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From “Nazaré Confusa” to the “Confused Blonde Lady”: The Role of Brazilian “Zuera” as a Post-Mass Media Genre in Digital Culture

Abstract: This chapter focuses on how a meme becomes viral in a transcultural context, starting from the audiovisual centrality and the internet memes’ role as major articulators between mass and post-mass media. We discuss the circulation of memes of the Brazilian telenovela character Nazaré Tedesco (aka., “Nazaré Confusa” or “Confused Blonde Lady”) which circulated internationally. Our discussion focuses on Social TV, Telenovelas, and internet humour through these memes in an attempt to define some characteristics of their role as a genre in digital culture.

Keywords: digital culture, memes, telenovelas, media genres, social TV

Brazilians are well known for their quintessential online humour (see Monteiro Lunardi and Burgess 2020). This makes for a favourable context in which many things can easily become popular memes online. Whether it’s a carnival costume or a gaffe committed on a TV show, everything has the potential to become raw material for remixes and other forms of images that circulate widely on social media or are shared via instant messaging platforms. There are many explanations for this phenomenon.

The articulation between media, technology and culture was fundamental in this process. This scenario, which has been taking shape since the middle of the twentieth century, has gained more and more in strength since the end of the 1990s and has extended even further thanks to the exponential digitalisation process currently underway. In this chapter, we aim to discuss this phenomenon by looking into the circulation of memes of the telenovela¹ character Nazaré Tedesco. The im-

¹ The telenovela can be considered the most popular form of adaptation of melodrama into television language, especially in Latin America. It differs from soap opera – a popular genre in the United States – because it is generally broadcast at night and aimed at a wider audience and has a pre-determined run (generally between six and 10 months) meanwhile a soap opera is aimed at a younger audience in the afternoon slot and has an indefinite duration.

portance of this meme is related to its transcultural circulation and appropriation, but we will describe it in further details throughout the chapter.

This essay is divided into three sections. The first is dedicated to an explanation of the main concepts, such as Social TV and social media with more insight provided by the literature on Brazilian telenovelas. This allows us to investigate how this audio-visual genre is related to the production of images that are the templates used for online memes and how social TV, telenovelas, and audiences are related to one another. This section is essential to contextualise our case study. In our second section, we present and discuss the example of the meme “*Nazaré Confusa*” or “Confused Blonde Lady”. This meme comes from a scene from the telenovela “*Senhora do Destino*”² written by Aguinaldo Silva³ that aired in 2004 and was rerun in 2017. In the show, the character Nazaré Tedesco, played by Renata Sorrah, is trapped in a cell and recalls some events that led to that moment. The meme was known by both names, in Brazil and in the US, respectively – and it had an international impact after it first started to circulate in Brazil.

In our last section, we discuss the central feature of Brazilian internet humour – known as “*zuera*”, a slang expression that comes from the verb “*zoar*” that means “mocking”, “kidding” or “making fun of” as explained by Lunardi (2018). It is important to state that, according to cultural norms, the correct spelling would be “*zoeira*”, but we opted for the spelling that best translates the current vernacular language on the internet and, therefore, the one which is the most consistent with the original meaning and aesthetics of humour in digital environments in Brazil. Keeping that in mind, we attempt to define some characteristics of its role as a post-mass media genre in digital culture.

1 From TV to the Internet: Social TV in Brazil

A brief introduction focusing on cultural and social aspects is first necessary to establish what is meant by the concept of Social TV and how this phenomenon is connected to the Brazilian media scene. This is especially important due to the centrality of the telenovela as the main audiovisual media in Brazilian culture.

² The most-watched telenovela in Brazil during the 2000s. More information about it is available at: <https://memoriaglobo.globo.com/entretenimento/novelas/senhora-do-destino/>.

³ He is a Brazilian Emmy-winning telenovela writer active since the 1980s and is responsible for works that were very successful both in Brazil and Portugal, where he lives nowadays. His personal blog is available at: <http://aguinaldosilva.com.br/blog/>.

The term Social TV was first mentioned in Anglo-Saxon literature and was linked to the commercial meaning of the term as well as being used by large telecommunications corporations in their marketing strategies. Nowadays, we have a much more diverse debate as “television neither won nor was defeated by the internet. Far from extinction, it has reinforced the characteristics that make it a unique vehicle and is moving towards the construction of a more interactive and complex experience for the audience” (Finger and Souza 2012, 374).

Regarding the emergence of the term Social TV and its definition in Américo and Santos (2013), the authors express a direct concern in establishing a definition for the concept of Social TV as an “experience obtained by the user through convergence between television and the internet, which enables a television experience that can be shared locally or remotely in any technological medium” (87).

Still according to the same authors, other features that need to be considered are the content flow on a screen, the use of technology to access audiovisual material, the integration with social networking sites, the communication and active interaction between users both synchronously and asynchronously as well as portability and sharing. Santos’ work (2014) –which focused on the contributions of computer science – may complement what Américo and Santos (2013) pointed out previously. In his opinion the enthusiasm to allow TV viewers to interact with the content shown on TV has existed for some time. However, the limits that may exist in this interaction are known and explained as follows:

The characteristics of interaction between TV and the Internet meet different requirements and therefore adapting one model to another may not be effective (Pagani and Mirabello 2011). On the Internet, content is dispersed and it is up to the user to search for information. In television environments, the content is directed and presented directly to the viewer, who needs to perform little interaction to find what he needs, generally pressing a button or performing a sequence of commands. Internet content is also more dynamic and allows for different forms of consumption and interaction, while interactive television content, even with advances in interaction devices, is limited and differs in terms of form and quantity of interactions. (15)

For Matos (2013), inspired by Montpetit’s (2009) statement, the rise of the Social TV phenomenon could be explained by the combination of the passive entertainment experience with the active interaction promoted by online interactions. In this sense, we can say that the internet provides users with the possibility to communicate with each other on a worldwide scale has opened a channel for real-time, as well as asynchronous, interactions with TV content:

With its connected devices and ease of use, in addition to mobility, the internet sometimes makes the vehicle capable of transporting the television signal to the viewer, as well as being the response channel for broadcasters, creating a second way, or hand double in the commu-

nication process. It is through the possibility of use provided by the internet that the viewer is no longer passive and starts to act with television programming. For broadcasters, this new channel can also serve as an audience and viewer satisfaction meter. (Bernardini 2015, 72)

In the communication research field, it is essential to highlight the centrality of networked sociability. For Silva (2014), social media platforms have become a fruitful environment for sharing television content because they allow a great reach and a high number of views based on the creation of a network of people interested in the consumption and enjoyment of similar cultural products. He also adds that “this form of content dissemination leads to more interactions between viewers and also generates more discussions on shared subjects, adding knowledge and increasing the number of data and information that can be useful for improving the interactive content” (25–26).

Thinking about this perspective, Silva also argues that the phenomenon of Social TV rests on three pillars:

- Socialization around television programming: a large audience watching “together” and commenting on programs on the second screen, accomplishing an inherent human need;
- Search for extra content: search for information about the displayed content, whether about the show itself, an actor, character or presenter, some aspect of the narrative, or some information provided by the program;
- Interaction with content: affective involvement that strengthens the formation of communities, typical of fans. (43–44)

Despite efforts, there is still no consensus on the concept of Social TV. Cavalcanti (2016) – who has analysed 43 articles published in various journals around the world between 2007 and 2014 – concluded that it is possible to obtain at least 31 different definitions of this concept. According to her, the term, as it can be quite a broad idea, can also be considered empty, since “television has always given us something to talk about and television has always been talked about as part of our own experience with the media”.

Even though she points this out, in the face of the divergences, the concepts can be divided into two possible currents based on the standards and similarities of the concept: the technological system and the online conversation. The first concentrated almost two-thirds of the amount and primarily cites the initial concept coined by Harboe (2009) while the second prioritises a more sociological look with emphasis on interaction and social ties within the perspective of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC).

With that in mind, Cavalcanti (2016) proposes a synthesis so we may understand what is being called Social TV today because “The ‘Social TV’ phenomenon

is necessarily associated with the adoption of certain productive strategies by communication companies (content or technology producers (application producers), generally for commercial purposes and articulated with television programming” (54).

This synthesis may actually be a third current. According to Cavalcanti, this one is the most appropriate to understand the phenomenon today because, even though it recognises the role of technology, it also manages to encompass the role of interaction. Therefore, this synthetic proposal combines four inseparable factors: conversation, interactive technology, strategy and television content. Further, as she argues: “the removal of any of these basic factors causes the concept to cease to characterize a specific and well-defined phenomenon within countless manifestations of participatory culture” (55–56).

In fact, Social TV has been used by media companies to enhance the effect of the presence of a collective experience around television content. This is achieved by reinforcing and renewing the importance of television programs with the clear intention of maintaining its importance in the centre of the media convergence process and because there is a productive possibility to create data, especially qualitative, based on the behaviour of its audiences (see Cavalcanti 2016).

Despite Cavalcanti’s advances in the theoretical discussion, it still does not satisfactorily clarify the complex effects at play. According to Orozco and Miller (2018), to understand these technological movements, it is first necessary to intertwine an anthropological and a micro-sociological perspective. This is especially necessary in parts of the world such as Latin America where inequality, including in terms of technology, is still evident and deeply rooted in their history.

1.1 The Telenovela Beyond the Screens

The discussion about the interface between communication, culture, and technology in Latin America will be based in this study on telenovelas due to the symbiotic relationship between the genre and the media history in the region. As shown by Martín-Barbero (2013),⁷ melodrama is the most popular genre in Latin America, while Orozco and Miller (2018) add to this argument as they recall the popularity that, in the beginning, was achieved from mass media such as radio which, still to this day, remains as important as television and the internet:

From the revolutionary Cuban radio soap opera and its expansion throughout Latin America, *telenovelas* became opportunities to invent stories, imagine lives, seek liberation, punish the bad, participate in reinterpretations, encourage personal encounters, and seek new forms of communication. Without knowing it and without trying to leave a television or audiovisual record, the Latin American public has been constantly creating transmedia exten-

sions [. . .]. What happens on television becomes cultural, if not legal, property of the audiences, as they process information, relate it to their own lives, and give new meaning to what is seen (Orozco and Miller 2018, 65).

To advance in the central discussion, it is necessary to remember the process of convergence in which television, despite being the centre of the telenovela's narrative, is no longer solely responsible for its circulation. The reach and impact of television content goes beyond the limits of TV, not only from the production instances but, above all, from the audiences and their online presence. Estevão (2013) deals with exactly this issue when he discusses how the Brazilian telenovela has been dialoguing with the possibilities of intervention and influence by fan participation on the official websites related to the telenovela.

For the author, in addition to recognising the telenovela as an evolution of melodrama, we must note that it has also transformed itself as a format into a television fictional genre⁴. As Gomes (2011) reminds us throughout the Barberian⁵ standpoint adopted, the television genre is a form of mediation itself because "genre is not a property of texts, but something that runs through texts; it is not a strategy for the production of texts, but a strategy that links the production and consumption of media texts, which links writing and reading strategies" (123).

Furthermore, regarding the relationship between Brazil and telenovela, it is impossible to ignore the important role of Rede Globo in the construction of the genre. In addition to the production strategies, Estevão (2013) points out that the technical-aesthetic standard, the establishment of the timetable, and the accessibility of the language of their telenovelas were fundamental for this two-way relationship between production and consumption instances in which the telenovela assumes the role of a "repertoire of references shared by Brazilians" (Lopes 2009, 25) from "sharing habits, behaviours, facts of reality and bringing them to the family environment, the *telenovela*, easily, becomes an agenda of conversations, becoming part of the daily lives of viewers" (Estevão 2013, 41).

Still, according to Estevão (2013), the telenovela has always had a leading role in Rede Globo, the Brazil's most important TV broadcaster that reaches 99.5 percent of the population (Negócios Globo, 2015). In the 1960s, founded at the beginning of the military dictatorship, fixed schedules were a major milestone for TV in Brazil, and because of this, in the following decades, telenovelas became the flagship of audience ratings, even gaining specific themes. However, it was only in the 1980s that

⁴ It is possible to recognise at least a few more fictional television genres in Brazil besides the *telenovela*: specials (e.g., Christmas and New Year's Eve), mini series/micro series, TV shows and soap opera (see Pallotini 2012).

⁵ With reference to Martín-Barbero.

the genre became consolidated in the country, and in the world, by combining popular characteristics with the typical mass media of a medium like TV which was gaining more and more traction on a national scale in Brazil.

Lopes (2002) points out the contribution of telenovelas had in the conception of a supposed national identity:

[T]he *telenovela* in Brazil gained public recognition as an artistic and cultural product and gained visibility as a central agent in the debate on Brazilian culture and the country's identity. It can also be considered one of the most representative phenomena of Brazilian modernity, for combining the archaic and the modern, for merging anachronistic narrative devices and modern imaginaries, and for having its history strongly marked by the nationalization-mass mediation dialectic. (1)

She also adds that the popularity of the genre was also important due to its similarity to Brazilian daily life:

[T]he *telenovela* is an example of a narrative that extrapolated the dimensions of leisure, which permeates the nation's daily routine, building mechanisms of interactivity and a dialectic between the lived time and the narrated time, which configures itself as an experience, cultural, aesthetic and social at the same time. As a sociability experience, it triggers conversation, sharing, and imaginary participation mechanisms. The *telenovela* became a form of narrative about the nation and a way of participating in this imagined nation. Viewers feel like participants in soap operas and mobilize information that circulates around them in their daily lives. (16)

These elements were presented in the early 2000s, when the digitization process and the participatory culture were beginning. Now, we can see an acceleration and a consolidation of both processes and, because of it, the rise of Social TV not only as a concept but as a practice directly linked to the relationship between audience participation and producers' strategies.

1.2 Social TV, Telenovelas, and Audiences

The change telenovelas had to go through to adapt to an everchanging social context and to remain one of the strongest cultural elements still present in Latin America are notorious. The most important features are new narrative elements as well as audience monitoring. In 2002, when digital culture began to be a topic in Brazil, Lopes (2002) reported these adaptation trends observed at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

She had already pointed out a central issue that permeates the relationship between telenovelas and the internet until today. According to her, commenting was as important as the ritual of watching a telenovela (16). For this reason, de-

spite being incipient, it was a sign that the internet was about to become a very favourable environment for people who wanted to engage with the content from the TV melodramatic genre. The author reminds readers that in the “debate forum [internet] capillary diffuse, complex and diversified, people synthesize public and private experiences, express divergences and convergences of opinion about actions of characters and developments of stories” (18).

In more recent studies, we can contextualise and better understand this audience’s behaviour concerning the current configurations. According to Huertas Bailén (2015), in the history of Brazil, humour has been used as an outlet for Brazilians to express their feelings and opinions about the country’s political and social problems, and as a tool to define their cultural identity. Thus, *Zoeira* presents itself as an extension of Brazilian humour that already existed before the time of online ambivalence (see Phillips and Milner 2017). In this context, the internet works as a medium through which humour is communicated with a liberating laugh that allows Brazilians to discuss controversial issues – such as cultural tensions between social classes – and to define Brazilian cultural identity, both as a nation and as an online community. The fluency of messages between different media and the hybridization of interpersonal and media communication would not be possible without this “new habitat for reception”. Orozco and Miller (2018), who recognize the vast transformations that TV has undergone, reinforce this argument when they state that “being an audience means connecting with others and with others mediated by screens” (70).

Despite these screen decentralisation processes, it is practically a consensus that the main screen, at least in Latin America, remains television. Still, according to Orozco and Miller (2018, 62), Latin Americans watch more TV than ever. Data from Millward Brown (2014) indicate that Peru is the record holder in average TV consumption/day, at nine hours. Brazil comes next with eight hours and Mexico in third with seven hours.

According to the authors, intrinsic aspects such as melodrama, orality, sociability, connectivity and inequality are essential to understand what they call the “reinvention of Latin American television”. They also explain that the imbrication of fiction with everyday life, an emblematic characteristic of melodrama, is the cultural difference that represents the deep mixture of culture, language and suffering of Latin American peoples.

These aspects are shown in different manifestations and reappropriations of fictional elements by the audiences such as online memes. In addition to being a way to continue consuming audiovisual content, they can also extrapolate the original narrative. This type of phenomenon, according to Nunes (2016) is due to the relationship between affections and memory formation because “the memory generated by the media as a process in which affections are reproduced in the form of words,

images, and gestures that, as replicators, become memes subject to longevity, stability, fecundity, mutation, selection, reproduction, and transmission!” (152).

Nowadays telenovelas and memes are both present in Brazilians’ everyday lives. In addition to being among the countries that consume the most television in the region, Brazilians are also among the largest producers of telenovelas. After Mexico (Televisa), Brazil is the world’s second-largest producer. Together, Televisa and Rede Globo have produced more than 1,000 telenovelas since 1951 and currently have the highest sales records: *Maria do Bairro* (Televisa) was sold to 182 countries and *Avenida Brasil* (Rede Globo) reached 130 (Correio Braziliense 2018).

It is important to mention that, currently, there is still an audience that, on one hand, is affected by high rates of historical social inequality, but, on the other hand, is one of the most active on social media sites. According to the latest available edition of the Brazilian Media Survey, which interviewed 15,050 people throughout the national territory between March and April 2016, 63 percent of respondents cited TV as the most used means of communication, while the internet appears next with 28 percent. However, the survey also reveals that about two-thirds of respondents access the internet, and at least 79 percent of them do so primarily from their homes during weekdays.

Another interesting fact is that the relationship between the two media is also present in the survey because, amongst the people who answered that they watch TV, 28 percent said they use their cell phones, and 17 percent that they use the internet at the same time, and, of the ones who access the internet, almost 20 percent watch TV simultaneously (see Brasil 2016).

These numbers reveal a behaviour typical of convergence culture (see Jenkins 2009). For Ribeiro et al (2015, 239), “consumers are using digital devices that allow an effective participation in media culture, transforming their appropriations and resignifications into media narratives that are often shared in forums, blogs, groups and profiles on social networks”. Thus, consumption and resignification of media products, as well as their production and distribution, permeate not only digital devices but also “new media”. One of the best examples of this process are the memes produced from *telenovelas*. Studying these as a subject matter means going deep into audiences’ behaviour toward TV media content.

2 When the Memes Meet the Telenovela: From “*Nazaré Confusa*” to the “Confused Blonde Lady”

The “*Nazaré Confusa*” meme is taken from a scene from the telenovela “*Senhora do Destino*”, and, according to an entry in the Meme Museum: “The close-up of her

confused face became a gif in mid-2016 and was shared by several internet users, who used the scene to create other memes, which became popular between September and October 2016” (Belo Gil 2016).

This means that, even before the telenovela was rerun in 2017, memes based on this scene had already begun to circulate on Twitter and later on Facebook. At the same time, the meme began to circulate among foreign users, especially from the USA, even though they did not know where the scene originated from. It explains the fact that many of them thought it was a scene with Julia Roberts, as Renata Sorrah looks a lot like her. It became so popular that it was even featured during the presidential campaign of the same year. The meme later ended up being known as “Confused Blonde Lady” or “Confused Math Lady” – after another remix of this image together with a quadratic formula – among other subvariants.

Those nicknames given in the US generated a backlash among many Brazilians due to the supposed appropriation of a meme of Brazilian origin (see Belo Gil 2016). Another assumption made by the same author is that, although there is no official confirmation, it is believed that the *telenovela* was repeated precisely because of the repercussions of this meme. The announcement of the alleged return of the soap opera was made on Twitter by its own author and confirmed by the broadcaster a few moments later.

It is worth mentioning that the author uses a less famous meme to talk about the announcement of the second rerun of the telenovela⁶. Another curiosity surrounding the repercussions of this meme is that the actress recorded a teaser for the premiere of “Murder on the Orient Express”⁷, which premiered at the end of November 2017, alluding to the same scene of her character that became the meme.

The repercussion of the memes was so emblematic that the actress continued to be questioned about the character. On his personal blog, the author Aguinaldo Silva reports about it when Renata Sorrah was called by the audience the “mulher dos memes” (“woman of memes”) as she affirmed during an event in 2017⁸.

It is easy to visualise (Fig. 1) the moment when the meme was trending in and outside Brazil (Figs. 2 and 3). According to Google Trends data, Brazil (blue) led interests, but only after it was brought up abroad, especially by USA users (red)⁹.

6 Tweet available at: <https://twitter.com/aguinaldaosilva/status/795252458129936384>.

7 The video is available on the official page of 20th Century Fox in Brazil on Facebook at: <https://web.facebook.com/FoxFilmDoBrasil/videos/1408627422601386/>. Accessed 9 February 2018.

8 Available at: <https://natelinha.uol.com.br/celebridades/2018/01/05/renata-sorrah-diz-trabalhei-a-vida-toda-para-virar-a-mulher-dos-memes-113351.php>.

9 We used the term “Math Lady” for comparison because it was the one most mentioned in English on the platform.

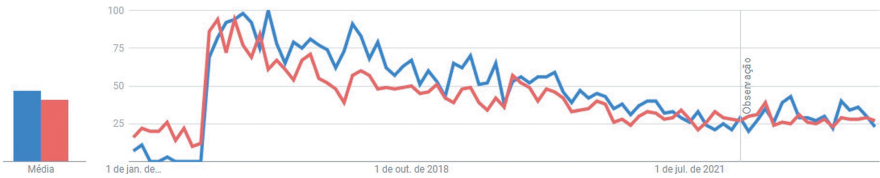


Fig. 1: Comparison between “Nazaré Confusa” and “Math Lady” interests on Google Trends. Accessed 12 May 2023. <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2016-01-01%202023-05-12&q=%2Fg%2F1jv2mpk6t,confused%20lady>.

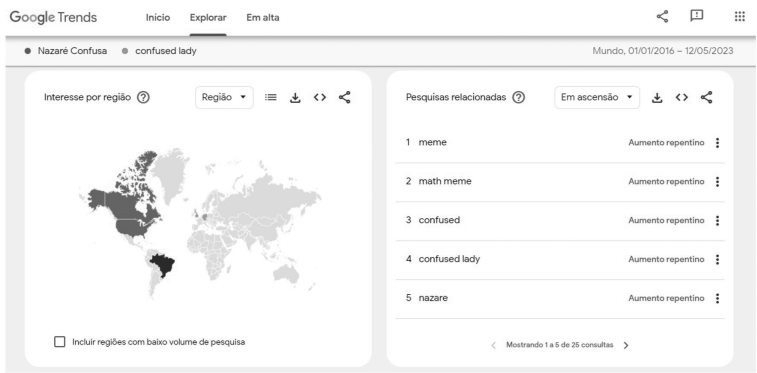


Fig. 2: Main distribution of interests about “Nazaré Confusa” on Google Trends. Accessed 12 May 2023. <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2016-01-01%202023-05-12&q=%2Fg%2F1jv2mpk6t,confused%20lady>.

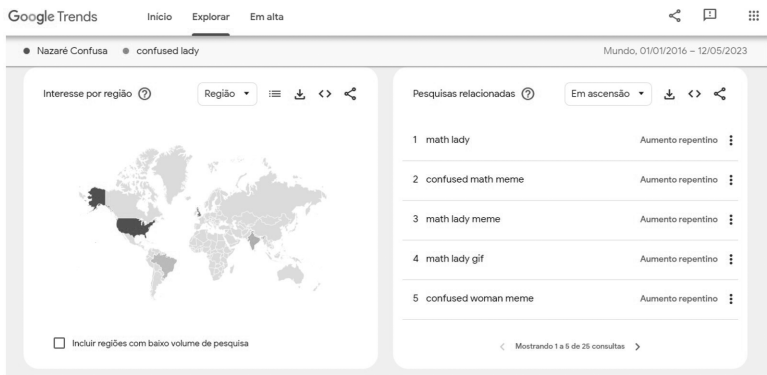


Fig. 3: Main distribution of interests about “Math Lady” on Google Trends. Accessed 12 May 2023. <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2016-01-01%202023-05-12&q=%2Fg%2F1jv2mpk6t,confused%20lady>.

According to Know Your Meme¹⁰, it was first featured as a gif in BuzzFeed Portugal¹¹ and then spread out to 9 Gag¹² and Reddit¹³, where it was already shown alongside the math equations.

After that, it was possible to visualise many other examples with and without equations. In addition to this, attempts by Brazilians to become leaders in the discussions about the meme's origins highlighted to what extent the telenovela character became a focal point in its online presence on main social media platforms like Facebook¹⁴, YouTube¹⁵ and Twitter¹⁶.

These examples of Nazaré Tedesco are thought provoking regarding our contemporary media landscape. They concatenate evident aspects of the convergence and participatory culture as well as the phenomenon of Social TV which is directly intertwined with popular culture and audiovisual media (soap opera). For Inocêncio (2016, 1) these memes need to emerge as hybridised, intertextual and multifaceted because they can carry hereditary traits and cultural repertoires.

In the case of Brazil, it is fundamental to draw attention mainly to the interfaces with audiovisual production in the country. As argued by Chagas (2018), Brazil has increasingly stood out regarding the format of memes and to issues related to intellectual property:

Around here, the success of social networking sites led internet users to adapt internet memes to these platforms, developing their own languages and creating transmedia characters and products, such as memes of soap opera protagonists (Félix Bicha Má, Carminha Perturbada, etc.). These creations also highlight the authorial character of internet memes, something normally little discussed in international literature – since the vast majority of foreign memes are anonymous creations – and also little noticed by national literature. (Chagas 2018, 369)

¹⁰ Available at: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/math-lady-confused-lady>.

¹¹ Available at: <https://buzzfeed.com.br/post/13-historias-que-mostram-a-capacidade-infantil-de-fazer-bosta-em-toda-sua-gloria>.

¹² Available at: <https://9gag.com/gag/a25ZDYw>.

¹³ Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/OutOfTheLoop/comments/55gik3/where_is_this_meme_confused_woman_with_math/.

¹⁴ Nazaré Amarga is one of the main parody pages on Facebook. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/NazareAmarga/videos/1854931971422443>.

¹⁵ The first video posted on YouTube in 2016 has more the one million views so far. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7QA0ogagEc>.

¹⁶ Tweet published by a Brazilian influencer in 2016 about the repercussion of the meme in the USA. Some users also commented about a possible “meme war” between Brazil and USA. Available at: <https://twitter.com/Itspedrito/status/785204765907124224>.

In addition, it is also crucial to highlight the symbiotic relationship between memes and humour:

Created from detours, clippings, rereadings, appropriations and free creations of texts and audiovisual works, these artifacts of digital culture also reveal themselves as a repository of countless cultural repertoires and behavioral traits in the fertile ground of various groups and communities on social networking sites. Memes can thus provide clues about how everyday themes and public debates can intertwine with entertainment products and mobilize millions of people, functioning as collaborative micronarratives marked by innovation in format, by the articulation of signs, with a high power of synthesis (dense in content and simple in format) and by exercising the transposition of the comic. (Inocêncio 2016, 1)

This link between Brazilian culture and humour does not just appear on the internet. On the contrary, it also manifests itself in digital environments because of historical materiality. According to Mário da Silva Brito (1963), when he uttered an anecdotal reply to a question about the skills a comedian should have: “What does it take to be a comedian in Brazil? Simple: take everything seriously” (36).

According to Saliba (2017), Brito’s speech would be closer to reality than an anecdote. Because, according to him, humour is so present in our daily lives that it doesn’t provoke any contrast and ends up going unnoticed. Thinking about this omnipresence of humour in Brazilian culture, and bringing this discussion back to our research topic, in *Zuera* we have a materialisation of this phenomenon during contemporary cultural manifestations, especially those based on processes of convergence and digitisation.

Moreover, she has recently developed this argument by describing the relationship between self-irony and Brazilian idiosyncrasy, already described at other times by other researchers:

Humor is an essential part of Brazilian popular culture and functions as a hallmark of this online community, which is so different from the “global” internet. Brazilians make fun of themselves, laughing at their problems as a nation and as a virtual community that lives on the margins of an internet dominated by North American culture. While Brazil is one of the countries with the most online presence (Danno 2018), non-Brazilians do not seem to understand Brazilian irony, often considering Brazilian behaviour on the internet as bizarre and peculiar (Bevins 2016; Heim 2012; Ruvolo 2014), or even irritating or aggressive (Fragoso 2015) (Lunardi and Burgess 2020, 428–429).

As a result of their research, Lunardi and Burgess (2020) also add the following:

In the history of Brazil, humour has been used as an escapism resource for Brazilians to express their feelings and opinions about the country’s political and social problems, and as a device to define their cultural identity. Thus, *Zoeira* presents itself as an extension of the Brazilian humour that already existed before an ambivalent internet (Phillips; Milner, 2017). It works, in this context, as a liberating laugh that allows Brazilians to discuss controversial is-

sues – such as political problems and economic and cultural tensions between social classes – and to define Brazilian cultural identity, both as a nation and as an online community. (451)

Therefore, we understand *Zuera* here as a contemporary media genre that is a tangle of cultural matrices that go back to the very construction of local society, but, at the same time, also carries global values of digital culture, such as the typical libertarian values of the internet and still intertwines them with the material characteristics of the network. Due to these intersections, it also follows the logic of the Barberian palimpsest (see Martín-Barbero and Rey 2001).

3 The Role of Brazilian *Zuera* as a Post-Mass Media Genre in Digital Culture

To understand the role of the *Zuera* in our media landscape, we will investigate Martín-Barbero's mediation theory. Gomes (2011) points out a clear and pertinent argument based on this theory. According to her, placing the media genre at the centre of the map of mediations is a good clue for building an analysis model that articulates the relationships between communication, culture, politics and society, thus allowing the conceptualisation of a global and complex vision of the communicative process (see Gomes 2011, 127).

With that in mind, we intend to make a parallel between the *Zuera* and melodrama. If, on one hand, melodrama is a typical media genre of mass culture, on the other hand, the *Zuera* would be a typical media genre of digital culture. Below, we can see how the proposal by Martín-Barbero (2006) of media genres works as “articulators” (Fig. 4).

The central argument of Gomes (2011) is that the genre would first articulate the two axes (synchronic and diachronic). From the perspective of sociality, it is possible to connect the cultural matrices with reception skills, articulating the collective uses of communication, the everyday relationships that people establish with the media, with genres and media formats (see Gomes 2011). Thus, the mediation of sociality implies analysing communicative processes not only from the point of view of determinations and structures, but from the point of view of practice and the daily-basis non-hegemonic processes of meaning.

One can thus visualise the articulation between genre, logics of production and industrial formats through technicity, which serves today as the scenario of globalisation and convergence culture (Gomes 2011, 120). Therefore, it interfaces with a rituality, that bridges industrial formats with audience reception skills. Thus, the basic cycle proposed by the author places television genres at the centre

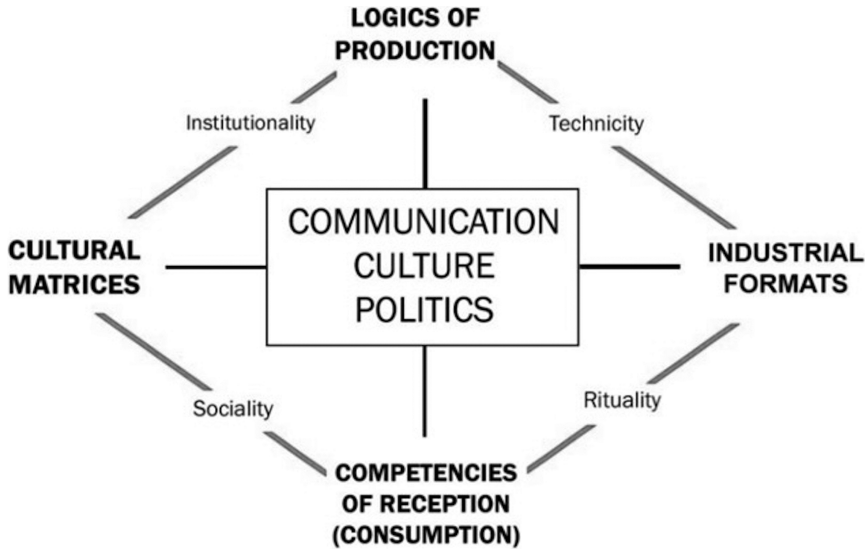


Fig. 4: Map of mediations according to the Barberian proposal. (Lopes da Silva 2020, 5).

of the map, finally allowing the recognition of the popular within the mass media system and vice versa.

Genres trigger the mechanisms of perception and recognition of the popular; they are not just a feature in texts and narratives but a mechanism that works as a device for reading, for producing meaning, and for “reencountering the world” (Martín-Barbero 2006, 204). In this way they become the anchor point of the media industry in the perceptual apparatus of the masses.

Grohmann (2009), also inspired by the Barberian proposal, reinforces this when he affirms that audiences can find the “key” to the genre by identifying a media product, such as drama or comedy, based on the elements presented in it. These genres, according to the author, can be defined by internal architecture or even by their place in the middle of the programming schedule (in the case of TV). In this way, in addition to being a communication stratagem rooted in different cultures it is simultaneously, “a reading strategy, because people do not understand what is happening in the story if they do not find the “key” of the genre” (Grohmann 2009, 6).

Therefore, we are proposing a movement similar to the Barberian proposal, by putting the *Zuera* at the centre of the map in order to comprehend the mediations in the logic of the Brazilian Digital Culture scenario where *Zuera* is conceived as a post-mass media genre and articulated via the humour-timing-polyvocality tripod.

Most “Nazaré Confusa” memes were based on the original telenovela scenes to express what is known as “reaction memes”, that is, memes that are used to

express the users' reactions beyond the usually text-based online content. Therefore, it is possible to highlight the relation between users' everyday lives, their subjectivities (e.g., to express confusion) and media literacy skills (e.g., remixing videos and static images) in this kind of user generated content (UGC). Following the Barberian logic, it is plausible to affirm that rituality and society can be directly articulated using the model combining industrial formats, competences of reception and cultural matrices throughout with humour as a central element.

Although melodrama (as a typical mass media genre) still plays an important role in the meme's generation, the *Zuera* becomes crucial to understand the logic of digital culture, where melodrama is transformed by users through memes that presents, at the same time, mass media (melodrama) and post-mass media (*Zuera*) elements.

Then when we put the *Zuera* at the centre, it is reasonable to point to three possible mediations that are essential: humour, timing, and polyvocality, as illustrated below (Fig. 5):

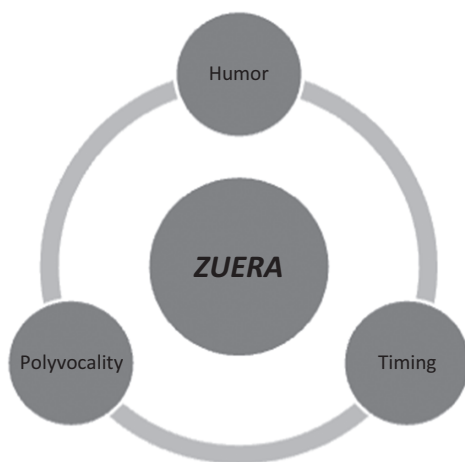


Fig. 5: *Zuera's Map Proposal* (Vieira 2021, 192, translated).

Based on this map, we can think of *Zuera* as a post-mass genre capable of articulating elements from inside and outside digital culture. As a result, sociocultural elements such as Brazilian humour – strongly based on superiority, self-irony, and identity – would be the first element that, together with timing, makes the content of digital culture more fluid and capable of being “spread out”. Moreover, there are also elements of convergence culture such as the polyvocality of pop culture which, while allowing people to access content from the parameters of mass culture, help to solicit more reflections and criticism and thus resume the

initial cycle without breaking the logic of ontological humour based on the inequalities that constitute our society.

Conclusion

When considering the Brazilian digital cultural landscape, we agree with Inocêncio's (2016) standpoint that Brazil is a major player when it comes to the production and circulation of memes. In addition to this, we can think of identity markers that differentiate it from other countries due to historical processes. That is why it is important that Brazilian researchers investigate this subfield of research and deal with the specificities and complexities that it demands. This theoretical approach is also a political one that can reiterate as much as it shows the specificity of humour in social media in the context of the Global South, as the South African author Shepherd Mpofu (2021) has argued.

Furthermore, we have tried to bring clarity to some of the characteristics of digital culture generated by the articulation of mass and post-mass logics through the use of the genre of melodrama and the *Zuera* meme present in the case of the “Confused Blonde Lady”. We were able to see how users rearticulated the melodrama through *Zuera* and, to a certain degree, transform it into a meme. The “Confused Blonde Lady” meme epitomises the idea of polyvocality, timing and humour that is contained in *Zueira's* map. These three characteristics can be thought of as the central element of the production, circulation and audience of memes and it is also an example that highlights how the combination of television studies, humour studies and internet studies should be addressed more often as a valid approach to understanding the place of memes in the digital culture context as much as the role of Brazilian *Zuera* as a post-mass media genre.

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