

Tensions between the covid-19 pandemic and current mediatization: discussions on emerging concepts and reconfigurations

Tensões entre a pandemia de covid-19 e a midiatização na atualidade: discussões sobre conceitos emergentes e reconfigurações

Tensiones entre la pandemia de covid-19 y la mediatización actual: debates sobre conceptos emergentes y reconfiguraciones

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ABSTRACT

The aim is to discuss the tensions between the covid-19 pandemic and the process of mediatization of culture and society today. Seeking to look at possible reconfigurations and emerging concepts brought about by the context, the definitions of mediatization are bibliographically reviewed and a state of the art of Brazilian academic-scientific research that addressed the link between mediatization and the covid-19 pandemic in recent years (2020-2022) is presented. Conceptual essays are identified on the mediatization of religion, mediatization of work, mediatization of politics, mediatization of health, mediatization of consumption, mediatization of education, mediatization of entertainment, among others. Thus, it can be concluded that the developments related to mediatization were directly connected to everyday life within the context, when mediation by the media met latent needs of different segments.

Keywords: Covid-19; Pandemic; Mediatization; State of art; Digital ecosystem.

RESUMO

Objetiva-se discutir acerca das tensões existentes entre a pandemia de covid-19 e o processo de midiatização da cultura e da sociedade na atualidade. Buscando olhar para possíveis reconfigurações e conceitos emergentes trazidos pelo contexto, retomam-se bibliograficamente as definições de midiatização e apresenta-se um estado da arte de pesquisas acadêmico-científicas brasileiras que já abordaram a temática atrelada à pandemia de covid-19 nos últimos anos (2020-2022). Identificam-se ensaios conceituais acerca da midiatização da religião, midiatização do trabalho, midiatização da política, midiatização da saúde, midiatização do consumo, midiatização da educação, midiatização do entretenimento etc. Assim, conclui-se que as emergências relacionadas à midiatização estiveram diretamente relacionadas aos chamados cotidianos inerentes ao contexto, quando as mediações pela mídia supriram necessidades latentes de segmentos diversos.

Palavras-chave: Covid-19; Pandemia; Midiatização; Estado da arte; Ecossistema digital.

RESUMEN

El objetivo es discutir las tensiones entre la pandemia de covid-19 y el proceso de mediatización de la cultura y la sociedad actual. Buscando mirar posibles reconfiguraciones y conceptos emergentes provocados por el contexto, se revisan bibliográficamente las definiciones de mediatización y se presenta un estado del arte de la investigación académico-científica brasileña que ya abordó el tema vinculado a la pandemia de covid-19 en últimos años (2020-2022). Se identifican ensayos conceptuales sobre la mediatización de la religión, la mediatización del trabajo, la mediatización de la política, la mediatización de la salud, la mediatización del consumo, la mediatización de la educación, la mediatización del entretenimiento etc. Así, se concluye que las emergencias relacionadas con la mediatización estaban directamente relacionadas con la llamada cotidianidad inherente al contexto, cuando la mediación por los medios atendía necesidades latentes de diferentes segmentos.

Palabras clave: Covid-19; Pandemia; Mediatización; Estado del arte; Ecosistema digital.

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INTRODUCTION

There is social consensus that the covid-19 pandemic has defined an era, whether this is due to the terrifying nature of the situation, with millions of lives lost, the social and economic consequences, or the changes arising from the need to adapt to the particularities of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). This emergency lasted for more than three years, with the official start decreed by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, and the end on May 5, 2023. In this environment, the use of communication and/or media resources has been prominent and on the rise in many everyday processes, crossing geographical boundaries. It has become an important means of getting information as well as impacting leisure, education, training, work, etc. Traits that were already on the rise such as remote study, work, medical appointments, etc., have become commonplace practices as a result of this emergency scenario.

This research is focused on discussing how the covid-19 pandemic and the resulting movements (social, cultural, economic, political, emotional, informational, etc.) have contributed to the emergence and reconfiguration of the concept of mediatization in today's communication environment. It is assumed that this specific context can be considered a milestone and an influence on the future of the communication field and media studies.

As a result, the aim is to outline an authorial and illustrative mind map of the reconfigurations and developments brought about by the pandemic (in its social context) to studies on mediatization (in their academic context). The focus being on those related to the area of communication and the media environment. To that end, a brief bibliographical overview of the concept of mediatization over time is presented, based on Braga (2006); Barros (2012); Couldry and Hepp (2016); Hjarvard (2014); Sodré (2002, 2006); Verón (1997). Subsequently, the exploratory state of the art method is used to identify academic discussions that, in 2020, 2021 and 2022, addressed the phenomenon of mediatization and the pandemic. Our research proposal is immersed in this context: a specific, atypical, and emerging reality that we believe has been fertile and decisive in the construction of the current communication environment.

METHODOLOGY

Our analysis has the theoretical-methodological influence of cultural studies, a perspective that urges researchers to value the specific context and "(pay) attention to specificities and particularities connected to a given historical conjuncture, thus producing a theory engaged in cultural differences" (Escosteguy, 2010, p. 45, own translation). The essence of cultural studies is an interdisciplinary, contextual practice, committed to raising concerns and (looking at) social transformations.

Based on empirical data collection, the research adopts a contextual approach. Thus, the covid-19 pandemic is presented as the social and temporal context of the investigation. Through a bibliographical survey, the theoretical trends around mediatization that have been present since before the advent of the covid-19 pandemic are presented.

The state of the art research was carried out in an exploratory and inventory manner, allowing us to get acquainted with academic-scientific research that has already focused on mediatization in the social and temporal contexts mentioned. According to Romanowski and Ens (2006, p. 39, own translation):

[...] states of the art can make an important contribution to the composition of the theoretical field of an area of knowledge, since they seek to identify the significant contributions to the construction of pedagogical theory and practice, point out restrictions in the field in which the research is carried out, its dissemination gaps, identify innovative investigated experiences that point to alternative solutions to the problems of practice and recognize how research contributes to the formation of proposals in the area in question.

More specifically, we sought to look at academic-scientific productions that, in recent years (2020-2022), have prompted reflections related to the thematic confluence between mediatization and the historical moment of the covid-19 pandemic. We paid special attention to the phenomenon of mediatization, its mutations, developments and relations with culture and society in this period. The research took place in May 2023, with Google Scholar as the online search space. This is because, according to Gaudêncio, Figueiredo and Leite (2009, p. 16, own translation), it provides a straightforward way to search academic literature comprehensively, from: “peer-reviewed articles, theses, books, abstracts and articles from academic publishers, professional organizations, pre-publication libraries, universities and other academic entities”.

Reflecting on this broad scope, for the purposes of our analysis we only included studies that are scientifically rigorous, such as: publications in journals recognized by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Capes), publications in the proceedings of events and/or congresses recognized in their fields, book chapters, as well as undergraduate, master’s and doctoral research. Therefore, we present a mapping of research written in Portuguese, made available on the Google Scholar virtual platform, and published in the years 2020, 2021 and 2022. The material was organized using the Google Sheets tool, sorted by: title, author, type of publication, year, author’s home institution, access link and keywords. Following this, skim reading enabled us to gain an understanding of the results - which will be presented in section 4.

The keywords “mediatization” AND “pandemic” were used as search terms. We applied the filters of three complete years (2020, 2021 and 2022) and research published in Portuguese. We found 1,890 works, a sizable number of results, but one that came as no surprise considering the emergence of the topic and the wide scope of the platform mentioned. Considering both practicality and analytical depth, we selected the first thirty results that covered the two spheres of this investigation - mediatization and the pandemic.

Our aim was to understand the main themes, contexts and concepts related to mediatization and the covid-19 pandemic as addressed in academic-scientific research. To that effect, the analysis presented in topic 4 focuses on the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the thirty studies that made up the research corpus. It is also worth mentioning that data was systematized using mind maps, i.e., infographic resources used to help structure, organize, and visually present the research results.

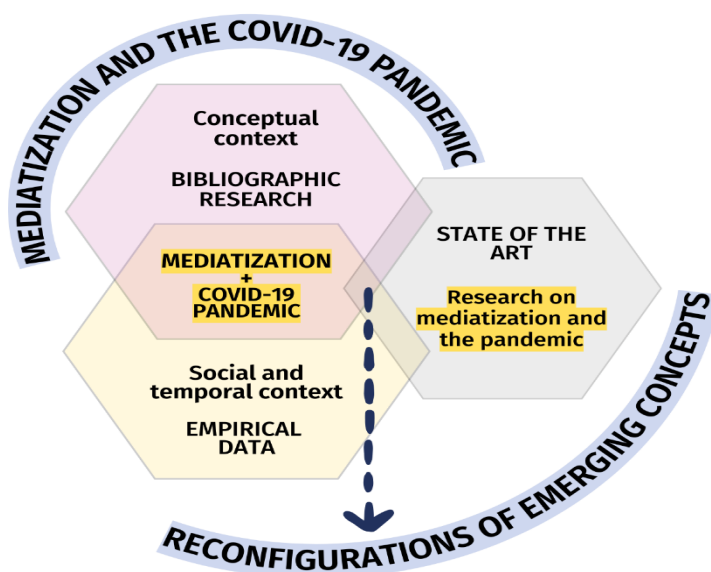


Figure 1 - Research methodology protocol
Source: Produced by the authors

Figure 1 illustrates the combination of research activities. The studies of mediatization and their effects were observed in a context where there were major impacts on culture and society. We have tried to look closely at the time and manner in which the existing structural changes took place, considering interplay between the media, various social institutions, and the pandemic itself.

MEDIATIZATION AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

It can be said that we live in a society permeated by the media, with media phenomena being a universal characteristic of all human societies, and mediatization being one of the main interventions in society (Braga, 2006). Therefore, mediatization spreads and penetrates deeper into the social structure, constituting a culture that can be considered mediatized (Barros, 2012). Back in 2002, Muniz Sodré already pointed to the emergence of the process of mediatization in society (Sodré, 2002), which shortly afterwards was dubbed a mediatized society by the same author (Sodré, 2006).

However, with the advent of the covid-19 pandemic, these issues related to media interventions have become increasingly apparent (and urgent) in theoretical and practical discussions in various fields of knowledge. Thus, in an attempt to get a handle on the concepts and contexts that are at the heart of this study, we present below a theoretical essay on mediatization, as well as a historical and social overview of the covid-19 pandemic.

Mediatization: a brief history of the concept and its relationship with culture and society

Mediatization is understood here as a phenomenon in progress that occurs socially and in conjunction with social and cultural events. In this sense, we are in dialogue with some like-minded authors, especially Hjarvard (2014), who studies mediatization in connection with culture and society, highlighting the interdisciplinary approach and the permeations of mediatization in various social institutions, such as the family, religion, work, politics, etc.

Historically, the author highlights the impact of mediatization on culture and society. He stresses that it is not a universal process that characterizes all societies, but rather a development that accelerated in the last years of the 20th century in modern, highly industrialized societies (Hjarvard, 2014). This statement is corroborated by Couldry and Hepp (2016), who emphasize that mediatization should not be seen as a singular process, since the processes of mediatization derive from the process of social complexification - which demands mediated communication between technological devices, institutions, and subjects.

In Europe, Hjarvard (2014) points to the advent of radio in the 1920s as the moment when the media began to reach the public more widely and gradually began to take on the character of cultural institutions. The 1980s were characterized by structural changes in the communications sector and in society. Examples of this are the end of the public radio and television monopoly and the expansion of satellite and cable transmission services. In the 1990s, the rapid expansion of mobile telephony and the internet made communication systems even more complex. Likewise the media's identity transitioned from being made up of cultural institutions to media institutions.

As a way of summarizing the movements that have shaped the history of communication and, consequently, mediatization, Couldry and Hepp (2016) outline four waves: mechanization (which began with the invention of the printing press, bringing about the creation of mass print media, within industrialization); electrification (beginning with the creation of the telegraph and ending with telecommunication media); digitalization (originating with the creation of the computer and digital media); and, finally, the so-called fourth wave, considered to be the one experienced at the present time, which is expressed through the representation of social life by means of computerized data arranged in media devices and software, among others.

For the authors, in this latest wave there is greater penetration of mediatization as a result of a much more intense incorporation of media and technological developments into social processes.

Similarly, there are a number of reflections on the transition from a so-called media society to a society in the process of mediatization. According to Verón (1997), the latter is when institutions, practices, conflicts, and issues involving cultures begin to dialog with media issues, with the media having taken on a significant role in societies across different contexts. Furthermore, new technical devices have allowed new phenomena to emerge.

Considering the most recent scenario, it can be said that “contemporary culture and society are so permeated by the media that it may no longer be possible to conceive of them as something separate from cultural and social institutions” (Hjarvard, 2014, p. 15, own translation). Finally, it is worth mentioning the complexification and intensification of social interrelationships with the advent of digital technology over the years. More recently this has been accentuated by the covid-19 pandemic and through a number of social processes, combined with technological and/or media immersion in cultural and social institutions related to the health crisis. In view of this, we have taken the process of mediatization as a theoretical recourse to identify how the influence and reconfigurations of the media operate in this environment of social complexification between communication, the media, and the covid-19 pandemic.

Covid-19 pandemic: context and social perspective

More than just a microbiological phenomenon, we see the covid-19 pandemic context as an important social, political, economic, and cultural event, with consequences and social and behavioral transformations that are still immeasurable in their entirety. Covid stands for coronavirus disease. The number 19 refers to the year 2019, when the first cases were made public in December (Fiocruz, 2020).

On March 11, 2020, the disease was declared a pandemic by the WHO - a denomination that occurs when the worldwide spread of a new disease is across different continents and has sustained transmission from person to person. The same period also saw the start of the most rigorous social isolation initiatives in Brazil and around the world. Since then, according to data from the organization Our World in Data (2023), as of March 16, 2023, 760,896,791 cases and 6,874,572 deaths from covid-19 have been confirmed worldwide. In Brazil, the Ministry of Health's Coronavirus Dashboard (2023) confirmed 37,145,514 cases and 699,634 deaths (up to March 14, 2023). These figures represent much more than numbers and/or statistics: they are about people, lives, families, and a multitude of interrupted dreams.

The creation of the vaccine and the vaccination rollout were decisive for the significant reduction in the number of serious cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from the disease. In Brazil, the arrival of the immunizing agent and the application of the first dose took place on January 17, 2021, when the Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária (Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency - Anvisa) authorized the emergency use of two vaccines in the country: Coronavac (in Brazil, produced by the Instituto Butantan) and AstraZeneca (manufactured by the Fundação Oswaldo Cruz - Fiocruz). As a result, amid the fears and uncertainties of a unique social and health scenario, there was gradually an end to lockdowns and restrictions on movement, the compulsory wearing of masks indoors and/or on public transport, and the requirement to show proof of vaccination in order to enter places where social interaction took place. On May 5, 2023, the WHO announced a change in the status of covid-19, which is no longer classified as a PHEIC.

During this period, we looked at the pandemic and what was going on around it through two lenses, which are sometimes synthesized to deal with the complexity of the situation. The first is related to health and epidemiological issues and deals with prevention as well as the severity and high mortality of the disease. Pain, suffering, insecurity, tension, and physical and mental exhaustion are analyzed. To this day these consequences are not fully measurable, but certainly have short-, medium- and long-term impacts.

The second lens deals with political, economic, cultural, and social issues that have turned the Covid-19 pandemic into an event that shapes major crises and social transformations.

Nowadays, focusing on what is happening in Brazil after the second half of 2023, it can be said that we are facing what has been called the “new normal”, characterized by social, cultural, behavioral and language changes and alterations in the media ecosystem that have been incorporated into everyday life. These are the issues we are focusing on most in this research.

In general, it can be said that, with the advent of the pandemic, we have immersed ourselves in an emergency scenario that has accelerated actions and innovations, requiring adaptations and resilience to deal with a situation of social complexification in various areas. Therefore, dealing with this topic means approaching an emerging context, of great relevance and social impact, which has affected and reconfigured life in society in recent years.

MEDIATIZATION AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN ACADEMIC-SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTIONS (2020-2022)

The covid-19 pandemic - given its epidemiological nature, its severity and the consequent need for isolation and social distancing - has contributed to a much more intense incorporation of the media into social processes, with the transformations reflected not only in the media environment, but also in sociability and interactional processes.

It is worth reiterating that talking about mediatization in the context of the covid-19 pandemic means talking about media phenomena that have been accelerated and intensified by a global emergency situation, which has brought about social transformations and impacts. Culture, society, the media, and the population in general have had to find ways of following their routines and relating to each other, giving rise to new possibilities for socialization and changing everyday practices. In this context, we are witnessing ruptures between space and time, caused, and/or accelerated by technical devices.

In practice, this can be seen in the use of internet platforms to carry out various activities: the cultivation of relationships through interaction via online interpersonal communication resources; the presence of remote activities that impact the lives of various actors as well as social activities. There have been impacts on students and professionals in various fields, teaching activities and consumer practices to name but a few. In the academic-scientific sphere, these issues were also reflected and, even in the face of physical distancing, research continued to be carried out, with many of the researchers aware of the context of the covid-19 pandemic and critical of the challenges it caused. Here are some markers from the state of the art.

Of the thirty results that focused on mediatization and the pandemic, we would like to draw attention to the fact that, even without the use of filters to separate the research by undergraduate or postgraduate degree, almost all of the research analyzed (26 results - equivalent to 86.6%) was carried out by postgraduate researchers. This number highlights the relevance and prominence of specialized master's and doctoral researchers studying emerging themes such as the one we are investigating. It should also be noted that, even without applying filters by area (since the platform does not offer this possibility), the vast majority (27 studies - equivalent to 90%) of the results found through the search were authored by researchers in the area of communication - which highlights the relevance of the concept of mediatization in this academic area. The other studies (three - equivalent to 10%) are from areas that are in dialogue with communication: the arts, administration, and fashion.

Figure 2 illustrates the classification of the findings by **type of publication**, with the majority of papers published in event proceedings (16 papers - equivalent to 53.35%) and in journals (9 publications - equivalent

to 30%).¹ This result highlights the importance of researchers taking part in events to debate emerging issues in a more dynamic and dialogical way.

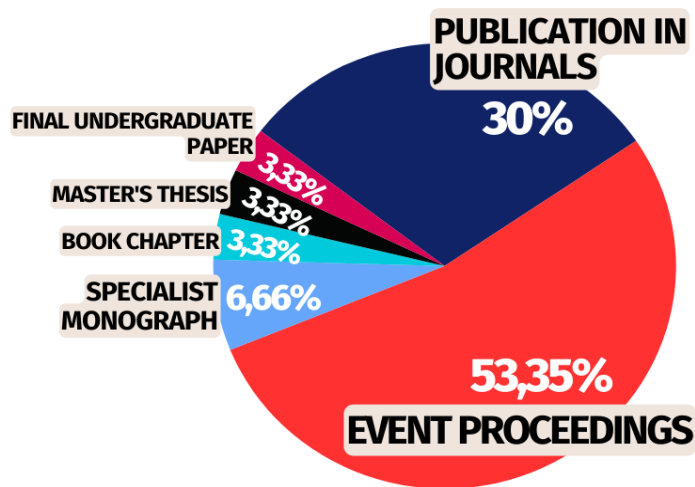


Figure 2 - Types of publications that make up the corpus of analysis.
Source: Produced by the authors.

One of the events most evident in the results is the International Seminar on Research on Mediatization and Social Processes (Midiaticom), in its 2020, 2021 and 2022 editions, held by the Graduate Program in Communication Sciences (PPGCC) at the University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Unisinos), whose proceedings featured ten of the thirty results analyzed, equivalent to 33.3% of the total. This number highlights the institution's status as a leading authority in studies on the phenomenon of mediatization in Brazil.

It is also worth noting the significant contribution of researchers from the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM) to the field of study, with authorship in seven of the thirty studies (23.3% of the total), making it the institution with the most repeat authors in the related publications - along with researchers from Unisinos, with authorship in five of the thirty studies analyzed (16.6% of the total). The authors of the other 18 publications analyzed come from another 16 different Brazilian institutions. This institutional and regional diversity also gives us clues as to the importance of analyzing the confluence between mediatization and the pandemic in various thematic and geographical research spheres - which we will deal with in more detail in the next topic.

Figure 3 below shows an authorial mind map that illustrates the main contextual triggers related to mediatization and the covid-19 pandemic. Based on the analysis of the results and the interpretation of the thematic triggers in each of the studies, we identified two principal areas of investigation: mediatization and social processes and mediatization and cultural processes. It is also important to point out the intersection and dialogue of these aspects with the digital sphere and the theme of mediatization in this environment. We would like to highlight that some of the studies covered more than one theme and/or category in their research - dealing concurrently with social and cultural issues, whether in a digital sphere or not. Through this grouping and these perceptions, it is possible to see that mediatization, in the context of the pandemic, is guided by an interdisciplinary perspective, covering a series of diverse cultural and social contexts. This in turn shows how latent these issues were in the temporal and social contexts mentioned and how vast and constructive the analyses involving the theme of mediatization in this period can be.

¹ Of the other studies : 6.66% are equivalent to 2 results and 3.33% are equivalent to 1 result - as shown in Figure 2.

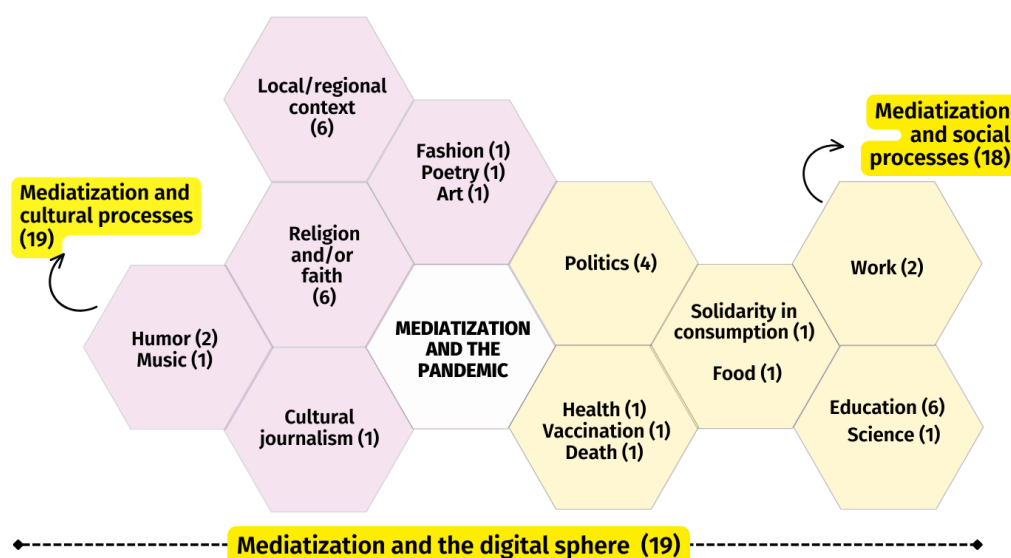


Figure 3 - Mind map with the compilation of contextual links between mediatization and the pandemic
Source: Produced by the authors

The most prevalent link identified in the studies analyzed was between mediatization, the pandemic and cultural processes. In this area, themes involving religion, regionalism and entertainment stand out. Of particular note is research investigating the relationship between mediatization and religious spaces, looking at the mediatization of faith. Silva Junior and Ferreira (2020), conducting regional research, sought to discuss how mediatization has altered the logic of the social process of experiencing faith in times of social distancing.

Similarly, the following were also on the agenda: transformations to the logic of the religious social field (Milani, 2021); changes in the practices of the Catholic faith as a result of the pandemic (Cunha; Colferai, 2020); diocesan discourses and practices on Instagram during the pandemic (Silva *et al.*, 2021); and the evolution of communication in the religious and educational contexts during the pandemic (Gasparetto, 2022). The study by Regiani and Borelli (2021) on the relationship between comedy and religion in the pandemic, circulated via WhatsApp, shows the links between mediatization and entertainment, which also appeared in other publications that focused on music, art, poetry, cultural journalism and, again, comedy. The relationship between mediatization and comedy was highlighted in the analysis of how Rede Globo approached the pandemic in a comedy program (Avila, 2022).

The mediatization of music was evident in popular culture and through live concerts on streaming platforms and social networking sites during the pandemic (Dewes; Silveira, 2020). The analysis of the artistic representation of the pandemic was based on photo-performances (Rodrigues, 2020) and links between mediatization and art. The connection between mediatization and cultural journalism was addressed by Santos (2021), who set out to understand the changes brought about by the covid-19 pandemic (and its consequences) to the narratives of Cultural Journalism articles published on a YouTube channel.

The relationship between mediatization and fashion appeared in the research by Zogbi (2021), who, through a semiotic analysis of magazine covers, sought to study the impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on the fashion world. Granez (2021) describes and analyses the poetic use of the WhatsApp application and thus explores the intersection between mediatization and poetry as a socialization resource. It should be pointed out that the entertainment mentioned so far deals with cultural processes and sociability that are almost entirely mediated online.

Media coverage rooted in local, regional, and/or territorial contexts reiterates that various specific realities have been influenced by the pandemic. These studies bring to light organizations and movements that were important to the researchers' understanding of what was happening near to them. When looked at together they give us a sense of the scope and complexity of the context surrounding covid-19.

There were many themes and developments in this research: the mediatization of faith in the dioceses of Brazil, in the Northeast Region V (Silva Junior; Ferreira, 2020); the circulation of information about covid-19 vaccination in small municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul (Kroth; Borelli; Dalmolin, 2021); the analysis of regional cordel literature pamphlets to investigate discursive interconnections between the pandemic and politics (Fausto Neto, 2022); an analysis of the use of images in promoting local consumption in solidarity (Belmar, 2022); a look at regionalisms in the music scene, highlighting the success of the grotesque in musical mediatization (Dewes; Silveira, 2020); and the work of Santi and Araújo (2022), which sets out to think about the reterritorialization of work. Several of these themes are in line with our analysis below, when we look at research that deals in particular with the relationship between mediatization, the pandemic and social processes.

This categorization was identified mainly by looking at links between the fields of education, politics, economics, consumption, work, and health. These results provided clues to issues related to the mediatization of daily life, characterized by people staying at home and the inevitable need to reconcile work, food, health and study in the same space and time. The two most common areas of discussion are education and politics.

The field of education was mentioned the most, especially from the point of view of mediatization and dialogue with an **educommunicational** perspective. The works included reflections on learning (Gonçalves; Braida, 2021) and looking at educational practices within a public school (Veiga, 2020). Tessarotto (2022), took a critical and probing look at the age of hypermediacy, platforms and algorithms. We also came across reflections on the use of digital media to aid teaching during the pandemic (Resende, 2020), on school, interventions in the digital sphere and everyday meanings (Oliva, 2022), as well as the evolution of communication in the school environment (Gasparetto, 2022). This research is directed towards closer ties between the spheres of education and communication, a dialog that has already been taking place over the last few decades, but which has accelerated in a scenario of emergencies and uncertainties.

The relationship between mediatization and politics was particularly evident when looking analytically at government communication strategies (Pereira; Oliveira, 2021); through the analysis of discursive links between the pandemic and politics (Fausto Neto, 2022); by paying attention to the circulation of meanings in comments on the covid-19 CPI (Eichelberger, 2022); and by studying media consumption by young people in the context of the covid-19 crisis, theoretically anchored in the definitions of technopolitics and mediatized politics (Nascimento; Morais, 2021). These studies show the media's essential role in engaging with political issues - especially in the context of the pandemic and all the uncertainty that surrounded it. The author's highlight the media's role as an analyst, critic, and watchdog.

Reflection on mediatization and work has focused on remote work, stemming from the perception of media territories and the reterritorialization of work through an attentive look at the virtual dynamics of work in 2020 in Brazil (Santi; Araújo, 2022). This is also demonstrated by studying how organizations present narratives through live streaming (Ferreira; Maradei, 2021). These studies point to new forms of (physical and social) labor relations and the tools used to carry them out. When looking at consumption and the economic environment in relation to the pandemic, the encouragement of local solidarity in consumption was identified (Belmar, 2022). Furthermore, Farias (2020) looked at the mediatization of food on social networks, especially through the study of online menus.

Social processes that reflect the health aspect of the covid-19 pandemic have also been highlighted, such as: the mediatization of scientific discourse (Fiegenbaum, 2020); the interfaces of face-to-face communication with the mediatization process in a hospital environment, through digital hugs, letters and humanized badges (Maio, 2021); the circulation of information about the covid-19 vaccination (Kroth; Borelli; Dalmonlin, 2021); the circulation of discourses about the coronavirus pandemic in WhatsApp groups (Ruedell *et al.*, 2022); and meanings of death in the pandemic, beyond the numbers (Silva, 2022).

It can be seen that mediatization during the pandemic was closely related to the online world, with reference to the online environment explicitly made in 63% of the titles, abstracts and keywords of the publications observed. Figure 4 illustrates the main virtual environments used as objects of study in the thirty papers analyzed. In line with Couldry and Hepp (2016), these objects can be seen as channels capable of providing reconnections, sociability, and possibilities for humanization in an atypical moment, with mediatization being the mediated communication resource between technological devices, institutions, and subjects.

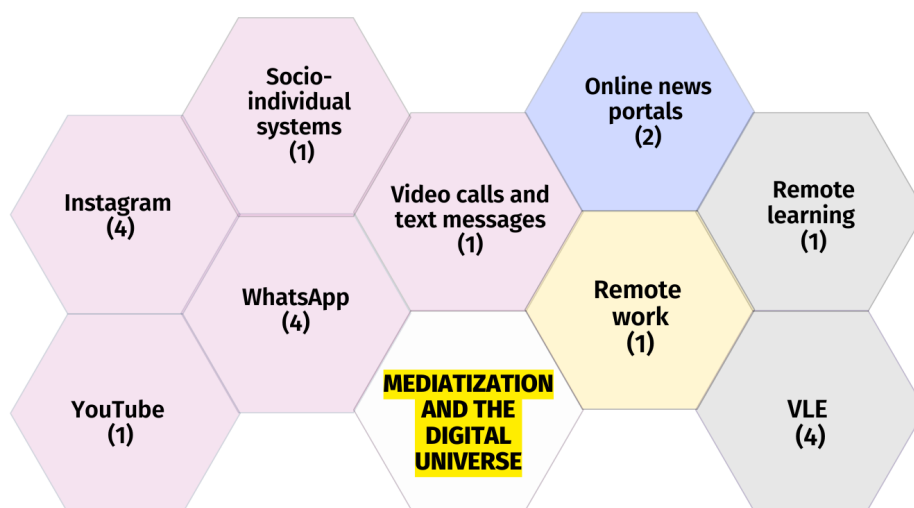


Figure 4 - Objects of study related to mediatization and the digital sphere.
Source: Produced by the authors

The predominant digital spaces are social networking sites, including Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Indirectly, they appear through the terms “Socio-individual systems” and “Video calls and text messaging.” These are features that are also present in WhatsApp, for example. This result demonstrates how hugely significant these channels have become in recent years, both in the context of daily life and in studies on mediatization and its interaction with a wide range of issues. This importance has become even more pronounced with the advent of the pandemic.

Research has also focused on the educational sphere, especially the use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) and remote teaching resources during the pandemic. Online news portals also emerge as places that produce and circulate meanings that are directly associated with contexts related to the pandemic. Such research highlights, among other issues, how fundamental it is to reflect on the role of recent technologies and mediatization within the social and interactional context in which we live today. The research shows the virtualization of various social institutions, culminating in cultural and social changes. Given their recent nature, these changes are difficult to measure and require further research.

RESULTS: RECONFIGURATIONS, DEVELOPMENTS AND PRODUCTION OF MEANINGS ABOUT MEDIATIZATION BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

We reiterate, that according to Hjarvard (2014) mediatization provides “a framework for analyzing and building a theoretical understanding of the possibilities of media interaction with other social and cultural processes” (p. 18, own translation). In this way, Gomes (2014), in his preface to the aforementioned work, sees the mediatization of culture and society as a new social situation: a typical environment in which communication and society are intertwined and produce meaning for culture as a result of technological development. We believe that these reflections are useful in building a set of hypotheses related to the growing presence of various media in culture, in modes of interaction and in social participation. The prominence of such questions, since the year 2020 and in light of the covid-19 pandemic is supported by the findings of the state of the art research reported here.

Some of the difficulties caused by the pandemic have accelerated the digitization of processes and the incorporation of technologies into the daily lives of social actors and diverse institutions, both in the personal and professional fields: retail, medical services, banking, education, communication, etc. It should be noted, however, that the pandemic has not changed the need for innovation that had been developing in various segments. What we saw was an acceleration of actions and/or updates that had already been discussed and would probably have taken some more time to be implemented, but which became possible very quickly given the pressing nature of that time.

Here, we interpret and make connections between this trend and Martino’s (2016) assertion that mediatization can be understood as a movement of media articulation within social processes, altering “mediated” practices and meanings (which occur in the media). In light of a multifaceted event such as the pandemic, a period in which various social processes took on new configurations, new forms and complexifications, it was possible to empirically witness - and academically prove - a process of reconfigurations, developments and production of meanings about mediatization.

We can emphasize that the communication-media research that dealt with mediatization in the context of the pandemic in 2020, 2021 and 2022 adopted an interdisciplinary approach which is essential for this time. They show that thinking about mediatization today, and especially in the unique circumstances of a pandemic, means adopting an interdisciplinary approach that goes beyond what is essentially mediatized, and also encompasses social, cultural and interactional realities of an everyday nature: issues related to the mediatization of religion, entertainment, education, politics, economics, consumption, work, health, etc., as can be seen in Figure 5.

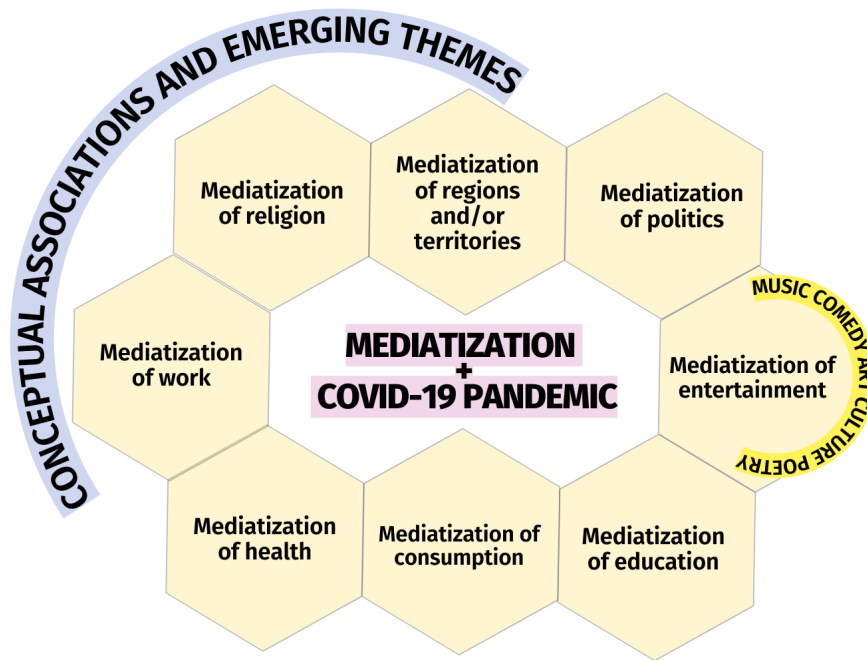


Figure 5 - Conceptual associations and emerging themes about mediatization and the covid-19 pandemic
Source: Produced by the authors

These themes are the basis for research concerned with social transformation and the issues that are situated in the connection between the specific context and the circulation, production and construction of meanings that surround it. Therefore, we must increasingly understand that media products are also socio-cultural products and, as such, are directly impacted by ways of life and everyday experiences - such as those arising from the covid-19 pandemic.

In other words, during such an emblematic period, media intervention met the latent needs of various segments and contributed (and still contributes) to the adaptations needed for the performance of many others. The developments related to mediatization were directly connected to those arising from the context: new ways of communicating, praying, trading, working, studying, and having fun were brought to the fore and many of them were supported by the existence of resources of a mediatized nature, as well as in a digital environment. Communication relations and mediated interaction have thus reconfigured the ways in which we live and see each other. These changes are applicable to everyday life and in research, in many new contexts.

Mediatization, in terms of its dialogue with social interactions and its influence on relationships in various environments, can be seen as having emerged during the period under analysis. During and after the pandemic, mediatization processes were identified, driven by various technical means which, even though they already existed, gained momentum in the wake of developments, and had their meanings accelerated and/or reconfigured.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through theoretical reflections and their connections with recently published academic-scientific research, we sought to situate investigations into the intersection between mediatization processes and the covid-19 pandemic. Combining theory and empirical perspective in an authorial way, seeking to give value to contexts and experiences, we presented a brief historical account of the concept of mediatization and data that gives an overview of covid-19 in Brazil, also considering a state of the art research.

We sought to pay attention to the processes of mediatization in the context of a health crisis, to the different meanings that emerge from the relationship between social practices and media processes. As a result, taking mediatization as a way of looking at interactions permeated by media processes and interrelated with social practices, we identified that the covid-19 pandemic can be considered a milestone and an influence on the future of communication. In the context of isolation and social distancing, media spaces that were already experiencing growth have become even more present and important in people's daily lives. It was no different in the academic-scientific sphere: a large amount of extremely relevant research has already been produced on the subject.

Understanding a process of social complexification such as the covid-19 pandemic, which has been impacted socially and culturally by many transformations, accelerations, and uncertainties, has not been an easy task and we do not consider this research effort to be complete. We have tried, in a critical and vigilant way, to provide insights and discussions about the developments and reconfigurations of the mediatization process that have resulted from the above-mentioned context. The reflections raised here allow an understanding of the process in which the phenomena of mediatization are inscribed in line with the pandemic, when Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) began to be used for the most diverse purposes and in order to meet latent needs of (co) living, work, education, leisure, etc.

It is worth reiterating that both the research evidenced in the state of the art on the subject and this essay itself can contribute greatly to the future of mediatization studies and new reflections on how mediatization operates in society, providing insights into reconfigurations and emerging concepts surrounding mediatization in line with the particular characteristics of the current context. What is more, it highlights the need to understand the social processes of living and experience.

Finally, we believe that this article is also a way of highlighting and valuing communication research efforts made at a time as emblematic and complex as the covid-19 pandemic. This compilation of conceptual findings related to mediatization studies in the context of a pandemic shows us that communication research is current, and as such is always attentive to the impacts of emerging issues in the field.

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