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## Articles

## **Soberanía popular y autonomía: diferentes sentidos y consecuencias para políticas digitales**

### **Popular sovereignty and autonomy: different meanings and consequences for digital policies**

Rafael Grohmann<sup>1</sup> 

Pedro Burity<sup>2</sup> 

Lorena Vilarins<sup>2</sup> 



**RESUMEN:** Este artículo explora las distinciones conceptuales y políticas entre soberanía digital popular y autonomía, examinando sus significados y sus implicaciones para las investigaciones sobre políticas digitales. A medida que la soberanía digital se vuelve cada vez más central en estos debates, han surgido, especialmente en América Latina, abordajes populares que resignifican la soberanía desde perspectivas comunitarias y de la clase trabajadora. Paralelamente, la autonomía ha sido un concepto clave en la articulación de compromisos colectivos feministas, indígenas y decoloniales con las tecnologías digitales. Aunque ambos conceptos buscan reivindicar el control sobre las tecnologías digitales “desde abajo”, difieren en sus fundamentos teóricos y en sus consecuencias políticas. A partir de un análisis conceptual, el artículo traza las formas en que estos términos han circulado en los discursos académicos. La primera sección mapea los diversos sentidos de la soberanía digital, con énfasis en abordajes de abajo hacia arriba. La segunda sección historiza la noción de soberanía popular en América Latina y su papel en el enfrentamiento de la dependencia tecnológica. La tercera sección analiza tres tradiciones clave de autonomía: el marxismo autonomista; el feminismo y el anarquismo; y la autonomía colectiva latinoamericana, con especial atención al zapatismo. La sección final compara estos conceptos, destacando sus objetivos convergentes, sus diferentes relaciones con el Estado, así como sus consecuencias para los debates sobre soberanía digital y autonomía.

**Palabras clave:** soberanía digital; autonomía; soberanía digital popular; tecnología

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores the conceptual and political distinctions between popular digital sovereignty and autonomy, examining their implications for internet studies. As digital sovereignty becomes increasingly central to debates around digital policies, popular frameworks have emerged, particularly in Latin America, that reframe sovereignty from a working-class and community-based perspective. In parallel, autonomy has resurfaced as a key concept in articulating grassroots, feminist, and indigenous engagements with digital technologies. While both concepts seek to reclaim control over digital technologies from below, they differ in their theoretical foundations and political consequences. Drawing on conceptual analysis, the article traces how these terms have circulated in scholarly discourses. The first section maps diverse meanings of digital sovereignty, emphasizing bottom-up frameworks. The second historicizes the notion of popular sovereignty in Latin America and its role in confronting technological dependency. The third analyzes three key traditions of autonomy: autonomist Marxism, feminist and anarchism, and Latin American collective autonomy, particularly Zapatism. The final section compares these concepts, highlighting their overlapping goals but divergent relations to the state, and consequences for debates on digital sovereignty and autonomy. The article offers theoretical foundations to understand both the commonalities and specificities of these concepts, with implications for internet policy.

**Keywords:** digital sovereignty; autonomy; popular digital sovereignty; technology.

## Introducción

El debate sobre la soberanía digital ha sido central en los estudios críticos de tecnologías, plataformas, datos e Inteligencia Artificial (IA) (GROHMANN, 2025), ha sido movilizado de diversas maneras por Estados, empresas, movimientos sociales, think tanks, investigadores, comunidades y formuladores de políticas (BARBOSA; GROHMANN, 2024). No obstante, con la profundización de las discusiones sobre la soberanía digital y sus posibilidades de reivindicación “de abajo hacia arriba” por parte de la sociedad civil y de comunidades indígenas, por ejemplo (COUTURE; TOUPIN; MAYORAL-BAÑOS, 2024), fue revitalizada otra noción: la de autonomía y sus relaciones con las cuestiones digitales. Tanto la autonomía como la soberanía pueden ser comprendidas a partir de múltiples referentes teóricos y políticos, con especificidades y puntos en común. Pero ¿cómo podemos entender qué es soberano y qué es autónomo en los debates tecnopolíticos? ¿Y cuáles son las diferentes consecuencias de estas nociones para los estudios críticos de las tecnologías?

Este artículo investiga las distinciones y articulaciones conceptuales y políticas entre soberanía digital popular y autonomía, examinando sus implicaciones para la investigación en el área. A medida que la soberanía digital gana centralidad en los debates sobre políticas digitales, han emergido, especialmente en América Latina, enfoques populares que resignifican la soberanía a partir de perspectivas comunitarias y de la clase trabajadora. Paralelamente, la autonomía resurgió como concepto clave para articular formas de compromiso con las tecnologías digitales provenientes de movimientos feministas e indígenas. Aunque ambos conceptos buscan recuperar el control sobre las tecnologías digitales desde abajo, difieren en sus fundamentos teóricos y en sus consecuencias políticas. Basado en una historicización teórica, el artículo traza las maneras en que estos términos han circulado en los discursos académicos, proponiendo fundamentos teóricos para comprender tanto las convergencias como las especificidades de dichos conceptos, con implicaciones para los estudios críticos de las tecnologías.

## Múltiples caras de la soberanía digital

La creciente concentración de poder por parte de las grandes empresas tecnológicas ha generado nuevas formas de dependencias económicas e infraestructurales. Estas dependencias se manifiestan a nivel micro, como demuestran autores como Schor *et al.* (2020), que enfatizan los enredos económicos cotidianos, y también a nivel macro, haciendo eco de las preocupaciones de la teoría marxista de la dependencia (MARINI, 1973). Esta lente teórica, recientemente revisitada en los estudios críticos de tecnologías (VALENTE; GROHMANN, 2024), destaca conceptos como la división internacional del trabajo y la superexplotación del trabajo, ofreciendo un marco crítico para comprender las desigualdades globales en el contexto de los capitalismo de plataforma (STEINBERG; ZHANG; MUKHERJEE, 2024), en plural.

Una de las principales respuestas a este escenario, destacada por formuladores de políticas, gobiernos e investigadores, ha sido la noción de soberanía digital, frecuentemente presentada como un antídoto al poder monopolista, incluso intelectual, de las Big Techs (RIKAP, 2023). Sin embargo, dicha noción es en sí misma objeto de disputa, insertada en una lucha más amplia por los sentidos. Corporaciones como Amazon, Microsoft y Alphabet lanzaron recientemente programas de “soberanía digital”, ofreciendo servicios de infraestructura a Estados y entidades privadas, lo que Barbosa y Grohmann (2024) describen como “soberanía como servicio”, es decir, la manera en que las Big Techs buscan cooptar los sentidos de la soberanía digital. En ese caso, esas empresas argumentan que una “nube local” sería soberana solo por estar almacenada en servidores nacionales, aun permaneciendo bajo su propiedad. Se trata de un vaciamiento político del concepto, que se ha ido extendiendo por diferentes esferas.

Antes de avanzar en la discusión sobre soberanía digital, es fundamental revisar las disputas históricas en torno a la propia noción de soberanía. El concepto posee una trayectoria larga y compleja, tradicionalmente asociado a la autoridad suprema e incuestionable del Estado

sobre su territorio y su población. El pensamiento político clásico, tal como lo articularon autores como Maquiavel, Hobbes y Bodin, posicionaba la soberanía como absoluta, centralizada e indivisible, estableciendo al Estado como el lugar de la autoridad última, en contraste con instituciones competidoras como la Iglesia medieval (ALMEIDA, 2011). El siglo XX reformuló estos entendimientos en el contexto de la posguerra. La creación de organizaciones multilaterales, como la Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU), institucionalizó un modelo de soberanía interdependiente, en el que los Estados colaboran para prevenir conflictos. Aun así, dicho arreglo siempre ha estado circunscrito por asimetrías geopolíticas y por la composición desigual de instituciones como el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU y la Organización Mundial del Comercio (ALMEIDA, 2011).

Con la consolidación de las economías digitales, la idea clásica de soberanía quedó nuevamente desestabilizada. Las tecnologías digitales, con su capacidad de hacer circular información, bienes y datos más allá de las fronteras, desafiaron la soberanía territorial y la autoridad estatal. A partir de los años 2000, grandes corporaciones tecnológicas empezaron a dominar las infraestructuras digitales globales, incluidos cables submarinos y centros de datos, mientras ejercen un control sin precedentes sobre la recolección y el uso de datos de ciudadanos.

En ese contexto, la soberanía digital ha emergido como un concepto plural, apropiado y reinterpretado por distintas instituciones. Para los Estados-nación, esta noción ha sido, en gran medida, asociada a la afirmación del control regulatorio sobre infraestructuras, flujos de datos y empresas tecnológicas, además del desarrollo de sistemas nacionales como nubes soberanas y cables submarinos domésticos, en un esfuerzo por reducir la dependencia de corporaciones extranjeras (FIGARO; PAULINO, 2024). En contraste, grupos de la sociedad civil, comunidades indígenas e incluso individuos han movilizad el lenguaje de la soberanía para reivindicar control y autodeterminación respecto a tecnologías digitales, infraestructuras y datos (COUTURE; TOUPIN, 2019).

Otros abordajes académicos, aunque reconocen el papel central del Estado en la garantía de la soberanía digital, proponen repensar el concepto desde la lente del internacionalismo. Rikap *et al.* (2024) conciben la soberanía digital “en un internacionalismo ecológico que rechaza ver la soberanía como un campo de batalla entre países, desatendiendo el hecho de que los gobernantes actuales no son solo Estados poderosos, sino también corporaciones dominantes” (RIKAP *et al.*, 2024, p. 3). Los autores también argumentan que el internacionalismo puede funcionar como antídoto frente a abusos de poder por parte de gobiernos individuales. Estas definiciones, ya sea enraizadas en la defensa del Estado-nación o ancladas en formas de soberanía digital de corte internacionalista, contribuyen a matizar el papel complejo del Estado, así como el contexto geopolítico más amplio.

La soberanía digital debe comprenderse como un concepto relacional, es decir, contingente a los contextos específicos y a las relaciones de poder en juego. Aunque las definiciones anteriores se basan en una aproximación que privilegia el papel del Estado con relación a la sociedad, una perspectiva alternativa destaca formas de soberanía digital enraizadas en movimientos sociales y colectivos de base. Como observan Couture y Toupin (2019, p. 2.315), este abordaje “se utiliza para afirmar la autonomía de los movimientos sociales mediante el control colectivo (y, a veces, individual) de las tecnologías e infraestructuras digitales, y particularmente del poder de desarrollar y usar herramientas”, con énfasis en tecnologías libres y abiertas. En movimientos como el de la “soberanía alimentaria”, que defiende el derecho de los pueblos a controlar sus sistemas de producción de alimentos, activistas conciben la soberanía tecnológica como una práctica de emancipación y resistencia frente al control corporativo y la vigilancia estatal (COUTURE; TOUPIN, 2019).

Couture, Toupin y Mayoral Baños (2024) critican los modelos de soberanía digital centrados en el Estado como inherentemente coloniales, abogando por la necesidad de desprenderse de la propia noción de soberanía digital. Los autores sostienen que tanto la sociedad civil como los grupos indígenas pueden reivindicar formas de soberanía digital

desde abajo, reconociendo, al mismo tiempo, que el propio término es disputado en el interior de esas comunidades. Enfatizan, además, la importancia de valorar las dimensiones culturales de la soberanía, y no solo las tecnológicas. Al complejizar las comprensiones predominantes de la soberanía digital, aquello que podríamos llamar soberanía digital desde abajo, estos autores contribuyen a un marco conceptual más amplio, alineado con una serie de proyectos orientados por comunidades en la economía digital, como el cooperativismo de plataforma (SCHOLZ, 2023), las economías digitales solidarias (RUBIM; MILANEZ, 2024) y los comunes digitales (MURILLO, 2025).

Estas perspectivas enfatizan la necesidad de que las comunidades tengan control sobre las infraestructuras digitales, conectando la soberanía digital a un conjunto más amplio de movimientos de base en torno a la tecnología. Esta reformulación invita a un cambio conceptual —o, al menos, a un suplemento crítico— a los marcos dominantes sobre la soberanía digital, situándola no solo en las capacidades regulatorias de los Estados, sino también en las prácticas de comunidades, movimientos e individuos que reivindican control y autodeterminación en el ámbito digital.

### **Lo “popular” en la soberanía digital**

Una de las maneras de comprender la soberanía desde abajo es a partir de la soberanía popular. Pero definir qué, o quiénes, abarca el término *popular* es una tarea conceptualmente compleja e históricamente contingente. Las formulaciones más antiguas de *demos* (el pueblo), en el pensamiento político occidental, reflejaban estructuras sociales jerárquicas que definían la ciudadanía de forma restringida y opresiva. En la antigua Atenas, frecuentemente celebrada como cuna de la democracia, el ideal participativo estaba fuertemente limitado por exclusiones sistémicas. El *demos* ateniense restringía la ciudadanía y la participación efectiva en los espacios deliberativos a una porción muy pequeña de la población, excluyendo sistemáticamente a grandes grupos como mujeres, personas esclavizadas y extranjeros (BAPTISTA, 2014).

Fue solo en el contexto de las revoluciones burguesas que el término soberanía pasó a asociarse significativamente con el pueblo. Históricamente vinculado a la autoridad de monarcas e imperadores, el concepto de soberanía sufrió una transformación profunda durante esos periodos revolucionarios. La idea de soberanía popular surgió como respuesta, a la vez intelectual y política, a la crisis del derecho divino de los reyes, que legitimaba el poder monárquico como una concesión de origen trascendente. Con el avance del pensamiento ilustrado y los sacudimientos políticos de los siglos XVIII y XIX en Europa, se afianzó la idea de que la autoridad política debía derivar del pueblo, y no de un principio divino o externo. Ese cambio redefinió las bases de la legitimidad política y reposicionó el poder constituyente como perteneciente al propio pueblo (KALYVAS, 2005).

Rousseau (2015) desempeñó un papel central en la formulación de un marco teórico para la soberanía popular. Notoriamente, rechazó la noción de representación política al afirmar que la soberanía no puede ser delegada ni enajenada, pues reside fundamentalmente en la voluntad general —la cual, por su naturaleza, no puede ser representada. Para él, la soberanía era indivisible, inalienable e infalible, residiendo exclusivamente en el pueblo reunido como cuerpo colectivo. Su visión radical de la participación política ejerció una profunda influencia en la Revolución Francesa, especialmente entre los jacobinos, que buscaron implementar un modelo de democracia directa (BAKER, 1990; WOKLER, 2001). Sin embargo, a pesar de la retórica revolucionaria, las revoluciones burguesas terminaron no concretando plenamente el ideal de soberanía popular. Como argumenta Kalyvas (2005), el concepto fue, eventualmente, apropiado por el pensamiento liberal y rearticulado como soberanía nacional, ahora investida en el Estado y ya no en una ciudadanía activamente comprometida. La democracia representativa emergió como el modelo político dominante, marcando un alejamiento decisivo del ideal de participación cívica directa defendido por Rousseau (MANIN, 1997; ROSANVALLON, 2008).

En la teoría democrática liberal moderna, la soberanía popular se reduce con frecuencia a la participación electoral, considerándose el voto como condición tanto necesaria como suficiente para la legitimidad

política. Sin embargo, críticos como Carole Pateman (1970) y Habermas (1996) sostienen que el ideal rousseauiano de compromiso activo de la ciudadanía no puede cumplirse solo mediante votaciones periódicas, sino a través de la democracia participativa, modelo que en la mayoría de las democracias a gran escala sigue siendo más aspiracional que efectivo.

En contraste con las teorías liberales e ilustradas de la soberanía popular, el pensamiento marxista redefine “el pueblo” desde la lente de la lucha de clases. Así, la noción de “pueblo” se identifica prioritariamente con el proletariado, la clase trabajadora cuyo trabajo es sistemáticamente explotado en las relaciones de producción capitalistas (MARX; ENGE-LS, 1969). Esta interpretación se opone fuertemente a las concepciones de la democracia liberal, que tienden a definir “el pueblo” como el conjunto abstracto de la ciudadanía, sin considerar las divisiones de clase. En *La Guerra Civil en Francia* (1993 [1871]), Marx celebró la Comuna de París como una expresión pionera de la soberanía proletaria, en la que los trabajadores asumieron el control directo tanto de la autoridad política como de las estructuras económicas.

Lenin (2011) amplió esa formulación al redefinir la soberanía popular como la “dictadura del proletariado”, una fase transitoria en la cual la clase trabajadora, organizada mediante soviets (consejos obreros), ejerce el poder político directo (NEGRI, 1999). No obstante, ese modelo pronto fue objeto de críticas contundentes. Rosa Luxemburgo (1940), por ejemplo, advirtió que el sistema soviético corría el riesgo de reemplazar la soberanía popular por la autoridad centralizada del partido.

Intelectuales marxistas contemporáneos han revisitado el concepto de soberanía popular para recuperar su potencial emancipador. Sotiris (2017), por ejemplo, la redefine como un proyecto político decolonial y antagonista, fundamentado en la lucha de clases. En su enfoque, el “pueblo” no es una entidad preexistente, sino una formación política construida performativamente mediante luchas colectivas contra la explotación capitalista, el racismo y el neoliberalismo. Así, la soberanía popular surge como una herramienta de resistencia subalterna orientada a la construcción de horizontes poscapitalistas.

Otra contribución importante dentro de la tradición marxista es la de Antonio Negri, con su elaboración sobre el poder constituyente. Para Negri (1999), el poder constituyente es la capacidad colectiva, legítima y creadora, inherente al ser humano; una fuerza que permite la creación de algo nuevo sin derivar de ningún elemento preexistente. Se trata de una potencia equivalente a la propia revolución, que funciona como fuente de legitimidad para democracias, repúblicas y revoluciones. Negri (1999) distingue su concepto de la voluntad general rousseauiana: su poder constituyente se basa en la diversidad, no en la unidad, y no transfiere la soberanía a representantes parlamentarios. Es un proceso colectivo y continuo de autoconstitución, una República constituyente: una figura insurgente que instituye un orden de libertad e igualdad, transformando una base emocional e ideal en una máquina de multitud.

Estas distintas interpretaciones del concepto de soberanía popular se aplican de formas igualmente variadas. Aquí procuramos mostrar cómo la soberanía popular, en todas sus dimensiones multifacéticas, fue teorizada y reimaginada en el contexto particular de América Latina, una región profundamente marcada por movimientos sociales de base y por una concepción emancipatoria (y no peyorativa) de lo “popular”. La noción de soberanía popular tiene vínculos profundos con la ascensión de líderes y gobiernos en la historia latinoamericana, con efectos que perduran hasta hoy. Los movimientos de independencia del siglo XIX invocaron la soberanía popular como principio fundacional, inspirados en los ideales de la Ilustración. Simón Bolívar, símbolo del proceso revolucionario en el continente, abordó la soberanía popular en una serie de discursos, cartas y manifiestos durante la lucha por la independencia, señalando la soberanía del pueblo como base para la construcción nacional (LYNCH, 2006). Ese concepto permaneció vivo en los imaginarios de los movimientos populares y de los partidos políticos de base en décadas recientes, inspirando liderazgos e insurgencias.

A diferencia de otras regiones, en América Latina el término “*popular*” no tiene connotación negativa; por el contrario, refiere a la agencia de las clases populares en las luchas sociales (GAGO, 2017).

Jesús Martín-Barbero (2008) está entrelazado con los medios de comunicación y la cultura, a partir de su noción de mediaciones. Esta perspectiva enfatiza las maneras en que grupos marginados se apropian de medios y tecnologías para negociar las relaciones de poder en la vida cotidiana (SILES; GÓMEZ-CRUZ; RICAURTE, 2022).

El trabajo de Negri (1999) también representó un hito teórico importante para líderes y movimientos emergentes en América Latina durante los años 1990. Citado como una de las referencias teóricas de la Revolución Bolivariana por Hugo Chávez, sus escritos sobre el poder constituyente evidencian el potencial de los movimientos sociales para la creación de nuevas formas de gobierno, de participación popular e incluso de soberanías (BETANCES; IBARRA, 2016). Fue en ese contexto de supresión del poder constituyente por los regímenes neoliberales que gobiernos progresistas ascendieron en América Latina, impulsados por movimientos sociales. Como sostienen Negri (1999) y Azzellini (2016), estos movimientos representan el terreno en el que el poder constituyente no solo se manifiesta, sino prospera, sirviendo como contrapunto a la política institucionalizada. En esos espacios de movilización colectiva el potencial radical del poder constituyente se expresa de forma más potente, desafiando estructuras de poder consolidadas y anticipando futuros democráticos alternativos.

En este sentido, los movimientos sociales construyen sus propias nociones de soberanía popular basadas en luchas prácticas e interpretaciones de sus realidades. Estas concepciones, aunque no siempre se alineen con los marcos teóricos establecidos, tienen gran importancia, puesto que la propia teoría se funda en la materialidad de esas prácticas. En Brasil, por ejemplo, el concepto adopta formas variadas: soberanía alimentaria, como en la Reforma Agraria Popular defendida por el Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra (MST); soberanía energética, articulada en los procesos de producción industrial propuestos por el Movimiento de los Afectados por Represas (MAB); y soberanía popular sobre la minería, expresada en el control de las tasas de extracción y de los territorios permitidos para la actividad, como propone el Movimiento por la Soberanía Popular en la Minería (MAM) (PENIDO; CAROLINO, 2020).

El concepto de soberanía popular aún está poco explorado en la literatura sobre soberanía digital, con escasas discusiones teóricas profundas. No obstante, los movimientos sociales ya vienen construyendo este concepto en la práctica. Según el Núcleo de Tecnología del MTST (2023), la soberanía digital popular es la capacidad de las comunidades marginadas para modelar y controlar autónomamente la tecnología en sus luchas emancipadoras. Esta concepción rechaza el modelo corporativo y prioriza tecnologías desarrolladas por y para movimientos sociales, vinculando el acceso digital a objetivos políticos más amplios. La verdadera soberanía, así, exige la democratización de la producción y del uso de la tecnología para enfrentar desigualdades y promover transformaciones sociales.

Las trayectorias históricas y teóricas de la soberanía popular revelan un concepto constantemente disputado, reformulado y reapropiado. Sea concebida como legitimidad electoral liberal, autogobierno proletario o poder constituyente decolonial, la soberanía popular sigue intrínsecamente ligada a las disputas sobre quién constituye “el pueblo” y cómo se ejerce la agencia colectiva. Sin embargo, estos debates se entrelazan inevitablemente con otra cuestión central: si la soberanía se refiere a la fuente de la autoridad política, ¿cómo funciona la autonomía como su contrapunto, o complemento, práctico y teórico?

### **¿Qué es autonomía? perspectivas marxistas, feministas y decoloniales**

A nivel empírico, las nociones de soberanía y autonomía con frecuencia se confunden como respuestas a las crecientes dependencias respecto de las grandes empresas tecnológicas en múltiples ámbitos de la vida. No obstante, la autonomía surge de tradiciones políticas diversas, no siempre alineadas con las teorías dominantes de la soberanía. Aunque hay convergencia en torno a la importancia del control comunitario, quienes defienden el concepto de autonomía suelen expresar visiones más críticas o ambivalentes respecto del Estado.

Como concepto complejo y multifacético, la autonomía puede teorizarse de maneras distintas según los marcos epistemológicos. Adamovsky *et al.* (2011) identifican cuatro dimensiones que atraviesan distintas articulaciones del concepto: autonomía como modo de hacer política y criticar las relaciones de poder; autonomía como diversidad, potencia y posibilidad; autonomía como prefiguración; y autonomía como horizonte emancipatorio. Tales dimensiones reflejan umbrales distintos según las tradiciones político-filosóficas. Así, la autonomía puede referirse a la independencia del trabajo respecto al capital; a la separación de comunidades políticas respecto del Estado; a las relaciones entre clases; o bien a formas internas de diferenciación colectiva (THWAITES REY, 2004).

Para comprender cómo estas diferentes tradiciones se relacionan con los contextos digitales, esta sección explora tres perspectivas clave sobre la autonomía: enfoques marxistas, especialmente el *operaismo* y el marxismo autonomista, además de los escritos de Rosa Luxemburgo; perspectivas feministas, con énfasis en tradiciones anarquistas y en los estudios críticos de la tecnología; y marcos decoloniales e indígenas de América Latina, como los propuestos por los zapatistas. Lo que une estas aproximaciones es una crítica compartida a la concepción liberal de autonomía como individualista, autosuficiente y desvinculada de las relaciones sociales.

Desde el punto de vista del marxismo autonomista, en particular en la tradición del *operaismo* italiano (TRONTI, 1966; WRIGHT, 2017), la autonomía está enraizada en la composición de clase y en la negación tanto del trabajo asalariado como de los circuitos más amplios de la reproducción social (GARLAND, 2010; WRIGHT, 2017). En esa tradición, autonomía se refiere a la capacidad de la clase trabajadora para autoorganizarse contra y más allá del capital y del Estado (ALCOFF; ALCOFF, 2015). Modonesi (2011, p. 28) define la autonomía marxista como “independencia de clase —subjetiva, organizativa e ideológica— y autonomía como emancipación”, enfatizando su dimensión prefigurativa. Rosa Luxemburgo (1976), a su vez, vincula la autonomía con la lucha de clases internacionalista, distanciándose de interpretaciones

nacionalistas de la autodeterminación. En ese sentido, la autonomía es inseparable de la circulación transnacional de las luchas de la clase trabajadora (DYER-WITHEFORD, 1999).

En los estudios sobre el trabajo Woodcock (2016), la autonomía suele referirse al grado de control que los trabajadores poseen sobre el proceso de trabajo. El control gerencial, la vigilancia y la automatización se comprenden a menudo como amenazas a esa autonomía (BRAVERMAN, 1976; WOODCOCK, 2021). En contextos digitales, la autonomía del trabajador puede manifestarse mediante la resistencia, como en las políticas antitrabajo (WEEKS, 2014), o en esfuerzos por recuperar el control sobre las condiciones de producción. Sin embargo, el concepto de autonomía sigue estando poco teorizado en los estudios sobre trabajo digital, donde sus posibles conexiones con el marxismo autonomista aún suelen ser frecuentemente descuidadas.

El enfoque feminista de la autonomía se alinea especialmente con tradiciones anarquistas, destacando las dimensiones relacionales, colectivas e interseccionales de la autonomía. Aquí, la autonomía no se entiende como separación de los demás, sino como enraizada en la ayuda mutua, el cuidado y la autogestión no jerárquica. Como enfatiza Stoljar (2013), las críticas feministas plantean la autonomía como siempre situada socialmente, moldeada por relaciones de poder y sostenida por el cuidado. Esta concepción rechaza modelos verticales de liberación y valora la acción directa y la inseparabilidad entre emancipación personal y política.

En los debates sobre contextos digitales, la autonomía feminista está estrechamente ligada a lo que Toupin e Haché (2015) definen como *infraestructuras autónomas feministas*. Las autoras definen esta noción como iniciativas colectivas, de base y feministas que buscan construir tecnologías e infraestructuras —tanto digitales como no digitales— fuera del control de sistemas patriarcales, capitalistas y estatales. Estas infraestructuras pretenden crear espacios donde valores feministas —como consentimiento, inclusión y solidaridad— puedan florecer, ofreciendo alternativas materiales y simbólicas a las estructuras tecnológicas dominantes. Además, subrayan la importancia de la interseccionalidad y la

inclusión en el diseño y la gobernanza de las tecnologías (COSTANZA-CHOCK, 2020; WOIP, 2025). Esta perspectiva centra experiencias vividas diversas y promueve entornos tecnológicos en que distintos puntos de vista, incluidos los de grupos marginados, informan la creación y el uso de herramientas digitales. Estas iniciativas suelen priorizar prácticas de cuidado, reconociendo que la tecnología está profundamente entrelazada con el trabajo reproductivo y de cuidado.

Por fin, en las perspectivas decoloniales e indígenas en América Latina conciben la autonomía tanto como práctica situada como horizonte político que confronta la colonialidad, el capitalismo y el Estado. Arturo Escobar (2018) define la autonomía como *reexistencia*: una forma radical de interdependencia que afirma la pluralidad de mundos, epistemologías y ontologías. Inspirada en el pensamiento zapatista, esta visión entiende la autonomía como profundamente relacional y territorializada, enraizada en luchas por el derecho de las comunidades a definir los términos de su propia existencia y futuro. La autonomía se presenta así no solo como resistencia, sino como afirmación de la vida, la diferencia y la autodeterminación colectiva.

Fundamentado en esas bases, Escobar (2018) desarrolla una comprensión relacional y territorial de la autonomía. Él la sitúa en prácticas ancestrales y formas de ser-con-relación. La autonomía, en este sentido, está anclada en la ancestralidad y la conexión con saberes y modos de vida que sostienen formas comunales y relacionales de existencia. No se trata de aislamiento ni de independencia absoluta, sino de la capacidad de mantener y regenerar modos de vida anclados en territorios específicos e historias colectivas. El autor subraya que la autonomía no es una condición estática sino un proceso dinámico de diferenciación frente a las lógicas dominantes de dependencia impuestas por el Estado, el capital y la modernidad colonial. Crucialmente, argumenta que no existe en la práctica una autonomía absoluta; debe entenderse como una negociación continua de interdependencia centrada en la creación de redes de apoyo mutuo y coordinación. Como escribe: “la capacidad de las comunidades de crear y mantener su autonomía depende de la coordinación transversal

y hábil de esfuerzos en múltiples niveles, desde lo local y regional hasta lo transnacional” (ESCOBAR, 2018, p. 175). En esta perspectiva, la autonomía es una articulación pluriversal de mundos, realizada mediante redes interculturales planetarias y en conexión con diversas entidades vivas.

En la misma línea, Souza (2016) enfatiza que la autonomía no es solo resistencia a las fuerzas del Estado y del mercado, sino una praxis espacial que reivindica el territorio y reconfigura condiciones materiales mediante formas sociales autogestionadas colectivamente. Este anclaje territorial de la autonomía también resuena en movimientos indígenas y campesinos, donde la autonomía se relaciona con las relaciones vividas con la tierra y los bienes comunes. Como escribe Bravo (2017, p. 126):

No se trata aquí de una declaración de soberanía, sino de autonomía. Aquí, el poder no se construye a partir de la soberanía del pueblo, sino del territorio, ese bien común donde la propiedad privada no tiene lugar, y donde la tecnología desempeña un papel en el fortalecimiento de esa autonomía.

En ese sentido, la autonomía es inseparable de la tierra, de la comunidad y de la toma de decisiones colectivas, y las tecnologías se evalúan según su capacidad para fortalecer esos vínculos.

Además, Bravo (2017) propone una intervención teórica contundente al argumentar que el concepto de soberanía tecnológica debe descolonizarse desde la lente de la autonomía. Al hacerlo, complejiza la relación entre autonomía y soberanía, movilizandolos marcos latinoamericanos y decoloniales —énfasis también presente en los trabajos de Lehedé (2021; 2024). Lehedé destaca, en particular, la noción de autonomía colectiva como respuesta decolonial a los paradigmas dominantes de apertura y soberanía: “La autonomía colectiva se refiere a preocupaciones históricas con la justicia social en América Latina que tomaron forma en paralelo al colonialismo europeo” (LEHUEDÉ, 2021, p. 3). Esa forma de autonomía apunta a alternativas emancipatorias frente al capital, al Estado y a la colonialidad del poder y del saber.

En suma, la autonomía emerge como un concepto multifacético y relacional que no puede reducirse a una sola definición. En las tradiciones

marxistas, feministas y decoloniales, la autonomía se entiende como concepto relacional y modo de autodeterminación colectiva enraizado en luchas, territorios e historias específicas. Se articula mediante prácticas de negativa, cuidado, autogestión y reexistencia, desafiando las lógicas dominantes del capital, del cis-heteropatriarcado, del Estado y de la colonialidad. Mientras las aproximaciones marxistas enfatizan la autonomía como organización de la clase trabajadora contra el capital, las teorías feministas subrayan su inserción en infraestructuras y relaciones sociales, y las perspectivas decoloniales resaltan sus dimensiones territoriales, epistémicas y ancestrales. Juntas, estas aproximaciones no solo ofrecen un amplio conjunto de marcos críticos que confrontan las interpretaciones liberales, sino que además complejizan la relación entre autonomía y soberanía.

### **Soberanía y autonomía: convergencias y especificidades**

Soberanía y autonomía son conceptos íntimamente relacionados, pero no idénticos. Aunque con frecuencia se usan de forma intercambiable, una mayor precisión conceptual puede fortalecer tanto el análisis académico como la formulación de políticas sobre soberanía digital, especialmente desde perspectivas “desde abajo”. La noción dominante de soberanía digital, entendida como *top-down* y liderada por el Estado, difiere claramente de la noción de autonomía, más arraigada en elementos de base. No obstante, optamos por centrarnos en la soberanía popular precisamente para establecer un punto de contacto con la dimensión “desde abajo” de la autonomía. Al hacerlo, buscamos reflexionar tanto sobre los puntos en común como sobre las especificidades de estas dos aproximaciones “desde abajo” de conceptos que pueden ser útiles para movimientos sociales y otros colectivos.

Las principales especificidades de cada concepto se refieren al papel del Estado y a los diferentes niveles de alcance y escala de la agencia colectiva (micro, meso, macro), entendidos como distintas dimensiones de la vida social, que van desde las prácticas locales y formas de organización

hasta cuestiones nacionales y geopolíticas. Estas características pueden conducir a objetivos políticos distintos, tácticas diferenciadas y visiones diversas sobre el poder. Desde esta perspectiva, ambas conceptualizaciones pueden abrir distintos enfoques y posibilidades para pensar las tecnologías y sus relaciones con los contextos digitales. Al mismo tiempo, tanto la soberanía popular como la autonomía comparten visiones semejantes sobre el poder que puede ser reivindicado desde abajo, por comunidades y pueblos, vinculando las tecnologías a los territorios y enraizándolas en el seno de las comunidades.

El Cuadro 1 que sigue presenta las principales características de cada concepto, con base tanto en contribuciones académicas como en ejemplos prácticos de aspectos centrales de la soberanía popular y de la autonomía. En términos generales, los dos conceptos se comprenden mejor como espectros que como categorías fijas. Esto significa que no deben tratarse como nociones puras o rígidamente delimitadas; por el contrario, las realidades que abarcan son mucho más complejas en términos de formas y del proceso de organización (NUNES, 2021).

Como muestra el Cuadro 1, la comparación entre soberanía popular y autonomía revela dos orientaciones “desde abajo” que se solapan, pero que también son distintas en cuanto a la agencia política y la tecnología. La soberanía popular tiende a conectar movilizaciones de base con proyectos más amplios, con frecuencia de escala nacional o geopolítica, mientras que la autonomía privilegia formas de organización territorializadas y localizadas, que se expanden horizontalmente en lugar de estructurarse mediante instituciones centrales. Estas diferencias de escala se reflejan también en los horizontes estratégicos: la soberanía popular busca reconquistar el control popular sobre infraestructuras, mientras que la autonomía pone en primer plano la autodeterminación y la resistencia mediante el desmantelamiento de sistemas de dominación interconectados, especialmente en los niveles micro y meso de actuación.

En la práctica, las concepciones del poder divergen en sus énfasis. La soberanía popular suele combinar autoridad institucional con acción colectiva, reflejando la tensión entre el poder constituyente y la

Cuadro 1 – Soberanía popular y autonomía

Dimensión	Soberanía popular	Autonomía
Origen conceptual/ Marcos teóricos	Ilustración, teoría gramsciana y tradiciones de poder popular latinoamericanas; vinculada al poder constituyente y reapropiada por enfoques decoloniales.	Marxismo autonomista, anarquismo feminista, pensamiento decolonial e indígena latinoamericano (p. ej.: zapatismo).
Relación con el Estado	Frecuentemente se relaciona con el Estado, ya sea para reclamarlo en nombre de las clases populares o para sustituirlo mediante el poder constituyente; puede ser ambivalente u opositora según el contexto.	Frecuentemente escéptico o rechaza el Estado; prioriza la autoorganización, la autogestión, el control comunitario y las políticas prefigurativas.
Escala/Nivel de actuación	Primariamente macro (nacional/popular), pero enraizada en luchas meso y micro; articula movilizaciones de base con proyectos geopolíticos/nacionales/transnacionales más amplios.	Predominantemente micro y meso (comunidad, territorio, redes translocales), con relaciones transnacionales horizontales; la escala macro se aborda mediante estructuras federadas o en red, y no por instituciones centralizadas.
Objetivos políticos centrales	Emancipación mediante el control popular sobre infraestructuras.	Autodeterminación y reexistencia.
Visión de poder	Poder constituyente “desde abajo” capaz de refundar el orden político; frecuentemente combina “poder-sobre” (autoridad institucional) con “poder-con” (acción colectiva).	“Poder-con” basado en ayuda mutua, cuidado, toma de decisiones horizontal; rechazo de la dominación jerárquica; poder relacional y territorial enraizado en la vida cotidiana.
Posibilidades tecnológicas	Control popular sobre infraestructuras digitales; integración de la tecnología en proyectos políticos más amplios.	Desarrollo de infraestructuras tecnológicas autónomas, a menudo de código abierto, feministas o bajo control indígena; énfasis en la gobernanza comunitaria de la tecnología.
Ejemplos	Núcleo de Tecnología del Movimiento de los Trabajadores Sin Techo (MTST); Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra.	Redes autónomas zapatistas; infraestructuras autónomas feministas; redes indígenas <i>mesh</i> ; colectivos <i>hackers/makers</i> .

necesidad de involucrar, transformar o sustituir estructuras políticas existentes. La autonomía, por su parte, tiende a alinearse con la noción de “poder-con” (ABIZADEH, 2023), enraizada en la ayuda mutua, el cuidado y la toma de decisiones no jerárquica, priorizando formas relacionales de poder insertas en la vida cotidiana. Ambas, sin embargo, rechazan los marcos capitalistas de la tecnología y se comprometen con formas tecnológicas orientadas a la transformación social, reivindicando el poder de los pueblos sobre las tecnologías.

Aunque este artículo no tiene por objetivo analizar en profundidad proyectos tecnológicos basados en estas dos aproximaciones, destacamos el Núcleo de Tecnología del MTST en Brasil, que propone una forma de soberanía digital popular, comprendida como el desarrollo y control de tecnologías al servicio del pueblo, moldeadas por los territorios y operando con, además de, contra o a pesar del Estado (NÚCLEO DE TECNOLOGIA DO MTST, 2023; SALVAGNI; GROHMANN; SILVA, 2024). Ejemplos de autonomía tecnológica pueden encontrarse en infraestructuras autónomas feministas, como el colectivo MariaLab en Brasil, y en tecnologías indígenas, como demuestra Alejandro Mayoral-Baños (2021). Estas iniciativas dialogan con movimientos históricos de software libre y culturas hacker, que tienen una trayectoria consolidada en América Latina (FOLETTTO, 2021).

Tomadas en conjunto, estas perspectivas y ejemplos ilustran que soberanía popular y autonomía no son mutuamente excluyentes, sino que operan en trayectorias que se cruzan y pueden nutrirse entre sí, tanto en la teoría como en la práctica. La soberanía digital popular puede entenderse no como mera extensión o apéndice de la soberanía estatal, sino como una reconfiguración fundamental del poder. Mientras la soberanía tradicional ha sido históricamente definida como forma de *poder-sobre*, anclada en la autoridad jerárquica y en la capacidad de imponer control, la soberanía digital popular se legitima mediante una lógica de poder-con. Los matices presentadas aquí proporcionan una base para examinar cómo diferentes tradiciones políticas, escalas de acción y relaciones con el Estado moldean estrategias para reivindicar el poder tecnológico desde abajo.

## Conclusión

Los debates sobre soberanía digital y el control de las comunidades sobre las tecnologías no son homogéneos. Este artículo, al distinguir entre soberanía popular y autonomía, y al reconocer sus convergencias, ofrece un vocabulario más preciso para analizar y fortalecer perspectivas “desde abajo” en torno a las formas en que las comunidades están reivindicando tecnologías digitales. Aclarar estas trayectorias puede ayudar a comunidades, movimientos sociales, responsables de políticas públicas e investigadoras e investigadores a identificar qué enfoques, o combinaciones entre ellos, son más adecuados para determinados contextos, luchas y proyectos tecnológicos. Este artículo busca fomentar nuevos debates sobre las nociones de soberanía y autonomía, no solo como cuestión terminológica, sino como conceptos enraizados en historias y teorías políticas que deben considerarse a la luz de sus contextos históricos, incluso cuando son reapropiados por distintas comunidades.

**Conflicto de intereses:** nada a declarar.

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## Green cultural diplomacy: How environmental values are transmitted through art, heritage, and cultural policy?

### Diplomacia cultural verde: Como os valores ambientais são transmitidos por meio da arte, do patrimônio e das políticas culturais?

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**ABSTRACT:** In the context of the global environmental crisis, there is a growing need to rethink the role of culture as a tool for transmitting environmental values. The relevance of the study is due to the need to integrate environmental issues into the system of international communication, where cultural diplomacy increasingly performs the function of soft power. The aim of the article is to analyze how environmental meanings and values are transmitted through art, cultural heritage, and cultural policy within the framework of green cultural diplomacy. The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines elements of cultural studies, international relations, environmental ethics, and political ecology. The methods of case analysis, narrative analysis, and comparative studies were applied. The study revealed that contemporary art, museum practice, and institutional cultural policy are actively involved in the formation of environmental consciousness in society. A number of international practices are analyzed, including the activities of European cultural institutions, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization programs, and environmentally oriented art projects.

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Special attention is paid to the Ukrainian context, where environmental issues are gradually being integrated into cultural initiatives and strategies. The conclusion is made that green cultural diplomacy is a promising tool for intercultural dialogue and sustainable development. At the same time, the need for institutional support for eco-cultural projects and avoiding the superficial use of environmental rhetoric in the cultural sphere is emphasized.

**Keywords:** cultural heritage; ecological art; environmental awareness; public diplomacy; sustainable development.

**RESUMO:** No contexto da crise ambiental global, cresce a necessidade de repensar o papel da cultura como ferramenta de transmissão de valores ambientais. A relevância do estudo decorre da urgência de integrar as questões ambientais ao sistema de comunicação internacional, no qual a diplomacia cultural desempenha cada vez mais a função de *soft power*. O objetivo do artigo é analisar como significados e valores ambientais são transmitidos por meio da arte, do patrimônio cultural e das políticas culturais no âmbito da diplomacia cultural verde. A metodologia da pesquisa baseia-se em uma abordagem interdisciplinar que combina elementos dos estudos culturais, das relações internacionais, da ética ambiental e da ecologia política. Foram aplicados métodos de análise de casos, análise narrativa e estudos comparativos. O estudo revelou que a arte contemporânea, as práticas museológicas e as políticas culturais institucionais têm participação ativa na formação da consciência ambiental da sociedade. São analisadas diversas práticas internacionais, incluindo atividades de instituições culturais europeias, programas da Organização das Nações Unidas para a Educação, a Ciência e a Cultura (UNESCO) e projetos artísticos com foco ambiental. Atenção especial é dada ao contexto ucraniano, onde questões ambientais vêm sendo gradualmente incorporadas em iniciativas e estratégias culturais. Conclui-se que a diplomacia cultural verde é um instrumento promissor para o diálogo intercultural e o desenvolvimento sustentável. Ao mesmo tempo, enfatiza-se a necessidade de apoio institucional a projetos ecoculturais e de evitar o uso superficial da retórica ambiental no campo cultural.

**Palavras-chave:** patrimônio cultural; arte ecológica; consciência ambiental; diplomacia pública; desenvolvimento sustentável.

## Introduction

The prerequisites for the emergence of green cultural diplomacy were formed gradually. Being a part of the state's soft power, culture has been shaping the global agenda since the second half of the 20th century; it helps strengthen interstate ties and evoke certain values in public consciousness. Environmental diplomacy, in turn, appeared as a sphere of international cooperation for solving environmental problems (KRISHNAN, 2024). Thus, green cultural diplomacy appears as a purposeful activity of states, international organizations, cultural institutions, and artists aimed at promoting environmental values, forming a sustainable ecological worldview, and strengthening environmental awareness through art, heritage, and cultural policy.

The European Green Deal outlines “green diplomacy” as a political priority that has not only an environmental but also a humanitarian and communication dimension (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2019). In March 2024, the European Union (EU) Council, understanding the consequences of the ongoing war in Ukraine for the environment, confirmed the European Union's intention to promote global climate justice through active cooperation with partners, including Ukraine. Against this background, culture does not present a secondary addition to the policy of change but a transmitter of ecological issues and empathy toward nature and the creator of new ethical frameworks (GREEN TRANSFORMATION OF UKRAINE, 2024). This article supports Lane's (2013) position that cultural diplomacy, traditionally seen as a tool for promoting national image, needs to be rethought from the perspective of global environmental responsibility.

Despite the growing interest in the topic of environmental diplomacy in academia, there is a lack of systematic interdisciplinary research that combines the analysis of cultural practices with environmental ethics, political ecology, and international relations. Existing research mostly focuses on the political and legal aspects of “green” diplomacy, while the cultural dimension is presented fragmentarily (ALFRED, 2004).

However, cultural initiatives, such as contemporary art and museum exhibitions, film festivals, or educational projects dedicated to environmental issues, act as a channel for visualizing complex ecological challenges and forging empathy for nature, while the state and cultural institutions become mediators between artistic vision and political initiatives (WINTER, 2021).

In Ukraine, the integration of the environmental aspect into cultural diplomacy is in the initial phase; no clear policy has yet been developed. Russia's war against Ukraine has increased the value of the natural environment as part of national identity. Thus, the object of research in this article is green cultural diplomacy as a complex form of public influence, which is implemented at the intersection of environmental activism, artistic creativity, heritage preservation, and cultural policy. The article aims to examine how environmental values, transmitted through art, cultural heritage, and cultural policy within the framework of modern public diplomacy, form new models of international environmental solidarity.

For the first time in the academic discourse, green cultural diplomacy is analyzed as an element of public diplomacy and a tool for raising global environmental awareness. A distinctive feature is the emphasis on the synthesis of critical art, cultural eco-capacity, and ecological heritage as components of a new cultural ethic. An attempt is made to conceptualize "ecology of restoration" as a potential Ukrainian diplomatic narrative in the post-war context.

## **Theoretical and Methodological Foundations**

Cultural diplomacy is a component of the broader category of soft power, developed by Nye (2004). In the traditional sense, cultural diplomacy involves institutional activities aimed at promoting national culture abroad. However, as Doeser and Nisbett (2018) note, the distinction between state policy and cultural relations gets preferences among contemporary academia, where the last ones are seen as horizontal, often informal, connections between cultural institutions, artists, and activists, existing

independently of government strategies. In his research, Bennett (2018) also considers cultural diplomacy a network ecosystem of cross-border cultural communication. “Green diplomacy” is a concept that emerged in response to global challenges related to the climate crisis, environmental degradation, and resource depletion.

As for the Latin American studies, Gomes (2018) argues that Western conceptualizations of ecology and peace often exclude indigenous cosmologies that emphasize relationality, mutuality, and coexistence with nature. Gomes’s (2018) notion of “peace ecology” calls for integrating ancestral wisdom and indigenous worldviews into ecological communication as forms that reveal non-exploitative ways of being with nature. Similarly, Gama and Costa (2021) highlight culture as a transversal vector in global governance and the sustainable development agenda. Their research thus reinforces the communicative role of culture in shaping the ethical imagination of global citizenship. Cabral and Gehre Galvão (2023) suggest introducing a new Sustainable Development Goal that directly focuses on culture, arts, and communication. They do not view culture as a supporting field but as a strategic space to counter disinformation, stop climate change, and foster symbolic resistance. Considering these perspectives allows for a more pluralistic and decolonial understanding of green cultural diplomacy.

From a communication studies perspective, green cultural diplomacy can also be understood as a system of mediation. Mediation in this sense links symbolic production with reception, transforming cultural artifacts (pieces of art, exhibitions, or heritage sites) into communicative interfaces. The perception of environmental messages depends on the social and cultural context of the audience (CRUZ COSTA ALVES, 2025). Therefore, the effectiveness of green cultural diplomacy lies in the production of artistic or political initiatives and in the dialogical process through which these meanings are interpreted by the public.

The central concept of Soini and Birkeland’s (2014) approach is ecological consciousness, a cultural construct formed through symbols of nature, ideas about beauty, landscape sacralization, and collective memory. The notion of symbolic consumption is crucial for understanding how

environmental consciousness functions within global media and cultural markets (ZHAO, 2021). Environmental aesthetics becomes a form of cultural consumption where ethical values are encoded in lifestyle and identity practices. Green cultural diplomacy appears to mediate between environmental ethics and symbolic consumption, constructing new modes of cultural legitimacy and affective belonging in an era of climate change (NISBETT, 2016; MULSKA *et al.*, 2022).

In modern humanities, ecological art intervenes in ecosocial processes, thus destroying the boundary between the aesthetic and the political (FAUCHER; ZHU, 2025). For example, the practice of posthumanist ecoart questions anthropocentric ideas about nature, proposing new models of interspecies ethics and interdependence. In this connection, the concept of cultural eco-capacity is defined as the ability of cultural systems to respond to environmental challenges, transforming without losing their value integrity (WINTER, 2021). Based on the analysis of international and Ukrainian literature, the research develops a typology of green cultural diplomacy (Chart 1).

Chart 1 – Typology of green cultural diplomacy

Type	Content	Examples	Effect
Articulatory	Formation of environmental sensitivity through art	Ice Watch, Venice Biennale, eco-performances	Aesthetic eco-education, empathy
Representational	Use of heritage, museum practices, eco-tourism	Green museums, Patrimoines en mouvement, UNESCO	Building the environmental image of the state
Transformational	Creating new ethical models and ecosystems of co-creation	Art residencies (Gate 27, Sitka Center, NAHR), community art	Developing new ethical models

Source: developed by the authors.

Articulatory diplomacy uses visual and performative arts to express ecological issues and foster environmental empathy, as seen in Olafur Eliasson's Ice Watch (2014) and eco-pavilions at the Venice Biennale. Representative diplomacy connects environmental protection with

national identity through heritage, museums, and sustainable tourism, shaping a state's ecological image, as promoted by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s "green museums." Transformational diplomacy encourages intercultural collaboration and ethical rethinking of human–nature relations via art residencies, community projects, and local initiatives.

## Results

### Art as a tool for environmental communication

In the modern art environment, new practices are being formed that focus on the theme of human-nature interaction. These include, in particular, ecological performance, land art, installations from recycled materials, and digital projects that visualize climate change or the consequences of human activity. A significant example of an artist working at the intersection of art, science, and ecology is the Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson (2014). His projects, including *Ice Watch*, highlight the fragility of ecosystems and visualize abstract climate processes in public space. In this project, Eliasson (2014) brought blocks of Arctic ice to the centers of European cities (Copenhagen, Paris, and London) so that people could physically touch the consequences of climate change. Another important platform for the presentation of environmental art is the Venice Biennale, one of the most influential international exhibitions of contemporary art. In 2018, many national pavilions, including Lithuania, Finland, and Great Britain, addressed climate threats, changing landscapes, and the problem of waste disposal (IPCC, 2018).

The Lithuanian pavilion "Sun & Sea (Marina)" is an opera about climate change, taking place on an improvised beach, which won the Golden Lion award for the best national exposition (VASILENKO, 2019). Critics noted, "this opera is something different in climate change art... it does not scare but leads to resignation through everyday scenes." *Weather Report: Forecasting Future Exhibition* is a joint project

of Argentina, Sweden, and Finland, presented at the Nordic Pavilion. It showed the coexistence of humans, microbes, and algae to raise awareness of multi-life and climate threats (STEAD, 2019). The 2022 Biennale also focused on posthumanist ideas, including the coexistence of humans and nature, environmental traumatization, and ecofeminist visions (BURLEIGH, 2022).

The Art for the Environment residency at the University of the Arts London, founded by artist Lucy Horta, brings together international artists engaged in projects related to biodiversity, sustainable development, water resources, and human rights. Its partnership programs are implemented in the United Kingdom, Canada, Brazil, Egypt, South Africa, etc. (UAL, 2024). Similar initiatives exist in many European countries. The British Royal Society of Arts took on the project “Arts & Ecology” from 2006 to 2010. It was designed to study the climate crisis through cultural practices and resulted in the anthology publication called “Land Art: A Cultural Ecology Handbook.” This anthology analyzed artistic responses to landscape degradation and ecosystem change (KASTNER *et al.*, 2006). In Italy, the Nature, Art & Habitat Residency (NAHR) has hosted an annual summer program in Valtellina since 2015, bringing together artists, designers, and ecologists to explore bio-inspiration, architecture, and ecosystems. In 2024, NAHR also presented a publication on eco-focused art practices in the United States (MAZZOLENI *et al.*, 2024).

It is worth mentioning Gate 27, the Turkish residency, which focuses on regenerative approaches. These approaches involve creating pieces of art in a sustainable agriculture garden or in collaboration with local communities. Gate 27 conducts open public lectures and workshops (GATE 27, 2023). In the United States, the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology has been inviting artists and researchers to interact with forest, marine, and river ecosystems since 1970. This is a long-term format initiative. It lasts for several months to ensure a deeper immersion in the natural environment and the creation of complex artistic and ecological reflections (SITKA CENTER, 2023).

The article identifies common patterns of modern green art diplomacy. First, most projects are interdisciplinary, combining art with biology, climatology, and urban studies, which shifts art from aesthetics to communication and activism. Second, many initiatives such as NAHR, Sail Britain, and the Sitka Center engage directly with the natural environment, turning it into a participant in the creative process. Third, artistic projects increasingly use participatory formats involving communities and audiences to embed environmental narratives in society. Finally, the visibility of these practices in global media and international exhibitions demonstrates the globalization of environmental art as a tool of public diplomacy (OSTAPENKO *et al.*, 2024).

Despite common patterns in green art diplomacy, the strategies for visualizing environmental issues differ a lot. Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Finland, and others) tend to conceptual installations transmitting the ideas of multi-life and posthumanism, while southern Europe (e.g., Italy, France) often uses narrative-empathic formats (bio-inspiration, anthropocentric metaphors, etc.). In Britain and Canada, visual representations focus on the artistic environment's transformation into a space of sustainable thinking (residences on the water, mobile locations). In countries of the Global South, art, as a rule, performs cultural and social protest functions; it becomes a tool of environmental justice and a way to visualize the traumatic experience of pollution or resource exploitation (POTAPCHUK, 2023).

### **Cultural heritage and the green narrative**

The term “green heritage” denotes a paradigm according to which the conservation of cultural heritage sites is viewed through the prism of environmental sustainability, low-carbon technologies, ethical use of resources, and respect for the relationship between people and nature (JONES; YARROW, 2013). One of the key areas of ecological transformation in the field of cultural heritage is the implementation of the principles of sustainable tourism. This involves adapting tourist routes,

limiting mass access to vulnerable sites, promoting local resources, and informing visitors about environmental challenges (HARRISON *et al.*, 2020; KRYVOVYAZYUK *et al.*, 2025).

Within the framework of the UNESCO program “World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism,” strategies for sustainable management of World Heritage sites are being implemented, which take into account environmental, social, and economic factors. The program emphasizes the importance of the participation of local communities in decision-making, which allows integration of traditional knowledge and environmental practices into global policies (UNESCO, 2012). In France, energy-efficient modernization programs for historic buildings while preserving architectural authenticity are being implemented within the framework of the program “Patrimoine en mouvement” (ARCHITECTURE & PATRIMOINE, 2022). In Germany, the German Archaeological Institute (2025) studies the impact of temperature and humidity fluctuations on historic architecture. In Sweden, the national cultural policy strategy includes requirements for “ecological management” in museums, archives, and architectural monuments (SWEDISH NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD, 2024). The green narrative that links cultural diplomacy with environmental policy embraces preserving individual objects and rethinking heritage as a system that can contribute to the ecological transformation of society (ORR *et al.*, 2021). A comparative analysis of environmentally-oriented practices in the field of cultural heritage allows us to identify a number of key patterns (Chart 2).

The differences between countries lie in the dominant vector of implementation. In France, the emphasis is on architectural modernization with an energy-efficient focus, while Germany emphasizes research on climate impacts on cultural monuments. Sweden, in turn, develops environmental standards for cultural institutions. Another significant distinction is the degree of community involvement. UNESCO programs and models of community-based heritage management actively engage local populations, enhancing the sustainability and adaptability of such initiatives.

Chart 2 – Green practices in the field of cultural heritage

Form of heritage	Objective	Mechanism of influence	Efficiency	Geography
Green museums	Environmental education, reducing carbon footprint	Information programs, green exhibitions, environmental standards	High	Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom
Sustainable heritage tourism	Minimizing impact, local sustainability	Restriction of mass flows, local routes, visual communications	Medium-high	France, Italy, Spain
Restoration with ecological principles	Preserving authenticity with an ethical approach	Energy-efficient solutions, natural materials, reuse	High	France, Germany
Community-based heritage	Strengthening local participation, sustainable development	Integration of traditional knowledge, community participation, adaptation to climate challenges	Medium-high	Latin America, South Asia
Cultural landscapes	Balancing the natural and cultural	Recognizing the interaction between humans and nature, preserving traditional practices	High (with proper management)	Globally (UNESCO sites)

Source: developed by the authors.

### **Cultural policy and environmental diplomacy**

In the 21st century, cultural policy increasingly responds to the climate crisis and sustainable development. A new paradigm of green cultural policy integrates environmental priorities into strategic planning, institutional cooperation, and cultural diplomacy. As UNESCO (2023) notes, culture should become “an integral part of the ecological transition” because it shapes values and promotes environmental awareness. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals,

particularly Goals 11 and 13, guide the rethinking of culture's role in environmental transformation. EU cultural programs reflect this integration. The European Green Deal introduces cultural aspects through green architecture, circular economy, and sustainable urban design (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2019). The New European Bauhaus initiative promotes culture and art in shaping inclusive and ecological cities (EUROPEAN UNION, 2021). Creative Europe explicitly supports environmental projects, requiring contributions to the "green transition" (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2023). Leading institutions such as the British Council, Goethe-Institut, and French Institute implement eco-oriented programs linking art, research, and civic activism (BRITISH COUNCIL, 2021; GOETHE-INSTITUT, 2022; FRENCH INSTITUTE, 2023).

In Ukraine, the issue of ecology is only gradually gaining systemic importance in cultural policy, but there are examples of both state and civic response. Within the framework of the National Economic Strategy of Ukraine until 2030, culture is identified as one of the factors ensuring sustainable development, in particular through the support of innovative environmental practices (CABINET OF MINISTERS OF UKRAINE, 2021). Regional strategies, for example, in Lviv and Zakarpattia Oblasts, include cultural and environmental components: the development of ecotourism, the preservation of landscape heritage, and the support of eco-festivals. GogolFest is one of the most illustrative examples of cultural and environmental initiatives in Ukraine. In recent years, GogolFest has been thematizing the climate crisis, changing resource policies, and sustainable art. The festival implemented projects that combined theatrical productions, environmental installations, and public lectures within the concept of "ecological thinking through art" (RÜSSBERG, 2020; RUDENKO, 2021).

The review of European and national initiatives shows common features in the environmental policies and the activities of cultural and diplomatic institutions (Chart 3).

Chart 3 – Comparison of environmentally oriented cultural policy practices

Art initiative	Objective	Mechanism of influence	Efficiency	Geography
Climate Connection (British Council)	Formation of a global cultural and ecological dialogue	Exchange platforms, partnerships, interviews, art projects with activists	High	UK
New Nature (Goethe-Institut)	Education and interdisciplinary reflection	Residencies, lectures, artistic interventions	High	Germany, EU
Nouveaux Commanditaires (Institut Français)	Artists' participation in the rethinking of space	Artistic commissions from citizens, environmental representation in public space	Medium-high	France
A New European Bauhaus	Eco-urbanism, environmental transformation	Design, architecture, culture as part of urban planning	Medium	EU (focus on urbanism)
Creative Europe: Culture Cluster	Integration of ecothemes into cultural production	Project selection criteria, financial support for green initiatives	High (in projects)	EU
ГорольFest (UA)	Cultural reflection on climate challenges	Art, installations, lectures, eco-focus in theater productions	High (local level)	Ukraine
Regional cultural strategies (UA)	Ecotourism, preservation of landscape heritage	Cultural events, grants, support for local initiatives	Medium	Lviv and Zakarpattia Oblast

Source: developed by the authors.

The comparative assessment of effectiveness, presented in Chart 3, is based on three interrelated dimensions: institutional impact, public engagement, and transformative potential. Institutional impact refers to the extent to which the analyzed initiative is embedded in national or international cultural policy frameworks (strategic documents, funding, and institutional partnerships). Public engagement reflects the outreach, inclusiveness, and participatory nature of the activity (means of engaging

audiences and local communities in environmental reflection). Transformative potential indicates the ability of the initiative to lead to long-term changes in attitudes, behavior, or cultural norms related to environmental awareness and sustainable practices.

The indicators “high,” “medium-high,” and “medium” were assigned through a comparative content analysis of available reports, project documentation, and expert assessments provided by the relevant cultural institutions. In cases where the observed results were limited to specific projects rather than systemic programs, the assessment reflects contextual rather than structural effectiveness. Therefore, the effectiveness rating in Chart 3 should be interpreted as an analytical one that illustrates the relative scope, coherence, and impact of the practices studied within the broader framework of green cultural diplomacy.

Searching for environmentally oriented cultural policy practices combined a purposive sampling strategy with desk research of European and Ukrainian sources, including reports from cultural institutions, UNESCO, and EU policy documents, and official websites of key cultural diplomacy actors. Additional cases from Ukraine were identified through media archives, open-access cultural platforms, and interviews with local stakeholders. This selection was not intended to be exhaustive; it prioritized initiatives that clearly integrated environmental goals into their cultural or diplomatic programs, demonstrated continuity of implementation, and provided publicly available evidence of results.

## **Discussion**

While the institutionalization of green cultural diplomacy has advanced in the countries outlined above, the situation is significantly different in developing and low-income regions. In many parts of the Global South, environmental and cultural diplomacy is constrained by economic instability, weak institutional infrastructure, and asymmetric flows of cultural resources and funding. As postcolonial communication scholars have emphasized, global cultural programs often reproduce hierarchies

of power, where models of sustainable development and environmental ethics are exported from the North without adequate adaptation to local epistemologies and socio-economic realities (DELOUGHREY, 2011).

However, diverse practices are emerging in the Global South, such as community eco-art projects in Latin America, indigenous cultural diplomacy in Oceania, or environmental heritage initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa. These initiatives typically operate through grassroots networks, informal alliances, and artistic activism rather than formal institutions, reflecting different understandings of what “green” diplomacy might mean outside of Eurocentric frameworks (GRAHAM; TIFFIN, 2016). In this sense, the global dialogue on cultural ecology should move toward recognizing these pluriversal models that integrate ancestral knowledge, local narratives, and environmental justice as legitimate and necessary components of global sustainability. There are pressing issues related to the financing and accessibility of green cultural diplomacy initiatives. Limited financial resources often lead to the elitism of certain cultural projects, concentrating participation in privileged institutions or international networks (GRAHAM; TIFFIN, 2016). This dynamic can unintentionally exclude local actors and communities, even when their participation is crucial for ecological transformation.

Thus, a country’s political orientation largely determines the priorities of green cultural diplomacy. Changes in government programs, ideological preferences, or international agreements can support the redirection of funding flows and the reevaluation of which forms of green culture are considered politically relevant (WEARING *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the institutional sustainability of green cultural diplomacy depends on economic factors and a complex of political will and ethical frameworks that guide cultural policy. Addressing these challenges requires greater transparency in resource allocation, inclusive participatory mechanisms, and cross-sectoral partnerships.

While most European countries develop top-down institutionalized approaches to green diplomacy, the Ukrainian model evolves as a hybrid, combining local initiatives, mobile formats, and adaptability to military

conditions. Despite limited resources and the challenges of war, Ukraine demonstrates intensive activity at the level of communities, artistic communities, festivals (GogolFest), regional programs, and intersectoral initiatives. In this context, the basis for the Ukrainian model of green cultural diplomacy is being formed, based on the principles of horizontal partnership, local ecological ethics, and traumatic memory of nature as a victim of war.

A comparative assessment of the approaches embedded in European and Ukrainian initiatives is summarized in Chart 4.

Chart 4 – Approaches to green cultural diplomacy in Ukraine versus the world

Country and initiative	Objective	Mechanisms	Institutionalization	Features
France (Institut Français)	Thinking about public space with an environmental focus	Public art commissions, in partnership with communities	High	Posturbanism, eco-symbolism
Germany (Goethe-Institut)	Climate education	Lectures, residencies, artistic interventions	Low	Interdisciplinarity, educational focus
UK (British Council)	Formation of a global cultural dialogue	Online platforms, joint projects, public discussions	High	Interdisciplinarity, educational focus
Ukraine (GogolFest, Carpathians, communities)	Ecological ethics of restoration	Theater, visual arts, mobile formats	Low	Traumatic environmental experience, micro-practices
Ukraine (Strategies 2030, local initiatives)	Integration of eco-themes into politics	Regional programs, eco-festivals, residencies	Partial	The potential of a hybrid model

Source: developed by the authors.

In the context of the full-scale war in Ukraine, environmental issues acquire philosophical significance. The destruction of ecosystems

exposes nature's vulnerability as a silent victim of human conflict and reflects the historical marginalization of the natural world. For centuries, nature has been treated as an external resource for exploitation, reinforcing the divide between humanity and the environment. This instrumental view has impeded sustainable development as a cultural and ethical transformation rather than a purely technocratic process (OSTAPENKO *et al.*, 2024). The Ukrainian experience of ecological trauma can be a turning point for rethinking environmental diplomacy through the prism of shared vulnerability and shared responsibility. Combining vertical and horizontal approaches can ensure the institutionalization of environmental action and the emergence of cultural frameworks that support ethical transformation at both local and global levels.

Thus, the suggested concept of restorative ecology takes on a broader meaning: it envisages recovering post-war consequences and overcoming the legacy of alienation that has shaped modernity itself. This multidisciplinary initiative in the field of cultural diplomacy would unite countries with similar experiences of post-war environmental transformation, in particular the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), Central Europe (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary), and the South Caucasus (Georgia and Armenia). This platform can become a unique platform for:

- Collective development of new cultural and ecological narratives based on the traumatic experience of environmental losses;
- Development of formats of “culture of co-recovery” through joint festivals, mobile exhibitions, art residencies, and educational programs;
- Research and archiving of environmental damage caused during conflicts as a basis for diplomatic initiatives and international law;
- Support of cultural and artistic initiatives in regions that have suffered ecocide, including ecological heritage as an element of reparation;
- Formation of an “Eastern European narrative of sustainable peace,” where ecological responsibility appears as a central humanitarian category.

This platform would differ by the ecological thinking integrated into post-war reintegration, where cultural diplomacy forms the ethical framework of new partnerships. The concept of “restorative ecology” transforms the ecological discourse from utilitarian to symbolic-cultural: the environment is thought of not only as a resource, but also as a carrier of collective memory, a witness to violence, and a potential space for reconciliation. Ukraine, as a state that has experienced a large-scale eco-catastrophe as a result of war, can initiate this platform, demonstrating a new approach to foreign policy, where instead of “export identity,” the model of transnational eco-solidarity dominates. The idea of the Restorative Ecology Platform is currently still in the conceptual design stage, being developed through academic collaboration and pilot cultural initiatives. The project currently has no permanent institutional funding, but preparatory discussions are ongoing with partner organizations and cultural foundations to secure international support for its future implementation.

## Conclusions

The article explores how green cultural diplomacy contributes to the transmission of environmental values through art, heritage, and cultural policy, and reveals its potential as a soft power tool in the global context of sustainable development. Drawing on Paulo Freire’s (2005) understanding of consciousness as a dialogical and experiential process, it cannot be imposed or entirely shaped by external influences. Rather, it emerges through reflection, experience, and critical engagement with the world. In this sense, cultural diplomacy does not create ecological consciousness but facilitates a space for awareness raising and collective reflection, enabling individuals and communities to reconsider their relationship with nature.

From a communication and educational perspective, it is therefore more accurate to speak of awareness raising than of its “formation.” Awareness involves dynamic interpretation and personal transformation, influenced by diverse social and cultural repertoires. Cultural and artistic initiatives can inspire, inform, and mobilize. However, their impact

depends on how audiences perceive and reinterpret these messages in their lived realities. Recognizing this distinction strengthens the participatory and dialogic dimension of green cultural diplomacy and prevents its impact from being reduced to one-directional persuasion.

The discussion field identified a number of challenges that affect the effectiveness of green cultural diplomacy: the risks of superficial environmental populism, the lack of institutional support, the limited duration of projects, the need for ethical standards, and interagency coordination. At the same time, the prospects for intercultural environmental interaction remain extremely relevant, especially in the context of the global climate crisis. The scientific novelty lies in the comprehensive theoretical justification of green cultural diplomacy as a new direction of cultural policy that combines environmental ethics, artistic practice, and transcultural communication in the context of the climate crisis. The proposed concept of “ecology of restoration” can become the basis of Ukrainian cultural contribution to the formation of international environmental diplomacy.

In this context, green cultural diplomacy has the potential to serve not only as an effective tool of soft power, but also as an ethical and symbolic framework for shaping a new environmental consciousness. Its successful implementation requires interdisciplinary approaches, cross-sectoral collaboration, and the development of a coherent cultural policy that positions culture as a central — not peripheral — component in achieving a sustainable and environmentally responsible future.

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## Modernity comes from the coast: visual conflicts in the city of Salvador/BA, 1916–1926

### A modernidade vem do litoral: conflitos visuais na cidade de Salvador/BA, 1916–1926

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**ABSTRACT:** The article examines how the coastal space — particularly the Atlantic shoreline of the Rio Vermelho and Barra neighborhoods in Salvador, Bahia — emerged as a key element in the city’s modern imaginary, and contributed to shaping a sensitivity that distanced itself from the perceptual and affective regimes of the colonial, slaveholding Salvador. Using photographic images of seaside life published in the magazine *A Renascença* between 1916 and 1926 as primary sources, we conduct an interpretive study inspired by iconology and historic materialism. The analysis shows that the emergence of a modern visual culture in Salvador is closely related to how representations of the sea circulated in weekly print journalism and to the erasure of traces of the city’s enslaved past.

**Keywords:** *image; photography; Salvador/Bahia; Renascença.*

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**RESUMO:** O artigo reflete sobre como o espaço litorâneo, especialmente da orla Atlântica, dos bairros do Rio Vermelho e da Barra, da cidade de Salvador, Bahia, emergiu como um elemento do imaginário moderno da cidade e contribuiu para a construção de uma sensibilidade que se afastava das formas de sentir e perceber da Salvador colonial e escravagista. Tomando as imagens fotográficas da vida litorânea que circularam na revista *Renascença*, entre 1916 e 1926, como fontes de pesquisa, realizamos um estudo interpretativo, de inspiração teórica na iconologia e no materialismo histórico que aponta que a emergência de uma cultura visual moderna em Salvador se relaciona fortemente com o modo como as imagens do mar circularam no jornalismo impresso do semanário e com o apagamento dos vestígios do passado escravagista da cidade.

**Palavras-chave:** *imagem; fotografia; Salvador/Bahia; Renascença.*

## Introduction

*Renascença* was a significant illustrated magazine published in Salvador during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was managed by the Lindemann group, initially known as *Photografia Lindemann*, established by a Swiss family that arrived in Bahia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Featuring an extensive collection of photographs documenting social and everyday events, the periodical distinguished itself in the Salvadoran press for its contribution to visual culture. It played a role in educating readers to observe and engage with urban life, which was framed as civilized and necessary to counter prevailing representations of Bahia as a Black city, a portrayal that, according to the elites of the time, positioned the region as backward within the colonial and slave-owning imagination.

In this visual analysis of the magazine, it was observed that in numerous editions (published between 1916 and 1926), the coastline of Salvador was depicted in various forms, including urban views, individual snapshots and/or photographic reports, as well as through poems, chronicles, and travel narratives. Areas of Salvador such as Barra, Rio Vermelho, Amaralina, and Itapagipe appeared frequently in the periodical. This recurring representation raises questions about the role that these photographs and images of the sea and the city's beaches may have played in shaping the visual culture of Salvador's inhabitants during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The fundamental hypothesis of this study is grounded in Walter Benjamin's (1987) conception of the aesthetic reconfigurations that reproducible techniques introduce to human sensibility. His seminal essay on the work of art is particularly relevant to the phenomenon under investigation, as it addresses the transition from manual image reproduction to mechanized reproduction. Although Benjamin (1987) identifies a range of broad and ambiguous transformations (such as the alienation of authorship, the very notion of authenticity, the material durability and historical testimony of the work, culminating in the loss of aura), this analysis focuses on his observation that these changes indicate

the emergence of new historical patterns of sensibility. Specifically, they reflect a configuration of perceptual habits oriented toward objects that are spatially and humanly closer.

The abundance of landscape photographs significantly reconfigures the relationship with images. How does the experience of the city change as its coastal spaces are increasingly exposed and circulated in the pages of illustrated magazines? What meanings and experiences do these representations convey, given that they become objects not only of lived experience but also of visual enjoyment for the magazine's audience/readers? This discussion can be situated within the two patterns of sensibility identified by Benjamin (1987): one of cult (presence and singularity) and another of exhibition (meaning and fetishization).

The visibility and visibility of the sea emerged from the significance that the coastline assumed as a space for leisure and modern living, closely linked to established notions of health and hygiene. The construction of a maritime space also constituted a visual challenge, as its value is understood in relation to other images, an iconosphere of paintings depicting the coast of Salvador. These images engage in a dialogue with the visual arts tradition, initially produced by European painters and subsequently by Brazilian artists.

Thus, the images of the coastline conveyed by *Renascença* embody a dimension of survival, simultaneously revealing a modern aspect of life in Salvador while evoking the lingering presence of colonial and slave-owning experiences. To explore this issue, selected images of the Salvadoran coastline published in the magazine were analyzed in relation to certain paintings, as well as chronicles and poems also featured in the periodical. The methodological approach was inspired by Aby Warburg's (2015) procedures in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, which involved creating visual series to highlight survivals and ambiguities in the images and, consequently, the tensions that Bahian visual culture confronted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term *nachleben*, introduced by Warburg (2015) and commonly translated as "posthumous life," "afterlife," or "survival," denotes the enduring presence of Antiquity (though historically dead) as

a phantasm that continues to influence later eras. Accordingly, particular ways of capturing bodily movement, which reveal the passions of the soul, persist from the Florentine Renaissance into the photographs of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, constituting what Warburg (2015) identified as a preformulated *pathos* (*pathosformel*).

The very name of the magazine in which the photographs of Salvador's coastline appeared signals this notion of survival: *Renascença* (Renaissance). What form of renaissance is evident in the pages of the weekly? Which values can be discerned in the images it circulated? Do they constitute the ghosts of another era, as suggested by Warburg (2015)? This interpretation is structured around two primary ways in which the maritime space was represented in the periodical: the visual updating of the beaches and the contemplation of the sea.

### **The maritime landscape between the modern and the picturesque**

The modern phenomenon of the sea and the beach developed primarily between the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (CORBIN, 1989). In this context, it is important to recognize that illustrated magazines mediated the relationship between readers and preexisting maritime images, although this mediation occurred differently across various regions of the world. Consequently, although *Renascença's* publishers sought to depict a modern and innovative city through representations of the sea, this process did not unfold linearly, but rather in a dynamic and often contradictory dialogue with maritime visualities and visibilities established in the city's past.

Particularly from the rise of the Enlightenment in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, beaches gradually transitioned from being perceived as unknown and mysterious elements to objects of analysis and reflection, thereby becoming a known domain, controlled and mastered by humans. Consequently, the maritime universe ceased to evoke feelings of repulsion, fear, or aversion, giving rise instead to new sensibilities associated with leisure, recreation, health, and contemplation (CORBIN, 1989).

In the field of visual arts, paintings of seascapes and coastal landscapes played a fundamental role in shaping and educating a particular perception of the so-called natural coastline. From perspectives that were simultaneously romantic and classical, naturalist/scientific, and historical, and under the influence of figures such as Alexander von Humboldt, Jacob Hackert, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, painters, chroniclers, and writers, among other literate actors, traveled extensively to produce drawings, sketches, and paintings. These works sought to re-enchant the sea and beaches, portraying them as exuberant and spectacular (MATOS, 2004).

This movement, driven by Europeans traveling through the Americas and Asia, was central to a process of reinvention and rediscovery of non-European worlds as wild, natural, virgin, and primitive spaces (SÜSSEKIND, 1990; PRATT, 1999). These travelers, equipped with technical-scientific knowledge, assumed the role of classifying and revealing this nature, thereby reaffirming Europe as modern and civilized, while framing the New World as a natural realm to be explored specifically by Europeans, the only people considered capable of appreciating, contemplating, managing, and instructing others about nature, given their established mastery over it.

At least in Brazil, the predominant mode of landscape production was framed through the aesthetic category of the picturesque, which Europeans understood as:

In general terms, this was what William Gilpin advocated: beauty understood through the eyes of a painter, recognizing in the landscape the quality of being suitable for perfect reproduction on a canvas. But what did this beauty consist of? Art in England was based on the pleasures of the imagination, not as coarse as those of the senses and less refined than those of knowledge. It delighted in variety, in the repertoire of images to combine, associate, and fantasize. For the delight of vision, the superior sense in this approach, it was essential to have a variation of impressions and inputs over time. The scenes and their succession needed to possess richness and variety, qualities desired by the eye. The irregularity of forms

and silhouettes, of shadows and textures, constituted the foundation of the picturesque, providing the necessary variety and contrast, as well as effects of light. Alongside the idea that something is picturesque was a decomposition of the observed, recognizing elements that added variety, “diversifying,” or richness, “enriching” it, satisfying that eye made the protagonist, the subject of the clauses and sentences, thirsting for sensations with which to delight (PAZ, 2020, p. 153).

In the case of picturesque seascapes, the painters’ repertoire typically included rocks, plants, trees, the sea, boats, small houses, and people, the latter categorized according to commonly recognized types of an ethnic group or community. Together, these elements constituted nature as visual sensations that “present themselves as lighter, darker, variously colored patches and not a geometric scheme like that of classical perspective” (ARGAN, 1992, p. 18) and “as a source of stimuli to which correspond sensations that the artist clarifies and transmits” (ARGAN, 1992, p. 18).

In various ways, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, traveling artists/scientists, relying on visual representations, idealized the nature of the

Figure 1 – Near Bahia, 1835



Source: Ouseley (1852).

Figure 2 – Rugendas, Johann Moritz. São Salvador, c. 1827



Source: Bueno (2004, p. 48).

Americas. In their conceptualization of landscape, they sought to capture “the singularities of the regional physiognomy, representative individuals of a given society, in short, everything that allows the construction of a typical identification of a country or region” (DIENER, 2008, p. 71):

They contributed to constructing the picturesque America by evoking, more or less consciously, the procedures that had led to the creation of *the grand tour* stereotypes. Their journeys through very different lands and their contact with other peoples imposed on them constant decisions about what should be incorporated into their records, and what should be interpreted as truly symptomatic and representative of the identity of these places and their inhabitants (DIENER, 2008, p. 72).

Before the advent of photographs in magazines, painting established a mode of perceiving the coastline that extended beyond its function as a site for leisure activities. These landscapes reflect a perception of

the sea that is both serene and intense. Moreover, such images not only document the perspective of foreigners on the city but, more importantly, constitute a means through which this group related to Salvador. In this sense, both the paintings and the act of observing these regions effectively shaped the spatial experience of foreigners. The spaces designated for leisure and residential purposes in Salvador were thus informed by what these visitors saw, and failed to see, through mental and pictorial representations.

Alongside paintings, photographs played a fundamental role in shaping these contemplative and sensorial landscapes. Like the painters, most photographers of the period were foreigners. In this regard, the photographic views adhered to “the canons of romantic painting and landscape painting of grand panoramas, hence the use of large-format plates, which were the most suitable for this type of photography, as they produced a result close to painted views and panoramas” (MAUAD, 2004, p. 6).

Figures 3 and 4 clearly illustrate the relationship between the paintings and the photographs. In these images, as in the paintings, Barra and Rio Vermelho are depicted with a particular perspective, framing, lighting, and distribution of planes that, to some extent, adhere to the conventions of the picturesque landscape tradition.

Figure 3 – Porto da Barra, c. 1903



Source: Salvador Antiga (2025).

Figure 4 – Rio Vermelho region by Gaensly & Lindemann c. 1890



Source: Ferrez (1988).

Unlike paintings, photographs occupy different spaces due to their enhanced capacity to reproduce reality (BRIZUELA, 2012). In addition, the development of new production and marketing techniques reduced costs, expanding the audience for these images to a scale potentially unattainable for paintings, although still largely limited to the educated elite.

Through both differences and similarities, paintings and photographs dialectically sought to shape an image of the cities' beaches and coastlines as expressions of the modernity and civilization that urban development, including European-inspired buildings and streets, aimed to achieve. They also conveyed a vision of the landscape as "prodigal nature, exuberant wealth, bizarre customs, heterogeneity, mystery and distance imposed on us by the other who gazes at us from the Enlightenment perspective" (MAUAD, 2004, p. 14). In this way, photographs, in some measure,

They belong to the natural world, to that world governed by premodern beliefs about nature. And yet, as a technique that depends on an apparatus and a method conceived thanks to the advances of reason and science, photographs were also the product of the long process of rationalization (BRIZUELA, 2012, p. 15).

**From the suburbs to the neighborhoods of barra and rio vermelho**

these considerations suggest that the transformation of regions such as Barra and Rio Vermelho, from fishing villages to summer resorts and, later, residential areas at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was also constructed alongside the emergence of a modern visuality, which framed these spaces as sites of contemplation and enjoyment. In other words, paintings and photographs shaped the perception of Salvador, privileging certain spaces over others. Spending summers or residing in Barra or Rio Vermelho became linked not only to leisure but also to the capacity *to see* and *be seen*, reflecting the modernity of Salvador rather than the colonial perspective associated with the city center. This dynamic reveals a social-visual dialectic in which the modes of perceiving the city are closely intertwined with the circulation of its images.

The history of the Rio Vermelho neighborhood traces back to a period preceding the founding of Salvador in 1549. Forty years before the arrival of Thomé de Souza, the region experienced its first contact with European colonizers when the ship crewed by Diogo Álvares Correa, known as Caramuru, was shipwrecked. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Rio Vermelho developed into a settlement, providing refuge for part of Salvador's population fleeing the Dutch invasion of 1624. It was not until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the area began to be seasonally occupied by vacationers, who visited primarily for rest and sea bathing, an activity, at that time, largely restricted to a privileged few.

Religious festivals were also held in Rio Vermelho, the most prominent being the devotion to Our Lady of Sant'Anna, initially led by local fishermen from 1824 onward (COUTO, 2004). These festivities generally took place at the end of January and included masses and processions through the neighborhood's streets and squares. Unlike the devotion to Bonfim, which drew summer visitors to the peninsula, it was this social group, composed of families from the Bahian elite, that animated the festival in Rio Vermelho.

Barra was initially known as Vila Velha and later as Vila do Pereira. The first Portuguese occupation occurred there in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (SAMPAIO, 1949; AZEVEDO, 1959). According to Thales de Azevedo (1959), between 1500 and 1536, Vila Velha represented the first site of Portuguese settlement in the process of colonizing Brazil in the territory of Bahia. The settlement, which housed approximately one hundred inhabitants, also included indigenous people and shipwrecked Europeans. Between 1536 and 1549, the region came to be called Vila do Pereira (PESSÔA, 2017). From 1549 onward, with the arrival of the Governor-General of Brazil, Tomé de Souza, the city of Salvador was founded in a different location. Nevertheless, Barra remained occupied and retained its significance in the early years of the new city, serving as a source of construction materials.

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Barra remained primarily inhabited by fishermen, who lived in small houses and operated their boats locally. The region retained a predominantly rural character, contributing to the city's food supply. Similar to Rio Vermelho, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Barra gradually transformed from a fishing village into a picturesque suburb. Initially, occupation by elite families was seasonal, primarily for summer vacations, a process occurring simultaneously with developments in Rio Vermelho, though with greater intensity. Until the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these families rented houses and other rural properties to spend the summer. The practice of summer vacations emerged largely in the context of the Industrial Revolution, when the establishment of a regulated division of time created distinct periods for work and for leisure, rest, relaxation, and the recovery of energy. Consequently, "the separation between city and nature established by the industrial city of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had broader consequences, in particular, the diffuse procedure of taking some social activities outside the city, to places considered suitable for rest and leisure" (SECCHI, 2009, p. 202).

The transformation of a fishing village into a summer resort and later a residential area was largely driven by the gradual presence of foreigners — French, Dutch, and particularly English — who, from this period

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onward, especially following the opening of the ports, began to reside and trade in the city. The British presence introduced specific housing practices that had a profound impact on Barra and Vitória, its neighboring region, which served as the primary residential area for foreigners throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century (ALMEIDA, 1997).

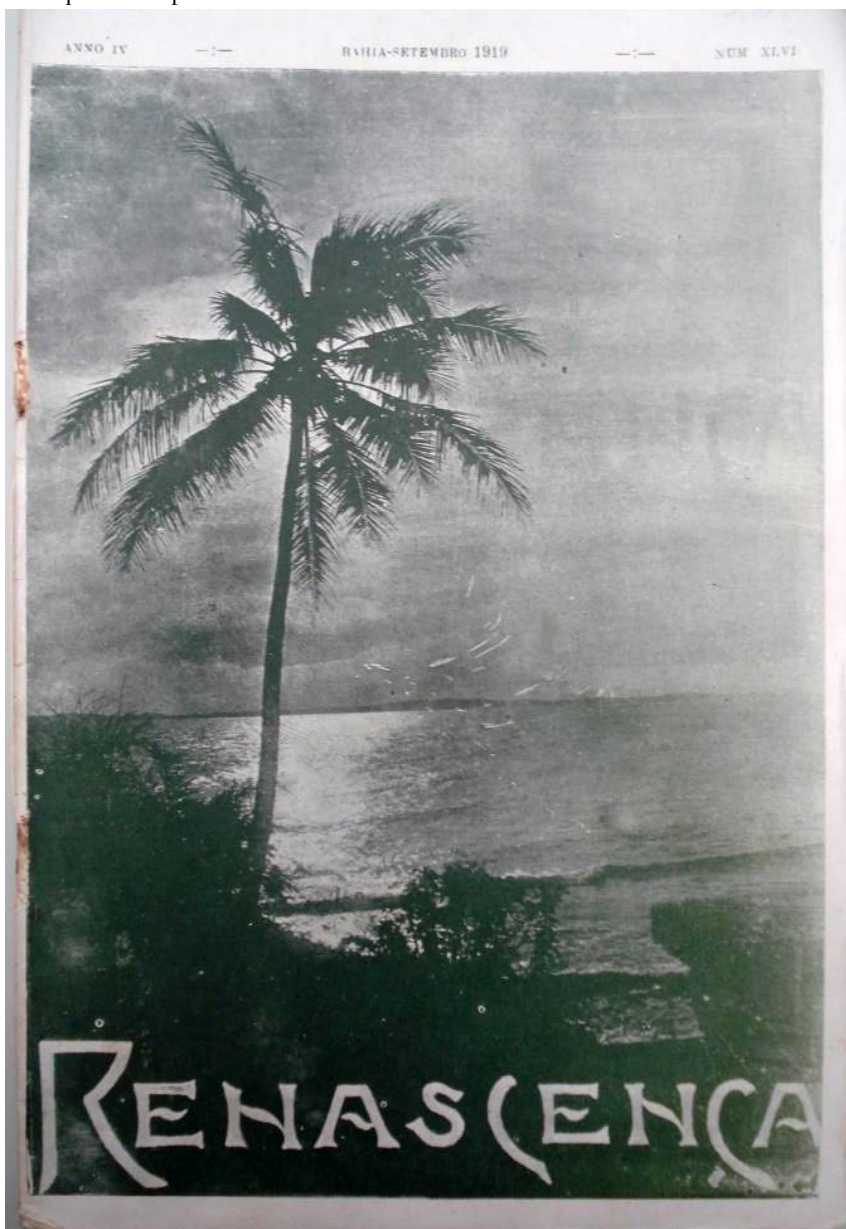
Among the new practices adopted was an emphasis on distinguishing work and living spaces. Unlike the Portuguese and Brazilians, who conceived of the city as a compact entity in which functions overlapped or were adjacent, foreigners, particularly the English, structured urban space more distinctly, defining separate areas for work, leisure, and residence. The selection of leisure and residential sites involved visual considerations, such as the ability to enjoy green spaces and sea views. There was also concern that residential areas should be cool and have clean air, isolated from the work environment, which in Salvador was perceived by foreigners as unhealthy and rife with miasmas due to the city's narrow streets and alleys.

### **The visual update of the beach**

In covers, individual images, and photojournalistic reports, as illustrated in Figures 5 and 6, photogravures depict the sea, the movement of waves crashing against rocks, and the surrounding vegetation, particularly trees and coconut palms. Captions and titles further contribute to the picturesque construction of these images — in fact, the term picturesque is sometimes used to identify and describe specific clichés. Even the sublime appears to be conveyed in these representations. Notably, in Figure 5, the cliché of the undertow is evident, with powerful waves seemingly striking the promenade of the newly constructed Avenida Sete in the Barra neighborhood.

Urban views, such as those depicted in Figures 7 and 8, which aimed to present the coastal regions as modern spaces, also featured prominently in the pages of *Renascença*. In certain images from the series *A Bahia Moderna* (Modern Bahia), the editors, employing the photographs

Figure 5 – Cover of an edition of *Renascença*, featuring a large cliché of a picturesque seascape of Salvador



Source: *Renascença* (1919, p. 1).

Figure 6 – At the bottom of the page, a cliché capturing the phenomenon of high surf recorded on Avenida Oceânica

*Renascença*

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## VENUS ALADA



ARDE fresca de estio, no campo uma planície... agonizava o crepúsculo, lentamente, numa florescência magica de tintas, broslando a paisagem de encanto, de tonalidades violetas, outro e outro morte-côr... Um cheiro forte, capitoso, ascendia da terra, enchia o ambiente repassado dos dolorimentos da hora vespéral, de violinações magoadas de saudade, de sugestões acroamáticas de sereias... A viração muito mansa, sfiagosa e morna, tinha exquísitas caricias de halitos perfumados de amor, de bocças de velludo e arminho, em contactos subtilíssimos que vivificam e matam de goso, inefavelmente... voluptuosamente...

A distancia, solagava, seu eterno queixume, a clara lympha fluminea, como harpas eolias em symphonia do occaso...

Contagiado da avassaladora dormeneia errante, olhos semi-cerrados para melhormente gcsar a doce embriaguez quintessencial, absorvi-me numa infinita suavidade melancolica, senão quando, um bando estuante de mocidade, illuminando tudo em torno com a luz eterna, da eterna belleza feminina, veio divinizar a hora, com o só prestigio da sua presença todo-poderosa!... E, então, senti, profundamente sentida, aquella emoção biblica, em que a terra se communicava com o céu, á feição do sonho de Jacob, e as creaturas, todo-perfeitas, mal rogavam com as plantas a impureza da terra... Bella entre as bellas, e rainha, sobreexcellia aquella de negro trajó, contrastando com a alvura lyrial de sua carnção, em cuja trama, o eloquente sangue circulante, á maneira de um sol mital, imprimia um tom roseo, deslumbrante e imoar.

Vinha, entre andando e voando, rum passo lento, com ondulações de tulipa acariciada pela brisa vespéral, majestosa e radiante de esplendor e graça!

Os olhos inquietos, muito vivos e brilhantes, illuminando tudo em torno com deslumbramentos de luz primaveril, poisavam aqui e ali, na paisagem encantada, como dois passaros de sonho, para melhormente beberem a poesia divinamente esparsa...

A bocca como uma madrugada a desabrochar prestes na aurora do seu sorriso, era como um ciborio que guardava a hostia do seu beijo, muito para divinizar o misero mortal a quem conhece a súpream ventura de commungar-lo... Os braços, da nívea e luminosa brançura das estrellas, sobro o peito, numa attitude hieratica, monial de protecção tinham o que quer que fosse de divino ao proteger aquellos dois passaros formosos dos seus seios que timidamente tremiam ao seu contacto amigo... O seu collo eburneo, tal o collo de um cysne, ornado por um delgado fio de perolas que parecia macular aquelle lyrio de innocencia, tinha os deslumbramentos da alvorada, e a belleza que um artista genial houvesse tallado... Os cabellos diademando a fronte, prestavam-lhe um aspecto imponente de rainha oriental... O seu talhe, enfim, esbelto, garboso, enrythmico era um poema vivo e palpitante de carne, com tentações magnificas de fructo prohibido.

Depois releve o passo, mansamente, harmoniosamente, abriu os braços, como asas que dealbassem um vôo, remigiasssem no ar, num vago espreguiçamento de languor e sorriu...

Admirei-lhe, então, a belleza, na sua mais alta e eloquente expressão muito a ponto de confirmar, exuberantemente, o acerto de Wilde nesta passagem: «a belleza é uma das formas do genio, a mais bella talvês, porque é aquella que não precisa ser provada».

O sol crepuscular com os tentaculos multiplos do poente, cingiu-lhe o corpo, tal si quizesse engasta-lo numa garra de luz!

E, hoje, guardo, commigo, no melhor de mim mesmo, no altar intimo da minha saudade maior, a imagem fulgurante dessa appriçção genial de belleza que é *Venus alada* de minha terra!

Bahia, Julho de 1925.

**PEDRO DE F. FERREIRA**



RRSSACA — Avenida Oceânica (Colleção de A. Adcodato)

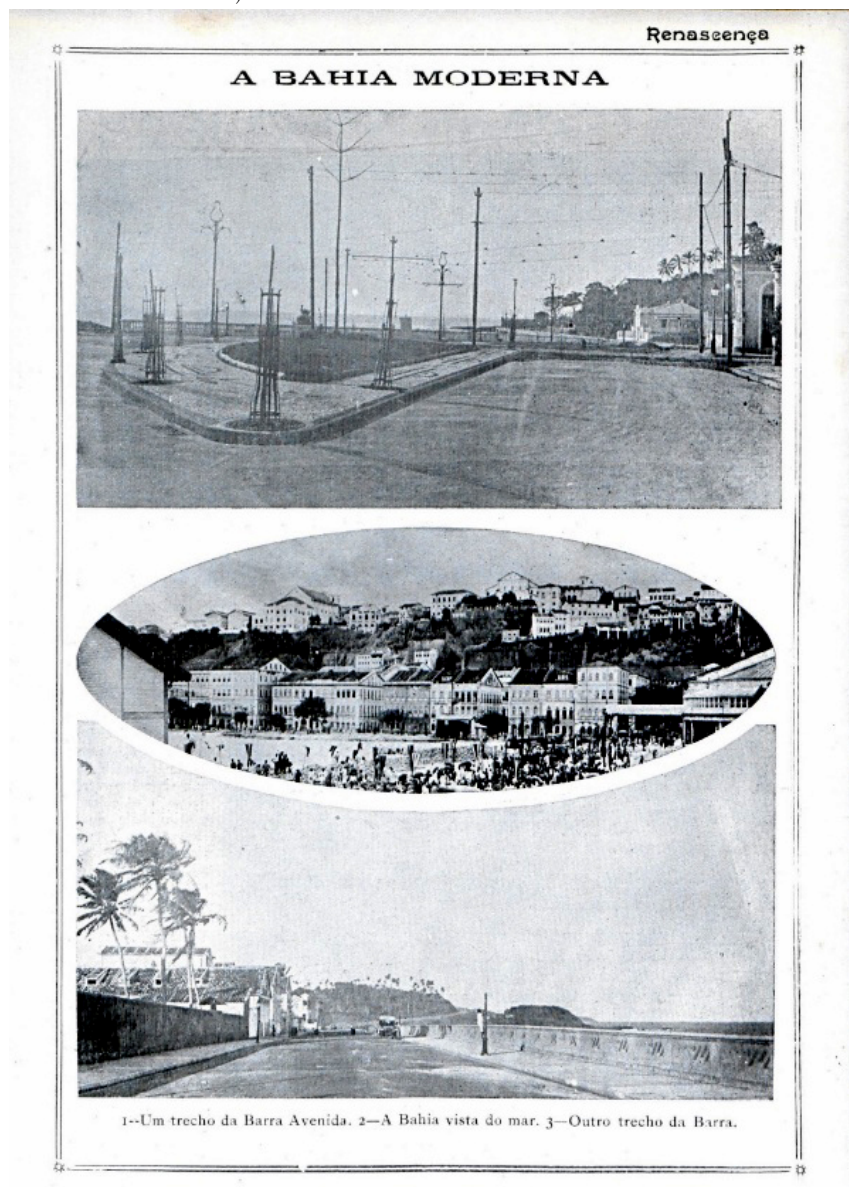
Source: *Renascença* (1925, p. 64).

Figure 7 – In the page footer, a cliché from the A Bahia Moderna series, showing a newly constructed mansion on the under-construction Avenida Oceânica



Source: *Renascença* (1917a, p. 31).

Figure 8 – Page with several clichés from the *A Bahia Moderna* photographic series. The photogravures at the edges of the page show aspects of the Avenida Oceânica renovation, also known as Barra Avenue



Source: *Renasçença* (1916, p. 32).

in a manner similar to postcards, emphasized the physical and material progress of Barra, including its palaces and the Avenida Oceânica itself. This emphasis becomes particularly evident in a small photographic series entitled *Fatos e não palavras* (Facts and Not Words), in which the construction of Avenida Oceânica is presented as an unequivocal testament to the development of both the region and the city.

Thus, while *Renascença* did not visually invent Barra and Rio Vermelho as attractive locations, it played a decisive role in consolidating and popularizing this image. It is important to note that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the circulation of landscape paintings and photographic views, whether individually or in albums, was largely limited to small audiences. Many paintings never circulated in Brazil, serving instead as objects of consumption for Europeans in the “Old World.” Photographs, by contrast, reached a broader audience due to their commercial circulation within the country. Moreover, the postcard format, which became popular in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, further expanded their reach (SCHAPOCHNIK, 1998; VELLOSO, 2001). In any case, the apex of the construction of the sea as an urban landscape, one that ambiguously embodied both modernity and the picturesque, the future and the past, occurred with illustrated magazines. Through the development of a specific editorial profile, that of the variety magazine, these publications often managed to bring together photographs of diverse themes within a single edition or even on a single page, establishing themselves as a central and privileged medium for fostering visual culture.

By featuring images of people on the beach, the magazine contributed to normalizing this cultural practice. Moreover, these images, to some extent, educated social groups, potentially the urban elites and middle classes of Salvador, regarding the value of sociability and cultivated sensibilities, thereby participating in the formation of social identities. In other words, for merchants, teachers, and lawyers, social advancement and inclusion within a civilized elite involved not only consuming the magazine but also engaging with the world of sensations and possibilities it presented, which encompassed being, feeling, and appreciating the coastline.

### **The contemplation of the sea**

This collection of images appears to be the primary means by which the editors of *Renascença* depicted leisure activities in coastal regions. Compared with representations of sea bathing or natural landscapes along the coasts of Salvador and other cities, clichés showing people strolling along the sands and rocks of the beaches, or sitting on benches facing the sea, markedly outnumber images addressing other aspects of the coastline.

A sample of just over thirty clichés related to this theme was assembled. Within this collection, certain trends are observable. The prevailing format was predominantly rectangular, with a few examples in oval or square formats. In terms of orientation, horizontal perspectives predominated, although some vertical-format images were also identified, particularly among the oval and square examples.

In terms of size, most photographs were small to medium, with the number of large images amounting to less than half that of the other formats. Unlike events scheduled for specific dates, walks along the coast of Salvador and other cities were depicted as occurring continuously throughout the year. This may partly explain the predominance of small and medium-sized images, which were distributed across multiple editions rather than concentrated in specific issues, such as those dedicated to Carnival, Christmas, or the Independence of Bahia and Brazil. Although in some pages the editors emphasized that snapshots of everyday social interactions along the coastal regions of Salvador and Bahia were important for the formation of a modern visual culture, they appear not to have applied the same approach to coverage of extraordinary events tied to specific dates.

This observation highlights another aspect of the arrangement and organization of photographs in the magazine. Among the images analyzed for the series, such as Figure 9, slightly more than half were presented alongside other photographs, which at first glance might suggest that they were organized in the form of a photo report.

A project envisioning a hygienic and healthy city in images appears to be reinforced when the accompanying captions are considered. It should be noted that none of the clichés, regardless of size, format, or orientation, contained text. Titles were rare, appearing in only four instances. In three of these, the expression *facing our Anschütz* was used, suggesting that these images were part of a series of snapshots published by the magazine as a form of editorial feature.

Captions appeared to serve as the primary support for the photographic images. While many aimed to document the presence of children and adults on promenades, benches, and rocks along Bahia's beaches, several captions also qualified the scenes portrayed. Terms such as "freshness," "clear," and "joy" were used to describe both the landscape and coastal sociability. To illustrate a series of beach snapshots, the editors noted, as in Figure 9: "It is most pleasant, in the calm stretch we are crossing, to go to Largo do Pharol da Barra to enjoy the freshness of summer, at dusk. This is what the elegant groups photographed above do" (*RENASCENÇA*, 1918, p. 18). On another page, as shown in Figures 10 and 11, two photographs were respectively captioned: "a graceful group enthroned on the cliffs of the Barra Lighthouse to enjoy the delightful phase of sunset by the sea" (*RENASCENÇA*, 1918, p. 11) and "improvised shellfish gatherers filling a stretch of beach in Quintas da Barra with movement and joy" (*RENASCENÇA*, 1918, p. 11). Finally, in Figure 10, the editors described a group of girls and women as "fully enjoying a clear and fresh March afternoon in the picturesque outskirts of Barra" (*RENASCENÇA*, 1918, p. 18).

The purpose of these captions was to convey the experience of being by the sea, its capacity to be contemplated and to engage the senses through smells, wind, the salty breeze, and other elements of the coastal landscape. Thus, the pictorial and textual representations sought not only to document activities on the beaches but also to produce an aesthetic effect for readers. Although individuals might spontaneously visit the shore, the magazine's images functioned as important mediators in fostering coastal sociability, as both clichés and captions aimed to educate readers on the significance of the sea and on how to perceive and feel its

Figure 9 – Example of a sequence of images resembling a photo report, with a title and large photogravures

RENASCENÇA

○ ○ NO PHAROL DA BARRA ○ ○

POSTAES  
FEMININOS

Para a *Silenciosa*

Zelos immotivados, vulgo ciúmes, molestem os seres que foram causa insciente delles e não raro contribuem para que nestes o amor se vá arrefecendo até a completa indiferença. Sómente almas fracas se submettem a essa afronta gerada pelo capricho de um espirito doentio.

(R. Vermelho)      *Agar*

Atenções demasiadas denunciam interesse mascarado. Tudo que é illimitado, transpõe certas e determinadas raías, perde a qualidade de beneficio. Desconfiai do mui muito.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Marion*

A lagrima de Alegria iróica e vivifica, a lagrima de dor suaviza e refrigera, a lagrima da Ira e do Despeito queima e corróe. A lagrima verdadeira, eruida do Prazer ou da Magua, é irmã da Perola e preciosa como esta; a lagrima falsa, oriunda do interesse ou da ambição, é bugiganga fabricada pela industria gananciosa.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Stella Mariz*






E' agradabilissimo, na quadra calmosa que vamos atravessando, ir para o Largo do Pharol da Barra gozar o frescor da viração, ao cair da tarde. E' o que fazem os grupos elegantes acima photogravurados.

Source: *Renascença* (1917b, p. 18).

Figure 10 – Mosaic of snapshots depicting the urban lifestyle of Salvador’s residents. In the cliché at the bottom of the page, the editors highlighted a group of young people “enjoying a clear and fresh afternoon in Barra”



Source: *Renascença* (1918, p. 18).

Figure 11 – Two clichés showing children playing on the rocks at Praia do Farol da Barra

RENASCENÇA

## Dançar...

Dançar... Sabes lá que de tentações diabólicas se retraem, se ajuntam, se enovelam e rolam nos cerebros dos libertinos; o sangue que refluxo, os desejos que se ampliam ou se restringem, sempre, na directriz do coração para despedaçar-lhe a candura, segredar-lhe conselhos galantes, na volúpia única de acordar e desvendiar aos nervos a fúria dos seus sentires?

Poderás, nunca, avaliar a razão, do mystico encanto, inédito, que sentes ao voejar languido duns compassos de valsa, este instinctivo desejo de cerrar as palpebras, e na mesma sensação, ascender, subir, se opre a rodopiar, a valsar, sempre a valsar...

Ignoras, decerto, o cortejo de victos e de miserias que esconde a carne, que se prende aos nervos, que roreja na epiderme e reflue no sangue...

Repara: estes mil e um nadas, essas intimidades que a sociedade, num baile, permite e aprova; estes acarinhamentos, passar de braço pela cintura, íntimos conchegos ao peito, respirações a se cortarem; esses encontros de olhares

a dous palmos, rostos quasi unidos, halitos que se sentem, risos que se trocam...

Troca de impressões, a mais das vezes íntimas, que se avivam, jamais permitirias fazel a com um estranho, em outra parte...

Repellirias sem duvida.

E, no entanto, em tudo isto gostosamente consentes, feliz, por voltear, ouvindo os mais ternos galanteios, as mais insinuantes interjeições que, certo, comprehendes, mas que finges não entender...

A mão que aperta a cintura, o braço que se estende a affagar o corpo, quasi a se confundir com o teu; a dextra que aperta e sente a maciez da tua epiderme em contactos estranhos, mornos de sensualidade, tudo, tudo isso é odioso, ridiculo, nojento...

Causa odio e repugnancia... Entregas-te ao primeiro que te pede e gyras com elle confiante...

Pouco te importa saber quem seja, desde que as linhas do seu «smocking» são elegantes ou que nenhuma ruga perturba o talho do casaco... O rosto apparenta insinuancia e sympathy, os dedos pharoleiam brilhantes e os pés estão fina-



Um grupo gracioso entronizado nos alcantais do Pharol da Barra para gozar a phase deliciosa do cair do sol, à beira mar.



Improvizados marisqueiros enchendo de movimento e alegria um trecho de praia, nas Quintas da Barra.

Source: *Renascença* (1918, p. 11).

presence. In line with this approach, a poem — likely placed intentionally on a page alongside two snapshots of children walking on the rocks at Barra Beach — was designed to generate an aesthetic experience for the reader regarding the perception of the sea. Titled “*Na praia*” (On the Beach), the poem included the following verses:

Dawn and the Petals, the Hill  
Little by little, it rises from the mist...  
Emerging, crowned in a blush of rose

Startled Birds take sudden flight,  
Their songs spilling, filling the sky with light  
Along the shore, the playful sea  
Stacks wave on wave in swift decree.

From foam-whirlpools that frame the view,  
An island rises on the horizon's hue;  
Above, the palms Sway, quiver, and bend

Tracing the air with their white-threaded blend  
Flights of a bird draw near, then flee,  
Appearing and vanishing gracefully

Around me, the world folds close and tight  
Like a lovely nest, a cozy sight;  
Above, the blue shines, pure and deep,  
A sky of radiance, wide and steep.  
Before me, the sea stretches, trembling, undulating

Its back along the horizon, undebating;  
 Beyond, the hill, green and gay  
 With trees, flowers, and melodies at play

In charming chaos, picturesque and free,  
 The rocks line up along the sea...

Over the dawn-lit beach, the hill's thick, cool shade  
 Spills down, challenging the golden sea,  
 Where the sun hurls morning's bright cascade (RENASCENÇA, 1920,  
 p. 22, our translation).

The poem appears to reflect an aesthetic concern, presenting the beach as a picturesque image rich in colors and composed of various elements arranged in graceful disorder, producing pleasurable sensations. Through the use of terminology characteristic of the picturesque aesthetic, it is possible to observe how a mode of experiencing maritime space, predominant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, persisted in the period's imagination. The inclusion of snapshots on the same page as the poem, as illustrated in Figure 12, may represent a strategy for composing a mosaic in which text and photogravure work together to convey the sensation of being on the beach, allowing readers to vicariously experience, like the children on the rocks, the profusion of colors, sounds, and smells described in the poem.

### **Final considerations**

Clichés, texts, titles, and captions appear to operate together in constructing an image of desire. The editors seem to have sought not merely to document the coastline of Salvador but to envision a seafront as an idealized space, tailored for an audience portrayed by the magazine as possessing

Figure 12 – Page with the poem “Na praia”, featuring two clichés showing children on the rocks at praia da Barra

RENASCENÇA

*Lindos efeitos de nossas  
Marinhas — excursão a  
Barra—Cawarão.*



**NA PRAIA**

Vermelha e enorme flor, desabotôa  
A madrugada as pétalas! o oiteiro  
A pouco e pouco avulta do nevoeiro...  
Surge, e de cor de rosa se corôa

A passarada surpreendida vôa  
E canta; o azul inunda o céu inteiro,  
Vê-se na orla da praia o mar fagueiro  
Que ondas sobre ondas, rápido, amontôa.

De turbilhões de espuma que a emoidura,  
Uma ilha cresce no horizonte; em cima  
Palmas ao vento oscilam e e estremeçam...

Bordando os ares com a nitente alvura,  
Vôos de uma ave que ora se aproxima  
Ou foge—mostram-se e desaparecem...

Vejo em torno de mim cerrar-se o mundo  
Como um bello niuho delicioso:  
Em cima, o azul esplendido, o radioso  
Azul de um céu purissimo e profundo.

Em frente o mar, que o trémulo e onduloso  
Dorso pelo horizonte alonga; ao fundo,  
O oiteiro, verde de arvores, jocundo  
De flores, de gorgeios melodioso.

Em confusão graciosa, em pittoresca  
Desordem, junto ás ondas se accumula  
A fila dos rochedos, mar em fóra...

Por sobre o alvor da praia, a espessa e fresca  
Sombra do morro se derrama e a insilla  
No mar de oiro em que o sol despenha a aurora...

VICENTE DE CARVALHO



*Aspecto na  
enseada da  
Barra—  
Pharol*

Source: *Renascença* (1920, p. 22).

refined and sophisticated aesthetic sensibilities, qualities deemed necessary to perceive and appreciate the potential of pleasurable places.

Drawing on Benjamin (1987), it can be argued that the serial repetition of beach clichés — typically in small and medium formats, horizontal orientation, featuring surfboards, benches, rocks, and groups of women and children — established a rhythm of exposure that transformed the beach from an event or cult object into a habitual experience. Following Benjamin's logic of repetition and circulation, accumulation with minimal variation "teaches to see": prescriptive captions such as "freshness," "clear," "joy," and "at dusk" function as anchors of meaning and as sensory markers, converting reading into enjoyment and enjoyment into a normative practice. In this way, the magazine transforms technical reproducibility into a pedagogy of the gaze: by multiplying equivalent images, it neutralizes the exceptional and naturalizes coastal daily life in accordance with ideals of hygiene, distinction, and domesticity.

Conversely, it can be argued that this imagistic and reproducible modernity has not entirely erased its ghosts. Drawing on Warburg (2015), the coastal iconosphere endures as a *nachleben* of nineteenth-century picturesque: the poem "*Na praia*", framing choices (horizon lines, rocky formations, vegetation, foam), and the chromatic and tactile rhetoric resonate with the *pathosformel* of contemplation established by travel painting. This picturesqueness "survives" in printed photography, shaping both the sweetness of the scene and the arrangement of bodies and affections. Accordingly, the modern beach functions as a montage of survivals, invoking the new through modes of feeling inherited from the older visual repertoire.

Finally, one may ask where the communities that historically depended on the sea were located prior to the modernizing vision promoted by *Renascença* in its visual discourse. Indigenous fishing villages, along with Black men and women, descendants of enslaved and/or freed individuals, constituted the original inhabitants of this coastline, yet they are largely obscured by the cultural imagery presented in the magazine's photographs.

These initial inhabitants maintained the closest relationship with the sea and the coastline, a relationship that Benjamin (1987) characterizes as a regime of cultic engagement with the work of art. This is not a sea of contemplation or hygiene, but a sacred sea, providing sustenance and reflecting the natural expression of ancestral relationships. In contrast, the experience of the sea depicted in the magazine's pages presents it as a public policy project, a symbol and index of health and purity for Salvador's white elites — who were depicted as needing to remove their ties and enjoy periodic repose. This perspective emphasizes the demarcation of work and leisure, action and contemplation, reflecting a logic characteristic of modern European thought.

The visual and sensory tension in Salvador's culture emerges from the persistence of the religious regime, which does not disappear but migrates to other areas of the city, particularly the shores of *Baía de Todos os Santos*, a region that would become part of the city's periphery during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Bodies excluded from the modern cultural and visual project were displaced to this area, where they maintained their practices and made them visible through alternative discursive strategies, including dance and popular and religious festivals. This process can be understood, following the frameworks of Paul Gilroy (2012) and Édouard Glissant (2021), as a form of Black modernity — a topic for further investigation in a separate article.

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## Nostalgia, colonial memory, and board games: representations of the Brazilian empire in Brazil: Imperial<sup>1</sup>

## Nostalgia, memória colonial e board games: representações do império brasileiro em Brazil: Imperial

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**ABSTRACT:** This article aimed to understand the role of Brazilian imperial nostalgia — expressed through conservative and wistful views of the colonial past —, as a shaping element in works depicting this period, specifically within the context of board game culture in Brazil. Our goal was to demonstrate how nostalgia frames the experience of Brazilian colonial history by glorifying historical elements encoded through game design, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for the naturalization of the violence inherent in the colonization process. To illustrate this, we examined the Brazilian board game *Brazil: Imperial*, published by MeepleBR in 2021, exploring how it represents themes of colonization and imperialism in Brazilian history. We argue that game elements reinforce Eurocentric and imperialist narratives while sidestepping the more problematic aspects of colonialism, such as slavery and the extermination of Indigenous peoples.

**Keywords:** *board games; nostalgia; memory; coloniality; Brazilian gamer culture.*

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**RESUMO:** Este artigo busca compreender o papel da nostalgia imperial brasileira, em seus traços conservadores e saudosos em relação ao passado colonial, como elemento conformador de obras que retratam esse período, especificamente no âmbito da cultura dos jogos de tabuleiro no Brasil. Nosso objetivo é demonstrar como a nostalgia molda a experiência da história colonial brasileira ao glorificar elementos históricos codificados por meio do *design* do jogo, além de estabelecer as bases para a naturalização da violência do processo colonizador. Para ilustrar isso, analisamos o jogo brasileiro de tabuleiro *Brazil: Imperial*, lançado em 2021, buscando entender como ele representa os temas da colonização e do imperialismo na história do Brasil. Argumentamos que elementos do jogo fortalecem narrativas eurocêntricas e imperialistas, enquanto evitam os efeitos mais problemáticos do colonialismo, como a escravidão e o extermínio dos povos indígenas.

**Palavras-chave:** *board games; nostalgia; memória; colonialidade; cultura gamer brasileira.*

## Introduction

Games, like any other media phenomenon, do not exist independently of society but are intertwined with culture and everyday life. Culture and politics, in their diverse forms, are embedded in projects and practices, which are in turn structured by sets of rules and algorithms. Their signs and symbols are subject to an ongoing feedback loop of translations and prescriptions, carrying normative and power dimensions, as they inscribe action programs, delegate behaviors, and stabilize power arrangements in daily practice (AKRICH, 1992; LATOUR, 1992; VERBEEK, 2005). These dynamics, grounded in systems of rules and the governance of material order, are manifested in design choices within games. Such choices are further shaped by market constraints, regulation, and the production chain, reinforcing the notion that an “apolitical game” is unattainable in contemporary contexts (TRAMMELL, 2022). Recognizing that games are political does not reduce all games to propaganda; rather, it acknowledges that design mediates behavior, prescribes possibilities, and shapes both the experience and the type of subject the system summons, mobilizes, and, to some extent, co-produces.

The gaming industry in Brazil has experienced accelerated growth and increasing integration into the global production and consumption chain, with the country now occupying a strategic position as the largest market in Latin America (CARDOSO *et al.*, 2023). However, this development occurs amid a persistent tension between the adoption of hegemonic production and narrative models — often aligned with cultural patterns of the Global North — and efforts to incorporate local references. This tension reflects the influence of global and hegemonic socio-technical infrastructures that shape modes of production, circulation, and representation. Falcão *et al.* (2021) note that it is manifested in the appropriation of Brazilian historical, mythological, and socio-cultural elements as resources, functioning less as an expression of identity and more as strategic tools in the pursuit of visibility, legitimacy, and integration into the international market.

In this context, representations of the past, national mythologies, or historical themes become fertile sites for the inscription of action programs and the negotiation of worldviews, operating in conjunction with the technical and economic structures underlying these artifacts. When games depict the historical past as a glorious era, they generate a form of nostalgia that simplifies culture and history in favor of stylistic elements, diminishing critical engagement. This fabulation of the past contributes to the perpetuation of ideologies that, in turn, downplay or even erase the violence of colonization, normalizing dimensions of symbolic and physical oppression familiar to Brazilian culture and society. Simultaneously, it reinforces specific power arrangements by transforming historical events into playful elements perceived as neutral and devoid of political tension.

In this context, *Brazil: Imperial*, a game created by Zé Mendes and released in 2021 by the Brazilian publisher MeepleBR, serves as an exemplary case for analysis. First, it is a distinctive object because it both contributes to and emerges from nostalgia. The game combines visual and mechanical elements that produce and stabilize a nostalgic historical framework, portraying the period of the Brazilian Empire as a glorious era of social progress. Second, as a Brazilian game focused on the history of Brazil, it provides a valuable opportunity to examine how media typically represent this historical period and, more importantly, what this relationship — between games and history — conveys regarding cultural heritage, memory, and national identity. Finally, the game achieved critical success in Brazil<sup>1</sup>, being the only Brazilian-themed title to appear on Ludopedia's Top 100 list (2025)<sup>2</sup>. It was published by a nationally relevant company and received predominantly positive reviews and community feedback<sup>3</sup>. *Brazil: Imperial* is also among the few Brazilian games to reach international audiences, having been released

1 Proven success evidenced by the various awards received by the game, listed at <https://ludopedia.com.br/jogo/brazil-imperial>. Accessed on: Aug 5, 2025.

2 Brazilian online forum dedicated to board games.

3 As exemplified, for instance, by <https://covildosjogos.com.br/2021/04/18/papo-do-ladino-e-bloco-do-block-resenha-brazil-imperial> e <https://tabulaquadrada.com.br/brazil-imperial-overview-video-e-review-escrito>. Accessed on: Aug 21, 2025.

in more than six languages. This combination of factors places *Brazil: Imperial* in a privileged position: it is one of the few Brazilian history games recognized as both a commercial and critical success nationwide.

The game is situated at the intersection of contemporary entertainment in Brazil — particularly gamer culture — and extremist political discourses, within the context of a “Brazilian far-right neoliberal nationalism” (IAMAMOTO *et al.*, 2021), a scenario that has attracted and mobilized many members of gamer culture (FALCÃO *et al.*, 2021). It is hypothesized that this environment facilitates the inscription and stabilization of nationalist narratives regarding the colonial and imperial past by reconfiguring historical representations through technical artifacts that diminish or silence dimensions of violence and conflict. In this context, board games function as a socio-technical infrastructure capable of prescribing specific historical frameworks, advancing a conservative agenda by employing nostalgia not merely as a stylistic device but as a counter-revolutionary ideological instrument. This selective reconstruction of elements of Brazilian history reinforces myths that support nationalist rhetoric.

### **Aspects of nostalgia in Brazilian gamer culture**

The emergence of gamer culture in Brazil is closely linked to the country’s technological history and the stratification of social classes. During the 1980s and 1990s, games were particularly significant in the consumption landscape of children and adolescents from economically privileged backgrounds. From the 2000s onward, gaming became a widely recognized form of entertainment, especially following the proliferation of game rental stores — which decentralized consumption — and the reduction in the cost of computers and accessories. These material, social, political, and economic conditions were decisive in shaping the practices surrounding this medium. Understanding the development of gamer cultures in Brazil requires consideration of the medium itself, its codes of use and consumption, and its material, political, and social

contexts. Historical analysis of these arrangements reveals how ideologies and power relations are materialized and stabilized both in the artifacts and in the practices they prescribe.

In this context, it is important to distinguish between casual gamers and those who engage with games as a hobby. While much of board game consumption is casual and unsystematic, a niche of gamers integrates board games into their lifestyle, forming a distinct and highly specific culture (TRAMMELL *et al.*, 2014). This group exhibits behaviors comparable to those observed in digital gaming cultures, including tendencies toward elitism, exaggerated expressions of masculinity, and political extremism (BURRILL, 2008; GOULART; NARDI, 2017; STANG; TRAMMELL, 2019).

Thus, it is relevant to reconsider how playful artifacts participate in the production and circulation of conservative and nostalgic narratives about history — whether recent or more distant. Gamer culture frequently seeks to prescribe specific forms of engagement with the past, relying on devices and design conventions that cultivate nostalgic longing and reimagine history in an idealized and simplified manner (SALTER; BLODGETT, 2017). This phenomenon parallels the ways games engage with the Middle Ages and its associated tropes (YOUNG, 2015), reflecting what Fedriga (2021) describes as “the emotions that connect us with the way we receive the Middle Ages in modernity.” Nostalgia thus asserts itself as a potent cultural and emotional force, framing the past as an unattainable ideal in contrast to the realities of the present (COONTZ, 2000).

This understanding of nostalgia as a mode of reimagining the past is central to this work. The discussion follows Jameson (1992), who conceptualizes nostalgia as a powerful stylistic vector of contemporaneity. According to Jameson, nostalgia manifests less as a return to the historical or institutional dimensions of a bygone period and more as the reproduction of stylistic constructs. The past appears as a collection of images, scenarios, and sounds experienced through a purely aesthetic lens, devoid of implicit historicity. This perspective underpins Jameson’s (1992) notion of pastiche, a practice of stylistic imitation that, unlike parody, lacks

irony, satire, or critical engagement. Understanding pastiche is essential for developing a critique of contemporary cultural products, particularly given that the deployment of such elements results in a political emptying of memory, preventing the past from functioning as a foundation for contextualizing social transformations.

Naturally, this is not the only perspective to consider. In contrast to Jameson, Pickering and Keightley (2006) critique what they regard as a reductionism in prevailing accounts of nostalgia. They suggest that nostalgia can function as a response to what they term “social amnesia,” in which the reification of a construct serves to preserve its existence and continuity. According to these authors, nostalgia should be understood as a plural phenomenon capable of assuming multiple modalities, rather than merely as an aestheticization of the past. In this sense, nostalgia can serve as a resource for social critique, articulating losses, memories, and possibilities for transformation. While Jameson (1992) frames nostalgia as indicative of the political neutralization of memory, Pickering and Keightley present it as a means of reimagining the relationship among past, present, and future.

In the gaming context, this perspective translates into practices that extend beyond a mere return to the past: nostalgia mobilizes emotions and, through the material dimensions of the game, reimagines the relationships among past, present, and future. It simultaneously reconstructs an idealized past and acknowledges its ruptures and ambiguities, creating space for reinterpretation and reiteration from a comparative perspective. This understanding aligns with Boym (2017), who conceptualizes nostalgia as a historical and social emotion capable of being both creative and productive, rather than merely a symptom of loss or alienation. Within the gaming universe, this is evident in the ways stylistic elements frequently reference the past, activating emotional circulation and supporting communities that reinterpret the past in contemporary practices of consumption and belonging (Boym, 2017).

In this sense, nostalgia can be understood as both a strategy and a structure for affective capture, particularly in the ways that emotions

circulate within these products, attaching to signs and aligning bodies around shared repertoires (AHMED, 2004). As a result, certain enactments and performances of the past and memory “stick” within communities, directing attention, fostering belonging, and shaping action. In board games, this process is primarily materialized through design, as exemplified in the analysis of *Brazil: Imperial*. Through this mechanism, specific affective orientations can be produced, at times reenacting an “ideal” past by mobilizing emotions that structure and govern behavior (AHMED, 2004; MASSUMI, 2005).

This line of thought leads to two parallel avenues, which merit elaboration to clarify the objectives of this work. The first seeks to examine the phenomenon described above through the analysis of a specific material element — a board game. The second concerns how the game, as a socio-technical artifact, inscribes and stabilizes historical frameworks that intertwine nostalgia and nationalism, selectively reconstructing an imperial past while minimizing or erasing colonial violence. Through its components, the game prescribes particular modes of affective engagement with history, aligning with what has been described as “a certain nostalgia for the time of the Empire that seems to persist in the Brazilian historical imaginary” (SALLES, 2013, pos. 64).

Adopting the concept of nostalgia as an interpretative framework for *Brazil: Imperial* informs the analysis of the game and situates its production within the political instability that Brazil has experienced since the mid-2010s. While the primary aim is to construct an argument regarding the imperial nostalgia conceived as foundational to the formation of Brazilian society (SALLES, 2013), it is impossible to separate the game’s conception and production from the country’s contemporary conservative resurgence. This resurgence is strongly associated with a nostalgic, nationalist, and militaristic sentiment, reflecting a longing for the various authoritarian regimes that Brazil has experienced throughout its history.

### Board game culture in Brazil

To understand how the mechanical and representational choices of the past are embedded within broader dynamics, it is necessary to situate *Brazil: Imperial* within the structure of the gaming industry in Brazil and Latin America<sup>4</sup>. The country's peripheral position in the global gaming ecosystem is not a recent development. During the 1980s, Brazil cultivated an ecosystem based on cloning and piracy practices, driven both by market reserves and the absence of international intellectual property agreements (FERREIRA, 2020). National companies relied on reverse engineering and unauthorized reproduction of foreign consoles and games to enable local participation, albeit under conditions of legal and technological informality. This context produced a gamer culture dependent on technologies, aesthetic references, and content from the Global North, while simultaneously generating hybrid forms of appropriation and circulation. In subsequent decades, as Ferreira (2025) observes, this asymmetry became entrenched, with the Brazilian industry remaining structurally peripheral, primarily a consumer of games produced abroad and facing economic, technological, and political barriers to the development of a robust domestic sector. This peripheral position is also reflected in the adoption of Eurocentric genres and repertoires, which have been established as hegemonic standards of cultural production.

It is within this context that the concept of coloniality, as proposed by Mignolo (1991), facilitates understanding the persistence of cultural and technological subordination, particularly under the logic of neoliberal capitalism. Mignolo (1991) contends that the implementation of the neoliberal system, alongside the promotion of free trade and globalization, has led to the displacement of indigenous communities and the erosion of traditional cultural practices, contributing to the emergence of a “coloniality”

4 Although it is not possible to establish direct causal relationships between video game and board game cultures in Brazil, both develop within the same sociotechnical environment, which shapes practices of use, circulation, and interaction. This environment shares normative logics that favor the reproduction of certain cultural and political frameworks, including conservative and nostalgic forms of engagement.

— a process by which the cultural and economic practices of the Global North are imposed upon the Global South. The Latin American gaming industry exemplifies this dynamic, as hegemonic patterns of production and representation are presented as universal and internalized, reinforcing historical dependencies. *Brazil: Imperial* emerges from this environment, mobilizing formal and discursive elements that reinscribe a nostalgic and glorified interpretation of the Brazilian imperial past, aligned with these global cultural logics and their accompanying erasures.

The peripheral structure of the industry and the neoliberal logic governing the circulation of cultural goods shape the modes of access, consumption, and formation of local gaming communities. In Brazil, this context is characterized by high prices and a limited number of suppliers. Board games gained popularity primarily from the 2010s onward, coinciding with the establishment of one of the country's largest companies dedicated exclusively to these games: *Galápagos Jogos* (TOLOTTI, 2022). Within the Brazilian market, a clear distinction exists between “traditional board games” and “modern board games,” with the latter preferred by the niche of hobbyist players over the former.

Within the enthusiast community, the term “modern board games” refers to contemporary games developed according to specific design principles — primarily derived from so-called eurogames. According to Woods (2012, pp. 16-17), modern board games — or hobby games — differ from traditional games in that they are manufactured commodities targeted at a specific market niche. These games possess characteristics that can foster cultural formations around their elements, “which reflect both the moment in which they are produced and the identity and recreational choices of the players” (WOODS, 2012, p. 17).

In Brazil, the distinction between traditional board games and hobby games is also linked to price. While classic games can still be purchased for less than R\$100, hobby games often cost two to ten times more<sup>5</sup>.

5 The game *Frosthaven*, by way of example, costs R\$ 2,149.10 on Mercado Livre at the time of writing this article.

This high-price scenario constitutes an important sociocultural marker, delineating those with the financial resources and time to engage with the hobby. Falcão *et al.* (2021), in their study of *Magic: The Gathering* communities, also observed correlations between political opinions within gamer communities and the high monetary cost of entry into the hobby. Although it cannot be definitively stated that the same phenomenon occurs within the board game community, it is evident that similar organizing elements and material conditions shape participation in both contexts.

*Brazil: Imperial*, at the time of its release, gained attention both for its graphic and material quality and for its focus on the Brazilian imperial period, a rarity in the commercial board game market. Initial reception included positive reviews of its design and production, while also prompting critical discussions regarding its representation of historical events<sup>6</sup>. These debates highlight the tension between appreciating the game as a cultural product and evaluating concerns related to its thematic approach.

*Brazil: Imperial* is not unique in engaging with complex historical themes in a problematic manner. The Eurogame genre has a longstanding relationship with colonialist themes (BORIT *et al.*, 2018), often reproducing historical episodes without critical reflection. The acclaimed Eurogame *Puerto Rico* (2002) serves as a classic example: players assume the roles of colonizers on the island, cultivating plantations and controlling buildings through the placement of pieces. Although the game manual refers to these pieces as “colonists,” historically they would more accurately be described as enslaved people, who constituted the primary labor force in that context (BORIT *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, the board game *Mombasa* (2016) has been criticized for its colonialist and racist themes (WINKIE, 2021). In this game, players manage companies

6 On the Ludopedia forum, the topic “Problemas na temática?” was created in April 2021 at [https://ludopedia.com.br/topico/48806/problemas-na-tematica?id\\_post=356230](https://ludopedia.com.br/topico/48806/problemas-na-tematica?id_post=356230), where criticisms of the representation of Indigenous and Black people appeared alongside comments dismissing these concerns.

responsible for the exploration and colonization of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Africa, constructing buildings and collecting resources to replicate mechanisms of historical colonization. The erasure of indigenous peoples' participation in this process aligns *Mombasa* with traditional colonial narratives, in which agency is largely reserved for the colonizers. Comparable portrayals of native populations and colonial processes are evident in *Brazil: Imperial*.

### **Colonialism, eurogames and brazil: imperial**

The analysis proposed in this article is based on the premise that board games — like other cultural industry products — constitute complex cultural texts, composed of systems of rules, material elements, and representations that convey discourses about the world (BOOTH, 2021). These dimensions shape the player's experience and, in this sense, constitute the materiality of the game as a medium. To examine *Brazil: Imperial*, a ludo-textual approach is adopted, combining the reading of rules and material components with the interpretation of the narrative and mechanical meanings embedded in its structure. It is emphasized that the analysis focuses on the object itself, independent of its context of use, that is, outside the act of playing. The emphasis is on the meanings, modes of representation, simulation, and world operations embedded in the artifact, recognizing that technical objects incorporate action programs, prescriptions, and moralities (LATOURET, 1992; VERBEEK, 2005; 2011). In this framework, the aim is to “describe” the object in the sense proposed by Akrich (1992), making visible the inscriptions and delegations embedded in the artifact and the manner in which they are articulated within a nostalgic affective economy that mobilizes a particular conception of Brazil's imperial past.

The analysis was conducted along two main, interconnected axes. The first concerns historical representations, aiming to identify the characters, settings, and events depicted in the game, as well as notable absences, such as slavery and indigenous resistance. The second axis

focuses on mechanics and victory conditions, examining the possible actions within the game, the resources represented, and the progression logic guiding players, with particular attention to how these mechanics naturalize power relations. To operationalize these axes, the rulebook and game components were analyzed, alongside publicly available recordings of gameplay on video-sharing platforms, in order to understand the dynamics emerging from the interaction between players and the system. No ethnographic observations or interviews were conducted; the focus remains on the game as a technical and discursive artifact, rather than on player communities or practices.

To operationalize these axes, the rulebook and game components were examined, alongside publicly available recordings of gameplay on video-sharing platforms, in order to understand the emergent dynamics of interaction between players and the system. No ethnographic observations or interviews were conducted, and the focus remains on the game as a technical and discursive artifact, rather than on player communities or practices.

The analysis begins with the axis of historical representations, focusing on how the game constructs (and omits) certain characters, scenarios, and events, thereby articulating a specific vision of Brazil's imperial past. *Brazil: Imperial* can be played by up to four participants, including a solo mode, and is described as a "Euro X," representing a hybrid of eurogame mechanics and the 4X genre (LUDOPEDIA, 2025). In the game, each player assumes the role of a historical figure associated with the Brazilian Imperial Era, such as Dom Pedro I, Dom Pedro II, and even Napoleon Bonaparte. Each player has an individual board, a unique set of special abilities, and units that can be placed on the main board according to the chosen character. Players compete for territories to gather resources, expand and develop their individual empires, and accumulate victory points to achieve victory.

The game board depicts a map of a region in South America, composed of a hexagonal grid divided into several irregular modules, which can be rearranged to represent different areas, such as the Brazilian

Empire, the Amazon, or the former Cisplatine Province — all of which serve as possible scenarios in the game. During setup, certain hexagons on the map are covered by “exploration pieces.” By exploring the map, players uncover these locations by flipping the pieces to reveal their contents. These pieces can represent, among other things, unknown fauna to be collected or *quilombola* communities, which are removed from the game once explored and utilized for their corresponding bonuses.

By exploring the map without encountering any opposition, players traverse a land that exists in the game solely to be discovered, economically exploited, and conquered. This process involves minimal friction and almost no negative consequences for exploring the unknown and (ostensibly) uninhabited territory. The game offers virtually no depiction of historical resistance to the Brazilian Empire — reflecting the Eurogame tradition of largely avoiding the representation of conflict.

The sole indication of resistance occurs when players uncover a red flag piece on the map, labeled “expedition.” This piece requires players to employ military force to defeat it in exchange for victory points. The only other form of conflict present in the game occurs between the players themselves. This dynamic conveys an empire impervious to rebellions and political struggles, while indigenous peoples and other inhabitants of the land are neither represented as legitimate territorial actors nor depicted as a threat.

This mythology of the virgin, uninhabited land — which, in reality, is occupied by peoples who, according to nationalist ideology, would lack the right to exercise authority over it because they are not considered part of the “national” (ELGENIUS; RYDGREN, 2022) — is common in strategy game franchises such as *Civilization* (DOUGLAS, 2002). In *Brazil: Imperial*, the only potential threats to the establishment of a player’s empire are external, represented by other players; that is, competing empires.

Players actively explore and develop the conquered territory by extracting natural resources and placing building pieces on the map, such as

a Sawmill, Gold Foundry, Agricultural Fields, or Church. Collectible resources include Brazilwood (*pau-brasil*), sugarcane, cotton, and coffee — commodities historically produced throughout the country. Gold and science function as special resources, used to purchase units and construct specific building pieces.

These game mechanics simulate, albeit only partially accurately, the techniques and technologies involved in the historical process of colonization, while disregarding the social consequences of their use. For instance, the workers who cultivated the fields and constructed the buildings in this scenario would historically have been enslaved people. By entirely removing any representation of these laborers and their struggles, the game adopts an institutional perspective on history, rather than critically engaging with the processes and methods depicted. This focus on technical aspects at the expense of the social impacts of colonization is evident throughout the game and is characteristic of the Eurogame genre more broadly.

This erasure of the social and political dimensions of colonization can be understood, in a broader sense, as an effect of an ideological logic characteristic of contemporary neoliberalism, particularly in its cultural and political counter-revolutionary form. This logic reacts to the post-war promises of equality and solidarity, promoting a symbolic return to idealized pasts characterized by order, stability, and progress (BELLO, 2019). Such a strategy relocates historical conflict to the aesthetic realm, transforming memory into a commodity and the past into a moral refuge in response to the uncertainties of the present.

In *Brazil: Imperial*, this cultural counter-revolution is manifested in the nostalgic aestheticization of the Empire as a period of harmony and prosperity. By translating colonial violence into playful and technocratic abstractions, the game reproduces the neoliberal tendency to reenact history as a manageable scenario, where progress and efficiency replace dissent and critique. This operation aligns with the process described by Bello (2019), in which the past is politically neutralized through its transformation into a spectacle of administration and productivity.

Consequently, the imperial nostalgia staged in the game can be interpreted as part of an affective counter-revolution — a project that, under the guise of cultural celebration, reactivates colonial hierarchies and naturalizes the neoliberal framework of governing emotions and memories.

Next, attention is directed to the mechanics and victory conditions, analyzing how possible actions, progression logic, and scoring systems guide player behavior and naturalize particular power relations. During their turn, players may perform one action and move a unit to an adjacent location on the board. Actions include, among others:

- call up/deploy: pay a cost to place a military unit on the board;
- build/construct: pay a cost to place a building piece on the board, generating resources and expanding the player's empire boundaries;
- market: trade resources.

Taken together, these actions convey a narrative of the Brazilian Empire from an executive, institutional perspective. Most actions — such as Build, Renovate, Port, and Market — are related to resource management and territorial development for production. The most distinctive action, not directly tied to resource management, is the Painting action, in which players can acquire portraits of notable historical figures from the country's history. A review of the available characters shows that most — if not all — were supporters of the Empire in some capacity. By choosing to depict only individuals aligned with this stance, the game constructs a homogeneous fictional scenario in which opposition to the Empire and diverse political perspectives are absent. This synthetic *Pax Brasilis* contributes, through nostalgia, to a vision of the past as an ordered, ethnically cohesive period, calmer and less fractured by the complexities and sensitivities of contemporary politics.

Each game unfolds over three “Eras,” with each Era triggered by achieving objectives specified on Mission cards. During setup, players receive two of these cards, and the game concludes when the third Era is reached and victory points are tallied. Victory points are earned through

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activities such as exploring new territories, deploying military units, expanding borders, constructing cities, palaces, farms, and mines, and producing gold, science, and other resources. By structuring activities that generate victory points, the game signals to players which types of actions are deemed appropriate and desirable. It can be inferred that this gameplay reflects historical patterns of imperial behavior: expansion and assimilation, as well as a perception of the Brazilian Empire as an era of administrative efficiency and social development (SALLES, 2013). In practice, players manage the production and utilization of resources as efficiently as possible to foster the cultural, economic, and scientific development of their empire. This development is, in turn, represented by constructions that generate additional resources, bonuses, and victory points.

A central contradiction in the developmentalist discourse embedded in the game's actions is that *Brazil: Imperial* entirely omits any representation of workers, transforming resource production into an abstract process executed according to the orders of the empire's ruler. The game and its rulebook make no reference to enslaved people, slavery, or abolition. Even if the decision not to address these topics is intentional, it remains evident that, thematically and historically, players' actions would have been direct consequences of slavery. By suppressing this fundamental aspect, the game avoids any critique of the imperial period while activating a form of restorative nostalgia, in which aesthetics and mechanics stage a past characterized by order, efficiency, and progress. The "bodyless" flows (orders that "magically" become production, maps, and resources) function as an affective economy that aligns players with a homogeneous, silent, and consensual *Pax Brasilis*. Within this framework, the past appears cohesive and promising, while the present is framed as a loss of this ideal, reinforcing a sense of belonging and guiding behavior. Nostalgia thus operates as a mobilizing device (AHMED, 2004), sustaining a contemporary imaginary that portrays the Empire as unblemished.

## Final considerations

The construction of a nostalgic past in *Brazil: Imperial* occurs through two simultaneous pathways. First, it downplays the most brutal social consequences of colonization by transforming them into matters of mechanics or the production and accumulation of resources. Historically formative processes in the country's development — such as the slave-owning system and the extermination of indigenous peoples — are represented in the game in an abstract or indirect manner, with emphasis shifted toward material and technological infrastructures, such as sawmills, farms, cities, and cannons. These elements are operationalized as seemingly neutral variables within the ludic system. Through this technical translation, the game prescribes a mode of reading the past that privileges material infrastructures and technologies while silencing the social conflicts that enabled them, thereby stabilizing a positive and depoliticized image of the imperial period. No unethical decisions exist in *Brazil: Imperial*, nor are there ethical choices for players to make. Moral deliberation is pre-inscribed in the artifact itself. As Verbeek (2005; 2011) argues, technologies embody moralities: rules, victory conditions, and cost-benefit structures prescribe behaviors and redistribute responsibilities. By defining “progress” as expansion and productivity without visible human cost, *Brazil: Imperial* shifts ethics from the level of player choice to the level of systemic framing. Within this framework, nearly every action appears acceptable, as the mechanics pacify dissent and render conflicts and victims invisible.

The second way in which the game constructs a nostalgic national past, after erasing some of its potential negatives, is by glorifying the aspects considered most positive, presenting them as the game's central features. This is evident in the playable characters, referred to as Monarchs, and in the portrait paintings, which highlight individuals depicted as heroes of the period. These ideals of nobility align Brazil's historical past with an imagined Medieval Europe, evoking tales of chivalry and thereby conferring an additional layer of legitimacy. Another example of

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this emphasis on perceived virtues is the portrayal of the territory now known as Brazil as a vast, uninhabited map, ready to be discovered and developed, rich in exploitable natural resources. Fauna and flora are presented as bonuses to be collected and utilized, reinforcing the representation of the land's abundant resources.

What reinforces the notion that *Brazil: Imperial* presents a reimagined history of the country is its occasionally anachronistic nature. The emphasis on the previously discussed abundance of land, represented by discoverable fauna and flora and the vastness of uncharted territory, suggests an environment more akin to 16<sup>th</sup>-century Colonial Brazil, further reinforced by the presence of cotton and sugarcane resources. This context contrasts with elements such as the monarchs, the painted letters, the text, and the coffee resource, which are associated with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century imperial period. This blending of historical references creates an anachronistic mosaic of Brazil's past, highlighting its appealing features while obscuring its more troubling realities.

Finally, it is worth revisiting certain aspects of how nostalgia operates in the construction of *Brazil: Imperial*. Earlier, we discussed some of the conditions from which this nostalgic principle emerges in the formation of Brazilian society. However, it is important to recognize that the game represents an instrumentalization of nostalgia, which does not follow a simple cause-and-effect trajectory. Beyond this more basic dimension of nostalgic perception, it is also evident, in engagement with the game, that its representation largely aligns with the same fascination that Eco (1986) critiques when analyzing the American perception of the Middle Ages.

The Italian linguist attributes Western culture's enduring fascination with the Middle Ages to the discovery of numerous technologies that, over time, led to Modernity. By analogy, the connection that Brazil maintains with its imperial period resembles the West's relationship with the Middle Ages. The attachment to the Brazilian Empire functions as an imagined return to a time when the nation appeared to be building a free, egalitarian, and fraternal society — provided, of course, that the foundations sustaining this structure are carefully ignored. Conceptualizing

the Empire as an idealized era represents a form of nostalgia rooted in nationalism, one that associates imperial symbols with order, grandeur, and moral cohesion.

This nostalgia activates affective economies (AHMED, 2004) that link pride, security, and the promise of “normality” to signs of the past, shaping how the present is experienced and the future imagined. These aligned affects narrow the horizon of possibility and predispose individuals to accept restorative projects: policies that promise to “rescue” the nation from perceived recent decline while erasing structural conflicts and historical violence. In this process, coloniality functions as a filter for the past, hierarchizing belonging and legitimizing exclusions. The political risk is evident, as this nostalgic fascination fuels conservative ultranationalist mobilizations that frame themselves as defenders of lost progress and past morality, while normalizing silences (regarding workers, racialized populations, and women), and transforming history into a decorative and performative backdrop for agendas opposed to social progress.

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## Media and corruption as a power-knowledge apparatus: an archeogenealogical analysis of political impeachment in Tocantins

### Mídia e corrupção como dispositivo de poder-saber: uma análise arqueogenealógica da cassação política no Tocantins

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**ABSTRACT:** This article analyzes political discourse at its intersection with media discourse, a space in which legal and moralizing discourses intertwine and materialize in the “act of denunciation” corruption in Tocantins, a state marked by the recurrent impeachment of governors. To conduct this examination, the archaeogenealogical method of Discourse Analysis is used, drawing on some of its operational concepts such as statement, discursive formation, apparatus (*dispositivo*), and episteme. The corpus consists of a news piece from G1 Tocantins titled “Dismissals, resignations, and impeachment requests: no governor has completed a term in Tocantins for nearly 20 years,” published on September 4, 2025. The results indicate that corruption is not only a crime, but a power-knowledge apparatus mobilized selectively by the state’s hegemonic forces. Finally, the role of the media is assessed, functioning as an apparatus that amplifies these powers.

**Keywords:** archaeogenealogy; corruption; impeachment; political discourse; Tocantins.

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**RESUMO:** Este artigo analisa o discurso político na interseção com o discurso midiático, espaço no qual os discursos jurídico e moralizante se entrelaçam e se materializam no “ato de denúncia” à corrupção no Tocantins, estado marcado pela recorrente cassação de governadores. Para tal exame, utiliza-se o método arqueogenealógico da Análise do Discurso, por meio de alguns de seus conceitos operacionais tais como enunciado, formação discursiva, dispositivo e episteme. Como corpus, tem-se a notícia do G1 Tocantins, intitulada “Afastamentos, renúncias e pedidos de impeachment: nenhum governador termina mandato no Tocantins há quase 20 anos”, publicada em 4 de setembro de 2025. Os resultados indicam que a corrupção não é somente um crime, mas um dispositivo de saber-poder mobilizado seletivamente pelas forças hegemônicas do estado. Por fim, sopesa-se o papel midiático, funcionando como dispositivo de amplificação desses poderes.

**Palavras-chave:** arqueogenealogia; corrupção; cassação; discurso político; Tocantins.

## Initial considerations

The relevance of the State and its integrity constitute historically constructed and consolidated truths grounded in assumptions that, in contemporary contexts, preclude their full contestation. The notion that the State represents the most complete form of political community was already articulated in the writings of Aristotle (ARISTÓTELES, 2011). Machiavelli (MAQUIAVEL, 2004) emphasized the State's central role in ensuring social order, stability, and security. Hobbes (1997), in *Leviathan*, argued that the State, referred to as the "Leviathan," constituted the only viable means of removing humanity from the "state of nature." Within this epistemic framework, Soares (2025a, p. 63) observes that "the importance of the State, in the popular imagination, for the functioning of societies is undeniable, even if some theoretically contest this assertion." An examination of this contemporary perspective reveals that the perceived truth of the State's relevance, even when situated within the "popular imagination," exerts effects not only at the symbolic level but also on concrete reality; on subjects, fauna, flora, and the broader environment in which life unfolds. From this standpoint, any human action (such as political corruption or State inaction) that disrupts the State's completeness (ARISTÓTELES, 2011) or its order, stability, or security (MAQUIAVEL, 2004) may hinder progress toward removing humanity from the state of nature (HOBBS, 1997).

Thus, the impossibility of contesting the State gains strength when corruption and the inaction of State institutions themselves undermine population well-being and compromise the allocation of resources intended for appropriate social improvements. According to Transparency International (TRANSPARÊNCIA INTERNACIONAL, 2025), based on the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which highlights the relationship between corruption and climate change, Brazil ranks 107<sup>th</sup> in terms of national integrity. Within the country, Espírito Santo occupies 1<sup>st</sup> place as the least corrupt state, whereas Acre ranks 27<sup>th</sup> as the most corrupt. Analysis of the table and map provided by the same source

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indicates that the North region is projected as the most corrupt in the federation (TRANSPARÊNCIA INTERNACIONAL BRASIL, 2022). In this context, Tocantins, although not the most corrupt according to the indices, is discursively positioned within the *epistemic frame of corruption in the North* through media representations. Considering these discursive projections, which aim to approximate reality through indices and statistics, Tocantins ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> in integrity (TRANSPARÊNCIA INTERNACIONAL BRASIL, 2022), appearing (from lowest to highest integrity) as the sixth most corrupt state. Within this scenario, the political landscape of this youngest state in the Brazilian federation is marked by a unique and recurrent phenomenon: instability in the Executive Branch, characterized by the interruption of elected governors' mandates and the resulting need for supplementary elections (FERNANDES; LAURIS, 2025).

More than isolated democratic anomalies, these events appear to constitute a historical regularity in the functioning of the local political system. A superficial observation might attribute this dynamic to the “moralization of public life” and to the fight against “corruption,” understood as an imperative of justice. However, a more precise analysis of this recurring alternation of political actors suggests additional meanings in which removal from office does not result from a neutral judicial process, but rather manifests “knowledge-power” that, through political conflicts, employs new instruments of control and sanction — such as the “discourse of morality” and the “act of denouncing corruption” — operating as mechanisms for restoring “state order.” From this perspective, in which the act of denouncing corruption emerges as an instrument of knowledge-power, the present article employs Archaeogenealogical Discourse Analysis to examine media pronouncements and their historical conditions as an enunciative extension that, through discursive processes, has rendered “corruption” a legitimate and powerful category for political sanction. Furthermore, based on the enunciative surface of the discursive event, the selected news report — “Dismissals, resignations, and impeachment requests: no governor has completed a term in

Tocantins for nearly 20 years,” published by G1 Tocantins on September 4, 2025 — seeks to demonstrate how the denunciation of corruption does not constitute a purely moralizing act.

Thus, this analytical approach is organized into three distinct yet interconnected parts that together support the proposed argument and enable verification of the thesis. In *Theoretical-Methodological Considerations*, the notions of discursive formation, utterance, device, and episteme are presented, along with an explanation of how these concepts are articulated within the analytical procedure. In the section *Analysis: Archeogenealogy of Corruption in Tocantins*, the aforementioned operators are employed in describing and interpreting the power–knowledge relations present in the text under examination. Finally, in *Final Considerations*, the potential contributions and probable developments arising from the analytical process are discussed. Following this brief overview, the text proceeds to the section in which the theoretical-methodological tools are introduced.

### **Theoretical-methodological considerations**

Archeogenealogy is essential for understanding how knowledge, practices, and institutions have been historically constituted through power–knowledge relations (SOARES, 2025a). Using the concepts presented in the previous section, the objective is to map the rules that organize discourses and to reveal the power relations that sustain them. According to Fernandes Júnior and Franceschini (2019, p. 12), discursive functioning “is not delimited by a linguistic or grammatical key, but elects the enunciative function and the concept of utterance as a methodological concept for reading different discursivities.” This approach avoids formalism, which restricts itself to superficial textual analysis; idealism, which disregards the material conditions of discourse production; and reductionism, which, although referencing power and knowledge, does not engage deeply with the analysis of language. It is important to note that, within this archeogenealogical perspective, discourses are events

(SOARES, 2025b) constantly being updated. For Foucault (2014; 2017), discourse, understood as the engine that produces tradition and influence and as a social practice independent of natural laws, establishes order within a given society.

Thus, by treating discourse as a set of rules that defines what is said and what is not said (FOUCAULT, 2014), the utterance is understood as the perceptible materiality of discourse. Consequently, according to Foucault (2017, p. 104), this notion cannot be defined as “a unit of the same kind as the sentence, proposition, or speech act,” but must instead be regarded as a historical and material extension of continuities and discontinuities that unfolds over time, generating relations of meaning in its actualizations (SOARES, 2018). For this reason, Soares (2025a, p. 49) affirms that “the utterance, as an analytical category, differs significantly from its homonym in the linguistic field,” which generally refers to a sentence or speech act visible in a given text. In the context of this analytical approach, the G1 Tocantins news article, taken in its entirety, constitutes an enunciative function (FERNANDES JÚNIOR; FRANCESCHINI, 2019) that must be segmented and examined.

Beyond the utterance, discursive formation represents the domain in which statements converge and the episteme materializes (DELEUZE, 2005). According to Soares (2019), discursive formations operate as a delimited system of possibilities, that is, structured zones of what can and should be said. In the author’s words, discursive formations “can be seen as ‘regions of the sayable’” (SOARES, 2019, p. 47). Within the same perspective, Foucault (2017) asserts that a discursive formation can be identified when regularity and a consistent pattern emerge among a set of statements; even when seemingly distinct, such statements follow the same rules that define their objects, concepts, themes, and modes of enunciation. Thus, discursive formations are understood as systems of dispersion within which an order may be established. Analyzing the discursive formations of a political–media discourse therefore entails tracing the connections between its history (its regularity) and its enunciative present (the image produced of contemporary politics in Tocantins).

By understanding the functioning of utterances and discursive formations, it becomes possible to advance toward an understanding of how devices operate. While discursive formation refers to the set of anonymous and historical rules that define the conditions under which utterances emerge, the device constitutes a broader and more complex concept. According to Veyne (2009, p. 73), devices are “the laws, acts, words, or practices that constitute a historical formation, whether it be science, the hospital, sexual love, or the army.” A device is thus a heterogeneous ensemble that encompasses discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, laws, and scientific utterances. Moreover, the device is not limited to discourse; rather, it brings together diverse elements, both discursive and non-discursive. As Soares (2025b, p. 124) affirms, “the device is one of the regulators of the macrodynamic structure of the utterance.” In this sense, the device occupies a hierarchical position as something more complex than discursive formations, functioning as a network of heterogeneous elements that make the existence of discourse and knowledge possible. In other words, discursive formations constitute the rules governing utterances, whereas the device represents the network that integrates them.

Finally, the notion of episteme, essential for understanding the historical circumstances that enable the emergence of specific forms of knowledge, is approached here as a truth sustained by sets of rules and laws, institutions, and subjects that constitute “corruption” as the trigger that “authorizes” the loss of power, the device that “summons the dismissal.” The episteme helps clarify the constraints imposed on discourse at a given moment; however, it should not be understood as “a unitary, coherent, and closed system” (REVEL, 2025, p. 41) or as a historical force that imposes rigid determination.

Following this brief overview of the theoretical and methodological tools for archeogenealogical analysis, it becomes clear that statements constitute the most basic units, “an atom of discourse” (FOUCAULT, 2017, p. 96). These units are organized by discursive formations (REVEL, 2005). Devices, including laws and institutions, make possible

the maintenance of subjects' positions within society. Finally, the episteme represents the broader relational structure that encompasses the practices of a given era (VEYNE, 2009), revealing how power and knowledge are organized and constrained within a specific historical field (SOARES, 2025a). With this foundation established, the text proceeds to the analysis section.

### **Analysis: archaeogenealogy of corruption in tocantins**

For greater didactic clarity, the archaeogenealogical analysis begins with a brief description of the conditions of production and emergence of the discursive materiality of the news report, "Dismissals, resignations, and impeachment requests: no governor has completed a term in Tocantins for nearly 20 years." The examination then turns to the internal enunciative structures that constitute the materiality of the G1 Tocantins text. After identifying the statements related to corruption, the notions of discursive formation and apparatus will be employed to identify the relations of force and power that summon the recurrence of meanings and formulations concerning corrupt acts within the statement under analysis. Finally, together with the notion of episteme, the goal is to understand how devices and mechanisms of power-knowledge operate through discourses of morality and the establishment of political order, resignifying the meanings of corruption and perpetuating this truth through the set of knowledge and powers that constitute it. It should be noted that italics will be used to present excerpts from the corpus in order to distinguish them clearly from direct quotations. Following these considerations, the analysis proceeds to an examination of the conditions of production in which the news report emerges.

The removal of Wanderlei Barbosa (*Republicanos*) from the position of governor of Tocantins in September 2025, by decision of the Superior Court of Justice (*Superior Tribunal de Justiça – STJ*), constitutes the most recent and emblematic event in a chronic and profound crisis of governability in the state, becoming the central focus of news reporting on local

political instability. The precautionary measure was issued within the scope of Operation Fames-19. The Federal Police investigation uncovered an alleged multimillion-real corruption scheme involving fraud in contracts for the supply of basic food baskets and other emergency provisions (FERNANDES; LAURIS, 2025). Given these circumstances, the report on Wanderlei Barbosa's removal adds to a sequence of impeachments, arrests, and resignations affecting previous governors. The news item therefore not only informs about a new scandal, but also employs the judicial removal as living and current evidence of the absence of ethics in governing and the collapse of the state's political system. Having outlined the conditions of production and emergence of the news report, the analysis now turns to the examination of its discursive materiality.

*Dismissals, resignations, and impeachment requests: no governor has completed a term in Tocantins for nearly 20 years*

The last governor to finish a term was Marcelo Miranda, between 2003 and 2006. Wanderlei Barbosa was removed from office this Wednesday (3).

[...] On Wednesday (3), it was Wanderlei Barbosa's (Republicanos) turn to leave office, following a decision by the Superior Court of Justice (*Superior Tribunal de Justiça* – STJ). He is under investigation for suspected involvement in a scheme to illegally purchase food baskets using public funds during the Covid-19 pandemic. [...] TV Anhanguera and g1 compiled a historical overview of the political situation and the 'turnover' in control of the State Executive Branch in recent years. See who the governors were and how the dismissals, impeachments, and resignations unfolded.

*Marcelo Miranda - 1<sup>st</sup> impeachment* [...] However, the governor was removed from office in 2009, when the Superior Electoral Court (*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral* – TSE) identified irregularities precisely in the 2006 political campaign. In addition to leaving office, Marcelo Miranda was also rendered ineligible for eight years. [...] *Carlos Gaguim* [...] He won an indirect election and remained in office until the end of 2010 but was unable to win reelection and was succeeded by Siqueira Campos. [...] *Siqueira Campos* and his vice governor, João Oliveira (DEM), resigned [...]. The objective was to enable a maneuver that would guarantee the candidacy of the governor's son, Eduardo Siqueira Campos. [...] *Sandoval*

*Cardoso* [...] In 2016, he spent 16 days in the Palmas Provisional Detention Center, accused of procurement *fraud involving earthmoving and asphalt paving contracts*. [...]. *Marcelo Miranda - 2<sup>nd</sup> impeachment* [...] After Sandoval's departure, Marcelo Miranda managed to return to power [...]. But in 2018, the Civil Police seized a plane *carrying R\$500,000 in cash and campaign materials supporting the Miranda-Lélis ticket* in Piracanjuba (GO). The case led to his second impeachment in 2018. He is the only Brazilian governor to be impeached twice while holding the same office, to date. [...]. *Wanderlei Barbosa* [...] Wanderlei assumed the governorship as soon as Carlesse was removed from office in 2021. [...] He is under investigation *for suspected involvement in a scheme that used public funds from parliamentary amendments to purchase food baskets* during the Covid-19 pandemic. Part of the money was allegedly used to build a luxury lodge in Taquaruçu. [...] *Laurez Moreira assumes office* [...] With the 180-day removal, Laurez Moreira became the thirteenth governor of Tocantins, assuming the position on an interim basis (FERNANDES; LAURIS, 2025, our emphasis).

By examining the syntactic-semantic structures that constitute the statement within the G1 Tocantins journalistic corpus, it becomes evident that the text is organized to construct a biogeographical logic (FOUCAULT, 2008) in which corruption is presented as an “endemic” and naturalized problem marked by seasonal regularity (reappearing with each gubernatorial term), while the justice system is depicted as continuously acting to punish and restore order — as seen in expressions such as *removed, investigated, impeachment, identified irregularities, accused*, etc. This logic is produced through a set of micro-statements (DELEUZE, 2005) that collectively constitute the news report. Within this framework, the article's central statement is conveyed in its title: *No governor has completed a term in Tocantins for nearly 20 years*. This enunciative structure not only references a historical pattern but also implicitly associates it with a causal chain involving political instability and, tacitly, illegality and corruption. The sequential listing of events functions as a mechanism for producing effects of evidence, shifting the title from the semantic domain of verifiability or common-sense observation to a domain of demonstrated proof, articulated through the legal discursive formation.

Given the shift from a common-sense lexicon to more specialized terminology, it becomes possible to observe not only the operation of discursive formation but also the mobilization of governmental mechanisms, since each governor's case is presented as a micro-statement with a syntactic-semantic structure of cause and effect. In the case of Wanderlei Barbosa, the statements *was removed from office and investigated for suspected involvement in a scheme to illegally purchase basic food baskets with public funds* justify the removal (punishment) on the basis of an investigation into illegality. The enunciative construction *is investigated for suspected involvement* indicates an ongoing process, thereby validating the action of the STJ as a legal mechanism. In relation to Marcelo Miranda, the statement *1<sup>st</sup> disqualification [...] the Superior Electoral Court (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral – TSE) identified irregularities precisely in the political campaign* presents the disqualification as the TSE's institutional response to those *irregularities*, a legal term that encompasses illegality and misconduct. Thus, both the explicit mention of TSE and the fact that the politician became *ineligible* reinforce the meaning of “application of the law.” In the statement regarding *Siqueira Campos and his vice-governor, João Oliveira (DEM), resigned [...]. The objective was to enable a maneuver*, the resignation, although not a direct punishment, is semantically linked to a *maneuver*, suggesting an illicit strategy intended to circumvent legal procedures.

Furthermore, in the statement *Sandoval Cardoso spent 16 days detained [...] accused of bid-rigging*, imprisonment is presented as the maximum punishment, directly associated with *fraud* and situated in the semantic field of corruption and illegality. From this point onward, although the legal instruments TSE and STJ remain implicit, they are evoked through lexical items such as *accused* and *detained*, which presuppose the exercise of a legal authority responsible for triggering these actions. Finally, in the statement *Marcelo Miranda - 2<sup>nd</sup> revocation [...] the Civil Police seized a plane with R\$ 500,000 in cash and campaign leaflets [...]. The case led to the new revocation, the seizure of the plane and the money*, G1 Tocantins discursively constructs “the material evidence,” that is, the linguistic materiality mobilized to justify the new revocation.

Thus, the discursive formation that constitutes the statement (FOUCAULT, 2017) conveys a tone of objectivity and impartiality. G1 Tocantins, as a media device, presents a *historical* account that reinforces the meanings of event reporting while producing, from the position of an investigating subject, effects of verifiability. The media statement, configured as a sequential list of facts, reproduces the effect of systematizing corruption in Tocantins, attempting to reinforce the notion that institutions (STJ, TSE, and Federal Police) are active and functioning to correct the problem. The statement, therefore, fabricates a health-related logic and sustains the episteme (FOUCAULT, 2017) that the law is being effectively applied and that “justice prevails.” In this sense, corruption is metaphorically framed as a “pathology to be cured by the application of the law,” and punishment constitutes “the remedy.”

After examining the enunciative structures, it is possible to perceive the dynamics of meaning that interconnect words and things, that is, that make it possible to evoke reality through enunciative regularities. From this point, archeogenealogical analysis (SOARES, 2025a) moves beyond the textual surface to trace and map the historical conditions of possibility of discourse. The G1 Tocantins corpus, in light of the provided framework, is not merely a factual report but the materialization of a knowledge-power device operating in the media field, constructing subjectivities. For this reason, the notion of utterance enables the understanding that enunciative materiality is not a simple collection of phrases or propositions. In contrast to its “namesake in the linguistic field” (SOARES, 2025a, p. 49), the G1 Tocantins news report functions as a set of statements that align under the same discursive formation, namely, that of corruption as a moral and individual problem that must be corrected by law.

Furthermore, based on the corpus under analysis, it is possible to observe that the statements about *removals*, *dismissals*, *arrests*, and *fraud* point to things in the world and follow rules of formation that make them possible and coherent. These are statements of the sayable (SOARES, 2019) within the domain of media discourse on politics in Tocantins

(SOARES, 2025a). This discursive formation is what allows the repetition of the theme of corruption, but always from the perspective of punishment and the restoration of order. The G1 Tocantins statement does not question the power structure itself, but only the misconduct of individuals within it.

To understand the existing knowledge-power dynamics, it is necessary to revisit the notion of *apparatus*, since, according to Soares (2025a, p. 87), this is “like an institutional regulatory apparatus, constituting all the practices of power relations in force in the social body”. From this epistemological perspective, the G1 Tocantins media apparatus is not limited to replicating statements; it represents a heterogeneous network that integrates discourses (the report, the news, etc.), institutions (the media outlets), and practices (the routine of investigation and publication). It is through this circuit of institutions, discourses, and practices that one understands the “spectrum of anchoring of the statement in relation to discursive formation” (SOARES, 2025a, p. 87).

This logic operates under an episteme of corruption, which is configured as a “truth” of a time and place (FOUCAULT, 2017). The modern episteme, unlike classical epistemes that viewed corruption as a problem of the prince’s character, now frames it as a deviation from the democratic norm. Corruption, in this sense, is no longer a problem of the ruler’s personal morality, but a systemic flaw that must be corrected by law. The analysis of the episteme engendered in the statement under examination, therefore, leads to a deeper understanding in which corruption is not only a theme, but a device of knowledge-power. It is mobilized by governmental mechanisms that seek power not for simple punishment, but for the overthrow and seizure of political power.

Given this, the G1 Tocantins news outlet, by focusing on removals and dismissals, legitimizes the replacement of one power by another. It does not question the origin of the power that assumes the position after the departure of the previous one, but only validates its arrival as a “rescue of the law.” Thus, the media report, in detailing the removal of

Wanderlei Barbosa and the subsequent arrival of Laurez Moreira, simply describes the transition as a natural consequence of the law, without delving into the dynamics of knowledge-power (SOARES, 2025a) that allow a substitute to assume office. The media apparatus, therefore, actively participates in the maintenance and circulation of this power. The “fight against corruption” in G1 Tocantins becomes a mechanism that erases the real power relations at play and legitimizes the replacement of one ruler by another, always in the name of law and order. Power is not simply exercised, but produced and circulated through discourses about “corruption” and “illegality.”

Thus, in a movement of historical deepening, it is understood that the founding of Tocantins in 1988 represented a political milestone of the New Republic, with its creation consolidated by the new Constitution that delimited the administrative structure and electoral rules for the new state (SOARES; BOUCHER, 2024; SOARES, 2025a). However, the genesis of the state did not signify a break with the old power structures, but rather their reconfiguration. The embryonic political scenario was quickly dominated by groups with deep roots in the former northern Goiás region, who rapidly consolidated their influence. The first election for governor, in 1988, was won by José Wilson Siqueira Campos, a political figure with experience since 1964 (SOARES; BOUCHER, 2024). His victory, with 62.49% of the votes, marked the beginning of a hegemony that would define the political system and the consolidation of the state’s first elites.

According to the brief historical overview provided by G1 Tocantins, it is clear that, instead of a broad democratization of power, what was observed was the discursive projection of a concentration of political control in the hands of a few families. A deeper analysis of Tocantins’ macro-power structure reveals that political power relations are not exercised by specific parties or ideologies, but by endogamous groups that control economic activity (agribusiness and mining) and, by extension, the region’s politics. Given this dynastic logic, represented in the statement by the names and their kinship and friendship relationships, the most

prominent political figures in Tocantins are the Siqueira and Miranda families. José Wilson Siqueira Campos, the patriarch of the Siqueira family, served four terms as governor, and this silent power relationship, working to ensure the continuity of the family's power, guaranteed the election of his son, Eduardo Siqueira, to the first mayoralty of Palmas due to his popularity and, subsequently, to positions as federal deputy, senator, and mayor elected again in 2024 — replacing Cinthia Ribeiro (SOARES; BOUCHER, 2024; SOARES, 2025a), then widow of Senator João Ribeiro.

Given this context, the struggle for power shifts from the electoral field to the legal-discursive one, but the same actors, the same “families,” remain at the center of the conflict. Based on this examination of the G1 Tocantins statement and the historical excavation of power relations, exposing the relationships of meaning between the event described in the present and the memories of Tocantins politics, it is possible to perceive that the struggle does not end when a leader is legally prevented from occupying the highest office. It is perpetuated through other family members or political figures linked to the hegemonic genealogy who maintain political and electoral influence, ensuring that the power base is not dismantled. This dynamic that delineates the power and knowledge of the transfer of state management allows for another interpretation regarding corruption and impeachment: both function as political instruments for managing internal crises within the oligarchy, rather than as tools for its dissolution.

Given these discourses that normalize the rule of law, the recurrence of interruptions of mandates is directly linked to the rise of corruption as the main category of political sanction in Tocantins. This scenario allows for an understanding of the “knowledge” about corruption in Tocantins. As already mentioned, this is not only a crime, but a “discursive formation” that has consolidated itself as legitimate knowledge for judicial intervention and political sanction. The jurisprudential logic in which the same corrupt practice can be revealed and punished in one case (Miranda's impeachment), whereas similar accusations against other

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leaders do not result in comparable sanctions, suggests that impeachment is not an inevitable consequence of denunciation, but rather a result of media exposure and the political struggle that sustains it in the state of Tocantins, since media and politics “reverberate in a feedback process” (SOARES, 2025a, p. 29). Political instability, in which governors no longer complete their terms, is a direct byproduct of this instrumentalization of corruption.

From this point, it is understood that the dynamics of political impeachment cannot be interpreted without analyzing the central role of the media (SOARES, 2022). In the context of Tocantins (and globally), the press, as a power device (FOUCAULT, 2017), is not a neutral channel of information but “acts, in all its aspects, as an extension of political action to represent it to the population” (SOARES, 2025a, p. 29). In this sense, although the political and legal powers in the state claim that the press is a fundamental “channel of denunciation” in the fight against corruption, this function is not devoid of intentionality. The media, with its capacity to select and frame news, operates as an apparatus that shapes political discourses and, ultimately, in this duality between denunciation and complicity, legitimizes the actions of power, since “media and politics, integral actors of the contemporary social circuit, perform integrative functions in relation to the activities developed both in the countryside and in the city” (SOARES, 2025a, p. 29). Finally, a practical example of this duality is the coverage by *Jornal Opção*, which, through the headline “Highest *per capita* income in the North and Northeast regions is in Tocantins” (JARDIM, 2024), employs an exhortatory discourse to associate economic success with Governor Wanderlei Barbosa. Simultaneously, other media outlets report investigations against the same governor, initiated by the Federal Police, for an alleged scheme to embezzle public funds.

## Final considerations

Throughout this study, it was observed that Tocantins politics presents a power structure deeply rooted in family relationships, in which

corruption is a systemic practice and its discourse has become a tool for the removal of elected officials. In this sense, removal from office, from this perspective, is not the opposite of corruption, but one of its expressions in the field of power. What is at stake is not only the pursuit of individual morality, but control over state structures, which are repeatedly contested but rarely transformed. Examining these structures allows us to understand that political instability in Tocantins does not represent a symptom of a dysfunctional system, but a manifestation of the internal logic of its oligarchic power structure, amplified through the subjugation of media power.

Given this, the political disqualification in Tocantins, observed through an archeogenealogical lens, is neither a historical accident nor the result of a process of democratic maturation. The logic of family relationships suggests that power does not represent a position individually contested, but an asset that is defended and transmitted (SOARES, 2025a). In this sense, the legal impediment of a leader, such as the disqualification of Marcelo Miranda for eight years, does not lead to the rise of new leaders or to the rupture of the system. Instead, the oligarchy adapts, and power is transferred to a close relative or ally. Disqualification thus marks itself as a device for oligarchic renewal (FOUCAULT, 2017), a mechanism for settling internal disputes and realigning political forces without dismantling the existing power structure.

Furthermore, instability, far from being an anomaly, is a defining characteristic of politics in Tocantins. The alternation of governments through impeachments and supplementary elections reveals one of its operational mechanisms. What could be observed in this trajectory was that the first oligarchies consolidated themselves in an environment of political borderland, and that power then became, metaphorically and literally, a *business passed from father to son, brother, wife, and husband*. Corruption, in its various forms (such as the use of slush funds, illicit fundraising, and overpricing), became the method of financing and perpetuating this power. Within this archeogenealogical perspective, the

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fundamental dynamic becomes evident: when conflict among political family members intensifies, the discourse of corruption, amplified by the media (SOARES, 2022), provides the legitimate basis for the action of the electoral justice system.

From this archeogenealogical perspective, corruption ceases to be merely an ethical or criminal deviation and rises to the status of a knowledge-power device operating within the Tocantins oligarchy. The succession of removals and dismissals, instrumentalized by media discourse and legal sanctions, constitutes the materialization and effect of this device. In this context, the result is dismissal, which removes the individual but not the power of family members, friends, or political partners. In this vein, the “*non-completion of mandates*” presents itself as the visible consequence of a subterranean struggle for control of the Araguaia Palace.

Thus, this analysis offers a significant contribution to the field of Linguistics and, above all, Discourse Analysis, by demonstrating how the archeogenealogical approach can be applied to a specific political context, going beyond traditional analyses. Therefore, corroborating Soares’s thought (2025a, p. 42), “it is believed that media work, regardless of its political spectrum, requires not only ethics, but also responsibility in shaping public opinion.” In short, as long as the same family power structures persist, it is likely that the episteme of corruption will continue to be produced and used as a mechanism for political instability and power struggles, ensuring that *governors no longer finish their terms*.

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## Staging affection: the performance of child influencers in digital cosmetics advertising

### Afeto em cena: a performance das influenciadoras mirins na publicidade digital de cosméticos

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Raquel Marques Carriço Ferreira<sup>2</sup> 

**ABSTRACT:** In this article, we investigate how child influencers create affective bonds with young audiences on Instagram to legitimize cosmetic consumption practices. We conducted a qualitative and exploratory study based on content analysis of 38 sponsored posts published in 2024 by three Brazilian child influencers. We identified strategies of staged affectivity, such as catchphrases, affectionate gestures, and everyday narratives, that embed products in an apparently organic manner within formats such as “get ready with me” and “unboxings.” We found a lack of advertising disclosures and evidence of the exploitation of children’s vulnerability, which underscores the urgency of regulatory updates and the need to deepen academic debate on digital advertising targeted at children.

**Keywords:** child influencers; children’s advertising; affectivity; consumption; social media.

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**RESUMO:** Neste artigo investigamos como influenciadoras mirins constroem vínculos afetivos com o público infantil no Instagram para legitimar práticas de consumo de cosméticos. Realizamos uma pesquisa qualitativa e exploratória, baseada na análise de conteúdo de 38 postagens patrocinadas de 3 influenciadoras mirins brasileiras publicadas em 2024. Identificamos estratégias de afetividade encenada, como bordões, gestos carinhosos e narrativas cotidianas, que inserem produtos de forma aparentemente orgânica em formatos como *get ready with me* e *unboxings*. Constatamos a ausência de sinalização publicitária e a exploração da vulnerabilidade infantil, o que reforça a urgência de atualização regulatória e de aprofundamento do debate acadêmico sobre publicidade digital voltada à infância.

**Palavras-chave:** influenciadoras mirins; publicidade infantil; afetividade; consumo; redes sociais.

## Introduction

In recent decades, marketing directed to young audiences has undergone significant transformations, especially driven by the reconfiguration of the contemporary media ecosystem. If traditional media — such as television and radio — once played a hegemonic role in the construction of imageries and in the symbolic mediation of child consumption, the advent of digital platforms profoundly redesigned these dynamics. Nowadays, social media are not only privileged spaces of sociability and entertainment for children, but also strategic channels of advertising dissemination. In this new scenario, child influencers occupy a prominent place, acting not only as content sources, but as symbolic mediators between brands and children's audiences.

The presence of children as producers of advertising content, often under the pretext of spontaneity, has intensified on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. These influencers build engaging, aesthetically cared-for narratives that combine elements of playfulness, affectivity, and everyday life to promote products. In the field of cosmetics, influencers are predominant. These types of content, although coated with informality and playfulness, act as persuasion strategies that potentiate early consumption and reinforce aesthetic and behavioral patterns still in childhood.

The most relevant — and, at the same time, the most worrisome — aspect of these practices lies in the veiled and affective form with which advertising is embedded in the media everyday life of children. By simulating an intimate relationship with the audience, child influencers build authenticity performances that dissolve the boundaries between entertainment and advertising. Through catchphrases, affectionate expressions, childlike language, and affectionate gestures, they create strategies of identification, engagement, and trust with young audiences.

The qualification of “veiled” attributed to such advertising insertions is worth problematizing. Although this adjective is justified by the absence of explicit identification as advertising content, the fake character

is only formal. At the discursive level, however, there is little to be veiled: When seeing these posts, the promotional intention that underlies them becomes evident. The supposed spontaneity is broken by the obvious marketing appeal — which, although not labeled as advertising, is revealed as such by the structure, the vocabulary used and, above all, the underlying commercial purpose. It is therefore a legal and rhetorical camouflage that does not stand up to the critical analysis of the content.

In the specific case of cosmetics advertising, we observe a symbolic construction of children's vanity as aspirational value. Skincare products, makeup, and perfumes are presented as an integral part of child influencers' everyday life, naturalizing habits traditionally associated with adulthood and shifting the boundaries of childhood to the universe of aesthetics and consumption. This simulation of normality, combined with the affective appeal, makes the advertising message even more effective and paradoxically more difficult to be identified as such, especially by an audience under cognitive development.

Within this context, in this article, we aim to analyze how child influencers create affective bonds with the children's audience to legitimize practices of cosmetics consumption on social media, especially on Instagram. We start from the premise that the affectivity staged on the posts works as an essential communication strategy for the naturalized ad placement in the daily life of digital childhood. To this end, we adopt content analysis as a method, based on a corpus composed of videos of three Brazilian child influencers, produced throughout the year 2024.

The discussion is based on authors such as Juliet Schor (2004), Henry Jenkins (2006), David Buckingham (2007), and Crystal Abidin (2018), whose theories allow us to understand the development of digital culture, persuasive communication, and child consumption. By the end of the article, we intend to contribute to the debate on the ethical limits of children's advertising on social media, as well as to the critical reflection on the aesthetics of affection as a persuasive tool in the contemporary digital environment.

## Theoretical Basis

### Digital influencers and the performance of authenticity

The phenomenon of digital influencers, especially in the social media context, has been redefining communication practices between brands and audiences. In the specific case of child influencers, a singular performance is observed, marked by the fusion between spontaneity, affectivity, and ad placement in disguise. This emotional construction can be interpreted in light of the concept of calibrated amateurism developed by Abidin (2017), who describes an aesthetic and performative practice in which authenticity is carefully staged to look spontaneous and unpretentious. Although Abidin (2017) deals with the concept in contexts that are not restricted to the children's universe, an approximation can be made between the author's theoretical formulation and the performative dynamics carried out by child influencers, especially regarding the simulation of intimacy and naturalness as a strategy of capitalization of attention.

This affective performance, based on emotional bonds with the followers, becomes even more powerful when the message source is a child talking directly with other children. In this dynamic, the advertising discourse is permeated by informal language, expressions of affection, and narrative constructions that seek engagement through empathy. As Henry Jenkins (2006) points out in his study on the culture of convergence, contemporary content operates under hybrid logics, dissolving the boundaries between advertising, entertainment, and the audience participation. The influencer ceases to be just a transmission channel to become an affective mediator of consumer practices.

The symbolic capital of these influencers is linked not only to visibility, but also to the ability to produce a discourse that simulates authenticity, intimacy, and identification. In the case of children, this staged authenticity creates the illusion of a shared consumption, reinforced by the idea that "children like me use the same products I do." Affectivity, therefore, is not only a communication style, but a key strategy in legitimizing influence.

### **Children's advertising and the construction of desire**

Children's advertising is historically one of the most effective ways of mobilizing desire, making use of children's cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities. Juliet Schor (2004), economist and professor of Sociology at Boston College, analyzes this phenomenon as pester power, in which advertising creates messages that induce children to develop a strong desire for specific products, leading them to persistently push their parents for it until they give in. According to Schor (2004), this pressure is exerted by psychological mechanisms such as repetition, emotional appeal, affective blackmail, and social embarrassment. Thus, children's advertising shifts from a direct persuasion approach to a strategy that mobilizes children's ability to influence adults' decisions.

David Buckingham (2007) mentions how children's advertising shifted from direct approaches to more sophisticated forms of influence, exploring the imagery of children, their ability to mimic, and their affective bonds with media figures. From this perspective, the child is not merely the recipient of advertising, but rather becomes an active agent in the mediation of family consumption, often without realizing the commercial nature of the content to which they are exposed.

This vulnerability is broadened in the digital environment, where advertising takes on hybrid and less noticeable forms. The Instituto Alana [Alana Institute] (2014), in its report *Por que a publicidade faz mal para as crianças* ["Why advertising is bad for children"], denounces the difficulty of identifying the advertising message when it is immersed in playful, affective, and seemingly spontaneous narratives. This strategy blurs the limits between fun and sale, compromising the critical development of children and promoting early consumption.

In this regard, Jean Piaget (1973), in his studies on children's cognitive development, show that until the age of seven, individuals are in the preoperational stage, in which egocentrism and the difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality predominate. At this stage, the child does not yet have enough cognitive structure to identify the intentionality of advertising, becoming especially susceptible to persuasive content disguised with affection.

### **Affectivity as a communication strategy**

The performance of affectivity in children's digital advertising is, therefore, a persuasive tactic that explores the cognitive and emotional weaknesses of the target audience. In the pieces of content produced by the child influencers, affectivity is manifested through accessible languages, affectionate vocatives, catchphrases, expressive smiles, welcoming gestures, and reports of personal experiences — all of these resources reinforce empathy and identification with young audiences.

These strategies aim to simulate an interpersonal relationship between influencers and their followers, diluting the asymmetry of advertising communication and shifting the focus from selling to affective sharing. The brand is presented as an extension of the child influencers' lifestyle, and the product as a natural part of their everyday life, as if there was no intentional business transaction.

By observing the dynamics of these types of content, we noticed that advertising often operates as a “invisible subject” of communication, concealed by affectivity. This deceit is not accidental, but intentionally designed to make the content more palatable, intimate and, above all, less questionable. Thus, affectivity works as a vector of persuasion, promoting an emotional and early consumption, which is legitimized in the relationship of trust established between influencers and their audience.

### **Method**

This is a predominantly qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive study, with the objective of analyzing how child influencers create affective bonds with children's audience by promoting, in a veiled way, beauty products on social media. The main method used was content analysis, according to the traditional assumptions of Bardin (1977), articulated to the contributions of Krippendorff (2004), whose perspective allows us to understand implicit meanings, discursive patterns, and symbolic strategies present in the analyzed posts. In addition, tables were used as an instrument of systematization and synthetic representation of the

data, which enabled a specific and schematic quantitative approach, facilitating the visualization of regularities and recurrences in the analyzed pieces of content.

The first stage is skimming, which consists of a preliminary assessment of documents to obtain an overview of the content. For the present study, a survey of child influencers that address the beauty niche on social media was performed. To this end, keywords, such as “beauty” and “child influencer,” were searched in the search tools of TikTok and Instagram, so that the algorithm of these platforms could indicate other similar profiles. The search for “child influencer” is justified by considering that news portals and gossip profiles often use this term when reposting content related to this type of influencer, facilitating the identification of the original profiles from these reposts. This process was essential for selecting the research corpus.

After this stage, the corpus was chosen, i.e., the direct definition of the material to be analyzed. The selection of the scope of this study followed specific criteria after the preliminary definition of the content, identifying, at first, three child influencers deemed more relevant in the established requirements.

To define the child influencers of the beauty niche, five main criteria were established:

- age: under 12 years old;
- frequent presentation of sponsored beauty content on the profile: at least three pieces of content posted between January and September 2024;
- frequent presentation of cosmetics in general: at least 60% of all content posted between January and September 2024;
- number of posts between January and September 2024: at least 50 posts, including feed posts and stories;
- number of followers: at least 100 thousand followers.

By using these parameters, pieces of information were found and crossed to select the corpus that actually provides a representative study

of the phenomenon. The three child influencers selected after this process were:

1. Sophia Hsu (@lookdajapinha): 10 years old; 21 sponsored posts and 26 posts that, although not sponsored, seek to attract the attention of brands; 173 pieces of content on cosmetics; 375 posts; 380 thousand followers on Instagram. TikTok was not considered in this research because it did not meet the criteria;
2. Valentina Abraham (@valenoliabraham): 10 years old; 13 sponsored posts and 14 posts that, although not sponsored, seek to attract the attention of brands; 51 pieces of content on cosmetics; 83 posts; 572 thousand followers on Instagram. TikTok was not considered in this research because it did not meet the criteria;
3. Manuela Abegg (@manuabegg): 11 years old; four sponsored posts and 16 posts that, although not sponsored, seek to attract the attention of brands; 202 pieces of content on cosmetics; 324 posts; 199 thousand followers on Instagram. TikTok was considered in this research because it did not meet the criteria.

In total, 38 sponsored posts of the beauty niche were found on the profiles of the three influencers and 56 posts that, although not sponsored, seek to attract the attention of brands in the analyzed period. It is worth highlighting that, in the course of the article, fictitious identifications will be adopted in order to preserve the image of the children.

Considering the child influencers already selected, and given the absence of evidence and the impossibility of confirming whether the approximately 56 posts were sponsored in fact or not, methodologically, we excluded them from the scope of this research, as well as the other posts from other niches, such as stationery companies and restaurants. Hence, only the 38 posts with explicit beauty-related advertising were gathered and archived, among videos and stories posted by them in 2024, which represent the likely questionable practice of advertising aimed at children, considering the strictly academic context of this study. After this stage, the material to be investigated is analyzed.

In this second stage of content analysis as proposed by Bardin (1977), the coding and categorization of the content were carried out, in order to transform the raw material into data that could be qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. Thus, posts were segmented into units of registration, including texts (subtitles and comments), images, and videos, which answered the following questions:

1. What types of beauty products and cosmetics are being advertised?
  - a. Separation between makeup, hair products, skincare, among others;
  - b. The brands promoted most often by these children will be observed.
  
2. How is the advertising message presented?
  - a. Post format, whether unboxing, reviews, weekly purchases, tutorials, among others;
  - b. Verification of whether or not there is explicit disclosure of paid content, either in writing or as a hashtag;
  - c. Interaction with the brand on the post, either directly — the brand is explicitly mentioned, with logo or tags —, indirectly — the product is shown without explicitly mentioning the brand —, or sponsored interactions — the brand interacts with the influencer (comments, content sharing).
  
3. Existence of patterns in the communication strategies of the child influencers:
  - a. Accessible and informal language, which is childlike, playful, simple, and close to the children's audience;
  - b. Words or expressions that create desire as well as excessive repetition of compliments and the brand;
  - c. Appeals to personal experience, and interaction with the audience and from the audience on the post.

Furthermore, it should be noted that not all content shared on the profiles of the child influencers are sponsored by brands. Nonetheless, considering that these are children and preadolescents whose

target audience is their peers, this type of post, although hypothetically speaking, may be involuntarily stimulating, in a premature way, consumption practices.

Subsequently, all the material collected during the research process is investigated. Thus, as recommended by Bardin (1977), in the third stage of results processing, inference, and interpretation, the qualitative analysis was carried out, which provided us with a deeper interpretation of the underlying meanings and the narratives constructed by the child influencers. Through critical readings of the posts, considering the social and cultural context in which they are inserted, we observed how the aforementioned influencers use language and visual elements to create an affective-emotional connection with the children's audience and, moreover, how this can contribute to the normalization and encouragement of early consumption of beauty products among children.

In addition, a complementary analysis of legal compliance was carried out, based on the Consumer Protection Code (Brasil, 1990b), the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* – ECA) (Brasil, 1990a), Resolution No. 163/2014 of the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (*Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente* – Conanda), and the guidelines of the Brazilian Advertising Self-Regulation Council (*Conselho Nacional de Autorregulamentação Publicitária* – Conar, 1980), in order to confront the observed practices with the legal limits of children's advertising in Brazil.

This multidimensional approach allowed us to understand how affective language, when articulated to the performance of spontaneity and the deceit of advertising, configures a powerful tool for convincing and naturalizing early consumption on digital platforms.

## **Analysis and Discussion of the Results**

When analyzing the 38 seemingly-sponsored posts of the three child influencers on Instagram, we verified a communication pattern centered

on the performance of affectivity as a strategy of persuasion and naturalization of early consumption of cosmetics. These pieces of content recurrently present elements that build a symbolic environment of intimacy and identification, concealing commercial intentionality under an aesthetic of spontaneity and playfulness.

The three influencers analyzed demonstrated using verbal and non-verbal resources, in a carefully staged informality that appears in the catchphrase intros (such as “Hi, everyone!” and “Hi, guys! How you doing?”) and in the repetition of affectionate expressions, smiles, and gestures of intimacy (kisses to the camera, eyes wide open, enthusiastic tone). These resources, by simulating an interpersonal relationship, establish affective bonds that generate trust and increase the convincing power of the discourse.

In Chart 1 of the corpus, we highlight this construction: sentences, such as “Look how beautiful!”, “It smells so good and it’s very cute!”, “This serum is amazing!”, and “I have discount codes!”, create an emotional discourse that incites the desire for belonging and consumption. Furthermore, we observed a personalization of the advertising discourse, in which the product is presented as a personal discovery or a gift, which reinforces the intimacy character of the message.

Among the most widely used formats are the videos of the type “get ready with me” (67% of the posts of Influencer A, 22% of Influencer B, and 25% of Influencer C), unboxing of gifts, and vlogs (Table 1). Such formats structure everyday narratives that insert the products in an apparently organic way, linking them to moments of leisure, getting ready to go out, or domestic situations.

The insertion of the product in the affective context reinforces the idea that the child influencer is not “selling,” but “sharing” an experience. It is, therefore, a form of affective-commercial entertainment, which hinders the identification of the advertising message and compromises the critical capacity of the audience — especially when composed mostly of other children.

Chart 1 – Communication patterns used by the child influencers, Brazil, 2024.

Communication patterns	A	B	C
Catchphrases	“Hi, everyone! Get ready with me for...”	–	“Hi, guys, how you doing? Get ready with me for...”
Placement of the product in the video	<p>“I have news to share with you! Now I have discount code on X”</p> <p>“Gifts from the X store! The website and the Instagram are X, and use my code!”</p> <p>“Guys, oh my God! Look what I’ve just got!”</p> <p>“Before talking to you guys I have to tell you that the sale of the X brand has begun, which ends at 10 a.m.! You have 30% off + 10% using my promo code!”</p>	<p>“I’m going to use the X product now and don’t forget that you have a discount code, just click here!”</p> <p>“I couldn’t travel without my X jewelry! Here, guys, look how beautiful it is!”</p> <p>“Gifts from the X brand! Wow, what a beauty!”</p> <p>The influencer usually places information on promotions and discount codes in the caption of the post</p>	<p>“Unboxing X gifts, which is an amazing skincare brand!”</p> <p>“Now I’m going to use this moisturizer I received from X, and there’s a discount code for those who want to buy from them!”</p>
Comments on the product	<p>“Look how beautiful! It smells so good, I loved it!”</p> <p>“Guys! What a beauty! It smells so good and it’s so cute!”</p>	<p>“You guys, look how many lip balms, one cuter than the other! They’ve thought of everything, it smells like watermelon!”</p>	<p>“This serum is amazing, it smells really good and it’s helping my skin, like, a lot! And it’s lilac, which is my favorite color!”</p>

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 1 – Types of content produced by the Brazilian child influencers, 2024

Produced content	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)
Unboxing of gifts	21	22	25
Get ready with me	67	22	25
Vlog	12	22	–
Trying out products	–	35	25
ASMR	–	–	25

ASMR: Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Although it is clearly an advertising content — considering the presence of products, brands, discount codes, and sponsored interactions —, explicit advertising disclosure was practically nonexistent. Only one post (8% of the total of Influencer B) used the hashtag #ad, and still with low visibility and in a foreign language, which limits its informative reach to young audiences (Table 2).

Table 2 – Explicit disclosure of sponsored content, Brazil, 2024.

Sponsorship disclosure	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)
#ad	–	8	–

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In addition to the communicational dimension, we understand that these practices produce significant psychosocial and cultural implications. The promotion of cosmetics by child influencers contributes to the early development of children’s self-image, anticipating aesthetic concerns typical of adult life and generating potential feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. We also noticed that parents and guardians often act not only as mediators, but as promoters or managers of the children’s digital presence, which reinforces the legitimization of early consumption. Such factors evidence that naturalizing veiled advertising in childhood is not restricted to the present, but projects long-term effects on the formation of consumers more vulnerable to fake marketing strategies.

The debate about child adultification gained greater visibility in 2025, with the repercussion of the video *Adultização* [“Adultification”], posted by the Brazilian influencer Felca on his YouTube channel, which in a few days exceeded 40 million views (Estadão Conteúdo, 2025). In this video, Felca denounces the exploration of child influencers in pieces of content that anticipate aesthetic concerns and adult behaviors. By highlighting how digital platforms — through algorithms — amplify and disseminate this type of material, the video exposes not only the marketing dimension of the phenomenon, but also its social risks such as the normalization of hypersexualization and the exposure of children to contexts of symbolic

vulnerability. This episode illustrates how veiled advertising and the logic of digital visibility converge to accelerate childhood shortening, reinforcing the urgency of regulations that protect children from commercial exploitation in virtual environments.

This process can be clearly verified in the analyzed materials. The brands were mentioned in 100% of the analyzed videos, and in all cases the products were either directly or indirectly mentioned (Table 3). Comments from companies, praising emojis, and reposts of pieces of content in official profiles reinforce the promotional character of the posts. However, the absence of clear identification as advertising — in breach of Conar's rules and Conanda's Resolution No. 163/2014 — evidences a regulatory weakness and a permissiveness context in the digital environment.

Table 3 – Interaction of the contracting brands with the influencers' profiles, Brazil, 2024.

Brands' interaction	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)
Mention of the brand in the video itself, hashtag, or @	100	100	100
Brand comments in the post	5	24	50
Sharing on the brand profile	–	38	–

Source: Prepared by the authors.

This erasure of commercial intentionality is manifested, according to Schor (2004), as one of the most effective forms of child persuasion: The product is presented as an extension of the identity and everyday life of the child, and not as an object of desire imposed by third parties. Consumption, in this scenario, is deemed natural and is desired by similarity, mirroring, and empathy.

In addition to the influencers, brands play an active role in the construction of this symbolic universe. Products with colorful packaging, children's characters (such as the Hello Kitty collection by Cia. Beauty, as illustrated in Figure 1), and delicate names are often used to enhance

visual appeal. There are also affectionate interactions on the part of companies: comments with affectionate emojis, invitations to events, and content shares on official profiles.

Figure 1 – Cia. Beauty’s packaging.



Source: Cia. Beauty’s official Instagram profile.

These practices evidence a business model that bets on emotiveness as an engagement strategy and on the exploitation of children’s naivety as a market opportunity. As pointed out by Instituto Alana (2014), it is an “aesthetic of seduction,” in which the affective discourse acts as a symbolic curtain for commercial intentionality, hindering both the identification and the regulation of these types of content.

## Final Considerations

In the article, we showed that the performance of child influencers on Instagram, especially in the cosmetics niche, makes use of communication strategies based on affectivity, staged spontaneity, and simulation of interpersonal bonds to promote products to the children’s audience. By analyzing 38 posts apparently sponsored by three Brazilian influencers

under the age of 12, we verified that advertising content is created in a veiled way, disguised under playful and emotional narratives, which makes it difficult to identify them as marketing pieces.

The affectivity staged in the videos — manifested through catchphrases, affectionate expressions, childlike language, personal accounts, and gestures of sympathy — acts as a resource for getting closer to the audience, which is also mostly composed of children, in line with what Abidin (2017) describes as calibrated amateurism. This emotional language, when combined with the naturalized presentation of products in the everyday life of influencers (such as in the formats “get ready with me” or unboxing of gifts), creates a field of symbolic identification that transforms consumption into a desirable and legitimized experience by their peers.

From an ethical and legal point of view, the results point to communication practices that transgress the principles of children’s advertising provided for in Brazilian legislation such as the Consumer Protection Code, the ECA, and Conanda’s Resolution No. 163/2014. The absence of explicit disclosure of pieces of content as advertising, the use of children’s image to promote brands, and the exploitation of the cognitive vulnerability of young audiences constitute potentially abusive forms of marketing communication.

Moreover, we demonstrated significant gaps in the regulation of advertising on social media, especially in the face of the new protagonism of child influencers. The difficulty in monitoring dynamic and ephemeral pieces of content, such as stories, added to the aesthetics of affectivity that disguises the commercial message, imposes concrete challenges to regulatory bodies and digital platforms.

Therefore, it is imperative to improve public policies and regulatory standards, in order to specifically contemplate the new formats of digital communication and the performance of children as producers of advertising content. Most importantly, it is essential to hold not only legal guardians responsible for child influencers, but also the brands and platforms that benefit from these practices.

Finally, we reinforce the importance of communicational criticism to the phenomenon of child influencers, understanding them not only

as marketing actors, but as symbolic instruments of legitimization of early consumption. The challenge imposed on society, academia, and regulators is to protect childhood without limiting freedom of speech, but ensuring that communication aimed at children respects their peculiar condition as a developing individual, as advocated by the Brazilian law.

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## **Chefs and family farming: an analysis of Instagram posts**

### **Chefes de cozinha e agricultura familiar: uma análise de postagens no Instagram**


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**ABSTRACT:** Instagram is a social media capable of influencing consumers, and chefs have been considered important agents in promoting family farming and small producers. In this article, our objective was to analyze content related to small farmers posted on Instagram profiles of a group of renowned chefs in the eco-gastronomy field. The content posted on these public profiles was monitored and analyzed from September 2020 to April 2021. Data analysis was inductive, with systematic classification. We identified a total of 1,248 posts, of which 46 were selected for detailed analysis. The posts are less related to the promotion and appreciation of family farming and more to the self-promotion of their work. This platform has great potential to promote family farming, but it has proven to be underexploited for this purpose.

**Keywords:** family farming; chefs; Instagram; social network; restaurant.

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**RESUMO:** O Instagram é uma rede capaz de influenciar consumidores, e os/as chefes de cozinha têm sido considerados importantes agentes na promoção da agricultura familiar e dos pequenos produtores. O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar o conteúdo publicado no perfil do Instagram de um grupo de chefes reconhecidos na ecogastronomia relacionado ao pequeno agricultor. Foi realizado o acompanhamento e a análise do conteúdo publicado em perfis públicos durante o período de setembro de 2020 até abril de 2021. A análise de dados foi realizada de forma indutiva, com classificação sistemática. No total, foram identificadas 1.248 publicações e, destas, 46 foram selecionadas para a análise detalhada. As postagens relacionam-se menos à divulgação e à valorização da agricultura familiar e mais à autopromoção do trabalho que realizam. Essa rede possui grande potencial para promover a agricultura familiar; contudo, mostrou-se pouco explorada para tal fim.

**Palavras-chave:** agricultura familiar; chefe; Instagram; rede social; restaurante.

## Introduction

Currently, it is observed that social media significantly impact the way we communicate, consumption habits, access to information, and other social spheres (VELOSO; VARGES, 2020). Social media are established by the Internet and carry out their form of communication through it. They can be defined as a place where people with shared interests gather (VIVAR, 2009), being a phenomenon that has been increasingly growing, in such a way that Instagram is the second largest social media in terms of users in Brazil.

According to Silva (2012), social media allow users to be producers of their own content, not only by texts, photos, and videos they share, but also by the possibility of choosing what they want to see and follow. In this context, we identified the user-media, a term coined by Terra (2023, p. 5, free translation), which, according to the author, is

a heavy user both of the Internet and social media and who produces, shares, disseminates content of their own and their peers, as well as endorses them with their audiences in blogs, microblogs, online discussion forums, communities on relationship websites, chats, among others.

Based on significant developments, in the field of formulation of media visibility strategies, we are nowadays faced with the notions of aspirational work (DUFFY, 2017), visibility (ABIDIN, 2016), and digital influencers, “recently called creators,” as stated by Karhawi (2024, p. 105, free translation), which approach the discussion proposed in this study.

Food and nutrition consist in one of the subjects most posted on Instagram, and we observed that the topic has been discussed in society as a whole (PUPSITA; HENDRAYATI, 2020). Instagram posts that allude to food and nutrition allow people to influence healthier food choices. In addition, it is noteworthy that the professionals who exert the most influence are chefs and nutritionists, due to their titles of specialists, presenting credibility to users (SILVA; MEDEIROS, 2021). Corroborating

this fact, which brings chefs closer to the “digital influence” work, there is an understanding that influencers “do not only impact the consumption of goods of individuals or followers, but are also responsible for addressing agendas, amplifying discourses, or even suppressing debates” (KARHAWI, 2024, p. 105, free translation).

In this regard, we address the issue raised by Aragão Bôto Paz *et al.* (2016) on the social interaction provided by Instagram — interaction which, by the act of commenting on and liking posts, positively influences the act of consuming goods and services. We are living in the platform economy, and there is an emphasis on assessing the source of information that is consumed. Therefore, given the great potential that some profiles present to influence consumers/buyers, we consider it important to study, in the context of food security, how chefs pass on information related to food consumption, with emphasis on family farming and small producers.

According to Zaneti and Dorigon (2015), issues related to the agro-industrial production and the impacts of the use of pesticides on human health, as well as on the environment, allied to the search for health, quality of life, and pleasure in eating, are producing changes in the perception of food quality, linking foods to conditions such as fair trade and local organic production. Thus, family farming began to be seen as important not only for the supply of basic foods, which ensure food sovereignty and security, but also as a provider of products with unique qualities. The same applies to gastronomy, as the use of local, typical, and organic products has gained even more prominence among chefs from all over the world, as can be observed in the statement by Xavier (2019, p. 2, free translation):

Aligned with this discussion, chefs around the world, aware of their role as opinion makers and the link between food production and consumption, are organizing themselves in movements that propose to rethink the way food is produced, consumed, and distributed. It is worth highlighting the Slow Food movement, which was one of the precursors and source of inspiration for the creation of several groups of activist chefs.

Family farming is the main model responsible for the production of food that is consumed by Brazilians. The model, which differs in many aspects from the reality of large monocultures, is carried out in small land properties managed by a household, in which labor is supplied by family members themselves. It produces about 87% of cassava, 70% of beans, 58% of milk, 50% of poultry, 59% of swine, 46% of corn, 38% of coffee, 34% of rice, among others (BRASIL, 2022).

In addition to being directly related to the population's food and nutritional security, family farming also assists local economy and sustainable rural development by promoting a strong link between families and their place of residence and production (BITTENCOURT, 2018).

In major centers of Brazil, it is possible to perceive a growing search on the part of restaurants for distinct products, and many prefer to directly purchase it from the producer (BRAGA; LORENZI, 2014). The search for food from producers is related to product quality, origin, and form of ecological or organic production, as these characteristics attribute great symbolic value and media visibility to the food (ABIDIN, 2016). Thus, such products are inserted in gastronomy as unique ingredients (ZANETI; SCHNEIDER, 2016).

Given this scenario, when considering the social media Instagram as an important communication channel, we intend to understand how chefs use it to disseminate the work of family farming. We believe that the study is relevant to the understanding of the use of Instagram by chefs, aiming at promoting the consumption of family farming products in a sustainable way and the communication between producers and consumers.

Hence, we focus on content related to small farmers posted on the Instagram profile of a group of chefs in the eco-gastronomy field. We emphasize that eco-gastronomy, in this study, is understood as a gastronomy capable of comprising all the actors involved in the supply chain of food production and consumption with socioenvironmental responsibility, valuing small farmers who adopt agroecological practices (INSTITUTO MANIVA, 2019).

Therefore, we question: What does a group of chefs who advocate eco-gastronomy post in terms of family farming on their Instagram profiles? Do these chefs use their Instagram profiles to disclose and promote family farming?

## Methods

This exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative study was carried out based on the monitoring and analysis of content (images, subtitles, and hashtags), in Brazilian Portuguese, posted on public profiles on Instagram by a group of renowned chefs in Brazil, through projects involving the promotion of traditional foods from family farming and food education areas. The group consists of 17 chefs, of which 15 have public profiles on Instagram, one has a private account, and the other has not had their account found.

The choice of this group of chefs was motivated by them being part of a group whose main objective is promoting the approximation between family farming and the consumer, encompassing issues concerning short food supply chains. As aforementioned, these chefs are seen as cooks who have socioenvironmental responsibility and who aim at building a bridge between the small producer and the consumer (GARSON; TORQUATO, 2018).

Data analysis was inductively carried out. A careful reading of the chefs' posts was performed, followed by the process of systematic classification and codification and identification of topics or patterns (CRESWELL, 2014). Data were manually extracted, adopting as inclusion criteria posts that referred to family farming, small producers, or food originating from this form of production. All pieces of information (texts, images, videos) have been manually processed and refined to organize the material in the Microsoft Excel software.

After data processing, the next step was to compile a table of frequency of hashtags. Subsequently, a word cloud was generated. The word cloud is a graphic form that allows the immediate perception of the most frequent words by size, which helps in categorization.

The selected posts were published from September 2020 to April 2021. This period was chosen considering the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Brazil, the adoption of social distancing measures was vital for controlling the virus. Thus, social media, which already played a significant role in communication channels, became even more relevant. Therefore, the period was chosen because it was understood that there would be a greater number of posts related to the chefs' performance in their respective social media.

Regarding the ethical procedures of the research, ethical care was taken in all stages, such as the non-identification of the chefs by name and changes in subtitle texts used as reference in the article, in such a way that, when searching for it, they could not be found.

## **Results and discussion**

Of the public profiles analyzed, seven were from men and eight from women. Among them, five did not publish posts related to family farming in the analyzed period. Thus, a total of 1,248 images/videos were identified and, of this amount, 46 were selected to compose the research corpus, namely 37 images and nine videos.

In the description of their profiles, most chefs present themselves as professional chefs and cooks. As for these descriptions, most of them describe their professional experiences, highlighting their own restaurants, titles, awards, courses offered by them, as well as disclosing their professional contacts, i.e., emails and websites. Only one chef has a more personal life-related description.

Bourdieu (2008) helps us in understanding this emphasis given to awards received when discussing the effect of the title. Chefs seem to want to stand out from competitors, showing, through their “diplomas,” a specific competence, the possession of a “general culture” legitimized by the certificate, which will be wider the more prestigious the diploma. A similar competence would not be necessarily acquired in practice. Thus, the guarantee of the skill to adopt the aesthetic disposition would

be based on awards and titles. According to Bourdieu (2008), nothing determines the class more and is more distinctive than the ability to aesthetically constitute any object, in such a way that, based on this author, we can say that the school capital guaranteed to the chefs by the titles determines a distinct position in gastronomy, in terms of aesthetic creation of foods, from those with lower capital. Acknowledging this acquired disposition on social media can be interpreted by their followers' likes.

In Table 1, we present the chefs whose profiles were selected for this study, as well as their sex, total posts, total posts selected in the study period, and the number of followers.

Table 1 – Chefs' profiles on Instagram according to some characteristics, 2020/2021.

Chef	Sex	No. of followers	No. of posts	Selected posts	
				N	%
Chef 1	Man	3,975	110	1	0.9
Chef 2	Man	23,800	35	0	0
Chef 3	Man	898,000	389	2	0.5
Chef 4	Man	5,170	19	1	5.3
Chef 5	Man	11,000	164	6	3.7
Chef 6	Man	1,463	23	0	0
Chef 7	Man	101,000	132	13	9.8
Chef 8	Woman	4,652	14	6	42.9
Chef 9	Woman	41,400	54	5	9.3
Chef 10	Woman	3,380	20	0	0
Chef 11	Woman	2,275	135	5	3.7
Chef 12	Woman	2,061	0	0	0
Chef 13	Woman	1,706	49	3	6.5
Chef 14	Woman	760	1	0	0
Chef 15	Woman	29,300	103	4	3.9
<b>Total</b>	–	–	<b>1,248</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>3.7</b>

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2023.

We observed that some chefs have more posts related to family farming or small producers than others, and that most (96.32%) of the posts do not mention family farming, but rather content related to self-promotion, by promoting restaurants and dishes produced by them, as well as photos of moments of leisure and time spent with their family.

These personal posts on profiles that are focused on professional content can bring their followers closer, so that they become more intimate to their everyday life, in addition to helping to build a positive image. According to Tascin and Servidoni (2005), in today's society, for a greater prominence in the labor market, personal promotion tends to be increasingly evidenced, so that it helps people in building and consolidating a positive image, being able to highlight and value their personal and professional attributes.

The tactics adopted by digital influencers to remain in evidence on digital platforms are part of the visibility work proposed by Abidin (2016). Abidin (2016) points out that, in addition to relying on algorithms, this visibility results from conscious efforts made by influencers to reinforce their own exposure (self-conspicuousness) both in the online and offline environment. These actions are carefully designed to increase their notoriety, ensuring continuous and effective self-promotion in the different spaces in which they perform.

In this study, we observed the use of visibility strategies that emphasize the so-called "positive visibility." According to Karhawi (2024, p. 108, free translation), "this refers, for instance, to the choices of posts, topics, and debates that influencers engage on a daily basis, as well as to the places or events selected for taking photos."

Regarding posts related to family farming/small producers, Chef 8 is the one with the highest number of posts in relation to the others; almost half (42.86%) of his/her posts in the analyzed period have mentions to family farming/small producers, being more involved with the topic. This result would be expected, as this chef is a renowned leadership in gastronomy regarding actions aimed at strengthening family farming.



Chart 1 – Categories and codes created from the images/videos, hashtags, and captions of the selected posts.

Empirical category	Codes
Cooking	1. Appreciation of the Indigenous culture; 2. Shared knowledge; 3. Women and cooking; 4. Fresh foods; 5. Real food; 6. Vegetarian food.
Appreciation of the product	1. Gratitude; 2. Appreciation of the producer; 3. Appreciation of the farmer's/fisherman's product; 4. Short food supply chain; 5. Biodiversity; 6. Sustainability; 7. Local product.
Partnership between chefs and producers	1. Appreciation of the work of the group of chefs who use family farming products; 2. Engagement; 3. Dissemination of the work; 4. Support for family farming.
Social Practices	1. Satisfaction; 2. Food education; 3. Social engagement; 4. Solidarity; 5. Support for families in food insecurity; 6. Support for food delivery; 7. Support for small establishments.

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2023.

By identifying what each chef posts in their profile, we noticed that there is a predominance of posts related to “product valorization,” this being a topic present in 21 posts; “cooking,” in 17 posts; and “partnership between chefs and producers,” in 13 posts. Moreover, we observed that chefs post less about “social practices,” this being a topic addressed in eight posts mostly related to solidarity actions carried out during the pandemic. It is worth noting that some posts have been included in more than one category.

### **Cooking: perfect local products and women's kitchen**

“Cooking concerns the procedures [...] that aim to adapt nature to human food. It is the basic matter of gastronomy, which is the set of knowledge of the development of pleasure in eating” (DÓRIA, 2006, p. 16, free translation). By the chefs' interpretation, food is deconstructed, modified, and rebuilt in many technical dimensions, coining what is expressed nowadays as contemporary cuisine (BENEMANN; MENASCHE, 2017).

In this culinary process, the centrality of the ingredients for the chefs is noteworthy, who highlight, when preparing their dishes, the use of in

natura, fresh foods produced in nearby locations, associating them with the forms of food production less harmful to the environment. Likewise, they use the term “real food” when referring to these preparations, defined by the Brazilian Council of Food and Nutritional Security (*Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional – Consea*) (BRASIL, 2015) as food based on fresh and minimally-processed foods, unlike ultra-processed products. It is the food produced by family farming and that presents an adequate management of natural resources, being healthy for human beings and contributing to the preservation of the environment.

The chefs, thus, contribute to the production of meanings of healthy food, a food that is good to eat and that does not harm the health of people, nor nature, associated with the use of ingredients derived from family farming/small producers. By disclosing that they adopt culinary practices with these ingredients, they are, through their work, valuing this form of food production, and are able to influence their followers in their food choices. Silva and Medeiros (2021) state that food-related posts have an influence on food choices and on people’s trying out foods and recipes. Thus, the chefs’ accounts greatly influence users for their credibility and the food appearance.

According to Jacob (2006), the images of posts related to cooking are able to sharpen the viewer’s palate through visual mediation. The elements of the image can involve the amount of light and shadow, textures, colors, and choice of the composition of objects. The author emphasizes that advertising photography aims to make people consume the photographed food such as a restaurant dish. We noticed the use of these resources in the images posted by the chefs. The images of the preparations or ingredients “invite us” to consume these foods and the dishes produced with them by the chefs.

The defense of the diversity of Indigenous peoples and women’s protagonism, in relation to culinary knowledge, can be observed in some chefs’ posts, through images — such as those of Indigenous women preparing foods in a village —, in addition to texts that highlight the

strength of women and the importance of their work. This takes place, for instance, with the emphasis on sharing traditional knowledge and the role of women in nutrition. On one video, a chef talks about what he/she has learned from an Indigenous community concerning sustainable fishing and forest conservation.

According to Silva *et al.* (2021, p. 2, free translation),

Women produce and have knowledge that is materialized in everyday practices, in the processes of agroecological transition, in their productive backyards, in the management of fauna and flora, in the cultivation of plant species, in the cultivation and use of medicinal plants, or in the creation of certain animal species. They know their differences in uses, they try out recipes, and apply this knowledge of food and health to their families, neighbors in the communities and territories that experience and reproduce their ways of living and existing.

The authors also highlight that women have considerable knowledge, which is passed from generation to generation and brings a series of benefits to production, increasing soil fertility, plant diversity, and the preservation of agrobiodiversity; therefore, they play an important role in food and nutritional sovereignty and security.

By these initiatives, chefs attribute women with a key role in nutrition and give visibility to the Indigenous cuisine, its ingredients, and traditions, thus participating in the relations of maintenance, negotiation, and reconfiguration of the tradition, as cooking can act as a mediator of the food culture of a people and their transformations (BENEMANN; MENASCHE, 2017).

### **Products in the foreground**

Products from family farming/small producers are also associated with the intrinsic quality of the product, which is of great importance for gastronomy.

According to Zaneti (2017), chefs are increasingly searching for traditional, local products that are produced in an ecological way and that refer to their trajectory. These products meet the demand of gastronomy

related to the search for flavor, freshness, quality assurance, and origin of the products. Within this context, the author highlights that family farming is now seen as important both for the supply of most Brazilian food products and for products that have unique characteristics regarding their provenance and mode of production.

For Zaneti and Schneider (2016, p. 13), unique products are those that have qualities and singularities, being local products and those originating from short food supply chains. They also consider that

the singular product is a hybrid concept that covers the following dimensions: product trajectory; origin/place where it is produced; relationship/knowledge of the producer; how and where it is presented/consumed; product quality; flavor/freshness/seasonality; small scale; traditional/artisanal/organic production (ZANETI; SCHNEIDER, 2016, p. 13, free translation).

Zaneti (2017) also points out that this relationship between chefs and producers can be understood as a social relationship based on exchanges. It allows chefs to empower producers to meet their demands. Therefore, at the same time that chefs have high-standard products — presenting origin, recognized quality, and exclusivity —, the producer gains the recognition of being a supplier of high-quality products. In addition, by disclosing information on different media outlets, it is possible to resignify the understanding of quality, in addition to transforming consumption patterns.

However, although chefs highlight in their posts the quality of food from producers and to seek for the flavor and freshness of these products, Pereira (2022) ponders on the limit of this practice, considering that, if these products do not meet certain parameters (size, appearance), the chefs search for other suppliers outside the short food supply chain: “When choosing what scallops to buy, it will not be those produced in the region by known fishermen, because even if the scallops have the intended sensory characteristics, they are small. Thus, frozen scallops imported from Canada are bought” (PEREIRA, 2022, p. 114, free translation).

We can also observe that there is a predominance of posts of the isolated product, without the presence of the person who produces it, which leads us to think of a certain hegemony of the chefs and the products they use for their creations, undermining the producer (PEREIRA, 2022).

Considering the notion of “aspirational work” proposed by Duffy (2017), we observe how chefs build their professional identities on platforms such as Instagram. They use their posts to promote not only their gastronomic creations, but also an ideal of life aligned with ecological and social values such as sustainability and the promotion of family farming. Aspirational work refers to the construction of a career that projects values and lifestyle desired by the followers, and chefs clearly illustrated that.

By promoting high-quality products and sustainable practices, chefs are simultaneously cultivating their personal brands and aiming for a high social status in the field of eco-gastronomy. The audience is invited not only to consume food, but also to adhere to a lifestyle that values authenticity, social responsibility, and care for the environment.

### **Relationship between chefs and producers**

Gastronomy has been presented as an important field for the creation of new spaces for trade and dissemination of local products, evidenced by the chefs’ growing search for products of known origin, unique, and with outstanding quality (ZANETTI, 2017).

Small producers have great difficulty in distributing their products, and chefs are attentive to the need to promote this trade and encourage an adequate and nutritious diet. To this end, in their posts, they encourage the purchase through the so-called short food supply chains.

Food supply via alternative networks is primarily carried out by short food supply chains (SFSC). The most important characteristic of a short food supply chain is that consumers have access to the product with information that allows them to know where the product was produced (place), by whom (producer), and how (production system), unlike food with standardized, impersonal, and anonymous information from global chains (DAROLT, 2020, p. 19, free translation).

In this model, producers have greater possibilities of interaction with consumers, which favors producers' autonomy, who can establish networks with both chefs and customers directly (ZANETI, 2017).

For Garson and Torquato (2018), issues concerning food consumption and its mode of production are increasingly present in society, from what we have been eating to how we purchase it; issues that are related to debates involving food and nutritional security, combating hunger, use of pesticides, food risks, among others. The authors also highlight a criticism of global food supply chains, which create a gap between producers and consumers, leading to the production of food without much information about its provenance. Conversely, they point to the emergence of the attempt to obtain "food from anywhere" and "real food," by appreciating social, cultural, economic, geographical, and environmental contexts related to food. Therefore, they mention the establishment of the so-called short food supply chains, which enable bringing producers closer to consumers.

This relationship between chefs and producers is particularly evidenced in the publication of a book written by chefs together with producers. In the work, farmers were interviewed by the chefs, with whom they have established a production/consumption partnership and share recipes containing the ingredients they provide to the chefs.

The book gained prominence in newspapers and social media and won the *Prêmio Jabuti* in the category Creative Economy, an important Brazilian literary award that acknowledges the authors who stood out the most during the year (VIVA MARIA, 2020). Such publications are a way to publicize the producers, giving visibility to their work, while chefs promote themselves as a distinct group within the field of eco-gastronomy.

Furthermore, the chefs also show appreciation for products from family farming through images of preparations of their restaurants, mentioning the farmers/small producers in their posts. Hence, they show not only the origin of the product, but also a close relationship with the producers.

## **Social practices: donation campaigns and pedagogical gardens**

In some posts, we observed the involvement of chefs with social projects, both valuing food from family farming and supporting their purchase. Two groups of posts were identified in this sense: one associated with the creation of pedagogical gardens for children and the other with the mobilization for donations.

The posts related to the implementation of pedagogical gardens evidence a concern on the part of the chefs with the promotion of food education since childhood. According to S. R. M. L. Oliveira *et al.* (2018), pedagogical gardens implemented in schools have been an effective way to promote health and food education, thus enabling students to learn about food systems, healthy eating, ecology, and regional culture. The authors also highlight the great role of schools in the development of eating habits.

The mobilization of the chefs in solidarity actions is related to the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic, a moment of social distancing, with important socioeconomic and health impacts on people's lives. Thus, the crisis aroused a participatory interest in several collective actions, with social media being a primary space for the mobilization of people.

Among the chefs, such actions were carried out by the collection and donation of food, the encouragement of food consumption of local producers, and in the dissemination of restaurants' delivery services.

These solidarity actions evidence the failure of the State in meeting the basic needs of the population and emerge as an attempt to cope with unequal conditions of access to basic goods and services. Nevertheless, some authors ponder whether these actions would be promoting effective changes in the tension of reality or merely ratifying an oppressor mode of production (Lima *et al.*, 2021).

Gracia-Arnaiz *et al.* (2021) problematize that vertical charity and uncritical solidarity alleviate the effects of impoverishment, but do not act on

its causes. Food assistance helps in meeting basic needs, but at the same time diverts social pressure on the State and makes those who receive the assistance increasingly dependent on the resources offered by organizations, which have emerged within the scope of this emergency system.

## Conclusions

Our final considerations evidence that, although the investigated chefs use their platforms on Instagram to promote, in some cases, the quality of family farming products and the work of small producers, the posted content tends to focus more on the self-promotion of their individual work and their restaurants. This phenomenon is aligned with the study conducted by Abidin (2016) on media visibility, in which the author highlights how influencers often use their platforms not only to support causes, but also to strengthen their own personal brands.

In addition, by reflecting on aspirational work (DUFFY, 2017), we noticed that chefs, as public and aspirational figures, construct a narrative around their professional identities, using the appreciation of family farming as a component of this image, but not necessarily as their main goal. According to the analysis of the posts, although there are elements highlighting family farming, they are not the central focus of communication strategies.

Thus, the posts end up promoting more the figure of the chef and their culinary expertise, using family farming as a background to legitimize their practices, rather than fostering a significant engagement with the topic or actions of direct support to small producers. The guiding question of this study — what is the role of chefs in promoting family farming via Instagram? — leads us to conclude that although there is a potential for these professionals to use their platforms to expand the reach and visibility of family farming, this potential is still underutilized.

Instagram, as a tool for visual communication and fast engagement, has a vast space for promoting broader social practices such as valuing local and sustainable production. However, as also observed in studies on

digital influencers, the analyzed chefs seem to focus on more individual and commercial practices, which suggests the need for a greater deliberate effort to promote family farming more significantly and less associated with self-promotion.

In short, there is a movement toward the promotion of family farming, but it is unexpressive, especially in the digital environment. The analyzed posts, instead of fostering a robust narrative for the sake of small producers, end up prioritizing the construction of an image of personal prestige of the chefs, which points to the ambiguous character of the visibility of these influencers. The most intentional and strategic use of social media could undoubtedly increase the visibility of family farming and consolidate a stronger relationship between chefs and small producers.

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## **From content to conversion: cultural mediation strategies of consumption on digital platforms**

### **Do conteúdo à conversão: estratégias de mediação cultural do consumo em plataformas digitais**

Renata Giacomini<sup>1</sup> 

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the influencer economy as a communicational system that integrates influencers, brands, and digital platforms, reshaping consumption practices and establishing new forms of cultural mediation. The study draws on theoretical frameworks of the influencer economy, the culture of connectivity, and self-presentation practices, combined with an empirical analysis focused on three platforms: Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The methodology included secondary data collection, analysis of industry reports, and a systematic literature review, enabling the confrontation of hypotheses with updated evidence from the Brazilian market. Findings indicate that perceived authenticity, communication styles, and the ability to mobilize communities are decisive factors in generating engagement and conversion. Influencers, embedded in a symbolic and communicational ecosystem, transcend boundaries between the personal and the commercial, reinforcing the interdependence between consumption, identity, and digital culture. This study contributes to the field of communication, media, and consumption by proposing a systemic approach to the influencer economy.

**Keywords:** digital influencers; consumption; digital culture; influencer economy; cultural mediation.

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**RESUMO:** Este artigo analisa como a economia da influência, compreendida como um sistema comunicacional que articula influenciadores, marcas e plataformas digitais, reconfigura práticas de consumo e estabelece novas formas de mediação cultural no ambiente digital. O estudo fundamenta-se em referenciais sobre economia da influência, cultura da conectividade e práticas de autoapresentação, articulados a uma análise empírica centrada em três plataformas: Instagram, YouTube e TikTok. A metodologia envolveu coleta de dados secundários, análise de relatórios setoriais e revisão sistemática de literatura, permitindo confrontar hipóteses com evidências recentes do mercado brasileiro. Os resultados indicam que autenticidade percebida, estilos de comunicação e capacidade de mobilização comunitária são fatores decisivos na geração de engajamento e conversão. Observa-se que os influenciadores, inseridos em um ecossistema simbólico e comunicacional, atravessam fronteiras entre o pessoal e o comercial, reforçando a interdependência entre consumo, identidade e cultura digital. O estudo contribui ao campo da comunicação, mídia e do consumo ao propor uma abordagem sistêmica da economia da influência.

**Palavras-chave:** influenciadores digitais; consumo; cultura digital; economia da influência; mediação cultural.

## Introduction

In recent years, the rise of digital influencers has emerged as one of the most significant phenomena in the fields of communication and consumption. Through content creation, community engagement, and the legitimization of lifestyles, these actors perform functions that extend beyond product recommendation; they operate as cultural mediators of consumption. In Brazil, the use of social media encompasses 144 million individuals, representing 66% of the population (KEMP, 2024). Recent reports indicate that more than 50% of Brazilian consumers have purchased products based on influencer recommendations (INFLUENCY.ME, 2025; NIELSEN, 2025), and the country ranks among the top five global markets for influencer marketing (INFLUENCER MARKETING HUB, 2025). These data underscore the relevance of examining the communicational and cultural impact of influencers within the national context.

Literature on consumption and cultural communication indicates that consumption should be understood as a cultural practice rather than solely an economic activity (CANCLINI, 1995), encompassing social, economic, and symbolic dimensions (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1987). Authors such as Bourdieu (1979) and Miller (1998) reinforce this perspective by situating consumption as a sphere of distinction and meaning production, while Bauman (2000) interprets it as a central axis of sociability in liquid modernity. Within this framework, digital influencers concentrate elements of distinction, belonging, and identification, functioning as mediators of everyday consumption practices.

From a platform perspective, Jenkins (2006) introduced the concept of convergence culture, in which producers and consumers interact, while Van Dijck (2013) emphasizes that platforms structure not only content circulation but also regimes of visibility. Accordingly, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube operate as ecosystems that shape formats and mediation strategies, reflecting the logic of the platform economy, in which value and engagement are concentrated and monetized by a limited number

of agents (SRNICEK, 2016). TikTok, for instance, is currently identified as the most effective platform for converting engagement into purchases among Generation Z consumers (TIKTOK, 2023).

Literature on microcelebrity and the influence economy (SENFT, 2008; MARWICK, 2015; DUFFY, 2017) indicates that authenticity and the performance of intimacy are foundational to engagement, aligning with what Banet-Weiser (2018) defines as the “economy of authenticity.” Recent reports reinforce this dynamic, demonstrating that trust and identification are central to digital persuasion (INFLUENCY.ME, 2025), while structural inequalities in monetization continue to affect different profiles (THE GUARDIAN, 2024).

In this context, the research problem is delineated as follows: How does the performance of digital influencers, articulated with brand strategies and platform logics, characterize processes of cultural mediation of consumption and reconfigure dynamics of visibility, desire, and engagement in the digital environment? The general objective is to analyze how the influence economy, integrating influencers, brands, and platforms, restructures consumption practices and establishes new forms of cultural mediation in the digital environment. The specific objectives include: mapping recent data on reach, consumption habits, and credibility within the Brazilian digital influence ecosystem; identifying how different platforms, influencers, and brands interact in shaping mediation styles; examining influencer communication as a component of cultural strategies of symbolic circulation; and discussing the impacts of these dynamics on the relationships among brands, consumers, and cultural consumption practices.

Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed: (H1) the digital influence system, comprising influencers, brands, and platforms, functions as a cultural mediator of consumption, linking products to identities and forms of belonging that extend beyond traditional advertising logics; and (H2) consumer engagement is conditioned both by the perceived authenticity of influencers and by the algorithmic and communicational logics specific to each platform.

This study situates the influence economy within a broader symbolic and communicational system in which brands, platforms, and consumption practices intertwine, reflecting the power and data flows characteristic of digital colonialism (COULDRY; MEJIAS, 2019). Influencers constitute one node within this network of cultural mediations, which is fundamental in connected societies where digital narratives interweave intimacy, entertainment, and consumption (SENF, 2008; ABIDIN, 2016). These dynamics generate everyday “micro-celebrities” (MARWICK, 2015), shift consumption toward symbolic practices of belonging and identification (KHAMIS; ANG; WELLING, 2017; DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018), and require analytical approaches that integrate cultural, economic, and communicational dimensions (VAN DIJCK, 2013).

From a social and academic perspective, this research examines transformations in consumption practices and the cultural authority acquired by ordinary individuals, contributing theoretically to the dialogue among consumption, media, and the attention economy (DAVENPORT; BECK, 2001). In Brazil, where internet access continues to expand (IBGE, 2024) and monetization models are diversifying (EXAME, 2024), it becomes urgent to investigate how these mediations affect different audiences and market segments. By analyzing the influence economy as a system that integrates influencers, brands, and platforms, this study seeks to address theoretical and empirical gaps, highlighting how these actors reconfigure consumption practices and establish new forms of cultural mediation in the digital environment.

### **Cultural mediations of consumption and the economy of digital influencers: theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence**

The study of cultural mediations of consumption derives from classic formulations in social and communication theory. Martín-Barbero (1987) proposed understanding communication as a cultural process, shifting the analytical focus from media to the social mediations that structure

everyday practices. Canclini (1995), in examining Latin American hybrid modernity, identified consumption as an arena of symbolic dispute and identity construction, while Appadurai (1996) emphasized “social landscapes” and the global circulation of images and desires. Together, these contributions support the understanding of digital influencers not merely as marketing instruments but as cultural mediators that reconfigure practices of belonging and consumption (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1987; CANCLINI, 1995; APPADURAI, 1996).

Social consumption theory reinforces this perspective. Bourdieu (1979) identified consumption as a marker of social distinction; Miller (1998) examined its domestic and symbolic dimensions; and Bauman (2000) emphasized the identity fluidity characteristic of liquid modernity. These contributions support the hypothesis that influencers do not merely promote products but also link goods to identity repertoires and lifestyles (BOURDIEU, 1979; MILLER, 1998; BAUMAN, 2000).

In the field of digital communication, Jenkins (2006) examined the culture of convergence, in which consumers function as co-producers of meaning. Van Dijck (2013), however, problematized this perspective by demonstrating that platforms are not neutral entities but mediation infrastructures that regulate visibility and engagement. This tension informs the analysis of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube as socio-technical ecosystems that shape distinct forms of consumption mediation (JENKINS, 2006; VAN DIJCK, 2013).

The literature on digital influencers has consolidated concepts such as micro-celebrity and the *attention economy*. Senft (2008) defined micro-celebrities as individuals who perform authenticity in pursuit of recognition; Marwick (2015) demonstrated how this authenticity is transformed into symbolic capital and leveraged as a strategic asset; and Banet-Weiser (2012) examined it as a cultural aesthetic associated with trust and persuasion. Duffy (2017) expanded the discussion by incorporating gender and precariousness in creative labor, highlighting tensions within the affective economy. These contributions support the hypothesis that perceived authenticity constitutes a central variable in explaining

engagement and its conversion into consumption practices (SENFT, 2008; BANET-WEISER, 2012; MARWICK, 2015; DUFFY, 2017).

Recent studies reinforce the relevance of this phenomenon. Datareportal (2024) indicates that Brazil has more than 144 million social media users (67.9% of the population), and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* – IBGE, 2024) reports that 88% of Brazilians aged 10 or older used the internet in 2023, consolidating the reach of the influencer economy. According to Influency.me (2025), 54% of consumers have already purchased products recommended by influencers, confirming their role as cultural mediators who articulate authenticity, engagement, and consumption.

The creator economy is, however, heterogeneous. Reports from *Exame* (2024) and Influency.me (2025) indicate that, although the sector moves billions, the effects on engagement and authenticity vary across platforms: TikTok emphasizes virality; Instagram prioritizes emotional connections; and YouTube supports in-depth narratives (MARWICK, 2015; BANET-WEISER, 2018; DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018). These differences demonstrate that cultural mediations are shaped by the ecology of each platform and its associated modes of interaction.

Issues of inequality also permeate gender, race, and visibility. Studies identify disparities in pay and exposure between white and non-white creators, as well as between men and women, which directly affect monetization opportunities (THE GUARDIAN, 2024). These asymmetries indicate that the cultural mediation of consumption reflects broader social inequalities and therefore requires critical and intersectional analyses.

From a cultural perspective, the literature indicates that influencers articulate consumer niches through specific symbolic practices. Banet-Weiser (2018) and Duffy and Freitas (2018) examine how fashion, beauty, gastronomy, and *lifestyle* function as aesthetic repertoires and consumption rituals that shape collective identities. Moisander and Valtonen (2006) introduce the notion of consumption scripts performed in everyday life, a framework useful for understanding how influencer narratives establish routines and symbolic repertoires incorporated by followers.

In theoretical terms, cultural mediation should be approached in an integrated manner. Bourdieu (1979) and Canclini (1995) provide a foundation for understanding the articulation between symbolic capital and consumption practices; Davenport and Beck (2001) situate this phenomenon within the logic of the attention economy; and Metzger, Flanagin, and Medders (2010) emphasize digital trust as a decisive element of persuasion. This theoretical framework supports the analysis developed in this study.

Finally, investigating influencers as cultural mediators of consumption requires consideration of normative dimensions. Gillespie (2018) demonstrates that platform governance involves power disputes, transparency, and accountability, directly influencing the dynamics of the influence economy. The literature on digital ethics and self-regulation highlights challenges related to public policies and market practices aimed at ensuring transparency, equity, and legitimacy. Thus, understanding influencers as cultural mediators necessitates methodological approaches that integrate symbolic, economic, and regulatory dimensions, thereby grounding the transition to the methodological procedures of this study.

### **Methodological aspects**

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on multiple case analysis, focusing on digital influencers as cultural mediators of consumption across selected niches (fashion, gastronomy, and lifestyle) and platforms (Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok). This methodological choice is justified by the need to examine complex processes of cultural mediation, digital engagement, and the circulation of consumer content, phenomena that are insufficiently captured by quantitative methods (STAKE, 1995; YIN, 2018).

The selection of cases prioritized representativeness, diversity of consumption practices, and cultural relevance, taking into account the platforms in which these niches operate due to their centrality in the Brazilian digital ecosystem and their role in mediating consumption. Reports indicate that fashion, beauty, and lifestyle niches account for

36% of content creators in Brazil (CIASCA, 2024), while recent metrics show a 49% increase in engagement with Instagram Reels and a 27% rise in content production on TikTok (COMSCORE, 2025), underscoring the relevance of these platforms. These platforms also concentrate most of the time spent on social media in the country and exhibit high engagement rates, reinforcing their centrality in consumption mediation (OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025). Media coverage was used only as a complementary reference.

Data sources included digital posts, engagement metrics, market reports, and academic studies (TIKTOK, 2023; YOUTUBE, 2023; EXAME, 2024; THE GUARDIAN, 2024; GONÇALVES, 2025; INFLUENCER MARKETING HUB, 2025; OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025; ZOTE, 2025). Each document was assessed for authenticity and relevance, ensuring reliability (BOWEN, 2009; YIN, 2018). The analyzed period spanned January 2023 to June 2025, enabling the identification of recent trends while avoiding a focus on specific individuals and instead examining the ways in which content and brand strategies operate as cultural mediation.

The analysis protocol defined central constructs: perceived authenticity, engagement, personal brand identity, and mediated consumption practices, articulating symbolic, cultural, and economic dimensions (VAN DIJCK, 2013; MARWICK, 2015; ABIDIN, 2016). Manual coding of posts and metrics, quantitative and qualitative analysis in NVivo, and inter-coder validation ensured consistency and replicability (BOWEN, 2009; CORBIN; STRAUSS, 2015).

The cross-case analysis considered institutional reactions, impact, and the effectiveness of cultural mediation, integrating metrics, press coverage, market reports, and academic publications. This triangulation enabled the validation of patterns, the identification of convergences and divergences, and an examination not only of influencers' reach but also of the symbolic dimensions of their mediations, including belonging, identification, and perceived authenticity (BANET-WEISER, 2018; DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018).

The exclusive use of secondary data was mitigated by rigor in source selection and by the detail of the analytical protocol. Each document and metric used were recorded and coded according to the defined constructs, ensuring traceability, transparency, and reliability of the analysis (BOWEN, 2009; YIN, 2018). In this way, the adopted methodology provides a robust, systematic, and replicable analysis of the cultural mediation practices of digital influencers, connecting empirical data, theory, and comparative case analysis. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how influencers act as cultural mediators of consumption, their engagement strategies, and the cultural impact of their digital activities.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Variables**

The variables were selected based on the framework of microcelebrity, economics of influence, and cultural mediation (VAN DIJCK, 2013; MARWICK, 2015; ABIDIN, 2016):

- Perceived authenticity: the impression that the influencer is genuine and trustworthy, which is essential for digital persuasion and engagement (BANET-WEISER, 2018; DUFFY & FREITAS, 2018). Assessed qualitatively through posts, comments, and interactions that indicate closeness and sincerity;
- Engagement: the intensity of audience interaction through likes, comments, shares, and views, which is crucial for understanding cultural and commercial impact (MARWICK, 2015; OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025). Measured both quantitatively and qualitatively by combining public metrics with follower participation;
- Personal brand identity: the influencer's consistency, positioning, and communicative style, which link products to symbolic narratives and are relevant to cultural mediation and belonging (KHAMIS; ANG; WELLING, 2017). Operationalized through content analysis, hashtags, campaigns, and the language used;

- Mediated consumption practices: the influence of the influencer's content on habits, decisions, and consumption styles, which is essential for testing hypotheses about cultural mediation (SENF, 2008; MARWICK, 2015). Assessed based on market reports (OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025) and posts with engagement metrics.

The four defined variables allowed for the translation of theoretical concepts into empirical indicators, ensuring coherence between the theoretical framework and the data. To avoid isolated analyses, a comparison was structured between niches and platforms, identifying patterns and particularities in the cultural mediation of consumption. Table 1 presents the results, cross-referencing perceived authenticity, engagement, personal brand identity, and consumption practices mediated by niche (fashion, gastronomy, and lifestyle) and digital platform (Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube), highlighting differences in impact on followers and brand identity construction.

Table 1 – Digital influencers by niche/platform (2023–2025)

Niche	Platform	No. of posts analyzed	Average engagement*	Perceived authenticity**	Consistent brand identity***	Mediated consumption practices****
Fashion	Instagram	40	5,200	High	High	Medium
Fashion	TikTok	35	7,800	High	Medium	High
Fashion	YouTube	25	12,000	Medium	High	High
Gastronomy	Instagram	30	4,500	Medium	Medium	High
Gastronomy	TikTok	28	6,200	High	Medium	High
Gastronomy	YouTube	20	10,500	Medium	High	Medium
Lifestyle	Instagram	35	5,800	High	High	Medium
Lifestyle	TikTok	30	7,000	Medium	Medium	High
Lifestyle	YouTube	22	11,200	Medium	High	Medium

\*Average engagement = mean of likes, comments, and shares per post; \*\*Perceived authenticity = qualitative assessment of comments, interactions, and positive audience response (high, medium, low); \*\*\*Consistent brand identity = analysis of style consistency, content type, and personal narrative (high, medium, low); \*\*\*\*Mediated consumption practices = frequency and impact of product recommendations (high, medium, low).

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on research data (2025).

The classification of perceived authenticity, consistent personal brand identity, and mediated consumption practices followed operational criteria based on qualitative analysis of posts, comments, interactions, and audience feedback (MARWICK, 2015; ABIDIN, 2016; BANET-WEISER, 2018). Perceived authenticity was categorized as “high” when most comments indicated sincerity and identification; “medium” when these indicators were present but not predominant; and “low” when comments signaled detachment or skepticism (DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018). Consistent personal brand identity was considered “high” when style, content type, and narrative maintained coherence; “medium” in cases of occasional inconsistencies; and “low” when no recognizable pattern was identified (KHAMIS; ANG; WELLING, 2017). Mediated consumption practices considered frequency, engagement, and conversion in consumption actions: “high” for frequent and noticeable impact, “medium” for moderate or sporadic impact, and “low” for limited impact (MARWICK, 2015; OPINION BOX; INFLUENCY.ME, 2025).

This operationalization ensures transparency, consistency, and reproducibility, avoiding arbitrariness. Table 1 summarizes posts and reports, integrating quantitative metrics and the qualitative evaluation of interactions and produced content (MARWICK, 2015; BANET-WEISER, 2018; DUFFY; FREITAS, 2018).

The analysis of the results reveals that the cultural mediation of consumption by digital influencers is marked by the specificities of platforms and niches, confirming that such processes are not homogeneous (JENKINS, 2006; VAN DIJCK, 2013). The mapping of recent data on reach and usage habits – objective (i) – shows that TikTok surpasses 95 million users in Brazil, with an average daily time of 1h18min (KEMP, 2024), being the network with the highest intensity of interaction. Its engagement in fashion and lifestyle stems from an algorithmic logic oriented toward viralization (KUMAR; ZHANG, 2022), evidencing that influencers act as cultural mediators adapted to specific ecosystems (H1).

On Instagram, where the construction of authenticity and brand identity prevails, engagement is observed to depend on the perception of proximity and genuineness (*H2*). Abidin (2016) defines this “perceived relationality” as the emotional basis of trust. According to Opinion Box and Influency.me (2025), 62% of users consider recommendations on the platform more trustworthy, which confirms the importance of credibility and authenticity – objective (i).

On YouTube, the results show a different configuration: long narratives, consistent identity, and depth of mediated consumption practices. According to Jenkins (2006), media convergence allows the formation of interpretive communities. Studies by Cunningham and Craig (2019) demonstrate that YouTube is consolidating itself as a space of cultural intermediation, where influencers shape discourses of lifestyle and sustainable consumption, fulfilling objective (ii).

These patterns indicate that the cultural mediation of consumption varies according to niche and platform, reinforcing *H1* and *H2*. Classic literature helps to understand these findings: Canclini (1995) conceives of consumption as a cultural practice, and Bourdieu (1979) as a form of social distinction. In the digital realm, TikTok influencers create distinction through the ephemerality of trends; on Instagram, through aesthetic curation and authenticity; and on YouTube, through expertise and symbolic authority.

Platforms, far from being neutral, operate as socio-technical ecosystems that modulate forms of mediation (VAN DIJCK; POELL; DE WAAL, 2018). Algorithms, moderation policies, and monetization models determine what gains visibility and symbolic value, linking influencer communication to the attention economy (DAVENPORT; BECK, 2001) and responding to objective (iii).

The relationship between perceived authenticity and engagement (*H2*) is empirically confirmed. Hudders *et al.* (2021) demonstrate that authenticity is a social construct mediated by platforms and is crucial for campaign effectiveness. On Instagram, this construct is expressed through the aesthetics of intimacy; on YouTube, through narrative

consistency; and on TikTok, through spontaneity. These differences explain why each platform develops its own economy of authenticity (BANET-WEISER, 2018).

The results also highlight the role of niches (fashion, gastronomy, and lifestyle) as privileged spaces of cultural mediation – objective (ii). McCracken (2005) argues that mediation involves the transfer of cultural meanings to consumer goods, a process intensified in social networks, where influencers translate global trends into local practices.

These patterns demonstrate that the mediations of influencers produce broader sociocultural effects. Bauman (2000) indicated consumption as the central axis of sociability. This study confirms that influencers articulate belonging and social recognition, transforming consumption into an identity narrative.

Thus, the findings corroborate the study's hypotheses and address objective (iv): to examine the impacts of these dynamics on the relationships among brands, consumers, and cultural practices. The analysis reveals multiple strategies conditioned by socio-technical and cultural contexts, reinforcing that understanding the influence economy requires integrating symbolic, technological, and economic dimensions.

The results also extend previous contributions (VAN DIJCK, 2013; MARWICK, 2015; ABIDIN, 2016) by showing that authenticity is modulated by each platform's algorithmic and communicative logic, an aspect that has been little explored in the literature. Similarly, the attention economy (DAVENPORT; BECK, 2001) and media convergence (JENKINS, 2006) help explain how different formats shape engagement and the meaning of consumption.

It is concluded that the cultural mediation of consumption cannot be understood solely through the figure of the influencer, but rather through the ecology of platforms that shape practices of engagement, authenticity, and belonging. This perspective integrates the study's objectives and contributes theoretically by proposing an analytical framework capable of explaining variations across platforms and niches, articulating micro-celebrity, brand identity, and cultural practices of consumption.

## Conclusion

This study began with the problem of understanding how the actions of digital influencers, articulated with brand strategies and platform logics, shape processes of cultural mediation of consumption, reconfiguring dynamics of visibility, desire, and engagement in the digital environment. It recognized that market communication is increasingly integrated into everyday online practices, requiring the analysis not only of advertising messages but also of symbolic, emotional, and cultural mediations between influencers and followers. The focus was on understanding how these mediations shape consumption and engagement patterns, articulating cultural and economic dimensions within the digital environment.

The objectives focused the analysis on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, considering authenticity; engagement; personal brand identity; and mediated consumption practices within the niches of fashion, gastronomy, and lifestyle. The qualitative approach, based on multiple cases and secondary data, allowed for the observation of concrete practices and the translation of theoretical concepts into empirical indicators. The findings indicate that the cultural mediation of consumption is not homogeneous, varying according to the ecology of the platforms and the predominant interaction formats.

The results showed that TikTok exhibits higher average engagement, linked to virality and rapid content consumption; Instagram stands out for its authenticity and emotional connections; and YouTube favors longer narratives, connecting consumption practices to symbolic values and personal experiences. These findings confirm the study's first hypothesis (*H1*), that influencers function as cultural mediators of consumption, and the second hypothesis (*H2*), which highlights the relationship between perceived authenticity and engagement.

Based on this evidence, the research expands the literature by articulating the role of influencers within the broader system of platforms and brand strategies, shifting the focus from the isolated individual to

the global communication process. Theoretically, it shows that cultural mediation should be analyzed comparatively, crossing symbolic aspects (authenticity, brand identity) and quantitative aspects (engagement), and integrating previously fragmented theoretical traditions, such as micro-celebrity, connection culture, and consumption practices. Empirically, it demonstrates how different platforms generate specific effects: virality on TikTok, emotional connections on Instagram, and in-depth narratives on YouTube. These findings offer practical support for managers, brands, and communication professionals, allowing them to align marketing strategies with cultural consumption practices.

The study has limitations: the exclusive use of secondary data and the focus on three niches and platforms restrict the ability to capture the subjective nuances of followers' firsthand experiences and may lead to generalized results. Other consumption categories, such as technology, education, and health, could reveal distinct dynamics of cultural mediation. Future research could adopt mixed methods, including interviews, digital ethnographies, and international or longitudinal comparative analyses, while also investigating the role of platforms as institutional mediators — examining the effects of design, visibility, and monetization on authenticity, engagement, and consumption.

In summary, the study demonstrates that digital influencers, in conjunction with the algorithmic logic of platforms, not only disseminate consumer messages but also structure emerging forms of cultural mediation, spanning narratives, identities, and everyday practices. By confirming the hypotheses and achieving the objectives, the research contributes to a broader understanding of the influence economy, integrating symbolic, relational, and normative dimensions, while acknowledging the fluidity and provisional nature of generalizations in this dynamic digital ecosystem. Thus, rather than providing definitive answers, this work suggests avenues for future research to further investigate the influence economy, maintaining ongoing dialogue with the ethical, social, and political challenges that characterize contemporary digital culture.

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## And the story goes: the comments of fans on House of the Dragon Instagram account as a form of narrative absorption

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### E a história continua: os comentários dos fãs na conta do Instagram de House of the Dragon como forma de absorção narrativa

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**ABSTRACT:** *The “team versus team” narrative formula in films prompts fans to extend the rivalry through social media comments, often by referencing the story or role-playing characters. This raises the question of whether such comments constitute narrative absorption. We argue they do. To examine this, we analyzed House of the Dragon’s official Instagram account and its fan comments using narrative absorption theories, transmedia engagement, and peritextual engagement. This qualitative study, employing Spradley’s method, reveals fans’ absorption through character role-play and story references. From these findings, we propose a typology of narrative absorption in “team versus team” contexts: impersonating, mockery, miming, spoofing, and mirroring. This typology offers filmmakers insights into strategies for eliciting audience and fan engagement.*

**Keywords:** *House of the Dragon; narrative absorption; narrative engagement; Instagram; team versus team.*

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**RESUMO:** A fórmula narrativa “time contra time” em filmes leva os fãs a prolongarem a rivalidade por meio de comentários nas redes sociais, frequentemente fazendo referência à história ou interpretando personagens. Isso levanta a questão: tais comentários configuram absorção narrativa? Defendemos que sim. Para investigar, analisamos a conta oficial de House of the Dragon no Instagram e os comentários dos fãs, utilizando as teorias de absorção narrativa, engajamento transmídia e engajamento peritextual. Este estudo qualitativo, conduzido pelo método de Spradley, revela a absorção dos fãs por meio de interpretações de personagens e referências à narrativa. Com base nesses resultados, propomos uma tipologia de absorção narrativa em contextos “time contra time”: personificação, zombaria, mímica, paródia e espelhamento. Essa tipologia oferece aos cineastas subsídios para estratégias que incentivem o engajamento do público e dos fãs.

**Palavras-chave:** House of the Dragon; absorção narrativa; engajamento narrativo; Instagram; time contra time.

## Introduction

Popular movies tend to invite serious debate from fans when the movies introduce the concept that Aimukhambet *et al.* (2017) call as binary-dyadic structure. Through this structure, opposition forces are clear-cut. In modern movies, this concept has been widely used in “team versus team,” e.g., Team Captain America vs Team Iron Man in *Captain America: Civil War*. When the movies have official fan pages on social media like Instagram, the “versus” narratives continue among fans. The “versus” narratives are expressed through various styles of comments. Expressions like “I’m with...,” “Say no to...,” “Down with...” indicate that the stories of the movies are not distributed but circulated. As implied by Jenkins *et al.* (2013), this circulation of stories shapes what they call as transmedia engagement.

As Evans (2020) has studied, social media is a part of transmedia engagement, and it has a type of engagement called peritextual engagement. This engagement highlights how experiences from various social media users are bound up to signify the transmediated narratives. Since the engagement relies on the users’ experiences in response to the narratives circulated on social media, it implies that they have different levels of what Kuijpers *et al.* (2014) and Kuijpers and Hakemulder (2017) call narrative absorption. Through narrative absorption, four experience-based dimensions are investigated: attention, mental imagery, emotional engagement, and transportation (KUIJPERS *et al.*, 2014). Through these dimensions, a scale to reveal the absorption level could be designed. The scale revolves around a preference for the use of popular techniques over literary techniques and a preference for the use of action-oriented stories over character-oriented stories for high scores of absorptions.

We argue that narrative absorption could be employed to address the issues of transmedia engagement of popular movies on Instagram. To address these issues, we attempt to construct a typology of how narrative absorptions are expressed through comments on the official Instagram of *House of Dragon* television series. The series was selected due to the

existence of their dedicated fans and the consistent circulation of postings from which engagements from fans are expected to flourish. That *House of Dragon* also possesses the concept of “binary-dyadic” is also a consideration in the title selection. This is the gap left by previous studies on audience engagement. Previous studies on the issues revolve around the confluence of technological, industrial, and cultural shifts (GRAVES, 2011), relations between engagement and modes (BEDDOWS, 2012), audience value (DAVIS, 2013), relations between engagement and experience (ATKINSON, 2018), and multimodality in transmediality (PERRY, 2020).

To construct the typology, the theories of narrative absorptions by Kuijpers *et al.* (2014) and Kuijpers and Hakemulder (2017), transmedia engagement by Jenkins *et al.* (2013), and peritextual engagement by Evans (2020) were employed. The theory of narrative absorptions was employed to reveal what preferences the fans imply from their comments – whether they tend to imply the use of popular, literary, action, or character-oriented techniques. The theory of transmedia engagement was employed to signify the relation between what is posted as a part of the circulation of the narratives and what is commented. The theory of peritextual engagement was employed to investigate the roles of Instagram’s features in supporting how they contribute to fans’ engagement through their comments.

## Literature Review

In new media, the idea of spreadability, introduced by Jenkins *et al.* (2013), represents a significant shift from traditional media consumption. Spreadability focuses on the active role of audiences in sharing content across platforms, unlike older models where content was delivered to passive viewers. This change highlights how media now thrives on user interaction, with people not only consuming but also creating, remixing, and sharing content. Jenkins *et al.* (2013) emphasize this move from passive audiences to a participatory culture, where users actively contribute to content creation and sharing, adding social and cultural value beyond

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just economics. Spreadable media suggests that value is created through audience collaboration in public networks. Films often use social media to engage with audiences, where fans discuss and share their experiences. These interactions are not just reactions; they become part of the film's evolving story. Audience input reshapes and expands the narrative, making it dynamic. This audience engagement is further enhanced by transmedia storytelling, where the story is told across multiple platforms.

Transmedia engagement involves storytelling across different media platforms, each contributing uniquely to the narrative (TORRES *et al.*, 2015). This allows audiences to explore a story through various formats—films, TV, social media, books, and games—each adding extra layers or expanding the plot. In film, transmedia engagement extends the story beyond the screen through social media, offering behind-the-scenes content, character spin-offs, and interactive fan experiences (SCOLARI, 2009). This deepens emotional connections and keeps fans engaged across multiple levels. Through this process, fans actively shape the story, sharing their interpretations and creations, which boosts the film's reach and influence. This blend of spreadable media and transmedia storytelling relies on audience participation to expand the narrative across platforms. For example, *Squid Game* (2021) has generated widespread social media engagement, with fans sharing theories and discussions, pulling even casual viewers into the conversation. This practice of spreadable media enhances engagement and expands the story's reach.

Evans (2020) introduces “peritextual engagement” on social media, focusing on how elements like captions, hashtags, comments, and user interfaces act as modern peritexts that shape the interpretation of content. These elements surrounding the main text of a film influence audience perceptions and boost their engagement with the story. Social media provides a platform for this engagement, allowing real-time interaction with these peritextual elements. Activities such as sharing promotional content, discussing trailers and posters, or creating fan art and memes extend the film's narrative and deepen audience connection. This interaction builds a sense of community among fans, increasing the

film's visibility and impact. By contributing to peritextual content, audiences help sustain the film's narrative and shape its cultural relevance (LIVINGSTONE, 2004). Such engagement leads to deeper narrative absorption, as immersive interactions foster stronger emotional and intellectual connections with the work.

Narrative absorption via social media comments is a dynamic form of audience engagement that illustrates how deeply viewers connect with a film's story. Fans frequently leave comments on official posts, fan pages, or forums to share emotions, interpretations, and theories (KUIJPERS; HAKEMULDER, 2017). These comments reflect their engagement and contribute to broader conversations around the film. Through this interaction, fans analyze plot details, debate character motivations, and share personal connections, enriching collective understanding and building communities of shared interest. This exchange of ideas can even shape future content, demonstrating how narrative absorption fosters participatory interaction and strengthens a film's cultural relevance (WILSON, 2005). A notable example is *Barbie* (2023), which stirred widespread discussion, especially on Instagram, over its feminist themes. The film sparked controversy and praise, leading to diverse forms of narrative absorption and deeper conversations, which offer opportunities to explore how audience responses vary.

## Methodology

The data of this qualitative study were in the forms of textual and visual data. Textual data consisted of captions and comments retrieved from the official Instagram account of *House of the Dragon*. The investigation of the comments was about the caption. This connective nature of the investigation suggested that engagement was the core concern of this study. On the other hand, visual data included images, emojis, and videos from Instagram posts taken from clips of the *House of the Dragon* series and from the comments that accompanied the textual elements.

Both the textual and visual data were published on the official Instagram account of *House of the Dragon*. As of this writing, the series

has released two seasons: Season 1 premiered on August 21, 2022, and Season 2 on June 16, 2024. The data analyzed in this study were drawn from posts published during the airing of Season 2. It is assumed that fan debates and discussions had already emerged during Season 1 and continued with greater intensity into Season 2. Each post used as data typically received thousands of likes and approximately 300,000 comments, with some posts reaching as many as 800,000 likes and 14,000 comments.

The data were then analyzed using Spradley's (2016) method, which involves four phases: domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme analyses. The first phase was domain analysis. In this phase, the theory of spreadability, as discussed by Jenkins *et al.* (2013), was applied to reveal intertextual links or connections between the source content and media of *House of the Dragon* with the target content and media. The intertextual links would indicate whether intrinsic or extrinsic elements of *House of the Dragon* were connected.

In the second phase, taxonomy analysis, they revealed intertextual links were investigated using the transmedia engagement theory by Torres *et al.* (2015). The implementation of the theory was an attempt to indicate how different media with the same content as the source might generate different engagements from the target audiences. Whether the engagement tended to revolve around intrinsic or extrinsic elements was investigated in this phase.

Since the engagement took place in a social media context, the theory of peritextual engagement by Evans (2020) and narrative absorptions by Kuijpers *et al.* (2014) and Kuijpers and Hakemulder (2017) were implemented in the third phase—componential analysis. Through the implementation of this theory, it was expected that a wide range of techniques of expressing engagement via comments could be revealed. The focus on the official Instagram of *House of the Dragon* indicates that the expressing techniques would circumnavigate the features of Instagram in delivering a comment.

In the last phase, cultural theme analysis, all findings were connected to construct a typology of narrative absorption-based transmedial

engagement. Through this constructed typology, one could learn how the engagement of the audiences to the same narratives on different media could, to some extent, signify the absorption of the audiences into the narratives.

## Results

This section is divided into five subsections, each corresponding to the typologies identified through the research. The typologies presented in this study are emergent categories, inductively constructed from audience comments on the official *House of the Dragon* Instagram account. The terms proposed in this study, *impersonating*, *mockery*, *miming*, *spoofing*, and *mirroring*, were not directly derived from pre-established theoretical frameworks but were instead formulated to describe specific patterns of narrative engagement that organically emerged within the social media sphere. Conceptually, the formulation of these typologies is grounded in the narrative absorption theory (KUIJPERS *et al.*, 2014; KUIJPERS; HAKEMULDER, 2017), which explains how readers or viewers become deeply immersed in a story world, and transmedia engagement theory (JENKINS *et al.*, 2013), which emphasizes how audience participation extends across multiple media and formats. Additionally, Evans's (2020) notion of peritextual engagement is employed to understand how audience interaction occurs not only within the main text but also in its surrounding spaces such as comments, hastags, captions, and other participatory forms. Thus, these typologies are intended as a new conceptual elaboration that enriches the understanding of how audiences negotiate narrative experiences and express forms of transmedial participation through performative practices in social media environments.

As discussed earlier, *House of the Dragon* revolves around the conflict between two factions: Team Green and Team Black. In this context, narrative absorption exhibits unique traits. Audience reactions on the official *House of the Dragon* Instagram account are marked by role-playing and referencing. Role-playing refers to audience members adopting the persona of a character to defend a particular team. Referencing, as defined by Purnomo *et al.*



Figure 2: Daemon scene in episode 5



Source: House of the Dragon (2025d)

Comment:

@Dasaharsh\_shrivastava: Daemon stop playing Resident evil, team black needs you 🤖

## Impersonating

Impersonating refers to the act of playing the role of the characters in response to the storytelling posted on Instagram. The comments posted by users are interpreted as attempts to embody characters from the *House of the Dragon* series. These responses are manifestations of the narrative absorbed by the audience, articulated through their comments. The key characteristic of impersonating lies in its diegetic consistency, the comments remain within the fictional framework constructed by *House of the Dragon*. This typology signifies a form of narrative embodiment, in which the boundary between the audience and the characters becomes

blurred due to deep emotional and imaginative involvement. Based on the analysis conducted, several data can be categorized as impersonating.

Figure 3 above are screenshots from the trailer posted on the official *House of the Dragon* Instagram account. Compared to other posts, this post garnered substantial engagement, with 800,000 likes and 14,000 comments. Among these comments, several can be associated with the typology of impersonating, where the audience plays the role of specific characters from the *House of the Dragon* series.

Comments:

@togrulraziyev: Team Green 🍀

@noaimi9: Team Black ❤️

@lonewolf\_\_\_\_07: I'm queen Rhaenyra now 👑❤️🍀

The audience of *House of the Dragon* series is divided into two factions: Team Black, led by Rhaenyra, and Team Green, led by Alicent. Although they belong to the same house, a power struggle over the throne ultimately splits them into two opposing factions, forming the series' central conflict. The comments referenced above illustrate how the audiences take on the role of characters, aligning themselves with either Team Black or Team

Figure 3: House of The Dragon Season 2 Trailer



Source: House of the Dragon (2025h)

Green. This role-playing behavior is classified as impersonating. By utilizing Instagram's comment feature, where users can respond to one another, this impersonating often sparks intense and seemingly endless debates.

Comment:

@palantemax: *THE REAL QUESTION IS, WHAT TEAM ARE YOU?* ❤️

Replies:

@yasaman2837: *TEAM BLACK* 🔥

@livinglavidaloca.x: *green*

@tw19913: ❤️🌿

@lnchrsty: *ofc* ❤️❤️❤️

@ayllacatarine: ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

@ladymorghul: ❤️❤️🔪

The audience's comments on *House of the Dragon* illustrate how viewers engage deeply with the show's characters. Commenting on Instagram allows fans to embody these characters, and these comments often provoke responses from other viewers who represent the rival characters. The types of comments vary widely, including text-based responses and symbolic emojis. For example, green and black heart emojis are used as codes to indicate allegiance to Team Green or Team Black. These debates go beyond simple support, often escalating into direct attacks on the opposing faction.

Figure 4 and 5 show that the audience engages deeply in role-playing as characters from *House of the Dragon*, with their intense feelings toward rival characters being clearly expressed in the comments. This aligns with Kuijpers and Hakemulder's (2017) assertion that comments reveal the audience's investment in the narrative through analysis, debate, and personal connections. This engagement goes beyond simple support or criticism of teams, as it involves viewers forming deeper relational ties with specific characters, thus intensifying their role-playing experience.

Statistically, Figure 6 received 194,800 likes and 894 comments, a noticeably higher level of engagement compared to Figure 7, which garnered 107,400 likes and 675 comments. Based on this difference in engagement levels, we distinguished the data presented in the figures: Figure 6 displays

Figure 4: Team Black Trailer



Source: House of the Dragon (2025n)

Comment on figure 4:

@gameofthrones: Watch the Green Trailer before pledging your loyalty.

Replies on figure 4:

@praiseomoaka: do we really need to? 😊

@aparr6: I'm all set #teamblack

@wisteriasbookshelf: I don't care

Figure 5: Team Green Trailer



Source: House of the Dragon (2025o)

Comment on figure 5:

@getsunfired: It's hilarious that the Greens (a small minority of the fans) makes TB so insecure that they spam our trailer 😂

Figure 6: Daemon and Rhaenyra in a scene (Team Black)



Source: House of the Dragon (2025c)

Comments on figure 6:

@monthly\_reads: Mom and Dad in their revenge era

@mxri.aana08: Love my parents

@aegonsflame: Father & mother

Reply on figure 6:

@jonfry3: fuck team green

Figure 7: Alicent and Christian Cole in a scene (Team Green)



Source: House of the Dragon (2025a)

Comment on figure 7:

@aegonsflame: Father & mother

three sample comments, while Figure 7 presents one sample comment.

The power struggle in *House of the Dragon* is centered around two factions, each represented by key couples that are prominently highlighted in the post. Daemon and Rhaenyra represent Team Black, while Alicent and Criston Cole stand for Team Green. This portrayal in the post subtly encourages the audience to engage in role-playing, as seen in the comments. Audiences from both factions, Team Black and Team Green, assume roles that suggest a deep relational connection with these characters. They position themselves as the children of the characters featured in the post. The audience perceives these characters as their parental figures, further intensifying their engagement in the narrative.

### **Mockery**

In the comment sections, audiences often display forms of humor or parody in response to the narratives presented on the series' official Instagram account. Based on the analysis, this humorous tendency is more frequently used to express sarcasm or mock certain characters. Following this pattern, this phenomenon is categorized as mockery, a form of humorous expression that functions to mock, belittle, or deride characters within the narrative context.

The use of the term mockery is conceptually grounded in the idea that not all forms of humor or verbal attacks can be classified as caricature or parody. Unlike caricature, which typically exaggerates physical traits, or parody, which imitates narrative structures to create comedic effects, mockery operates in a more linguistic and evaluative manner. It employs sarcasm, irony, or hyperbole to convey judgment toward a character without the need to imitate or reproduce the original form.

Thus, mockery is understood as a way for audiences to participate creatively in the story world, asserting their interpretive positions through language infused with a comedic tone. Within the framework of this research, mockery is regarded as one form of narrative absorption, as it demonstrates the extent to which audiences engage with the narrative not only through empathy or emotional identification but also through acts

of mocking and distortion, transforming characters into part of a playful negotiation of meaning within digital spaces.

The Figure 8 shows a scene from *House of the Dragon* featuring Lord Larys Strong. Within the *House of the Dragon* universe, he is aligned with Team Green. Larys is often portrayed as both cunning and opportunistic; he demonstrates little loyalty to any particular side, instead supporting whoever he perceives as beneficial to his own interests. Beneath this shrewd disposition lies intelligence and a keen sense of analysis. However, the character is also depicted as having a physical limitation, as he cannot walk properly and is often shown using a walking aid. This physical condition frequently becomes a subject of parody among audiences in the comment section.

Two comments responding to a post about Larys Strong exemplify this tendency. In the *House of the Dragon* narrative, the central conflict revolves around Team Black and Team Green. However, comments such as “Team Feet” and “Foot of the King” reveal how audiences distort the logic of the story into humor that takes the form of mockery. The phrase “Team Feet” sarcastically invents a new faction that does not exist in the series, while “Foot of the King” twists the official title “Hand of the King” to mock Larys’s disability.

Figure 8: Lord Larys Strong



Source: *House of the Dragon* (2025j)

**Comments:**

@graces.face: Team feet

@h3\_bubu: His ultimate goal is not to be named the Hand of the King, but the Foot of the King!

These comments are not merely light-hearted jokes but reflect a deeper dimension of mockery, a form of humor expressed through veiled insult and irony toward a character. In this context, comedy becomes a way for audiences to demonstrate both familiarity with the narrative and an evaluative stance toward certain figures. In other words, they participate in the story world not only by showing support or opposition but also by mocking the characters. This pattern of commentary therefore represents mockery as a mode of narrative absorption, in which engagement with the story is expressed through humor that ridicules rather than empathizes with fictional characters.

The second topic that can be categorized as a form of mockery appears in audience responses to the character Ser Criston Cole as seen in Figure 9. As is widely known, he belongs to Team Green and is one of the most disliked characters among fans. Consequently, most comments on posts featuring Ser Criston Cole's face contain elements of hate speech or ridicule. However, these mockeries are not always direct; they are often framed through humor and wordplay that reflect both the creativity and irony of the audience.

Expressions such as "A very punchable face" exemplify a distinctive form of engagement. This comment does not merely express hatred toward the character but frames it through sarcastic humor that invites laughter from those familiar with the narrative context. Within the framework of mockery, such expressions function as a form of social evaluation toward the character, a way for audiences to articulate disgust through ironic linguistic play. Similarly, the wordplay transforming "Ser Criston Cole" into "Ser Crispy Coal" reveals a similar tendency, as audiences modify the character's name to mock his traits and fate within the story.

Another form of mockery, such as the use of the term "incel," demonstrates a deeper dimension of this phenomenon. The term, associated with an online subculture of heterosexual men who are involuntarily celibate, is used sarcastically to comment on Ser Criston Cole's romantic failures. He fails to win Rhaenyra's affection and ultimately becomes a servant to Alicent without being truly loved. Through this term,

audiences do more than simply mock the character; they reinterpret his identity and gender relations in ways that are both humorous and critical.

These comments thus illustrate that mockery functions as a form of narrative absorption, emphasizing the audience's emotional involvement through humor that ridicules rather than empathizes. The audience not only understands the story's plot but also participates in it by consciously subverting meaning and laughing at the characters.

Prince Jacaerys Velaryon, or Jace as seen in Figure 10, is the son of Queen Rhaenyra and is clearly aligned with Team Black. Within the world of *House*

Figure 9: Ser Criston Cole



Source: House of the Dragon (2025m)

Comments:

- @miamihurrikane: Ser Crispy
- @duisabsent: intel ❌ incel ✅
- @tracebenjamin: A very punchable face
- @jacobalvarezI: Going incel on the enemy
- @rorifmnx: FUCK CRISPY COLE
- @eileenhr: me and my homies hate crispy coal

Figure 10: Prince Jacaerys Velaryon



Source: House of the Dragon (2025l)

Comments:

- @el3nasfine: Prince of serving face
- @azulbey: He pays his vacations with facecard
- @Plittlelordfuckleroy\_: rince Jace of serving face 🍷🍷🍷 (and securing the riverlands)

of the *Dragon*, Jace's role has not yet become particularly significant in the political storyline or the central conflict. However, the relative insignificance of his role contrasts sharply with the amount of attention he receives from the audience, particularly regarding his appearance, facial expressions, and demeanor. Comments such as "Prince of serving face" or "He pays his vacations with facecard" illustrate how audiences tend to reduce Jace's character to a mere representation of his facial expressions. Even a comment like "Prince Jace of serving face 🙌🙌🙌 (and securing the Riverlands)" demonstrates how commenters mock him subtly by blending praise with irony.

These comments exemplify a more subtle form of mockery—not an overtly offensive mocking, but rather a playful expression of irony. In this case, mockery does not function as a direct verbal attack but as a way of laughing at the character's tendency to be recognized solely for his "good looks." Thus, although the comments appear light-hearted and humorous, they still operate within the logic of mockery, as they exaggerate one aspect of the character—his appearance—to expose the emptiness of meaning behind it. Consequently, the audience's response to Jace can be interpreted not merely as aesthetic appreciation but as a form of symbolic mockery toward the insignificance of his role within the larger narrative of *House of the Dragon*.

To further examine the form of mockery, we can look at the two examples (Figures 11 and 12). Both occur within the same context—when the dragons each find their respective riders. In the universe of *House of the Dragon*, every dragon can only bond with one rider at a time. When a rider dies, the dragon chooses a new successor. This selection process is not arbitrary; traditionally, only those of Targaryen blood who can speak Valyrian are able to communicate and form a bond with a dragon. However, the two characters shown in the clips—Addam of Hull and Hugh Hammer—violate this convention. Neither possesses Targaryen lineage, yet both are chosen by dragons. This anomaly generates various comedic responses from the audience.

A comment such as "what a beautiful chocolate man ha ha ha ha 🤪" demonstrates how mockery operates. The remark imitates the perspective

of the dragon Seasmoke “chasing” Addam of Hull while embedding humor rooted in the actor’s skin color (an African American). Thus, mockery here functions not merely as laughter but as a form of racialized parody, in which the character is ridiculed through visual association and the reproduction of racial stereotypes within the space of fandom.

Similarly, the comment “Vermithor is bilingual” contains mockery based on linguistic irony. Within the narrative, only Targaryen riders can speak Valyrian to establish a connection with their dragons. By suggesting that Vermithor is “bilingual,” the audience mocks the absurdity of the situation—a dragon that defies the internal logic of its fictional world to bond with an ordinary human. These two comments reveal how mockery

Figure 11: Dragon Seasmoke and Adam of Hull



Source: House of the Dragon (2025c)

Comment on figure 11:

@mattpalmerofficial: SEASMOKE: “what a beautiful chocolate man ha ha ha ha” 🤪

operates through exaggeration, irony, and humor that target both the characters and the internal coherence of the story world itself.

Based on the various data presented, it becomes evident that mockery constitutes one of the dominant forms of audience expression in responding to *House of the Dragon* content on Instagram. These comments demonstrate that humor is employed not merely as a means of role-playing or interacting with the narrative, but also as a vehicle for ridicule, belittlement, and even verbal aggression toward certain characters. In several instances, such mockery exceeds the boundaries of civility, particularly when it involves issues of race or disability, revealing the presence of an aggressive and unethical dimension within fandom culture. This phenomenon is significant because it highlights that narrative absorption is not always positive or empathetic; it can also receive the

Figure 12: Dragon Vermithor and Hugh Hammer



Source: House of the Dragon (2025f).

Comment on figure 12:

@oboy\_sammy: So, Vermithor is bilingual now? 🤔 Cuz he clearly listens to Rhayneryra when she speaks valyrian, but Hugh says two words, and Vermithor chills all the sudden

darker aspects of participation, where emotional engagement with a story gives rise to harsh and discriminatory verbal practices. By foregrounding this ambivalence, the analysis of mockery expands our understanding of the interrelation between humor, narrative engagement, and ethics within the participatory digital sphere.

## Miming

Miming represents the third typology identified in this study. Miming is understood as playing a role from different stories but intertextually connected. In commenting, the audience also assumes the role of characters from the series and links them to characters from narratives outside *House of the Dragon* series. Miming expands the narrative space by connecting it to other story universes. Through miming, audiences demonstrate their creativity in bridging multiple popular texts, negotiating meaning by constructing cross-narrative relationships that reveal both the breadth of their cultural literacy and their associative capacity. In this way, miming illustrates how audiences actively engage with transmedia storytelling by weaving together elements from diverse fictional worlds. In this case, the study identifies four types of comments associated with characters drawn from *Harry Potter*, *Resident Evil* game series, *Luigi's Mansion* game series, and *Vikings* series.

Figure 13 are posts containing the trailer for *House of the Dragon* Season 2. As discussed in the previous subsection, these posts garner numerous comments and likes. The comments vary widely, and one type of comment will be analyzed according to the definition of miming. In these posts, one highlighted element is the dragons. In the *House of the Dragon* universe, dragons capture more attention compared to their portrayal in the *Game of Thrones* universe. *House of the Dragon* provides a deeper exploration of the history of dragons and their riders. This focus on dragons prompts the audience to respond by connecting them with characters from other stories or by assuming the roles of characters from other intertextually linked narratives. The comments indicate that the commentators wish Draco from the *Harry Potter* universe to have a dragon. Given that

dragons do not exist in Harry Potter, the comment “*Draco should have a dragon*” demonstrates that the audience is drawing connections between *House of the Dragon* universe and *Harry Potter* universe.

Figure 14 depicts Daemon at Harrenhal. Harrenhal is a castle in the Riverlands, built by Harren the Black, who sought to construct the largest

Figure 13: House of Dragon Season 2 Trailer



Source: House of the Dragon (2025h)

Comment:

@harrypotter: these dragons look scary... brilliant, but scary

Replies:

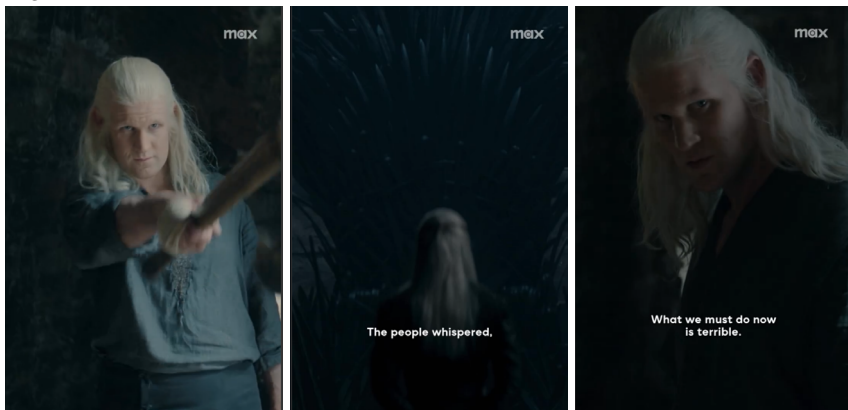
@shilananayati\_: draco should have a dragon

@lukaspanelo: Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus!!

fortress in Westeros. However, the castle is believed to be cursed due to its history of death and misfortune. In summary, Daemon is seeking allies there but instead experiences persistent hallucinations. Amidst the conflict between Team Black and Team Green, Daemon's presence is highly anticipated, given that he is the husband of Queen Rhaenyra. Against this narrative backdrop, the post has elicited numerous responses about him. As seen above, one such comment advises Daemon to stop playing *Resident Evil*. *Resident Evil* is a Japanese horror video game series. The audience humorously implies that Daemon is engaged in a *Resident Evil*-like scenario due to his presence in the eerie Harrenhal. This response suggests that the audience is role-playing between two worlds, *Resident Evil* and *House of the Dragon*, and drawing connections between them.

Similar to the previous case, Figure 15 addresses the issue of Daemon at Harrenhal. The comments indicate that the audience is also responding to Daemon's scene in Harrenhal. They perceive the series not as *House of the Dragon* but rather as *Luigi's Mansion*. *Luigi's Mansion* is an action-adventure game developed and published by Nintendo in 2001. The game is set in a mansion divided into several

Figure 14: Daemon scene in episode 5



Source: House of the Dragon (2025g)

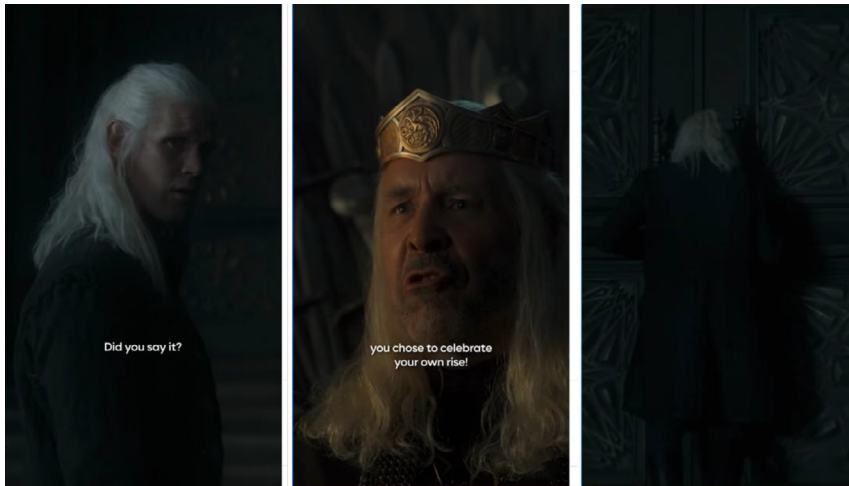
Comment:

@Dasaharsh\_\_shrivastava: Daemon stop playing Resident evil, team black needs you 🤖

areas or rooms that players explore while controlling Luigi to hunt ghosts within the mansion. This context of *Luigi's Mansion* prompts the audience to liken Daemon's situation to being in *Luigi's Mansion* and needing to escape. Furthermore, in the final comment, the audience questions why Daemon is still in the Addams Family's house. The *Addams Family* (1964) is an American Gothic sitcom based on a New Yorker cartoon by Charles Addams. Drawing from the narrative of *The Addams Family*, the audience connects this narrative with the events in *House of the Dragon*.

In addition to Daemon, characters receive audience responses with intertextual connections to narratives outside the story, including Hugh and Ulf. Hugh and Ulf as seen in Figure 16 are bastards who become new dragon riders in Team Black. They are frequently highlighted due to the initial improbability of their becoming dragon riders. From the interview post above, the audience responds by associating them with

Figure 15: Clip of Daemon in Harrenhal



Source: *House of the Dragon* (2025b)

Comments:

@sweetcherry13: The ghost of Christmas past. Are we finished with Luigi's mansion yet?

@\_raya\_34\_: IT'S no longer House of the dragon ... literally it became Luigi's mansion

@cup\_s05: Why is daemon still at the Adams family's house??

Figure 16: Hugh Hammer and Ulf interview



Source: House of the Dragon (2025i).

Comment:

@pasaqcale: I thought I was watching Vikings for a second 🤔

*Vikings* (2013) series characters. The characters in *Vikings*, based on their appearance, do indeed bear similarities. It can be concluded that the audience is role-playing as characters from *Vikings* and seeing themselves within the context of *House of the Dragon*.

## Spoofting

Spoofting is defined as a form of narrative engagement that employs real-life figures from social contexts as reference points to interpret or comment on fictional characters. In this practice, audiences perform or imitate public figures, celebrities, or cultural icons to create

comments that are both reflective and contextually grounded. Unlike miming, which connects *House of the Dragon* characters to those from other fictional narratives, spoofing links fictional characters to real-world figures. Through this process, audiences demonstrate their cultural awareness while constructing a broader engagement between the narrative world and the surrounding social reality. From the data collected, this study identifies only one topic that can be categorized as spoofing.

Prince Aemond, as seen in Figure 17 is one of the prominent characters in *House of the Dragon* series. He is a key character in Team Black, and it is no surprise that he has a substantial fan base. One notable aspect is Prince Aemond's role in substituting for the ailing King Aegon. From the comments above, it can be inferred that the audience associates Prince Aemond with the title "*Prince Regent.*" In English, the title

Figure 17: Prince Aemond and Ser Christian Cole scene



Source: House of the Dragon (2025k)

Comments:

@avarosegilbert: need to see aemond in that prince regent crown for research purposes...

@ewan\_mitchell\_sapphire: PRINCE REGENT 🔥🔥

“Prince Regent” is most commonly linked with George IV, who held the style of His Royal Highness as Prince Regent during the Regency era due to the incapacitation (resulting from mental illness) of his father, George III. The title “Prince Regent” is generally bestowed upon a prince who governs a country during the minority, absence, or disability of the nominal sovereign. This title, while taken from the real-life story of George IV, informs the audience’s responses. Although there is only one data point, the reaction to the post indicates that there will always be an audience with references to real-world characters, enabling them to connect with the narrative.

## **Mirroring**

The final typology identified in this study is mirroring. Mirroring involves reflecting the characters in story by relating them to the commenter’s personal lives. This concept closely resembles self-reflection. The audience responds to posts by connecting them to their own lives. In the process of narrative absorption, it is believed that the audience may imagine themselves within the story or, conversely, perceive characters from the series as reflections of themselves.

Figure 18 pertains to the typology of mirroring. As discussed in the typology of mockery, Lord Larys Strong is indeed a cunning, opportunistic individual with no loyalty to anyone. His father, Lyonel Strong, serves as Hand of the King, and his brother is Harwin Strong, the Queen Alicent’s guard. Despite his physical imperfections, Larys is highly adept at political maneuvering within the realm. To secure a strategic position, he sacrificed his father and brother to become Lord of Harrenhal. Such characteristics understandably make people wary of dealing with him. This is evidenced by the comment above. In this comment, the audience is role-playing as themselves, stating that they would leave if confronted by Larys Strong. The narrative surrounding Larys Strong seems to provoke the audience to absorb the narration that Larys Strong is someone to be avoided, suggesting that one should distance themselves if they encounter him.

Figure 18: Lord Larys Strong



Source: House of the Dragon (2025j)

Comment:

@breecancook: This is the snitch of all snitches! If I ever saw him I would go the other way instantly. 😂

## Discussion

This research integrates several theories to develop a typology in its conclusion. First, we apply Jenkins *et al.*'s (2013) concept of spreadability to identify intertextual links between the content of *House of the Dragon* and other media. These links reveal connections between the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the show. Next, Torres *et al.*'s (2015) concept of transmedia engagement is used to explore how different media platforms, while sharing the same content, create varying levels of engagement among target audiences. Evans' (2020) theory of peritextual engagement is also relevant, as the focus is on social media interactions. Finally, the concept of narrative absorption by Kuijpers *et al.* (2014) and Kuijpers and Hakemulder (2017) helps shape the typology. Based on the analysis, we identify five typologies: impersonating, mockery, miming, spoofing, and mirroring.

From the conducted analysis, these five typologies demonstrate that audiences comment in various ways in response to posts on Instagram. When fans leave comments on posts related to a film—whether on official social media accounts, fan pages, or discussion forums—they often express their emotional responses, interpretations, and theories about the narrative (KUIJPERS; HAKEMULDER, 2017). These audience comments are subsequently examined and categorized into forms of narrative absorption typology. The analysis also reveals that the narrative of *House of the Dragon* absorbed by the audience is highly diverse. The five typologies discussed are not entirely exhaustive; potential typologies may emerge over time. Social media is perpetually active, as is the Instagram account for *House of the Dragon*. This account will continue to attract visitors, and comments will increase, especially considering that *House of the Dragon* will continue into its third season.

Analyzing narrative absorption based on comment data does have its drawbacks. On Instagram, the comment feature cannot upload videos. Audiences can only respond to posts through text, emoticons, stickers, and GIFs. Text-based comments do not fully capture the narrative conveyed by the commenter. The process of interpreting text may also lead to inaccuracies. Interviewing commenters could be an option to mitigate interpretative errors, although this approach may be challenging to implement. A more effective method might be to analyze social media platforms with more varied commenting features. One platform that could be utilized is Twitter/X.

Twitter/X, despite being older than Instagram, has been surpassed in popularity and user base by Instagram over time. Nonetheless, a study by Ayora *et al.* (2021) indicates that both platforms offer near real-time latency, making them suitable for real-time processing. However, when comparing the platforms, Twitter/X excels in all evaluated metrics. Twitter/X offers more response features than Instagram, including reply, like, and retweet options. Additionally, Twitter/X allows users to upload videos within comments. Furthermore, users can retweet comments from others, which can be seen by other users who may not

be aware of the original tweet. This complexity in features enables a broader dissemination of narratives within audience comments. Utilizing the Twitter/X social media platform may allow for a more in-depth exploration of narrative absorption. In light of the evolving dynamics of social media, future researchers might consider analyzing similar topics on Twitter/X.

## **Conclusion**

We argue that comments in an official Instagram account of a “team versus team” movie are a form of narrative absorption due to the nature of role-playing and references of the comments. Departing from these claims and findings, we further constructed a typology of narrative absorption that consisted of impersonating, miming, mockery, spoofing, and mirroring.

The typology was constructed based on how the commenters role-played themselves and referenced the movies. In this study, the movie is *House of the Dragon*. Impersonating refers to playing a role as one of the characters as a response to the storytelling posted on Instagram, mockery to playing a role but twisting it to evoke parodic or comedic. This humorous tendency is more frequently used to express sarcasm or mock certain characters, miming to playing a role from different stories but intertextually connected, spoofing to playing a role with references to real-life characters, and mirroring to reflecting the characters by relating to the commenters’ personal lives.

Future studies could employ the typology as a basis to prove whether the typology is applicable to comments on other social media like Twitter/X that has different features. Through this study, the findings could complete the typology that we proposed. Movie-making practitioners who attempt to design movies with a “team versus team” narrative formula could employ the typology to construct a narrative absorption level rubric. With the rubric, they could predict the fans’ engagement level through social media.

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