into a corruption scheme involving Petrobrás. From there on, the media have been published articles on the so-called Operation Car Wash as being one of the greatest corruption scandals that surround the State-owned Company, large contractors and political parties.

Corresponding author: Phone: (34) 3239-4411

E-mail: cintia@ufu.br (C. R. O. Medeiros); rafael.alcadipani@fgv.br (R. A. Silveira)

Universidade Federal de Uberlândia. Av. João Naves de Ávila, 2121 - Santa Mônica, Uberlândia - MG, 38408-100, Brasil

Remembering the recent history of Brazil, corruption cases are frequent and, since Mensalão scandal was publicly known, in 2005, several other corruption cases made the list of great political scandals in the country longer . Before this context, it is not surprising that the agenda of researchers and organizations have space for and interest in corruption scandals. However, although the stage, where the corruption scandals occur, is focus of study in this field, this theme was marginally addressed and only recently it has received greater attention (Oberoi, 2014),with space on periodical and scientific media (Ashforth, Gioia, Rovinson & Treviño, 2008; Holan, Zyglidopoulos & Hirsch, 2017), and in several academic events.

In this article, we try to bring an answer to the following question: how do Brazilian online media contribute to the construction, design or extension of the corruption scandal revealed by Operation Car Wash? Our objective is to explore the design of corruption scandals by online media on Operation Car Wash, which made Petrobrás protagonist of one of the greatest corruption scandals in Brazil. Our analysis is on the media coverage performed by digital editions of two Brazilian publications, Folha de S.Paulo (newspaper) and Veja Magazine. To explore the material, we employed quantitative analysis, using grounded theory resources in constructive perspective (Charmaz, 2011). By indicating how media operate in the production of scandals involving corporations, our article contributes to the study of the organizations for considering two points: (1) sociology of corruption and sociology of scandals are connected (Grü, 2008), since corruption is a violation of rules that, when revealed, becomes a scandal whose proportions depend on media coverage; and (2) the media have active participation in the construction and design of scandals , involving organizations and individuals that react in order to minimize the negative consequences of the scandal. Besides, our critical constructivist analysis on the corruption scheme involving Petrobrás focuses on how the corruption scheme became a scandal produced by the Brazilian online media.

2 CORRUPTION THEORETICAL APPROACH ES

Although corruption has been considered object in sociology and political science for more than 30 years, there is no universally accepted definition so far. Corruption is a multifaceted social event, and it has been had different definitions. United Nation's 'Global Programme Against Corruption' (GPAC, 2001), Transparency International (2015), World Bank (World Bank, 2006), and Batabyal and Chowdhury (2015) associate corruption with the abuse of power exerted to obtain private gains. The fact is that the literature on corruption attracts interest from diverse fields, and the aforementioned lack of consensus on what corruption is comes from issues related to legal and cultural differences between nations (Gardiner, 1970; Heidenheimer, 1970, Maeda & Ziegfeld (2005). Considering the difficulties of achieving this consensus, Gardiner (1970); Heidenheimer (1970) and Hodgkinson (1997) combine several definitions around a main focus, which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Synthesis of corruption definitions according to different perspectives

Focus	Corruption definition
Legal Perspective	Act officially prohibited by laws established by the government. Behaviors that deviate from legal ruled and regulations.
Public Interest	Behavior pattern that deviates from the prevalent rules in a given context, whose main motivation is to obtain private gains.
Public Opinion	The corrupt act is defined by the population as long as it is consistent with formal institutions.
Market-centered	Illegal use of market mechanisms in allocative decisions, established apart from the democratic political system, to maximize decisions based on market principles and laws.
Public office-centered	Behavior that deviates from the formal duties of a public office due to pecuniary advantages or status offered to its holder, family or close friends.
Historical-cultural	Defined by traditional practices and historically constructed cultural perceptions.
Realist	Partisanship (particular interest of an individual or group over collective interest) that challenges statesmanship (refer to politician with skill and transit to integrate relationships between institutions and organizations exercising both coercive and persuasive sources of power).

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Gardiner (1970), Heidenheimer (1970) and Hodgkinson (1997).

Besides conceptual proposals, the literature on corruption encompasses studies on its causes, consequences, and typologies, among other sub-themes. The antecedents of corruption are studied at macro (country) and micro (individual) level, or by combining both levels (O'Connor & Fischer, 2012). At macro level, economic, political, socioeconomic, cultural and historical factors explain why corruption occurs, and at micro level, corruption is explained by the characteristics (sociodemographic, values, attitudes and rules) of the individual who has corrupt behavior. Considered by Transparency International (TI, 2015) as one of the greatest challenges in the contemporary world, corruption is an obstacle to democracy and the State based on the rule of law, being able to paralyze a nation's development efforts, since it prevents good government action, distorts public policies, causes misallocation of resources, harms the private sector, and particularly affects the poorest.

The literature on corruption has developed with few empirical studies (Oberoi, 2014), what can be explained both by the difficulty of collecting data and by the fact that corruption and the social networks, which surround it, represent a type of secret society (Warren, 2001, Numerato, 2015). For Simmel (1906), secret societies constitute a form of information in modern society, being organized on the basis of reciprocal trust and protection, besides knowledge of facts maintained hidden from non-members. However, the secret is always accompanied by the possibility of being revealed, and when that occurs, according to Cobb and Taylor (2015), the scandal generated takes proportions that depend on how the media act in the disclosure and coverage of the facts that represent transgressions.

3 SCANDAL THEORETICAL APPROACHES

In the 1990s, sociology of scandals began to take shape (Jacobsson & Löfmarck, 2008; Grün, 2008), followed mainly by studies in communication and political science (Silva, 2013). This literature sought to theorize typical social phenomena of intense drama, which can mobilize intense emotional energy, often with serious consequences (Adut, 2005). Scandals appear when there is revelation of behaviors that violate social or legal rules, and which have been unknown to the public until then, being defined by Esser and Hartung (2004: 1041) as the "intense public communication about a real or imaginary defect that is by consensus condemned, and that meets universal indignation or outrage."

Adut (2005), one of the authors dealing with the construction of scandals, shows when illegal, criminal, dishonest and offensive behavior generates scandals, and also when they do not generate, emphasizing the dramaturgical dimension of the public sphere. This author developed a sociological understanding of scandals on emotional and cognitive experiences, focusing on the interactions of those involved or those exposed when these behaviors are revealed to the public. Thus, Adut (2008) offers a theoretical framework for the study of scandals, regardless of their nature, frequency, dynamics, reactions, effects and their strategic use in different social systems. In the author's perspective, scandals are (1) actual or alleged violations of a rule; and involve (2) the publicizing of such transgression; making (3) the public to react to this transgression disclosed to the public. For the author, only a theory treating scandal as a disturbing publicity of transgression (whether real, apparent or alleged) can explain the significance of rule application.

Alternatively, Thompson (2000) proposes another theory of scandals. For the author, such events are (1) attempts to hide an act that is known to others from public's view; which emphasize (2) disapproval of the act, while making a (3) public denunciation of the act or behavior, with the expectation about the (4) probability that its disclosure will harm the reputation of those involved, as well as causing losses and criminal prosecutions. A fifth element is added by Cobb and Taylor (2015), which is the scandal sustained by media coverage. This implies that scandalous behavior may not matter politically if the media fail to cover it.

4 RESEARCH AND EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

To explore media discourses and identify how they build and eventually amplify cases of scandals in Brazil, specifically involving corruption, the case of Operation Car Wash at Petrobrás was selected. As consequence, we expect that our study to contribute to the understanding of other corruption scandal cases. The company was positioned as the protagonist of one of the greatest corruption scandals in the country. The case was observed through the media coverage on Operation Car Wash, performed on Folha de São Paulo and weekly Veja Magazine online editions, the vehicles with the greatest circulation in the country, as reported by ANJ (2015) and ANER (2015).

We performed qualitative analysis, employing a critical-constructivist perspective since it is adequate in studies that analyze media data (Zilber, 2006). Searching for the news was from March 18, 2014, when the corruption scheme was disclosed to the public, until March 18, 2015. This space of time excludes new information and consequences revealed later on the case.

In a preliminary phase, searching for said publications used the keywords: "Operação Lava Jato" (Operation Car wash), in order to find relevant reports that focused on the corruption scheme involving Petrobrás. The search found 3,419 articles on Folha.com, and 4,028 on Veja.com.

To filter the material, the keywords "corrupção" (corruption) and "Petrobrás" were added to the search logic. Regarding Veja Magazine, the search focused on the section Brasil, and concerning Folha de São Paulo, on the section Poder, for being dedicated to political coverage. There were 684 reports found on Folha.com and 1183 on Veja.com, with selection of 34 and 40 reports, respectively.

The 74 reports to be analyzed uniformly: (1) mention the word corruption in the content of the report; (2) have Operation Car Wash as the focus of the news, it not being marginal; (3) present journalistic content, excluding blogs, columns, opinions and material reproduced; and (4) have length of more than two full pages (texts with less than two pages previously read were identified as repeated and with superficial content). In addition to the reports, three special sections (reports that aim to provide a complete view of the case) were added to the research corpus: 1. Na trilha da Operação Lava Jato (On the track of Operation Car Wash) (Veja.com); 2. Entenda a Operação Lava Jato da Polícia Federal (Understanding Federal Police's Operation Car Wash) (Veja.com and Folha.com); and 3. Folha Explica – Entenda a Operação Lava Jato (Folha explains – Understanding Operation Car Wash) (Folha.com).

Our analysis is guided by two main points: (1) the real transgression, that is, the scheme of corruption; and (2) the production of the scandal by the media. From these focal points, we are guided by the conjugation of the approaches of Adut (2005); Thompson (2000) and Cobb and Taylor (2015). Through categorization and codification, we developed an analysis using resources from the constructivist grounded theory, as proposed by Charmaz (2011). This approach prioritizes the phenomenon and analyzes, which are constructed based on the meanings emanated from the empirical material, in this case, the selected reports. Initially, we studied the texts, line by line; then, we selected the most relevant meaning nuclei to categorize them from the research purpose committed to emerging ideas. In the following section, we present the discursive mechanisms.

This research uses grounded theory to answer about which phenomenon the data are. In the open coding process, when concepts are identified and developed in relation to their properties and dimensions (Charmaz, 2011), we examined, compared, conceptualized and categorized the data. Posteriorly, in the axial codification, when the identified categories improve (Charmaz, 2011), we selected the most relevant categories and then established relationships among them in order to group the data. Finally, in selective coding, whose objective is to integrate and refine categories at a more abstract level (Charmaz, 2011), we elaborated the essential category, from which other developed categories are grouped into. As result, we defined that the central category of substantive theory under construction is "discursive mechanisms," that is, articulations of language that contribute to the creation of meaning, since they have the purpose of creating the illusion of truth of discourse or the opposite effect (Zimmermann & Silva, 2014).

5 CONTEXT: Operation Car Wash Coverage

In this section, we present a summary of the case as reported on the mentioned special sections seeking to provide a view of the context in which the analyzed materials and the used discursive mechanisms appeared. Operation Car Wash was launched by the Federal Police in six Brazilian states plus the Federal District in March 2014, to investigate scheme of money laundering and evasion involving Petrobrás, large contractors, politicians and political parties. The operation was named after its beginning at Posto da Torre, a gas station located three kilometers from the National Congress, in which there was no car wash, but a laundry and a currency exchange house. The investigators considered that the gas station played the role of "Bribe ATM" (Veja.com). The scheme through bribe payment collected from contractors and other suppliers, by Petrobrás' executive officers and employees, so as to facilitate their business with the State-owned company. Another modality of the scheme is overpricing of contracts with companies to allow Petrobrás' funds misappropriation, which were destined to those involved. Lobbyists, dollar dealers and other operators were in charge of passing on the received money to politicians and civil servants. The scheme benefited political parties responsible for nominating the directors of Petrobrás involved in the scheme (Folha.com).

Since the scandal came to the public, the two analyzed vehicles have been published daily reports, and not a single day went by without publications on Operation Car Wash. This characterizes massive and wide journalistic coverage, including special sections with detailed and analytical information on the operation. In the case of Veja.com, one of the special sections contains 130 pages. In addition to this material, videos of interviews with defendants and others involved were also made available to the public.

The case that came to be known as *Petrolão* was characterized by plea agreements that stimulated the investigations. In exchange for guarantees of sentence reduction, those involved agreed to disclosure the crimes they participated in and provide evidence, in addition to returning the resources obtained through the operation (Folha. com). The main involved ones, according to the analyzed news media, are: 1) dollar dealers using shell companies, tax haven accounts and fictitious imports contracts for money laundering; (2) Petrobrás, since deviations in the State-owned comapny's works became the main focus of the investigation; (3) State-owned company's executive officers, who charged bribes and passed on the money to politicians; (4) large contractors, such as Odebrecht and Andrade Gutierrez; (5) politicians who received payments from companies under investigation; and (6) other sectors, such as electrical, transportation and works, such as Angra 3 nuclear power plant and Maracanã stadium rebuild (Folha. com).

6 CENTRAL CATEGORY OF THEORY: Discursive mechanisms

Two discursive mechanisms were identified in the analyzed materials. The first works on in the dimension of the event, and the latter works on in the political nature of the event.

"Petrolão, the greatest corruption scheme in the country's history" (translated by the authors)

This first mechanism refers to media coverage to construct or delineate a significant proportions scandal in order to mark the country's history, catching more attention than other corruption schemes reported. The analyzed media coverage elects the corruption scheme revealed as 'the greatest corruption scheme in the country's history,' without mentioning the dimensions of other scandals that have already occurred in the country:

> What started as a local investigation into a money laundering scheme operated by a network of dollar dealers eventually brought *petrolão* to light, the greatest corruption scheme in the country's history (Veja.com, 01/18/2015; translated by the authors).

> By stating that *petrolão* is one of the greatest corruption scandals ever found in the world, opposition leaders demanded the investigation into the allegations (Folha.com, 6/2/2015; translated by the authors)

> Operation Car Wash is the greatest investigation on corruption conducted to date in Brazil. It began investigating a network of dollar dealers operating in several states and discovered the existence of a vast corruption scheme at Petrobrás, involving politicians from various parties, and the largest contractors in the country (Folha.com, 2/22/2015; translated by the authors).

The terms *petrolão* and *propinoduto* are used in a recurring way in the analyzed material, and both have become part of the vocabulary related to the subject. The creation of neologisms, such as *petrolão* (union of Petrobrás with mensalão) and the term *propinoduto* (union of propina (bribe) with the suffix duto, as in the union of bribe and pipeline, forming the word "bribeline"), is a way of establishing a link with imaginary structures that create meaning for the reader.

Scandals are produced by publicizing a transgression, which may be real or apparent, and its resonance depends on the coverage they receive from the media (Adut, 2005; Grü, 2008), given their strong influence on formation of public opinion (2003), as well as the importance as source of construction and reproduction of realities (Risberg *et al.*, 2003), since, as Castells (2007, 241) observes, "what does not exist in the media does not exist in the public mind." In this perspective, the media are fundamental component of the political scandal, not only for following and reporting the facts, but, more than that, for having active participation in its occurrence. And, in times when the Internet reconfigured communication (Castells, 2007) by potentiating electronic media, the visibility of the facts gained broader scope and speed, since traditional media adopted digital versions, offering the public not only daily news , but also in real time, making this participation even more active.

The scandal is a transgression disruptive publicity; therefore, by publicizing Operation Car Wash as the country's greatest scandal, giving it wide and massive coverage, the media emphasize the drama nature of the public sphere. Adut (2008) shows that the advertising of an event is a social force capable of transforming the meanings and effects of a transgression. Mention of Operation Car Wash investigating the greatest corruption scandal in the country's history is recurrent in the reports analyzed, which contributes to the production of the scandal.

"Corruption is the exercise of political office power" (translated by the authors)

The second discursive mechanism refers to the perspective of corruption as a 'political scandal,' frequent in the analyzed material. The corruption scheme involved politicians and their parties, and this was broadly mentioned in the coverage of the media analyzed, indicating the perspective of corruption centered on office and authority. This perspective includes the definition of Nye (1967) and Bayley (1970) as corruption being the misuse of authority for personal gain, as it is the case of politicians, directors and other employees involved in the scheme.

> Appointed as one of the main contributors to *petrolão* scheme, dollar dealer Alberto Youssef said Wednesday, in defense presented to the Federal Court, that money laundering and bribe payment involving contracts with Petrobrás was a project of "perpetuation of power" practiced by politicians who wanted "unlimited" influence on the national scene. [...] "Political agents of the most varied types rationalized the crimes to remain in power, because they knew that as long as they succeeded, they could allow and carry out any wrongdoing, in the certainty that public opinion would absolve them at the polls," summarizes the dollar dealer (Veja.com, 28/01/2015; translated by the authors).

The corruption scheme involving Petrobrás is of political nature. In the characterization of Arseanult (2008), in a political scandal the behavior of politicians involved has the potential to undermine an organization's reputation. In the case of the Workers' Party (PT), its president suggests that there is an attempt to criminalize the party with false accusations, and affirms that he will not accept the stigma of corruption (Folha.com, 03/11/2015). A political scandal also denotes that civil servants may be accused of using their office power to obtain personal financial benefits, such as gifts, money, and campaign contributions (Cobb & Taylor, 2015), as characterized in the present case, where government and political parties are connected.

> Investigations into politicians began in March, when the Federal Prosecutor's Office was granted authorization by the Supreme Court and the Superior Court of Justice to investigate 53 people, including federal deputies, senators and two governors, from six political parties. Everyone denies involvement with the scheme. The Federal Prosecutor's Office decided there were no elements to perform investigation into President Dilma Rousseff, although one of the informers claims that the corruption scheme helped finance her electoral campaign in 2010 (Folha.com, 11/03/2015; translated by the authors).

Adut (2005) considers that the status of the offender and others involved is an important factor in causing a transgression to become a scandal. In the material analyzed, the focus on the involvement of political parties, politicians and directors and executives of large contractors was recurrent. Political scandals, according to Castells (2007), have implications for the political system, weaken the credibility of those involved, and influence the practice of democracy, provoking a crisis of political legitimacy.

7 THEORY FUNDAMENTAL STATEMENT: research and discussion implication

From the understanding that the media use discursive mechanisms to narrate the facts coming from corruption schemes, one proposes the fundamental declaration of the theory: 'The media articulate discourses in order to construct meanings, making it possible the interaction of the reader with discursive formations'; in other words, the media organize their discourse reinterpreting the events.

The analysis suggests that Operation Car Wash became a scandal in which the media outlined the meaning, and Petrobrás became the pivot of the corruption scandal. We specifically sought the most frequent themes in the approaches of the articles analyzed, and two discursive mechanisms used by Folha.com and Veja.com were identified: "*Petrolão*, the greatest corruption scheme in the country's history," and "Corruption is the exercise of political office power." These results reinforce at least three arguments to defend that the two approaches (scandals and corruption) are connected: (1) the media play a crucial role in the repercussions of the scandal; (2) the intensity of the scandal communication in the analyzed media determines the scandal dimension; (3) the media are partial, and thus, in the same way that they gave extreme attention to this case, may have left aside cases that could have greater financial repercussions and therefore major consequences.

Scandal consequences, which affect society, individuals and organizations (Transparency International, 2015, Lambsdorff, 2006), range from the loss of reputation to prisons and criminal prosecutions against those involved (individuals and organizations); devaluation of Petrobrás shares and of national currency is also included. On 03/31/2015, Folha.com published the consequences in numbers: 150 public investigations at the Federal Court of Paraná; five civil actions for devolution of misappropriation resources; 494 investigations and companies under investigation; 57 politicians under investigation at the Federal Supreme Court and Superior Court of Justice; 156 defendants at the Federal Court of Paraná; 119 arrests in preventive or temporary nature since the beginning of the operation; and up to the date of publication, 28 people arrested in the operation were still in jail (Folha.com).

Folha.com also published the estimate of the Federal Public Ministry for the misappropriation of Petrobrás' coffers: R$ 2.1 billion. In 2014, Petrobrás estimated the consequent losses of corruption in R$ 6.1 billion, after examining all contracts with the companies under investigation. In the case of contractors, according to Folha. com, the consequences of corruption were the incarceration of controlling executives of some of these companies, who were imprisoned from November 2014 to April 2015. Five contractors are still targets of civil actions in court and, in addition, the companies under investigation are prevented from obtaining new contracts with Petrobrás and have lost access to credit.

Publication of corruption schemes can generate externalities, as Adut (2005) notes: third parties can be affected and rules can be modified as a result of reflections and actions to resolve conflicts (Silva, 2013). In the analyzed material, these two aspects were mentioned. Folha.com has reported on government measures for an anticorruption package to "punish corrupt people more quickly, speed up lawsuits against misuse of public resources, and criminalize illicitly enriched public servants" (Folha.com, 03/16/2015), which represent potential gains that society could have. In addition, the State-owned company created a Board of Directors whose function is to prevent the risk of fraud and corruption in its business by observing compliance with laws, regulations, and internal Petrobrás rules in all its contracts and acts"(Folha.com, 1/13/2015).

As corruption occurrences emerge in State relations, involving politicians and public servants acting on behalf of the State, and individuals in private-interest organizations, several aspects of this relationship should be analyzed beyond the role of the press. On the one hand, social values and behavioral expectations of public managers; which choices will be made by these managers in the allocation of commissioned positions and opening of spaces for 'exchange of favors,' even knowing that they are observed by control bodies. On the other hand, scandals may have their collateral effects on the general trust placed in democratic institutions.

It is in this perspective that the sociology of scandals and the sociology of corruption are connected. Institutional and sociocultural changes are often caused by population's reactions to the scandals, whose proportion grows or not depending on the "resonance they gain on the media" (Grün, 2008: 320), as pointed out by studies that articulate scandals, corruption and the role played by the media (Grün, 2008; Tumber & Waisbord, 2004; Castells, 2007; Toepfl, 2011). Thus, the sociology of scandals presents itself as an alternative to the understanding of corruption, that is, the analysis of corruption schemes can be carried out on the basis of the theoretical-analytical frameworks of the scandals, "not only to understand the conditions that allow such events to transpire, but also their emergence, interpretation and propagation" (Kuhn & Ashcraft, 2003: 39), because "perceived corruption is not the same as scandal, but it is the raw material from where scandals are fabricated" (Castells, 2007, p. 244).

8 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article, we analyzed the publicization of the corruption scheme revealed by Operation Car Wash, involving Petrobrás, contractors and political parties. The analysis showed how the media built meanings in the scandal, and Petrobrás was positioned as the 'protagonist' of the "country's greatest corruption scandal" in the period analyzed.

Our analysis was based on two focal points: (1) the real transgression, that is, the scheme of corruption; and (2) the production of the scandal by the media. The analysis of these points allowed the understanding of the scandal as the disruptive publicity of a transgression, and the identification of two discursive mechanisms used by the media that produced the country's greatest corruption scandal. Political corruption schemes are articulated by several actors, in this case, directors and employees of Petrobrás and private companies, politicians, lobbyists and others, forming a dense web that, when revealed to the public, causes reactions and manifestations that take on greater proportions in the media wide and massive coverage, as the analyzed case was.

The first discursive mechanism is "*Petrolão*, the greatest corruption in the country's history." This discursive mechanism is a media effort to position the corruption scheme, which involves Petrobrás, as the greatest in the country's history, justifying massive journalistic coverage that includes daily news, as well as special sections with detailed explanations.

The second discursive mechanism is the understanding of "Corruption is the exercise of political office power." A political scandal gains greater proportions because it implies that the public interest is left aside to the detriment of politicians' private gains.

During the research, we returned to the literature on scandals and corruption for purposes of comparison with empirical material. Even knowing corruption is a crime in the country, we observe that the legal perspective of corruption is absent in the reports, since there is no mention or explanation of the acts committed being deviations from rules and regulations. In some reports, there was mention of "criminal organizations," but without explanation regarding the legal aspect.

The results presented contribute to the field of organizational studies through the understanding of the consequences on how corruption scandal meanings are produced by the media. Regarding method limitations, we highlight our choice for only analyzing two vehicles of the national press, which does not allow generalizations as to the behavior of other press vehicles. However, size and national scope of the analyzed channels allows us to glimpse the discursive mechanisms associated with the corruption scandal analyzed. Another limitation is that the ideological-political positioning of the vehicles was not considered. Both operate according to specific editorial guidelines to meet their audiences' expectations, but those were not taken into account in the analysis.

The corruption scandal issue is promising for development of research in the field of organizational studies (see Hirsch *et al.*, 2015). We propose a research agenda oriented towards discussing how the discourses about corruption developed by the media, when interacting on social media and with actors in the political scenario, affect organizations and their reputation and market capital. In the Brazilian background, these actors would be, besides great businessmen and their respective organizations, Ministers of the Supreme Federal Court, senators and deputies of greater prominence, ex-presidents denounced, Senate president and Low House Speaker. Such agenda may contribute to a new perspective on corruption in organizations and its impact on governments, organizations and society as a whole.

REFERENCES

Adut, A. (2005) A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde, American Journal of Sociology, 111(1), 213–48.

Adut, A. (2008). On scandal. Moral Disturbances in Society, Politics, and Art. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Amundsen, I.(1999). Political Corruption: an introduction to the issues. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute.

ANER.Circulação. Revistas Semanais. Recuperado de http://aner.org.br/dados-de-mercado/circulacao/.

ANJ.Maiores jornais do Brasil. Ano 2014. Recuperado de http://www.anj.org.br/maiores-jornais-do-brasil/.

Arsenault, A. (2008). Scandal Politics in the New Media Environment. Analytical Note. Spring 2008. Disponível em: https://www.academia.edu/444255/SCANDAL_POLITICS_IN_THE_NEW_MEDIA_ENVIRONMENT_Analytical_Note_Spring_2008.

Ashforth, B.E., Gioia, D.A., Robinson, S. L., & Treviño, L.K.(2008). Re-Viewing Organizational Corruption. Academy of Management Review, 33(3), 670-684.

Azevedo, F. (2010). Corrupção, mídia e escândalos midiáticos no Brasil. Em Debate, Belo Horizonte, 2(3), 14-19.

Batabyal, S., & Chowdhury, A.(2015). Curbing corruption, financial development and income inequality. Progress in Development Studies, 15(1), 49–72

Bayley, D.H.(1970). The effects of corruption in a developing nation. In: Heidenheimer, A. J. Political corruption - readings in compara tive analysis. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Castells, M.(2007). Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society. International Journal of Communication, 1(2007), 238-266.

Charmaz, K. (2011). Grounded Theory Methods in Social Justice Research. In: Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. E. Handbook of Qualitative Research. London: Sage Publications.

Clemente, M., & Roulet, T.K.(2015). Public Opinion as a source of desinstitutionalization: A "spiral of silence" approach. Academy of Management Review, 40(1), 96-114.

Cobb, M.D., & Taylor, A.J. (2015). An Absence of Malice: The Limited Utility of Campaigning Against Party Corruption, American Politics Research, 43(6), 923 –951.

Connelly, B.S., & Ones, D.S. (2008). The Personality of Corruption A National-Level Analysis. Cross-Cultural Research, 42 (4), 353-385.

Esser, F., & Hartung, U. (2004) Nazis, Pollution, and no Sex: Political Scandals as a Reflection of Political Culture in Germany. American Behavioral Scientist , 47(8), 1040-1071.

Gardiner, J. A. (1970) The politics of corruption in an American city. In: Heidenheimer, A. J. Political corruption - readings in comparative analysis. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

GPAC-Global Programme Against Corruption.(2001). United Nations Manual on Anti-Corruption Policy. Recuperado de http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/gpacpublications/manual.pdf.

Grün, R. (2008). Escândalos, Marolas e Finanças: Para uma sociologia da transformação do ambiente econômico. Revista de Ciências Sociais, 51(2), 313-352.

Heidenheimer, A.J. (1970). The context of analysis. In: Heidenheimer, A. J. Political corruption readings in comparative analysis. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Hirsch, P., Holan, P. M., Philips, N., & Zyglidopoulos, S. (2015). Special Issue of Journal of Management Inquiry: Corruption, Management and Organizations, Journal of Management Inquiry, Call for papers, Disponível em: http://omtweb.org/announcements/calls-for-papers/634-special-issue-of-journal-of-management-inquiry-corruption-management-and-organizations

Hodgkinson, P. (1997). The sociology of corruption –some themes and issues. Sociology, 31 (1), 17-35.

Holan, P.M., Zyglidopoulos, S., & Hirsch, P. (eds)(2017). Special Issue: Corruption Part 1. Journal of Management Inquiry, 26(3), 247-347.

Jacobsson, K., & Löfmarck, E. (2008) A Sociology of Scandal and Moral Transgression The Swedish 'Nannygate'Scandal. Acta Sociologica, 51(3), 203–216.

Kuhn, T., & Ashcraft, K.L. (2003). Corporate Scandal And The Theory Of The Firm- Formulating the Contributions of Organizational Communication Studies. Management Communication Quarterly, 17(1), 20-57.

Lambsdorff, J.G.(2006). Causes and consequences of corruption: What do we know from a cross-section of countries? In: Rose-Ackerman, S. International Handbook on the economics of corruption. Edward Elgar Publish, Inc, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Maeda, R., & Ziegfeld, A.(2015). Socioeconomic status and corruption perceptions around the world. Research and Politics, 1-9, Doi:10.1177/2053168015580838.

Numerato, D. (2015). Corruption and public secrecy: An ethnography of football match-fixing. Current Sociology, 1 –19. DOI: 10.1177/0011392115599815.

Nye, J. S.(1967). Corruption and political development: a coast-benefit analysis. American Political Science Review, 61(2), 417-27.

Oberoi, R. (2014). Mapping the Matrix of Corruption: Tracking the Empirical Evidences and Tailoring Responses. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 49(2), 187 –214.

O'Connor, S., & Fischer, R. (2012). "Predicting Societal Corruption Across Time: Values, Wealth, or Institutions?", Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 43(4), 644–659.

Power, T.J., & Gonzáles, J. (2003). Cultura Política, Capital Social E Percepções Sobre Corrupção: Uma Investigação Quantitativa Em Nível Mundial. Rev. Sociol. Polít., Curitiba, 21, 51-69.

Risberg, A., Tineri, J., & Vaara, E. (2003). Making sense of a transnational merger: media tets and the (re) construction of power relatins. Culture and organization, 9(2), 121-137.

Silva, T. (2013). A pesquisa sobre escândalo político: panorama de 10 anos. Revista Fronteiras – estudos midiáticos, 15(3), 160-169.

Simmel, G. (1906). The sociology of secrecy and of secret societies. American Journal of Sociology, 11(4), 441–498.

Thompson, J. B. (2000). Political scandal: Power and visibility in the media age. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.

TI.Transparency International. Unmask the corrupt. Recuperado de http://www.transparency.org/.

Toepfl, F. (2011). Managing public outrage: Power, scandal, and new media in contemporary Russia. New Media & Society, 13(8), 1301 -1319.

Tumber, H., & Waisbord, S. R. (2004). Political scandals and media across democracies volume II. The American Behavioral Scientist, 47(9), 1143-1152.

Vaara, E.; Tenri, J., & Laurila, J. (2006). Pulp and paper fiction: on the discursive legitimation of global industrial restructuring. Organization studies, 27(6), 789-813.

Warren, M.E. (2001). Social capital and corruption. Annual Review of Sociology, 24(1), 1–24.

World Bank.(2006). Engaging with fragile states: An IEG review of World Bank support to low-income countries under stress. Washington, DC: The World Bank. Recuperado de www.worldbank.org/ieg.

Zilber, T.B.(2006).The work of the symbolic in institutional processes: translations of rational myths in Isareli hight tech. Academy of Managemnet Journal, 49(2), 291-303.

Zimmermann, N., & Silva, H. C da. (2014). O Mecanismo De Antecipação Aplicado À Análise Discursiva De Entrevistas: Imaginários De Leitura De Professores Na Educação Científica. Ensaio Pesquisa em Educação em Ciências (Belo Horizonte), 16(2), 33-52.

APPENDIX: List of media sources cited in the document

Folha.com, 13/01/2015 <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2015/01/1574568-Petrobrás-escolhe-diretor-de-nova-area-de-prevencao-de-fraudes.shtml>

Folha.com, 06/02/2015 <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2015/02/1585865-oposicao-cobra-investigacao-de-propina-que-teria-sido-recebida-pelo-pt.shtml>

Folha.com, 22/02/2015 <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2016/02/1741802-policia-federal-inicia-23-fase-da-operacao-lava-jato.shtml>

Folha.com, 11/03/2015 <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/poder/211412-lula-se-queixa-de-vazamento-seletivo-das-investigacoes.shtml>

Folha.com, 16/03/2015 <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2015/03/1603461-pacote-do-governo-vai-punir-corruptos-mais-rapidamente-diz-cardozo.shtml>

Folha.com, 31/03/2015 <http://arte.folha.uol.com.br/poder/operacao-lava-jato/>

Veja.com, 18/01/2015 <https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/lava-jato-ja-e-uma-referencia-diz-delegada/>

Veja.com, 28/01/2015 <https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/petrolao-foi-projeto-de-perpetuacao-de-poder-de-politicos-diz-youssef/>