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## **Communication and Mediation in Health: Perspectives from the Graduate Program in Information and Communication in Health (ICICT/Fiocruz)**

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### **Abstract**

This essay intends to discuss how the Graduate Program in Communication and Information in Health (Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação e Informação em Saúde - PPGICS), offered by the ICICT/Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, problematizes, configures, and integrates the concept of mediation, particularly when associated with communication in public health, as represented by the Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde – SUS). After an introduction to the program's mission, the essay discusses the similarities and differences of Communication and Health in the SUS and, developing the idea of mediation as semiosis and alterity, discusses concepts that guide the understanding of mediation according to several authors. Finally, the essay specifically addresses the way in which the program seeks to develop the concept of mediation, offering some examples of its use in research projects and academic disciplines.

**Keywords** – Mediation, Communication, Communication and Health, SUS, PPGICS.

### **Introduction**

Our proposed topic is centered on the concept of mediation from the perspective of the Unified Health System's (Sistema Único de Saúde – SUS) public health policies, beginning with the binomial Communication and Health, which has been structured as a response to the various demands of health. In addition, we explore how this concept has been dealt with in the ICICT/FIOCRUZ Graduate Program in Communication and Information in Health (Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação e Informação em Saúde - PPGICS).

The significance given in this study to the concept of mediation is related to the analysis of communication practices associated with contexts and intertexts as a way of understanding the interstitial spaces, contact areas, and border areas that delineate the field of health.

We begin from the premise that the binomial Communication/Health presents itself as a kaleidoscope of social practices that are susceptible to various theoretical and practical interpretations, placing an emphasis on the discursive exchanges and various types of knowledge and action on health, which make a single approach difficult. Therefore, we decided to centralize the scope of our reflection on the issue of mediation as a structured and structuring factor of communication forms and construction of meanings that permeate society and health promotion policies represented by the SUS. This choice is justified because this system, created in 1988, has presented countless theoretical and practical challenges for both the field of communication and the field of health by proposing the reversal of the health model in Brazilian society to one whose philosophical principles presuppose, among other events, the decentralization of management, the participation of society, and new ways of dealing with individual and collective health. One of the most significant applications of these features has been the expansion and active inclusion of various social actors and their respective voices, in strongly contrast to the policies of social exclusion of broad sectors and segments of society that historically have left an indelible mark on Brazilian society. With the principles of universality, equality, and equity, all sectors and segments of society have begun to be considered together and taken into account in the planning and implementation of public health policies, generating expressions that have become common in the jargon of epistemic communities linked to public health policies, such as decentralization, social inclusion, popular participation, and social control, which are keywords that guide the new health paradigm presented by the SUS (CARVALHEIRO, 1999).

In this new paradigm, demands and ways of thinking about information and communication have emerged that are in opposition to the vertical models characterized by persuasion and operated by a central discourse that has predominated - and still predominates - in Brazilian public health policies since the last century. The emergence of the SUS highlighted the need to analyze and search for communication models and practices that are more open, participatory, and interactive, as well as to train agents in the field of information and communication according to the new health paradigm. In this regard, reflection on these areas was quantitatively and qualitatively expanded, enabling and inducing the creation of specific graduate studies focused exclusively on addressing these matters. This was the case with the area of Information and Communication, which has increased in importance in the country's public health settings and has been progressively structured and consolidated at the Institute of Communication and Scientific and Technological Information (Instituto de Comunicação e Informação Científica e Tecnológica - ICICT) - a unit of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation. The ICICT has produced informational and communicative products, increased research in the area, and offered numerous programs for extension and improvement. Since the early nineties and since 2009, the ICICT has offered graduate programs *lato sensu* and graduate programs *stricto sensu*, respectively, at the masters and doctoral levels to meet the training requirements of researchers and professors in the fields of Information and Communication.

The mission of the ICICT is to embrace the fields of Information and Communication, assigning them an important role in structuring public health policies from the principle of interdisciplinarity, which is a common principle for teaching and research at this institution. This mission implies the recognition of these elements as fundamental to research and innovation, providing services, education, planning, internal management, and the public debate on Science & Technology and Health themes, aiding decision-making processes shared

by society and the citizen. These issues challenge the ICICT to think, construct, and articulate, in an interdisciplinary manner, concepts and practices of Information and Communication in health without being limited to circumscribed knowledge and the rigid divisions of knowledge that often characterize the academic field. Within this shift, Information and Communication have become mediators and important vectors to overcome the traditional boundaries of both disciplines and enable a broader view of health.

After more than a decade pursuing this path through investments in research and specialized teaching, the ICICT created the PPGICS, which is included in the Interdisciplinary Assessment Area of CAPES (the Brazilian Federal Agency for the Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education).

Beginning with a staff of research professors with different academic traditions, experiences, and backgrounds, the PPGICS has been advancing in the possibilities of new methodological and epistemological tessituras that, while respecting the premises of each discipline, are not locked to them. As a result, enriched and multiple views have emerged.

In this Program, two main challenges drive us: 1) to constitute objects of interdisciplinary research that integrate particular sets of knowledge and seek to respond more effectively to the demands of the new social and political settings at the local, national, and international levels in the field of health; and 2) to develop interdisciplinary research methods.

These issues cross and define an area of knowledge that we summarize as "contexts, configurations, and dynamics of information and communication in health", which unfolds as two concepts: innovation and mediation, both perceived to cut across the research themes. Here, we will work more specifically on the notion of mediation, a keyword that brings us to two aspects of the same theme: a) the processes of production, circulation, and appropriation of information and communication systems; and b) the discourses, the actors, the networks, and the public policies in the field of health, within the specific area of information and communication.

A wide range of studies can be analyzed from the perspective of mediations because these studies depend on mediations to be effectively established: the development of methodologies and assessment processes for information and communication; the use of information and communication systems and practices in health; analysis of the uses of systems and methodologies, including information and communication technologies, virtual or not; and studies on scientific dissemination in this area among others. Despite its transverse character, the concept explicitly names one of the PPGICS research areas: Information, Communication, and Mediation in Health. According to their statement, this research area concerns the following:

Study of the relationships between healthcare institutions and the population in their processes of production, circulation, and appropriation of information, discourses, and knowledge. Dedicated to the conceptual discussion and development of methodologies that lead to a better understanding of the nature and characteristics of their cultural, social, institutional, and technological mediations. The projects prioritize the construction of indicators and the analysis of products, processes, and systems in information and communication, as well as public policies in these areas; the production and sharing of knowledge on social networks; the study of the discursive forms and relations between

media and health; and the access, use, and appropriation of information and communication technologies in health (FUNDAÇÃO OSWALDO CRUZ, 2009).

As observed, the idea of mediation is associated with the processes, flows, production-circulation-appropriation cycles of meanings, social networks, and methodological and conceptual development. In research projects, the idea of mediation has been generally associated with communication as it concerns alterity, flows, and movement of meanings. These are aspects that we will discuss further in the subsequent sections.

## **1. Communication and Public Health Policies - Convergence and Divergence**

Historically, health and communication have been combined in public policies since the beginning of the twentieth century. The scientific context of the time suggested the possibility of identifying a causative agent for each disease as well as its transmission and control, shifting the attention from environmental factors to the individual. According to this thinking, the habits of people were considered important factors of health and disease. As stated by Araújo and Cardoso (2007, p. 24):

It is natural that, in this interpretive context, which became stronger in the following decades, education and communication - still conceived as propaganda - formed the binomial that should guarantee the success of public policies in health, which lasted throughout the 20th century until, to a certain extent, our days.

In the seventies, epidemiological surveys were introduced that promoted studies on superstitions and knowledge regarding the transmission of diseases and their replacement with rational information derived from the health field. The inventory of knowledge about disease transmission, customs, identification of local leaders, means of communication, etc., aimed to ensure that messages were decoded appropriately by the public (PITTA, 1995, p. 241). In this communicational model, the other was not consulted, and people were not consulted as subjects of alterity in a clear strategy of banking education, as emphasized by Paulo Freire at the time (FREIRE, 1971).

This situation is the same regarding the use of the means of communication. These studies assume increasing centrality in disseminating information and meanings in health based on a significant matrix that, generally speaking, can be summarized as follows: a) it reproduces the technical-instrumental communication model by considering the other to be the listener, the viewer, or the reader to whom its content, images, and shapes are directed without hearing them, with no concern for understanding them as subjects other than as statistics to optimize the decoding of messages; b) the representations of health emphasize a linear logic of cause and effect based on prescriptions and reports of scientific and technological advances and the responsibility of individuals and groups regarding their own health; c) the mediatic success or failure of transmitted messages is statically inferred by variables that do not demonstrate the processuality of the field of reception and the various interpretations and uses of the messages made by the targeted public, barely taking into account the situational and cultural context in which these messages circulate. When there are non-statistical analyses of reception, these depend, methodologically, only on the study of focus groups to peer deeper into the receptor's behavior. However, this methodology follows the same logic as the analysis of effects because it is not a question of promoting communication but knowing if the recipient can decode the meanings of the messages issued by the means of communication.

This process describes what Antônio Fausto Neto called "enunciation as completeness" to designate the instrumental communication matrix centered on the "speaking subject". In this model, language is simply an auxiliary tool for the transmission of messages to a "subject receiver". "From this perspective, the conviction of transmitting the message as an act of communication would be restricted to the idea that every expression of what is said would be contained within the same boundaries as the one who utters it" (FAUSTO NETO, 2008, p. 121). The author believes that the notion of completeness is insufficient to analytically account for the complexity of discursive practices because these are structured around relationships between subjects whose effects of meanings do not occur only from the intentionality of one of the poles of enunciation. Based on Émile Benveniste, the author states that the discursiveness issue occurs in a territory of complexities in which the poles of the relationship act and interact to interpret and reinterpret the messages put into circulation (FAUSTO NETO, 2008, p. 125).

With the advent of the SUS, the communicational perspectives of the instrumental communication model were questioned more intensively, presenting new challenges in thinking about the role of Information and Communication for health and suggesting processes that are "more open, unstable, interactive, complex, intertwined, and tactical, forming networks through which cooperation, conflict, visibility, and invisibilities flow, where the subjects position themselves socially and politically" (PITTA, 1995, p.258).

Many studies have gained relevance while trying to answer how different social actors express themselves, participate, intervene, discuss, or assert their rights and duties in the construction and operation of the health system, which should be more aware of the particularities of the social, cultural, and economic environments, as enunciated constitutionally and in various legal documents of the SUS.

As this is an inclusive health policy, the theoretical and practical challenges that emerged from this proposition were not only to offer educational messages on health to people, groups, and communities but also to turn them into communication subjects, thereby turning listeners into interlocutors. This change cannot be achieved without the confluence of the Information and Communication fields. This prompted the need to deal with different forms of participation and cultural and political expression in society and to seek new methods of intervention and action from public health policies.

In this respect, the theoretical concept of mediation gains relevance, standing as an important reference for the PPGICS line of research on Information, Communication, and Mediation in Health.

## **2. Mediation as social semiosis and alterity**

The idea of mediation in communication has been approached by various authors and from various perspectives. We began with the reflections of Jesus Martin-Barbero, who understands mediation as an articulation between communication practices, culture, and social context as factors and places for the interpellation, recognition, and construction of social and cultural imaginaries, particularly in Latin America (MARTIN-BARBERO, 1997). He defends the thesis of cultural hybridization (*mestiçage*) to interpret the panorama of cultural, ethnic, and social diversity that characterizes societies in this region and formulate, from an epistemological and methodological point of view, the concept of mediation applied to communication studies,

taking as a source of major influence the three theoretical currents that dealt with this issue directly and indirectly: a) the thought of the Spaniard Manuel Martín Serrano on mediations; b) the ideas of the Italian Antonio Gramsci on culture, politics, hegemony, and counter-hegemony; and c) cultural studies.

Starting from the idea of hybridization of popular culture by media systems, which will mutually influence the content of social imaginaries of everyday life in Latin America, Martin-Barbero sees in this process the factors that constitute communicative mediations, including those related to the media universe (MARTIN-BARBERO, 1997).

Thus, Martin-Barbero inverts the common trend of communication studies, which are focused almost exclusively on mass media, to mediation in which the production, circulation, and understanding of meanings cut across different cultural and political matrices. These interlinked issues create new ways of thinking about and analyzing the processuality of communication in different instances of society, including in health.

From the perspectives of Martin-Barbero, we also seek contributions from other authors to understand, from a theoretical and methodological standpoint, how the concept of mediation can contribute to the analysis and understanding of communication meanings, from both public health policies represented by the SUS and relationships established with different social actors as well as from the role of mediatic communication in these processes. Thus, we focused our searches on those authors who consider, fundamentally, acts of communication as social binding factors, alterity of meanings, and construction of life in common, as suggested by Muniz Sodré. Contradicting study trends that summarize their analyses as means, messages, and effects, Sodré describes communication as a mediation process that emerges primarily from acts of sharing connections and a *commons* in which social life is manifested and reproduced both through rational thought and through its sensitive dimension (emotions, affect, desire, and pleasure), which contribute to produce interlocutory reciprocity and the meanings of social interactions. However, he notes that neither the bond nor the commons should be understood as a simple approximation and merger of subjects to allow mutual understanding but rather as a process that establishes the relationship between subjectivities from which emerge different strategies for approximation and differentiation between the social actors (SODRÉ, 2006, p.10-11).

Sodré asserts that the term *bond* "should not be understood as a mere standing-together, a physical cluster of individuals or community as gregarious mass, but as a condition for a possible comprehensive binding" from which emerges the *commons*, i.e., "sensitive tuning of singularities capable of producing an harmonizing similarity from the diverse" that modulates the sense of sharing a community (SODRÉ, 2006, p. 69).

However, Sodré notes that these issues are shaped not only by deliberate and rational acts of communication but also by sharing the sensitivity that evokes the territory of *aesthesia* and allows binding games that are formed mainly through discursive practices. These games, in turn, allow the location and the affectation of the subjects within language, thereby permitting approximation and differentiation among individuals, groups, communities, and purposes, as well as the convergence or divergence between different knowledges, social practices, and forms of disputing meanings. Sodré also explains that the concept of *aesthesia* (*aisthésté*) should not be understood as aesthetics but as "sensitive knowledge of an object" present in all

forms of social interactions linked to "sensitive perception, irreducible to logical knowledge" (SODRÉ, 2006, p. 45).

By this, Sodr  means that the bond to which he alluded does not happen only by the logic of the *logos* (rational, logic knowledge) as opposed to *pathos* (passion, feelings, subjectivity, or the sensitive dimension of communication) and that this opposition makes it difficult to understand the complexity and the role of communication in social life.

In the same vein, Boaventura de Souza Santos considers the development of science to have helped exacerbate this opposition, mainly with regard to common sense as represented by popular, mythic, poetic, or religious knowledge (SANTOS, 1989) . According to the author, the claim of science as a superior, rational, and critical form of knowledge resulted from a break with common sense, which is combatted by science and considered as mere opinion (*doxa*), superficial knowledge, conservative, and biased. For Santos, the superiority of scientific knowledge was obtained from its rupture with common sense, which was countered because it was considered a mere opinion, a superficial knowledge, conservative and biased, a view that endures to this day in the scientific field, with sanctions on certain discursive practices that escape the institutional pattern. In the field of health, the practices that "deviate" from the biomedical model usually receive legal sanctions under the rubric of quackery.

This understanding translates, among other consequences, into the hierarchization of knowledge, in which issues related to *pathos* or common sense are disregarded and treated as secondary or instrumental by most studies that seek to explain communicative acts only by their rational expression. This rational expression is typically represented by an issuer who intentionally transmits messages through a channel to a receiver who decodes and interprets them, thereby reducing the analysis to the rational dimensions that are deemed to exist in these acts.

This type of response is not always able to give an account of the complexity of the meanings, particularly in relation to affect, which is also a communicative and constitutive force of social life. In this respect, the philosopher Andr  Martins, based on Nietzsche and Spinoza, explains that the philosophical tradition, which has consequences even today in various streams of knowledge, always viewed affect and reason as dichotomous concepts, without considering that emotions are what move us and reason cannot always modify them, except when it becomes an emotional reason. For this author, affect is born of social interactions, and the meanings derived from it mark reason. Based on this assumption, Martins defines affect as "the inevitable reaction to everything that impresses us, everything that leaves a mark on us, all that we interact with" (MARTINS, 2011).s

Along the same lines, Samira Challub (1997) also discusses that affect reveals a pulsional intensity, which expresses an emotional state or sensation (pleasure, pain, compassion, hatred, or solidarity) with regard to what impresses us, allowing us to form our imaginaries on life and social interactions. However, beyond a single emotional feeling, affect should be observed alongside *logos* as a part of the formation of our convictions and the meanings of our actions regarding the things that surround us. These issues can be observed, among other examples, in soccer, traditional festivals, social and community movements, political mobilization, the field of folk medicine, and in other social bonds that shape language and

everyday life. This leads us to consider the relational and interactive character of affects involving knowledge, awareness, and attitudes in the face of facts and world events.

In this regard, the hypotheses defended by Santos regarding common sense can contribute to the understanding of communicative mediations. For Santos, common sense should also be understood as a practical way to reconcile the social conscience with what exists and to assist everyday decisions with a double break. If the first was the break of science from common sense, the second break would be characterized Boaventura de Souza Santos as the reconciliation of science with common sense, in which the sensitive would have a place as part of the construction and action of man on the world. However, for common sense to fully develop its positivity within a cognitive configuration, modern sciences would need to consider common sense a form of knowledge capable of interpreting the world. If that occurred, says Santos, we would have a more enlightened common sense and a more prudent science, a new configuration of knowledge that would come closer to Aristotle's *phronesis*, i.e., a practical knowledge that gives meaning and direction to existence and creates the habit of choosing well (SANTOS, 1989).

Paradoxically, neither common sense nor the sensitive dimensions of life are unknown to various social fields, such as the religious, the political, and the mediatic. Nor are they unknown to many applied scientific disciplines in the area of behavioral changes (Psychology, Communication, Advertising, Propaganda, Management, and Marketing, among others). In both cases, there is a strong strategic presence of emotion and desire as factors of mobilization and mediation of social and behavioral imaginaries, as has been noted by abundant and diverse literature on this subject since the beginning of the 20th century through the present. Authors such as Gustave Le Bon (*The Psychology of Crowds*, 1895), Serge Tchakhotine (*The Mystification of the Masses by Nazi Propaganda*, 1939), Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (*The Cultural Industry - Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, 1947), Edgar Morin (*Mass Culture in the 20th Century - the spirit of the times*, 1962), Guy Debord (*Society of the Spectacle*, 1967), and Zigmunt Bauman (*Liquid Modernity*, 2000), among others, have studied this topic. Commenting on their work is beyond the scope of this study, and we will simply highlight that the majority point, analytically, is the strategic use of communication within the instrumental perspective characterized by linearity and seeking meanings in view of an end result, as noted by Jürgen Habermas (1987), or the enunciative model of completeness, as indicated by Fausto Neto (2008), and not the perspective of communicational mediation as alterity as noted throughout this work.

Considering mediation as alterity, we highlight here the reflections of Eliseo Verón in defending the hypothesis that mediation is related to semiosis and cannot be viewed as a static process but as a dynamic one capable of causing successive transformations in discursive practices, the meanings of which are continuously changed. For this, he relies on Marx's concept of mode of production when he claims that production is immediately consumption, consumption is immediately production, and that each one is immediately its opposite. He also explains that this process results in a mediating movement in which "production is the mediator of consumption, whose materials it creates and without which there would be no such objective. However, consumption is also the mediator of production, while it creates for the products the subject for which they are produced" (MARX, 1977, p. 47).

This ternary structure noted by Marx is reinterpreted by Verón from the ternary structure of the sign (sign, referent, and interpreter) created by Charles Sander Peirce to assert that the entire process of semiosis (the social production of meanings) implies an infinite network of production of certain meanings by its conditions of production, circulation, and recognition in a continuous movement in which each instance produces meanings and transformations into another (VERÓN, 1980).

In the case of mediatic communication, this analytical context allows us to understand how social actors discursively enunciate themselves in the messages put into circulation and how the mediatic device imprints its marks on the discourses it mediates. It is also important to know how the discourses are dialectically transfigured in the field of reception because reception is not an inert or passive instance facing the messages put into circulation. On the contrary, there is an "entropic" dimension, the main characteristic of which is to transform the productive system itself. When media submits itself relatively to the conditions of public understanding, it adopts, albeit partially, the values and meanings of the public, even if the source emitting the messages dictates the rules of the game, generating processes of acceptance, complementation, denial, or opposition by giving rise to a mediating movement. This mediating nature of the mediatic system is what Verón understands as the carrying conditions, i.e., how the "name of the set of mechanisms which, as part of the productive system, define the relationships between the 'grammar' of production and 'grammar' of recognition of a discourse or a certain type of discourse" (VERÓN, 1980, p. 108).

For this reason, Eliseo Verón concludes that discursive practices should not be viewed only as information transmission but as effects of meaning between interlocutors and as part of general social functioning. This point reiterates the ideas that the analysis of mediation must take into account the placement of the interlocutors, the situation, and the historical-social context because no one says something from one place in society to another located elsewhere in society without going through different situations that regulate language. "What one wants to say is never said, no matter what" (ORLANDI, 1983, p. 76).

Therefore, we can say that the study of communicational mediations can be understood as a way to account for the ideological work that operates in the construction of the discourse, the operations and rules governing the work of the social production of meaning, and how the production and reception of subjects are socially positioned, inscribing their mark on the discourses put into circulation in society (PINTO, 1999; ORLANDI, 1983; VERÓN, 1980).

These views on mediation from several different interlocutory and symbolic situations are a way to understand the symbolic discursive strategies with which social actors interpret daily life and the situations experienced, as well as the location and the affectation of the subjects within language. In this setting, sensitive strategies are part of the rapprochement and differentiation processes between persons, groups, or communities that constitute different knowledge and social practices that concretize the production, circulation, recognition, and disputation of meanings (SODRÉ, 2006).

However, for mediation to be

... performed and be inscribed in the social order, it needs material bases, which consubstantiate regulatory institutions or forms of relationships in society. Forms of language, mediating institutions (family, school, union, party, etc.) are invested with values

(behavioral guidelines and practices) and mobilize individual and collective consciousness. Institutionalized values and norms legitimize and give social meaning to mediations (SODRÉ, 2002, 21).

Inesita Araújo specifically advances the discussion of these issues, specifying certain fundamental variables that are intrinsic to the process of mediation. For this author, composing an analytical matrix of mediation factors between a discursive center and the periphery (ARAÚJO, 2002) denotes the existence of **sources**, which represent the symbolic spaces that organize and produce mediations from the individual, social, and cultural collection of the individuals and social groups, which appear pre-constructed (e.g., History, Culture, Religion); of **fields**, understood as sociodiscursive spaces of an abstract nature, which may be more or less structured (in the first case, State, Church, Civil Society; in the second, themes and sociopolitical practices); of **instances**, which are characterized by concrete sociodiscursive spaces, formally structured like organizations but also by non-formal principles of organization, such as families; of **discursive communities**, a concept that designates groups of people who produce and make discourses circulate, in which they recognize themselves (MAINGUENEAU, 1993) and by which they are recognized; and of **mediation factors**, which emanate from the various contexts examined and promote or hamper the flow of subjects between the center and the periphery of the discursive power.

The factors were identified in six different orders: 1) motivations and interests; 2) relationships (personal, group, community, institutional, and organizational); 3) skills; 4) discursivities (discourses, nomination systems, paradigms, theories, and models); 5) communication devices (of enunciation, production and circulation, technologies); 6) laws, rules, and conventional practices (ARAÚJO, 2002).

According to Araújo, the valuation of these factors is linked to the notion of symbolic capital (BOURDIEU, 1989), particularly to its characteristic of conferring symbolic power to the interlocutor according to its ownership and modifying its position in the power scale between discursive Center and Periphery. In promoting the flow of interlocutors between different sites of interlocation and in various contexts, mediation factors co-determine the balance of forces or reiterate the asymmetry or the differences of symbolic capital between the various interlocutors. In this respect, symbolic capital becomes, methodologically, an important theoretical principle that can help to analyze mediation processes, particularly around the conditions of the production of discursive practices.

However, mediation should also be thought of from the standpoint of mediatic networks that are able to accelerate and enlarge the production, circulation, and consumption of symbolic goods and produce different meanings and directions for life and for health.

Guillermo Orozco Gómez, in his analytical typology of mediations in television reception, indicates four types of mediations: a) **Individual** - originating from individuality: capabilities, history, genetic and cultural conditioning, and specific characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, social, or geographical origin; b) **Situational** - the mode and circumstances in which people interact with the mean of communication as well as the various scenarios in which there are reappropriations; c) **Institutional** - related to scenarios that go beyond the moment of reception and act on the reappropriation of meanings. The institutions mediate the subject's agency through their scope of significance, which is determined historically by their institutional nature, objectives, origin, development, and political and economic pressures to

which they are subjected; d) **Mass media** – technology itself exerts mediation. The means, despite being an institution and vehicle for the reproduction of other institutional mediations, exert a peculiar mediation, which comes from their characteristic as means that involve a particular technology (OROZCO GÓMEZ, 1997).

The methodological proposal of Orozco Gómez, which interprets and supplements the concept of mediation in Martin-Barbero, draws attention to the fact that the media networks per se are not capable of engendering significations concerning the meanings of health just by coding bias, supply of messages, and technical availability of means. It is necessary to ask (and search) for the processuality of mediations, understood as discursive practices involving the socio-cultural context, the specificities of media devices, and the conditions for the recognition of different social groups, variables that taken as a whole form the systems of response, production, and sharing of meanings that can influence social conversation networks. This leads us to consider, for example, how the media narratives construct, encode, and promote contemporaneously the circulation of the different forms of cartography and tabulation on the world and thus on health (MARTIN-BARBERO, 1997; OROZCO GÓMEZ, 1997).

In this regard, surveys or studies on media in the field of health cannot be limited to content analysis or to affirming its apocalyptic nature as emphasized in many studies. Although there is a media power exercised hegemonically for a small conglomeration of commercial and family enterprises that control the form, content, and aesthetics of the messages put into circulation in society, the media should be understood plurally because socially it takes different shapes, particularly with the advent of the Internet. It is also not possible to ignore the thousands of experiences of popular media alternatives such as community radios and TVs, mobile media, and local and community newspapers, as mediation factors alongside the so-called far-reaching media.

Nevertheless, in any of the situations discussed, it is clear that mediations are becoming more and more complex, raising new questions for researchers, particularly in the field of health. In more specific terms, note the need to analyze and understand the appropriation (own something by converting it to knowledge and practices) and the reappropriations of messages in health in different contexts of production, circulation, and reception, both from the institutional pole and from the media for the population or those that are forged by the social and cultural dynamics related to the reproduction of everyday life. This complexity also requires analyzing and seeking to understand how knowledge and discursive practices are generated from the social and popular imagery that provides answers to an infinite universe of problems related to health and illness on a daily basis, whose practices are derived both from the cultural tradition (faith healers, folk medicine, and spiritual healers, among others) and as a response to everyday problems or shortcomings and difficulties of the official healthcare system.

The concept of mediation, as presented here, facilitates an understanding of these situations and the resulting forms of knowledge, misunderstandings, and political and symbolic cognitive dissonances, which, in turn, result in different imaginaries, convictions, beliefs, and behaviors that differentially affect the way people build their understanding and coping mechanisms when facing health problems. However, mediation favors the denaturalizing movement of certain forms of instrumental communication that block the understanding of communication

as processuality derived from cultural, political, and symbolic contexts in the perspective of alterity and semiosis as presented above.

### **3. The concept of mediation in the PPGICS: presence and configuration**

The PPGICS has been working with different lines of research, projects, and disciplines, some of which highlight the concept of mediation, to understand the configuration of mediation in information production, circulation, and appropriation processes, discourses, and knowledge. In the limited context of an essay, it would be difficult to contemplate every possibility explored in this direction. Therefore, we chose to focus on a few examples, stressing, however, that they do not cover all of the paths that are being pursued. In addition, the theoretical approaches mentioned previously do not represent the totality of approaches adopted by the PPGICS faculty.

#### ***3.1 Academic disciplines***

The discipline Health, Media, and Mediations performs critical analyses of the means of communication with respect to their role and importance for the configuration and construction of meanings of health in the contemporary public sphere. The concept of mediation is studied based on the current literature and practical examples involving public health policies, different texts and mediatic contexts, and different interlocutions of society with the fields of health and communication. The student is encouraged to discuss communication more from the perspective of mediation than from the perspective of content transmission.

The discipline Information, Knowledge, and Social Networks on Health brings together a set of concepts to support studies and critical reflection by the students of the production, communication, and appropriation of information on health in community spaces. The concept of social networks is studied to define the links and the mediations between the social actors on different levels: the cognitive, cultural, symbolic, and technical. The main theoretical sources for the study of mediation are British cultural studies and its Latin American facet in addition to information and communication sciences of French origin. The operation of the mediation concept is emphasized both to reflect the different dimensions of infocommunication processes in health and to relativize the dichotomy between the poles of information emission and reception.

The objective of the discipline Portfolio is to be an element of mediation itself between students, their academic and scientific courses, and research areas. In this manner, the discipline gives weight to the understanding that mediation is not removed from the poles of communication production and is their constituent and component. Throughout the program, students present and problematize in the classroom and systematically present their findings and positions through a physical portfolio, a virtual portfolio, and a non-academic text to communicate to other participants their itinerary, covering the intellectual and existential components. The portfolio provides materiality to mediation types of motivations and interests, relationships, responsibilities, discursivities, communication devices, and normativities. (ARAUJO, 2002)

The discipline Introduction to the Theory and Methodology of Discourse Analysis adopts the perspective of authors of the social production of meanings that the discourses not only translate visions of reality but also form the realities, operating as a result in the category of

discursive practice. Mediation is, in this context, an attribute of discourses that allows conversion from one reality to another. Through the analysis of texts in different formats and languages (newspaper articles, videos, posters, games, and television programs, among others), students realize the dynamism of social semiosis and understand the mediating role of contextual factors in different orders and specificities.

### ***3.2 Faculty research***

Health Observatory in Media (Observatório Saúde na Mídia - OSM) is a project that includes initiatives related to the mediatic construction of meanings in health. The OSM assumes that language is one of the first and leading mediations between facts and their semiologic construction and is therefore a central element in the construction of realities, as derived from there its strong implication in power relations. Symbolic power is of particular importance, taking into account Bourdieu's (1989) warning that every communication relationship is a relationship of strength and power. Images, texts, and layout are generally considered as a whole, taking into account the presence of strong mediating elements between one and the other. The Social Analysis of Discourses, due to its understanding of these subjects, has been its main methodological option.

The research area Cartography of Sources and Communication Flows establishes mediation as a central concept, along with symbolic power and context, to understand those that structure their methodological approach, such as discursive communities, symbolic markets, and interdiscursivity. In this sense, the research is methodological, operating as an analytical axis. The research aims to map out discursive communities vying for the same symbolic market with respect to a certain theme and population segment.

The research area Anthropology of Information and Social Networks in Health aims to systematize the theoretical-conceptual and empirical-methodological field in the line of anthropology of information studies, retrieving, deepening, and systematizing its dialogue with the field of popular education and health by means of two conceptual axes: social networks and health mediations. The Network of Popular Education and Health is studied as a network of knowledge and information associated with social action and how it employs different forms of virtual and face-to-face mediations to sustain its actions of mobilization and struggle in the academic, social, political, and managerial areas of health.

### ***3.3 Alumni research***

The alumni projects in the area of mediation and health research, master's and doctoral degrees, cover a wide diversity of social practices in health. However, common to most of the projects is the understanding of mediations as structuring and being structured by their objects, both theoretical and empirical.

The analysis of these projects leads us to identify a strong presence of the concept of mediation as an inseparable dimension of diagnostic processes and issues involving the relationship with the other. These include studying health advice, internet communication practices, identity and deliberative processes, sharing networks, the production of meanings in distance education, and communication in social movements. In these and any other theme mediations are present, either as practice or as an element in power relations, a determinant or result from interstitial processes, tense or synergic articulation. Motivations, relationships,

taxonomies, models and paradigms, conversations, places of speech, regulatory and customary contexts, discourses, technologies, and virtual reality, among others facets, characterize the approach to the theme of mediation, often identified as multimediation according to the proposal of Orozco Gómez (1997), which recounts a multidimensional and multidirectional movement, a combinatorial process of mediation of elements that determines the result in terms of the meanings produced.

Three examples emphasize the manner in which alumni research has been addressing the mediations theme. A survey has studied the network of mediations (reception and sharing) established by *Globo Repórter* programs (Rede Globo de Televisão), particularly those focused on the theme of health promotion and its relationship with the approach given to the same by discourses by the SUS, identifying links and points of divergence. The main theoretical axis to achieve the goals was the social production of discourses, particularly the approach of a social theory of discourses. The mediations were translated into Symbolic Market Maps (sources and flows of communication received) and Network Maps of Shared Meanings with groups of people in the cities of Rio de Janeiro - RJ and Aracaju - SE.

As a second example, alumni research studied representations and meanings of silence and of silencing in the experiences of illness of women living with HIV and AIDS, shedding light on the idea that silence is also a form of mediation involving expression of meanings and not mutism. From this perspective, the research aimed to identify what is not communicated by women living with HIV and AIDS and what meanings are produced by this lack of communication. The hypothesis that guided this work was that the AIDS scenario in women is permeated by silence related to the implications of stigmatization that are at the center of women's social vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. However, notwithstanding this fact, women seek alternative spaces in which to express and show solidarity with people in similar situations as forms of mediation.

Another example is the research on the press coverage of the influenza H1N1 epidemic by the newspapers *O Globo*, *Extra*, and *Expresso* in the period between April 25 and August 18, 2009. The study covered the news coverage of the first suspicions of contamination, the confirmation of the first cases, the announcement of a pandemic, the first death in Brazil, the first death in Rio de Janeiro, and the decline of contamination cases. The work consisted of an analysis of those newspapers' discursive production to demonstrate how the media coded, discussed, and indicated in their pages many meanings on the epidemic, demonstrating how the events and the public agenda were constructed and offered to the public. The theoretical references of this study were based in Pinto, Fairclough, Bakhtin, and Verón, among others, to understand how the various voices present in the news were articulated and which enunciative strategies were used by vehicles to give meanings to the epidemic at the time.

## **Conclusions**

The PPGICS, as a pioneering initiative that brings together the fields of Information, Communication, and Health linked to Science and Technology and Public Policies, is a program that attempts to understand the constitution of these interfaces while responding to strong demands for training.

In this interdisciplinary context, looming over this aspect of the Program's research on mediations in health are the challenges of understanding mediations as interstitial and cutting

across different areas of knowledge, information, and communication and of overcoming the models and paradigms of health and science and technology that are focused exclusively on the instrumental dimension of information and communication in health, to the detriment of its dimension of structuring practices and social and institutional relations and its role in the configuration of power relations.

It is not a trivial challenge, due to the importance of mediating procedures, which require appropriate methodologies for identification, understanding, and evidentiary, the breadth and variety of approaches that are being taken by several research centers around the world, the multiplicity of empirical and theoretical objects encountered in an interdisciplinary Program, and the provocation that emerges from relational practices of the virtual world, which problematizes this and other concepts.

It would be impossible to include in this article all theoretical currents already known, including several that guide the studies of PPGICS; thus, we have emphasized only a portion of these currents, focusing efforts on their relationships with the concepts of alterity and social semiosis. We start with the binomial communication and health at its point of origin, the SUS, and we return to it in teaching practice. Regarding this subject, there are multiple processes, multiple dimensions and articulations, multiple voices, and multiple mediations.

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