An approach from Brazilian State of Paraná on youth cultural consumption and media convergence: an analytical report

Uma abordagem paranaense sobre o consumo cultural juvenil e a convergência midiática: um relato analítico

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Abstract *The text is an account of the first phase of the research "The Youth and Media Consumption in Times of Convergence" in the Brazilian State of Paraná. By using preliminary data from the pilot study and the research exploratory stage in the Brazilian city of Curitiba, the article presents an overview of media consumption by young people by aspects related both to their complying characteristics and habits, as to those dealing with its presence as an active part of cultural and communicational practices in the media influenced society. Among these practices are noteworthy the media convergence, the new visualization schemes, the linking of the cultural and media assets and their symbolic character in the construction of juvenile identities, and collective performances aimed at socialization, identification and reinforcement of social ties.*

Keywords: *Media consumption; Youth; Convergence; Paraná*

Resumo *O texto é um relato da primeira fase da pesquisa "Jovem e Consumo Midiático em tempos de Convergência" no estado do Paraná. Ao utilizar dados preliminares do estudo piloto e da etapa exploratória da pesquisa na cidade de Curitiba, o artigo apresenta um panorama do consumo midiático pelos jovens*

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por aspectos ligados tanto às suas características conformadoras e hábitos, como às que tratam de sua presença enquanto parte ativa das práticas culturais e comunicacionais na sociedade midiatizada. Dentre essas práticas merecem destaque a convergência midiática, os novos regimes de visualidade, a vinculação dos bens culturais e midiáticos e seu caráter simbólico na construção das identidades juvenis e as performances coletivas voltadas para a sociabilização, a identificação e o reforço dos laços sociais.

Palavras-chave: *Consumo midiático; Juventude; Convergência; Paraná*

Introduction

The excessive increase of information and opportunities for access to media content considerably changes young people's perception habits and produces distinct forms of meaning and apprehension of meaning of the messages. Based on data collected in the Brazilian State of Paraná in the first phase of the research Rede Brasil Conectado (Connected Brazil Network) "The Youth and Media Consumption in Times of Convergence", it was possible to signal some important aspects in the acquisition and use of digital technologies by putting under tension the media consumption and its logic from these new practices, as well as discuss the interaction schemes caused on these young people based on a sui generis aesthetic experience.

The purpose of this article is to present the partial results obtained in Paraná in the subproject, "An approach from the Brazilian state of Paraná on the youth's cultural consumption and media convergence"[3]. The theoretical reflection is directed from the perspective of the British and Latin American Cultural Studies. It starts with the premise that the cultural dimension – understanding culture as a non-monolithic or homogeneous entity but differentiated according to the social formation and the historical moment – is crucial to understand the young people's consumption habits (AGGER, 1992, p. 89).

With regard to the practices of use and ownership of goods and services, (Argentine-born academic and anthropologist) Néstor García Canclini's prospect is considered, according to which cultural consumption is understood as "the set of processes of appropriation and uses of products in which the symbolic value prevails over the values of use and exchange, or where at least the latter are configured as subject to the symbolic dimension" (CANCLINI, 1993, p. 34).

The text begins with a brief description of the national project and its configuration in the Brazilian state of Paraná. Then a report on the tasks carried out until the stage of the pilot study is presented – with emphasis

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[3] A project supported by CNPQ, process no. 406286/2012-04, called MCTI/CNPQ/CAPES 18/2012.

on the application of in-person questionnaires and analysis of youth profiles in the virtual environment. Based on these data, it presents an overview of these ways of consuming by aspects linked both to the young people's complying characteristics and their habits, as to those dealing with its presence as an active part of the cultural and communicational practices in the media influenced society. Among these practices, some stand in the State, such as:

- Linking the cultural and media assets and their symbolic character as a determinant in the construction of juvenile identities;
- Belonging to a community where two functions are clearly intertwined: socialization and identification. The collective performances take place as processes of inclusion and social ties strengthening;
- Sharing and use of images (new visualization schemes) increasingly present in the young people's performances on digital platforms;
- The media convergence as a determinant in the consumption of music, TV series and movies rearranging the practices of perception and participation.

National Project versus Local Project

The national project "The Youth and Media Consumption in Times of Convergence" is an initiative by researcher Nilda Jacks[4] for the purpose of nationally studying and mapping young Brazilians' media consumption behavior in the digital age, in a socio-cultural status dominated by the convergence of the media and receptors more active and inserted in the context of the audience. Its problematization involves possession of or access to digital technologies by young people from different social strata of the five regions of the country, seeking to know whether the differences among the practices conditioned by a differential access in different (social) cultural contexts can set similar identity processes as

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part of a youth culture taken in general terms (JACKS, 2010). The team in Paraná, formed in early 2012, currently has ten members from three different institutions, including professors and postgraduation and undergraduate students, consolidating the network inter-institutional work.

Cultural consumption, identities and media convergence

Discussing the concept of cultural consumption in contemporary society and its potential influence on young people is no easy task, especially because the act of consuming is not necessarily linked only to the use or exchange of goods, but to a symbolic process of social representation. This process is realized in new models of interaction with the world and with things. In practice, it is possible to cite as an example of this new context the decrease in the collective use of the urban space and the considerable increase in consumption of domestic entertainment.

For Canclini (2005, p. 58-59), "the act of consuming involves broader cultural processes through which social life is given meaning and order and identities are built. Consuming would be an 'emotional investment' and not just a monetary act. The goods would be 'ritual accessories', giving meaning to the symbolic flow." Thus, "consuming is like making more intelligible a world where what is solid evaporates." In this line of reasoning, the author proposes two theories that should not be considered separately to understand the consumption practices. The first one concerns the "reproduction of the labor force and capital expansion." The second is understood as "a place where classes and groups compete for the appropriation of the social product." The third as "a place of social differentiation and symbolic distinction among groups." The fourth as "an integration and communication system." The fifth as "an objectification scenario of desires." And the latter as "a ritual process." (CANCLINI, 1992, p. 3-5)

In this sense, when young people select goods and appropriate them, they define what they consider publicly valuable, in a mix of

representations and meanings ranging from the appropriation of the social product and the symbolic distinction to the satiation of desires and rituals through an integrated communication system that does not necessarily obey a traditional logic.

It should be thought that the new practices of media consumption take place within a complex and significant dimension of everyday life. In them, culture and identity are intertwined concepts. Thus, the cultural transformations witnessed in recent years have directly affected the identities. In addition, we have witnessed the emergence of new forms of identification, now more distant from the classical conceptions. HALL (2003) states that this debate can not be had if we leave aside the consequences brought by modernity: on the one hand, the process of globalization and the emergence and spread of new technologies that have structurally transformed social relations; on the other, (free or forced) migration processes which present the debate on the postcolonial world.

Thus, identity is understood as a feeling of belonging of realities and a set of shared meanings (CANCLINI, 1995; HALL, 2001; KELLNER, 2001; SILVA, 2014). Its construction takes place according to the individuals' positioning in the social sphere (CASTELLS, 1999). "Cultural identities are points of identification, unstable points of identification or suture made within the culture and history speeches. It is not an essence, but a positioning" (HALL, 1996, p. 70).

What at first we can say is that media consumption by young people in Paraná is a territory full of senses, with possible understandings common to other Brazilian States and at the same time with its own dynamics. Thus, it becomes understood as an aspect of cultural consumption, a type of communication process that stimulates consumption both through the supply of goods, as when it comes to trends, behavior, novelties, identities, fantasies and desires. What interests us is to know what young people consume from the media – media and products/contents –, the way they get hold of it (of what they consume and how they use it), and the context in which they engage with it (places, ways,

routines, etc.), never losing sight of the fact that "cultural practices are essentially human, desperately needed and required in the turbulence of multiple and communication ages symbolically possible to be occupied". (GONZÁLEZ, 2012, p. 167).

Since one of the main features of media consumption is the convergence of mediae, it is important to discuss this concept by adopting (American media scholar Henry) JENKINS' perspective. The author defines this phenomenon as:

> [...] the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted (JENKINS, 2009, p. 29).

In this context, the author redefines the media from the technological, marketing and especially cultural transformations, analyzing that the content stream, besides pervading multiple mediae and markets, has a very strong relationship with the migratory behavior of the audience which, as indicated by the initial survey data, oscillates between various channels of search and new entertainment experiences.

The central argument in JENKINS's thesis (2009) is related to three core concepts: media convergence, collective intelligence and participatory culture. All these concepts dialogue with the way of looking from Rede Brasil Conectado and the partial research data in Paraná, since collective intelligence concerns a new form of consumption and a new source of power, and participatory culture characterizes the contemporary consumer's increasingly less passive character.

Thus, media consumption – as a cultural process – predisposes some particular characteristics made evident in the pilot study, which corroborate the perspective of this discussion, especially with regard to the concept of transmedia narrative. For the author, transmedia refers to certain ways of setting production, circulation and consumption of media products, often linked to the entertainment industry and which are characterized by the fragmentation of content in various mediae. This

appears quite clearly in music, TV series and movies consumption practices across multiple platforms.

In other words, thinking about the relationship of convergence and transmedia narratives assumes understanding that these issues (linked to media and cultural consumption) create communicative ecosystems (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2002, 2009) in which are set the forces and relations between society, communication, technology, culture and economy (and all this in a symbiotic way, without the possibility of thinking about these interrelationships in isolation from the context of production, distribution and reception of media messages).

A specific reading of the television field (by serial fiction) and its relationship with the transmedia strategies addressed by JENKINS (2009) is undertaken by LOPES AND GÓMEZ (2014). Such thinking helps us understand that "transmedia planning and production do not refer only to the changes of technological nature." On the contrary: transmedia strategies and practices alter the logic of the market with regard to the production and relationship among technologies, genres, formats and even audiences (LOPES, GÓMEZ, 2014, p. 73).

Thus, not only the environment is taken into account, but also the production of contents/narratives that can be unfold on multiple platforms and hence change the ways in which young people relate to the world through consumption.

The experience of the pilot study

It is important to highlight that the completion of the pilot study was preceded by a data collection on Paraná and Curitiba as part of an "information system"[5] with the purpose to know the State and local realities, besides composing a frame with data to support a text about the State and the city environments[6].

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[5] According to Galindo Cáceres, all research should start by creating an "information system" that will feed its execution and end with a "communication system" which will ensure its dissemination and social use.

[6] This initial step, as well as the tools for data gathering have followed the guidelines set out in the national project.

Regarding Paraná, it is worth considering some information: located in the Brazilian South region, it consists of 399 municipalities and has a population of about 10 million people, evenly split between males (49.13%) and females (50.87%). The young population is 17.52% of the total population (IBGE, Censo 2010). Young people follow the general balance in the division by gender, reversing the slight difference towards the male population (8.82%) and they reside mostly (15.08%) in urban areas. In regard to color or ethnicity, 11.94% identify themselves as white, 4.83% as of mixed ethnic ancestries and 0.53% as of black color or ethnicity. The Brazilian Native population is 0.04% of the young population, while 0.18% is identified as "yellow" (East Asians) (IBGE, Censo 2010).

As for Curitiba, the capital of the Brazilian state of Paraná, it sits on plateau, located in the eastern region of Paraná. It has 26 municipalities in the metropolitan region with 75 districts and 1,751,907 inhabitants. The young population in Curitiba totals 16.97% of the total population of the city, divided between males (8.47%) and females (8.5%), all residing in the urban area (IBGE, Censo 2010).

In 2013, the phase of field research itself began, with the completion of the pilot study, according to the protocol provided by the national coordination. The study consisted of two parallel movements: an interview with university students identified as belonging to the "lower classes" (which became known as an off-line search) and an observation of young people's profiles on (online social networking service) Facebook (online research).

Under the guidance script sent by the national coordination, the two research fronts serve to observe dynamics, flow and circulation of topics/contents set by the youth online, besides exploring details of university students' practices and rituals on digital platforms.

Off-line research

The recommendations for carrying out this step of the pilot study were that respondents should be university students between 18 and 24 years,

belonging to lower classes, with a maximum income of BRL 1,800. To ensure a youth "sociocultural" sense, the questionnaire incorporated elements such as family income, location and type of housing, family education level, professions, in an attempt to identify the social stratum researched, as well as aspects that would determine the cultural consumption by a survey with them.

The task of the in-person questionnaire was carried out in two stages. In the first there was the distribution to two undergraduate classes. In the second, there was a contact with Brazilian NGO Em Ação (In Action), which offers free-of-charge preparatory courses for Brazilian universities' entrance exams on weekends, serving young people with low income, to complete the sample. Adding the two fronts, 11 young people were interviewed. However, for analysis purposes, only 10 had their data compiled, according to the pilot study protocol.

With regard to the places where television sets and computers are used, there was a preference for the living room and bedroom. The parents' bedroom appears as a third option. Sites of mobility or even the kitchen did not have great representation, which sets up the media consumption from the site of use as being directly related to the family income and the sharing of the devices by the family members.

In relation to connectivity, access to the Internet is performed mostly in broadband, followed by 3G (third generation of mobile telecommunications technology). Cable connection is little representative. The representative access to broadband is due mainly to the State's good digital media structure, which now has 10 telecommunication carriers on offer. In Curitiba, Internet access is present in 340,770 households in the city, provided by Brazilian telecommunications companies like OI, GVT and NET. The presence of mobile phones is perceived in 529,024 households. The following mobile phone companies are present in the city: Brasil Telecom Celular S/A; Claro S.A.; Tim Celular S.A., Sercomtel and Vivo S.A. (ANATEL, 2013). It is also noteworthy that access to broadband in the State was encouraged by digital inclusion projects developed under the Paraná state government and non-governmental

initiatives. These data concern the large number of accesses to digital platforms via broadband in the State and how this technological aspect determines the use and appropriations that young people can or can not do on digital platforms.

The access points are divided among home, college/university and work. LAN Gaming Centers and community centers also appear. In relation to the type of mobile device that they use, the answers were divided equally between mobile phones with Internet access and smartphones. With regard to the use of mobile phones, consumption varies among: sending (text messaging service component) SMS (Short Message Service), listening to music, talking to friends, Internet access and phone calls. Internet access is divided into the use of social networks, research and searching information.

It was found that Free-to-air (FTA) television (TV) services broadcast still appears as a possibility for media consumption. However, it is already experiencing a decline in its use. Pay television is not used by these adolescents either. Radio, newspapers and magazines in their original formats are hardly consumed by young people in Paraná.
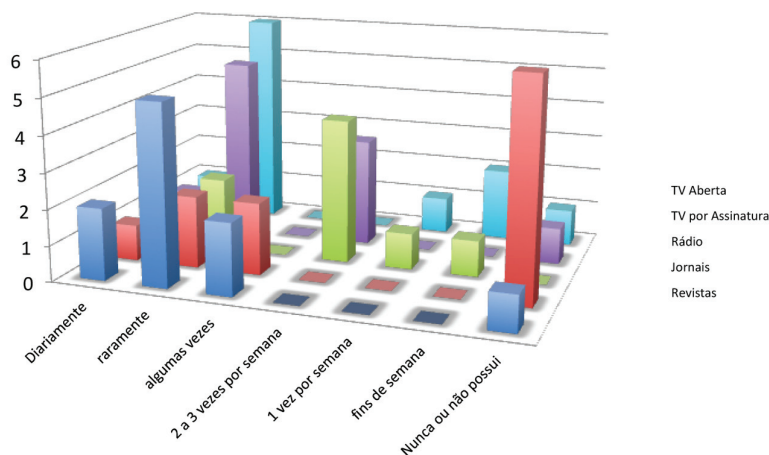
Figure 1. Media Uses
Source: Research Data

When analyzing media use by young people in Paraná, the pilot study signaled practices that support the idea of media convergence and trans-media proposed by the JENKINS (2009). The consumption of movies and TV series appears as an important segment for the young people and the practice of watching this genre takes place online, through downloads, followed by movie theaters and Free-to-air (FTA) television (TV) services broadcast. This practice occurs not only at the reception and interaction with the content, but also as new forms of participa-tion: comments on social networks, participation in communities and even phenomena such as "binge-watching"[7]. Other relevant data are in the choice of the watching platform, which no longer focus Free-to-air (FTA) television (TV) services broadcast and is now held in other screens like on tablet computers and smartphones.

Consumo de Filmes
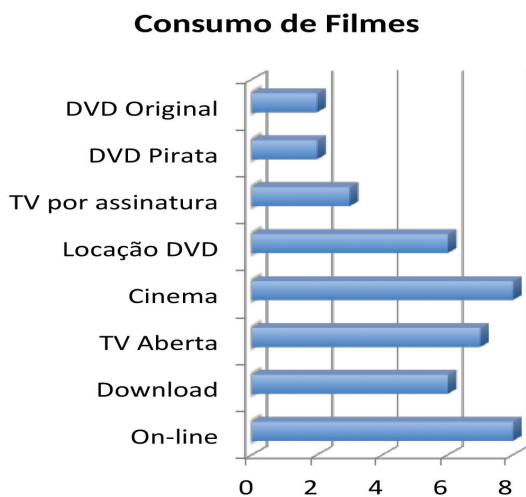
Figure 2. Movies Consumption
Source: Research Data

[7] Binge-watching, also called binge-viewing, is the practice of watching TV for longer periods than usual, usually a single television program.

This shows that media consumption reflects a set of communicative actions that transcend specific means of transmission, through making them digital, allowing desires for participation by recipients in the broadcast processes to be exacerbated to the point of generating this new set of behaviors.

In this context, as JENKINS (2009) states, young people interested in certain products start not only to consume but to create subproducts, discuss and gather to celebrate these products, enhancing their position as responsible for the final/official product and their importance and influence on their growth, continuity and/or creation itself, giving new configuration to the ratings.

The author also argues that the emphasis on convergence should not be moved from the capitalist market logic. Thus, it is also about strategies consistent with the global consumption format seeking to account for the new standards that the audience presents in contact with the cyberculture (computer culture) (JENKINS, 2009).

In which concerns the use of social networking, off-line data converge with the profiles analyzed on *Facebook* (*online research*). All respondents use the social network daily and unanimously use it to relate to friends, family, sweethearts or domestic partners and coworkers. *Facebook* highlights the average age of onset of use of digital social networks: 13.8 years. Most started by using (social networking website formerly owned and operated by Google) Orkut. MSN [Windows Live Messenger (formerly MSN Messenger), a discontinued instant messaging client developed by Microsoft)] and ICQ (Mail.Ru Group's open source instant messaging computer program) were also mentioned. Other networks mentioned were Pinterest, Badoo, Google+, Tumblr, Instagram, Linkedin and Twitter.

The consumption of digital services (Websites, e-mail, chat, etc.) is characterized by the search for information and contact with friends and family. The main reason cited for participation in the networks was the popularity. Also shown in the answers: practicality, the network benefits/resources that meet their needs, habit, contact with family and

colleagues, interests and news. Only two people never stopped using any network. Most have already stopped, mainly by collective disuse, due to extinction of the network, new and worst interface, use by few people and access to other sources. The times of day when they are more connected are afternoon and evening.

With regard to user's network, most contacts are focused on Curitiba and the State itself. The main topics of conversations are everyday life, studies, common interests, leisure, relationships and business. All stated that they usually meet their contacts outside of the virtual networks. Four young people stated that they meet the ones who are part of their everyday life. One of them meets them on specific occasions and another said that they meet some of the contacts.

The content flows address issues such as: professional area, music, photos, trivia and controversies, books, promotions, reflections, humor, issues related to citizenship, news, videos and texts and everyday life. Three respondents do not usually post. Most state that they read other people's posts. Only three said they do not forward posts. Most say they share content, especially if they are useful to a larger audience, if they are humorous or related to their own posts.

Therefore it can be seen that the partial data from the off-line pilot study reinforce the idea that it is through social networks that contemporary young people learn about the world they live in and expand their identities. These are the means that help them in the construction of reality, which is therefore formed by elements and information offered and triggered by the media coverage process existing nowadays. Such practices appear with greater emphasis and shall be deepened in the data collected in the online survey described below.

Online research

Data collection from *Facebook* followed the official protocol of the national survey and analyzed 11 young people's profiles, six men and five women. From the profiles analyzed, only one had no information about the family. All the others had information about work and education

and date of birth. Almost all informed current city, history, gender, languages and some link to contact (*e-mail* or *blog*). These data indicate that the practices of appropriation of digital platforms by young people are primarily related to the process of generating identification with the others, resulting in a communicative interaction of identification and sociability. Regarding this, Thompson states:

> Separating the social interaction from the physical location, the development of technical means affects also the how and how much individuals are able to manage their self-presentation. Every action or performance takes place within a specific interactive framework that involves all kinds of assumptions, conventions and landmarks. An individual acting within that framework shall adapt their behavior to it to some extent, projecting a self-image that is more or less compatible with the referentiality (THOMPSON, 1995, p. 302).

That is, young people increasingly build an identity that is coherent according to them in a symbolic process by utilizing materials available on the network. This is present in the recent activities of the profiles as new friendships, participation in events and pages liked.

Another noticeable feature is the high number of friends. The minimum number was 300. Of 11 profiles, eight had more than 800 friends. Three of them had more than 1,100. Regarding the favorite pages, the item that appears in greater quantity is music, followed by movies and sports/athletes. And there is also the fact that some profiles have "followers", i.e., they have subscribers to their updates (feeds), which shows the establishment of relationships beyond family or friendship circles.

With respect to posts, only one of the profiles analyzed had no post within one week. The themes are: humorous sentences, funny pictures and posts related to the study area (activities or jokes of the area), usually content shared from pages that they follow or their friends share. And also clips and direct messages from friends with names tagged. Posts that have more impact usually involve humor (sentences accompanied by an image or on colorful backgrounds), personal matters and photos with friends tagged. Rare are the posts that obtain no kind of interaction.
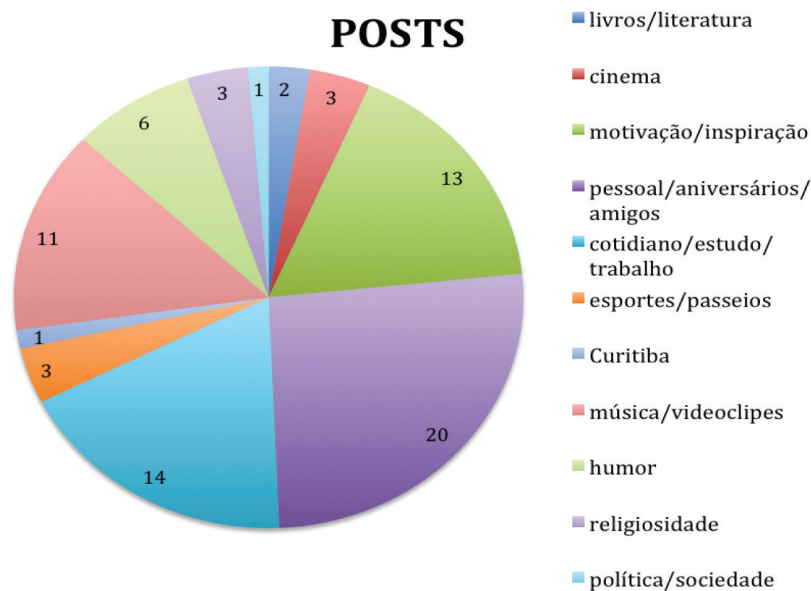
Figure 3. Categories of the *posts*
Source: Research Data

Thus, what is observed is that when these young people narrate their lives based on everyday life elements, their identity is presented not as a timeless essence that is expressed, but as an imaginary construction that is narrated. It is possible to see the emergence of social networks for the reorganization of identities, as the movies, radio and television have already done.

Further evidence on image and content sharing practices on the profile pages is that they tend to diminish the importance of the founding events and territories that used to sustain the illusion of un-historical and self-centered identities. This behavior has been shown by Canclini when he states that

> The referents of identity are formed now, more than in the arts, literature and folklore – which for centuries produced the nations' distinction signs – in relation to the textual and iconographic repertoires generated by the electronic media and with the globalization of urban life (CANCLINI, 1995, p. 124).
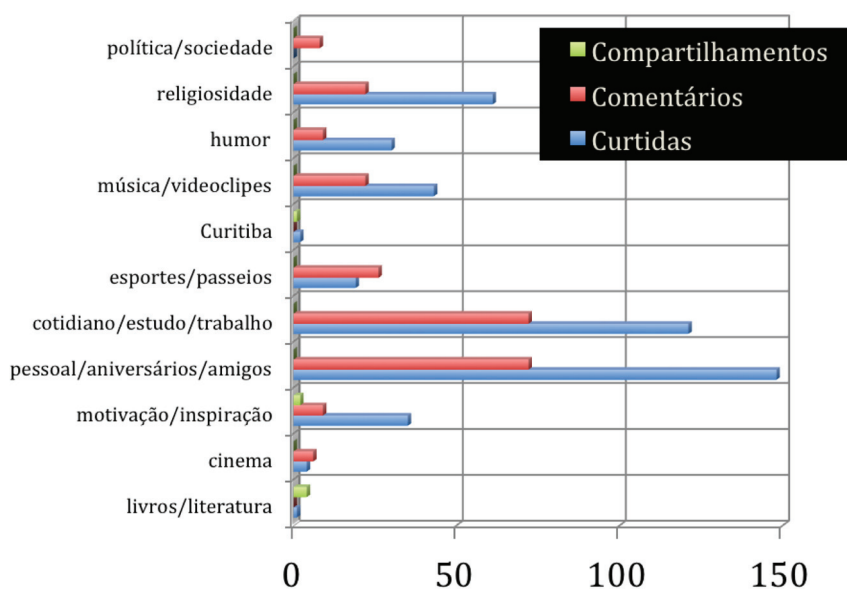
Figure 4. Data of shares, comments and likes by subject matter
Source: Survey data

In the profile pages observed on *Facebook*, these iconographic reper-toires are increasingly present and establish new visualization schemes for understanding the contemporary media culture. The increasing use of (online mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing, and social networking service) Instagram in the young people's preference is a reflection of this practice. Importantly, from the eight (software application) mobile apps identified in the profiles, four are exclusively for image sharing (Insta-gram, Pinterest, Flickr and Piccollage).

With this, we can try a foregone conclusion based on data collected in Paraná in the pilot study, which converge to the view approached by Canclini with regard to two outcomes for cultural consumption in contemporary society: the author proposes that culture, as well as art and communication, retrace their practices from globalization and urban transformations, as well as the role of media in modern society (CANCLINI, 1995; 2001; 2006) and considers identity and citizenship as processes strongly linked in Latin America. It is evident, however,

that these data can not be generalized because they comprise a relatively small sample, although suitable for a pilot study, but are important evidence to be further explored in the next stages of the project and compared with other regions of the country, which is the objective of the national survey.

From the report to the reflection: brief thoughts

The project "The Youth and Media Consumption in Times of Convergence" is a practical opportunity to think about the organization of a large research and its challenges. Although there is a standard protocol which guides all teams and searches homogeneity of the information collected and presented, there is an implied cultural diversity in the network of researchers among the regions and among the members of the same team.

With regard to the first results of the pilot experience, the plurality of response options in the data collection tools, in a way, already shows one of the characteristics of the youth who we seek to know better. If, on the one hand, this wide range makes it difficult to search – in terms of predicting responses, tabulation and analysis of results –, on the other, it gives more room for the multiple possible answers, given the youth's transitory nature.

The initial phase, which included the production of a monograph with the State and capital city data, was extremely important to the context of the pilot study data and also for the next stages of the process. These data were organized and published in a book. The delimitation of the media structure of each region and the aspects that determine the access to the digital platforms by the young people showed that in Paraná that access is facilitated not only by the number of broadband and 3G/4G providers available, but also by government and non-governmental projects of digital inclusion.

The pilot study data in Paraná led to the recognition of youth characteristics and enabled the expansion of the scenario to be explored, as well as adjusting the actual wording of the questions and the establishment of

categories to organize the data collected for the next phase of research. From these practices, some stood out, such as linking the cultural and media assets and the symbolic character associated with brands and products as determinants in the construction of juvenile identities verified in the young people's performances on social networks, their narratives, choices and absences.

In these narratives of life itself and daily life, new visualization schemes are established, propitiated by the increasing use of (software application) mobile apps related to the production and sharing of images, especially Instagram. It is clear that while participating on Facebook the young person answers the question, "What's on your mind?", on Instagram the question is: "What are you doing (watching) now?", reminding that Instagram content most often is also shared on *Facebook*.

The transmedia character and convergent nature of the mediae is another important fact that should be further explored. The consumption of movies, TV series and music on multiple platforms and the transposition of the audience as a coproducer of content, as well as the simultaneous use of devices in the act of consumption, are key aspects in these young people's profiles. The analysis of the postings made on the social networking Website, a step in development, shall qualitatively expand the debate, including more details of such practices, rituals and streams that make up their forms of ownership.

Finally, the experience of networking and the collaborative character in the search and exchange of information have shown, even with all the difficulties that a project of this magnitude presents, an important access and production model of scientific knowledge. Of course, added to the methodological requirements adopted to ensure the reliability of the data obtained in the various stages of the study, commitment and conduct assumed by the researchers are key.

Thus, between the tension and the satisfaction of fulfilling each stage of the research within the deadlines set, the conviction remains that it is an important contribution to know and understand a little more the reality of the State of Paraná and other states of Brazil.

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