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Mediações e letramento midiático: uma aproximação necessária

Mediations and media literacy: a necessary approach

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Resumo: Neste texto procuramos lançar um olhar sobre a Educação Midiática inspirado na Teoria das Mediações, na perspectiva de Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987, 1997, 2018), considerando a comunicação como aspecto essencial para se pensar a Educação Midiática. Trata-se de estudo que propõe a viabilidade de aproximações entre as duas propostas teóricas, partindo do conceito de letramento midiático e das competências midiáticas apresentadas por Celot e Pérez-Tornero (2009), tendo em vista que as mediações são um aspecto essencial para compreendê-las, e que extrapolam os fatores de entorno.

Palavras-chave: Teoria das Mediações; Letramento midiático; Comunicação

Abstract: In this text we seek to take a look at the European media literacy concept, taking into consideration the Theory of Mediations, from the perspective of Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987, 1997, 2018), considering communication as an essential aspect to think about media literacy. This is a study that includes a theoretical reflection that proposes the feasibility of approximations between the two theoretical proposals, starting from the European concept of media literacy and the media skills presented by Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009), considering that mediations are an essential aspect to understand them, that extrapolate the environmental factors.

Keywords: Theory of Mediations; Media Literacy; Communication

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Introduction

In this article, we approach the Theory of Mediations and media literacy, in an attempt to propose, by the end of it, approximations between both theoretical perspectives. We begin through the mediations of Martín-Barbero (1987, 1997, 2018), which are theoretical-methodological propositions that evolved since his first proposition, and media literacy, with focus in media competences, according to Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009).

The first map was proposed in 1987 in the seminal work of Martín-Barbero, *De los medios a las mediaciones, comunicación, cultu-ra y hegemonia*, later updated in 1997 and 2018. We tried to comprise this evolution, with focus on a more recent map, in which it inserts the technicity as basic mediation. We also present the criticism made to the author about the concept of Mediations, which makes it harder to develop a Latin American theory of communication.

In the field of Media Education, the path was to present the concept of media literacy, as a field concerned with media competences, adopted by European and North American researchers. Among other approaches in this field, we find educommunication, Latin American perspective; literacy for media, in Portugal; and finally Media and Informational Literacy, expression created by the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), in an attempt of unifying the area.

Despite being relevant, we will not go further on the discussion about the fields of Media Education. Each one of these concepts has a finesse, an approach, a specialty within the field, which applies to the demands of each research. We propose, thus, to go through a common communicational thought, and, in this sense, Latin America has a fundamental contribution, the Theory of Mediations.

The Latin American perspective of Communication seeks to understand the subject through their day-to-day life, through their relationship with the context that surrounds him, the negotiation of meaning made through mediations. This approach is more comprehensive than media literacy, when it approaches the surrounding factors, that are regarding the access and availability of media and apparatus, to the public policies of media-education, to the media industry and civil society. Because of that, we reflect about the possible theoretical and methodological bridges between South and North, in an attempt to extend the concept of media literacy, taking into consideration the Theory of Mediations as a theoretical milestone in the interface Communication/Education.

The mediations of the Latin American Communicational thinking

Just as the other fields of applied human and social sciences, Communication studies had comprised many theoretical and methodological tendencies, coming from the European and North American continent, especially, through the Mass Communication Research, which in its group, comprised the functionalist perspective, the critical theory, through the School of Frankfurt, with Marxist inspiration; Structuralism, which gained prominence with the French intellectuals; and the Cultural Studies, coming from the School of Birmingham, among other theoretical currents. In Latin America, the Theories of Communication had only started to develop in the 1950s, however, they still did not have a local emergency and were influenced by the aforementioned currents.

Lopes (2003) supplies an interpretation on how these theories began to appear in Latin America. According to the author, the functionalist current has dominance in the communication studies until nowadays, with more prominence from 1950s to 1980s. In the 1950s, researches based on quantitative methods are developed, such as audience measurements and polls of attitudes and motivations. In the next decade, the International Center of Superior Studies of Communication for Latin America (CIESPAL) conducted descriptive researches and community studies when it creates the line of research Communication and Development. In 1970, CIESPAL continues with this research tradition, focusing on national and international communication policies. The descriptive aspect makes way to a systemic analysis of production and circulation of communication in the 1980s. The extensive functionalist tradition could not handle the Latin American specificities:

The use of the functionalist paradigm in studies of Mass Communication and Culture in underdeveloped societies is transposed to these only the concept of social stratification, to which the culture studies of lower classes did not present any specificity, in addition to "obsolete" modalities of social relations and representations (LOPES, 2003, 2003, P. 53).

It is necessary to emphasize in the 1970s the influence of the critical theory in Latin America, due to the context of repression during the military dictatorship in different countries, pointing towards the manipulation in the cultural industry and their market logics. Another aspect is the elitist conception of culture, the idea that "high culture" would be capable of transforming society and developing ways of critical awareness that put a great part of people as victims of this process, without any resistance (LOPES, 2003).

However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, after overcoming the scenario of repression through the redemocratization of Latin American countries, especially Brazil, the Theories of Communication began to be influenced by Cultural Studies. New technologies of communication, transnationalization, culture and popular communication began to appear as object of studies (LOPES, 2003).

In this context, we perceive the need of our own Communication Theory, taking into consideration Latin American historical contradictions and cultural blends.

The Latin American and Brazilian contributions in this sense are articulated in an attempt of building a Reception Theory, whose originality for the Theory of Communication tend to be internationally recognized. The few, however influent, empirical research on critical reading of media, telenovela reception, leisure and everyday life, popular uses of media, urban cultures and others, point towards this theoretical construction dismounting the thesis of passivity and manipulation of receptors through MCM. We consider that in this theorization are involved efforts to take back the unity of the object of Communication, avoiding the parcelling and reductionism in the analysis of their components, tendency that constitutes one of the most negative characteristics in the current state of research in communication (LOPES, 2003, p. 69-70).

Corroborating for the analysis of Lopes, Barros Filho and Martino (2003) point towards the receptor delaying to be incorporated in communication studies, which firstly focused in the effects of mass media, then in the production and characteristics of the media.

Therefore, the mediation theory is a construction that makes an inversion of this manipulation logic of receptors through media and accentuates in the communicational process. Martín-Barbero (1987) proposes that the individual negotiates the meanings of media content with the context that surrounds him through mediation. The author's proposition, unline the Theory of Uses and Gratifications, presented by Blumler (WOLF, 1995), whose focus are the motivation of individuals to consume certain media content, puts mediation at central, crossing meanings produced by the receptors.

Despite mediations being the premise of the theoretical proposition of the author, he refuses to formulate a definition for the term, because the mediations are a continuous process that go through constant transformation. With the advancement in the studies of this theory and observing the maps proposed since the seminal book of Martín Barbero, we can find some elements for a free interpretation, or a clue, that leads us to contemplate mediations as a process in which aspects that are part of the context that surrounds the individual relate to him, directly or indirectly in different levels. They take into consideration the subject, the context and the relation established.

Some authors point towards deficiencies in the presentation of a concept of mediations by Martín-Barbero. Signates (2006, p. 69) says that the definition made by the author is blurry, and that while "the theoretical and methodological limits are not sufficiently defined, it is unlikely that the use of the notion of mediation will endow the studies

of communication of a theoretical support that can be admitted as an overcoming of existing theories and interpretations".

Signates made a mapping of the seminal work of Martín-Barbeo, identifying that the concept of mediation appears 37 times: "Out of these citations, in 21 opportunities the author uses it as a bonding limits of specific dichotomies, and, mostly, antinomic. In the others, he makes simple citations, without an explicit commitment with their definition" (2006, p. 6-7). To sustain even further his argumentation, Signates (2006) presents five ways in which the concept of mediation can be defined, according to the work of Martín-Barbero, to confirm the lack of epistemologic precision.

As construct or theoretical category; as specific discursivity; as linking structures, forms or practices; as a device for enabling and legitimating the imaginary hegemony or resolution of class struggle in the field of culture; and still as an institution or geographic place (SIGNATES, 2006, p. 62).

Sodré (2002, 250) agrees with Signates' position when he says that "the concept of mediation can no longer surpass the huge cognitive imprecision, already pointed by different authors, including Raymond Williams himself, one of his original sources". They are followed by Maio (2018, p. 8-9), who, when analyzing the confluences between Martín-Barbero's and Orozco's propositions, concluded that "one of the bottlenecks of his proposition is found, however, in the blurry definition of mediation", but minimizes the criticism mentioning an exaggeration of Signates when he denies the existence of the theory: "Martín-Barbero is, undeniably, vague in the definition of mediation, but such radicalization does not contribute for the theoretical construction, even because the intellectuals of the Barberian work already advanced in the conceptual development".

Another critic of the Theory of Mediations is Ciro Marcondes Filho (2008). He categorically says that it isn't a Communication Theory, claiming it to be, most of the time "a sociology, an anthropology, a political economy of communications (almost always dealing with mass communication), all of that very far from the study of the interpersonal communication, by irradiation or virtual". The author still reinforces that

The Latin American Theory of Communication is a lonely island, which seeks with their own – and often scarce – theoretical resources comprise the complexity of a communicational process in times of vertiginous changes, overcoming paradigms and technological acceleration. Maybe because of that, it finds few echoes in the United States and in Europe (MARCONDES FILHO, 2008, p. 69).

However, Martín-Barbero (1987; 1997, 2018) systematizes these premises through theoretical-methodological maps. It is important to reinforce that due to the contextual and relational character, it is not easy to identify those mediations. The representation of mediations – which is still quite complex – aims at the operationalization of the referred theory through the reading of the current society, and on how the individual is presented in it and in negotiations of meaning that he makes with the context surrounding him. It isn't possible to say that all mediations are contained in there, even because this would be an instrumental approach of the map. We consider this expansion necessary, given the interdisciplinary nature of theory, maybe this would be their biggest force and virtue.

The use of the map supplies different answers, because it comprises phenomena related to the context of the individual. However, he can be extrapolated and allows many entries through which one can research. In order to exemplify, we took the author's most recent proposition. Image 1 – Communicative and Cultural Mutations.



Source: Lopes (2018, p. 58).

At the center of the map, we see communication, culture and politics as founding mediations. It is important to highlight the emergency of a communicational reason, that resets social order in a paradoxical manner. On one hand, individuals are connected by a network that allows global exchanges, favoring agencing logics of the market and an apparent social cohesion. On the other, we watch the valorization of individuality and a return to the most primitive roots of humanity, through discourses and practices that reminds us more of instinct than rationality (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2018, p. 13).

Considering culture, according to Martín-Barbero (2018), the theoretical frontier between anthropology and sociology – in which for the first, culture is everything, and for the second, it summarizes into social phenomena of the canon of arts and languages – is found blurred. After all, today there are mechanisms in which the cultural production of symbolic goods, is offered according to their consumer audience. Then,

Culture escapes all compartimentalization, irrigating social life as a whole. Today, they are subject/object of culture both art and health, work or violence, and there is also political culture, drug traffic culture, work

culture, urban culture, youth culture, gender culture, scientific culture, audiovisual culture, technological culture, etc (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2018, p. 14).

When leading this reflection towards politics, the author perceives the need of "resetting mediations in which constitute the new ways of interpelation of subjects and representation of bonds that unite society" (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2018, p. 14). The media gained great importance when constituting discourses and the own political action. They participate of the public life and engender their points of view in society through the strength of their mediations. The television, mainly, enables this process through the "axis of the look", framing certain representations through the most convenient. Therefore, politics must retrieve their symbolic nexus, their capacity of aggregation in a scenario of constant tensions of culture and market.

Martín-Barbero presents, also, four basic mediations: temporalities, spatialities (since their first proposition), sensorialities and technicities. Before, social temporality was based in the TV schedule that guided the everyday life – the schedule for the novela, the football match, for instance. Spatialities, in this case, were more static and easier to be understood. The family interaction around the TV ended up the "primordial situation of recognition" (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1987, p. 293).

However, temporalities are not the same anymore. Martín-Barbero (2018) highlights the quickness of these transformations and the hardship of anchorage, due to the rhythm dictated by capitalism. Thus, the diffused present makes the subject seek identification in the past. There's a fever for memory, a certain attachment to the anchors of the past.

These dispositions of temporality end up setting certain spatialities, expressed in the most recent proposition of the theory. Thus, Martín-Barbero (2018) will categorize four spaces: the inhabited, by the human need of a place to manifest their individuality and having shelter; the imaginary, where imaterial and symbolic exchanges occur and the subject projects and constitutes their relationships with the context and the other; the produced space, through territorial markings and the material production, product of conquests and agreements, inventions, like machines, that make distances smaller and distract us; and the last one, is the space practiced by the modern city that amplifies the previous, because it amplifies the objective perspective o place and things for subjective relations, like the anonymous in the urban and their interactions in search for their own identity, considering here the interlacing between virtual and material space. The presence of submediation of networks – which appears for the first time in this map – confirms the author's intention in emphasizing this mediation.

Sensorialities are a thickening of other mediations that appear in previous maps, giving importance to close, daily communicational relationships. According to John, Ribeiro and Silva (2019, p. 124, our translation), the challenge is to "think about sensoriality as a central mediation in the understanding not only of the relationships that subjects establish with media narratives, but also with the way they relate with the world they live in". Another part of this idea is cognitivity, which derives from the cultural competence, the capacity of recurring to previous knowledges and/or scripts to understand a certain communication phenomenon and the rituality, which brings a symbolic meaning to communication.

The relation of these mediations with technicity is given through historic evolution. In the first map (1987), technicity would appear still as a set of abstract ideas, embedded within cultural competences and they still didn't even had this name. In the second map (1997), this mediation appears as a submediation, with the emergency of the internet in late 20th century. Then, technicity is a product of more concerns of Martín-Barbero (2010), who reinforced the need to face new spatialities and temporalities in a social scenario related to digital technologies. In this sense, the thickness of mediation of technicity presented in the last map (2018), rising it to the stage of basic mediation, is coherent with the author's evolution of thinking. In an interview to Mariluce Moura (2009, p. 3), Martín-Barbero mentions the evolution of society, from its natural surroundings, to the urban, and now to technocommunication, which overcomes the idea of device or media, and in which the subject must be prepared to deal with. Hence the need of developing different sensorialities.

Another submediation, citizenships, gains relevance in the current map with the thickness of technicity (potential of participation) and it comprises the relation between institutions and individuals, rights and duties of citizens. Before, it was pointed out as a submediation of institutionality, tensioned with sociality. These relationships, in turn, are also important agents in the construction of a subject's identity, the only submediation that remains in relation to the previous maps, especially in a scenario of constant and rapid transformation.

Next, we present some essential concepts for the understanding of media literacy, as a strand of Media Education, an interdisciplinary field between Education and Communication.

Media Literacy: competences and context

The concept od literacy, within the major area of Media Education, is defined as: "The need to access media, to understand evaluate in a critical manner the different aspects of media and their contents and creating communication in different contexts", with the aim of "increasing people's knowledge about the different forms of message of media found in their day-to-day". (EUROPEAN UNION, 2009, p. 227). The media messages can have many genres, formats and languages; videos, films, images, texts, sounds that get to the individuals with different forms of communication.

The media literacy exposes a series of competences a subject must acquire (ÁREA, 2008; PÉREZ & DELGADO, 2012; FERRÉS, 2007), but we adopt the reference of Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009), who systematize the process dividing competence into individual (use, critical comprehension, participation and communication) and surrounding factors, proposing a pyramid in which there is an order in the acquisition of competences.

According to the authors, the competences of use are linked to the own operation of electronic devices. However, they must be developed holistically in order to the subject fill all their needs, which go from the understanding of simple functions to more complex functions: the capacity of differentiating devices and their functionalities and transmitting these knowledges to others in a formal manner. There must also be a "critical awareness on technical issues of devices" (2009, p. 37 - our translation).

The competences of critical understanding comprise the knowledge on the media ecosystem. The first factor is the understanding on te media content and their functions, with the following linked competencies:

– Coding and decoding, with the goal of understanding the title and the content that was broadcast; – Competence to evaluate, compare and contrast critically the media content, giving value to information based on the needs of the user; – Actively exploring and searching for information; – Capacity of synthesizing and summarizing an information from different publications; – The capacity of mixing and recycling media content [that happens when someone shares something and makes a Facebook post, for instance] (CELOT, PÉREZ-TORNERO, 2009, p. 39 – our translation).

The second factor, according to Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009, p. 40), is the knowledge on media and its regulation, which comprises the competences of critical evaluation referring to regulations, diversity and "rights on media evaluation", in addition to searching knowledge on media to evaluate and interpret media content.

The third factor lies in the behavior of the user itself, which takes advantage of the semiotic and linguistic capabilities of individuals in the process of interpretation of media contents, "is the way each individual has to understand and relate with the world around them" (CELOT, PÉREZ-TORNERO, 2009, p. 40 – our translation).

The communicational and participative competences are also divided into three factors: social relations, citizen participation and content creation. In the aspect of social relations, Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009, p. 42) advocate that subjects must have the competences of "initiating and keeping in touch" through media and social networks; sharing behaviors and appropriating others, being that "media reinforces this mimetic capacity, especially on teens and young adults".

The same thing happens with the capacities of citizen participation, which demand mindful skills of participation and sharing, management and collaboration to "achieve certain goals", of presenting an "specific identity", related to the goal of each established relation, of interacting with "multiple institutions in an appropriate manner, using the appropriate channels" (CELOT; PÉREZ-TORNERO, 2009, p. 43 – our translation).

The content production, according to the authors (2009, p. 44), goes from sending an e-mail, commenting on a Facebook post, or something more complex as news production is reinforced by media and social networks. Therefore, it is necessary to have the competence of sharing tools, stimulating cooperative work, producing original content, having the ability of developing "conditions, norms or factors that affect the content creation made by the media itself, either by pressure, regulation, laws, rights, aesthetics, etc."

Finally, the surrounding factors are exposed through five spheres, which contain some indicators. The first one is the access and availability of media and apparatus, taking into consideration the amount of smartphones per 100 inhabitants, internet access, the circulation of newspapers and the amount of TVs and movie screens. The second factor is about media education due to the presence of media literacy in the school's curriculum, in teacher's training, in educational activities and in financial resources available for the achievement of these processes. The third is manifested through the adoption of public policies related to the promotion of agents and regulating activities linked to media literacy. The fourth and fifth are related to the initiatives of the media industry itself in promoting this process, mainly in joint actions

with organizations of the civil society (CELOT and PÉREZ-TORNE-RO, 2009).

The proposition of Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009) was later reviewed by two partner institutions of the European Committee: the Danish Technology Institute (DTI) and the European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI), which produced a new report (2011). The classification of competences remains, however, with a pyramid character. The report has concluded that the competence acquisition happens in an holistic manner, there is no way to hierarchize them. In addition to that, they added a few individual surrounding factors, such as age, gender, level of education and income. However, they question the way how surrounding factors are applied under the category of competences, because

Neither the availability of media nor the regulations, nor the public policies and industry seem to be understood as aspects of media literacy per se, but as appropriate circumstances for the advancement of media literacy in a social scale (2011, p. 22 – our translation).

Therefore, the big question lies in how these competences articulate among themselves and are acquired by individuals and how these surrounding factors are worked through the concept of media literacy. The own concept of competences is widely discussed in Europe. Unfortunately, there is no space for us to approach in-depth every concept, but it is important to emphasize what two authors think about it.

Marín (2012) makes a historic retrospective, reporting that the idea of competence gained strength in the 1970's, always attached to work issues. Later, it was evolving to other aspects of human nature, however, always in an instrumental, descriptive and limiting manner. The author concludes his reasoning leaving a question: He says not to know whether

competences are a product of the total articulation of knowledge, skills, dexterity and attitude/values of an individual, or whether a combination of some of these can generate an eruption of a competence, or if, by chance, it is possible that each of these on its own provoke a development of the competences in some field of the social and/or professional practice, or, also, if there is a gradual relation between these fields and, as a consequence, if the competences generated in someone produce the constitution of any other (MARIN, 2012, p. 4).

Drexel is more affirmative: "The concept includes not only formal and informal knowledges and skills, but also 'personal values', 'motivations and behaviors'" (2003, p. 7). In addition, Ferrés (2007), and Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012) say that skills, in this aspect of media literacy, "are defined as a combination of knowledge, aptitude and attitudes appropriate to the context". But, what is the context we are talking about?

Here we find a possible boundary to media literacy. The context is related to institutional aspects, such as public policies, availability of media and school curriculum (CELOT & PEREZ-TORNERO, 2009). Even when we add factors such as income, gender, age and level of education, the understanding of this complex surrounding gets limited. In addition, the question raised by the report of DTI and EAVI (2011) that surrounding factors seem to be only understood as a conductor for the advancement and amplification of media literacy in society sustains this limitation. When we consider them that way, we exclude the direct influence of the context in the acquisition of individual competences, something that can be observed.

Despite being located in the interface Communication/Education, European and North American communicational paradigms are pragmatic and elitist (LOPES, 2003), which could limit them in a communicational scenario as complex as the one we are living in. Next, we will present the possible bridges between Theory of Mediations and media literacy, in an attempt of exploring the importance of the context that surrounds the individual – beyond the surrounding factors – in the process of acquisition of media competences.

Considerations about Bridges between South and North

As we already said in the introduction of this article, we understand that each concept of the area of Media Education has its finesse, its own specialty. We work with media literacy, because it comprises, directly, reflecting on the communicational ecosystem, of relationships between people and media, from cinema to the internet.

However, one of the keys is in the interpretation of how these relations come about, bringing up a brief epistemological reflection of phenomenon, to punctuate how the Theory of Mediations can create bridges between the Latin American thinking and the rest of the world.

Despite of the criticism we mentioned before, the Theory of Mediations has evolved in the last two decades. Although the clarity of a context that establish the theoretical and methodological boundaries of "mediations", as some authors point out, their current perspective finds correspondence with the description of a communicational ecosystem, with the presence of new actors, such as experts in the operationalization of algorythms and traders that work with marketing research to fit media products to consumers' need (LEWIS & WESTLUND, 2015).

Martín-Barbero (2018) points out that, in order to understand these processes, it is necessary to use specific technicities that are acquired through different sensorialities and with the presence of other submediations, such as networks, citizenship and narratives, for instance.

In this sense, we consider that the concept of media literacy needs a communicational paradigm that does not only deal with the relationship of subject and its surroundings – in the European perspective–, because the communicational ecosystem is much more complex. The negotiation of meaning that the individual accomplishes with the context that surrounds him through his mediations is an important aspect to understand how this process comes about. Therefore, a communicational paradigm that limits the object of study doesn't seem to comprise the complexities produced through this thinking. It is necessary to build bridges between South and North for a dialogue in a wide perspective coming from mediations.

In practice, that means you should promote changes in the way of thinking, analyse and studies how the subjects acquire, improver and manifest their media competencies. There is a first approach in this path, considering mediations as a variable of this process. For instance, a research with university students from the outskirts of São Paulo, in an attempt of mapping which are the competencies existing in young adults and how these mediations work in the process of acquisition of these skills give some important signs (CUNHA, 2020).

The research instruments (questionnaires and interviews) were based in the set of competencies from Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009), presented in the previous topic. It is important to reinforce that none of these subjects of research took part of any formal initiative of Media Education. The conclusion is that even though some participants did not have "competences related to the critical understanding, they presented competences of participation", creating content. The author says: "We believe that this happens because mediations are an important variant in the acquisition of media competences and must be taken into consideration when analysing this process" (CUNHA, p. 100).

All of the interviewees cited some mediation: family, friends, school, teachers, identity. These aspects are a part of the sensoriality of individuals and are some examples on how the surrounding context relates with the understanding of media content, from the negotiations established.

Therefore, just as the author, we believe that there is a two-way street between media literacy and the Theory of Mediations. The process of acquisition of competencies – and its practicel use by the individual – has mediations as an essential aspect, just as it is also a part of sensoriality, as media literacy is an important tool for the subjects' understanding of today's world.

When we present the evolution of the theoretical-methodological maps of Martín-Barbero as a proposition for communication studies, bearing in mind the dynamics of mediation in the negotiation of meaning in communicational processes, with focus on the contemporaneity, we could observe possible sources. Instead of the surrounding factors, mediations could offer new clues for us to understand and contribute for the studies in media literacy, specifically when we deal with competences acquired in informal contexts.

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