

A case study on transmedia reception: Fandom on Facebook and social issues in the brazilian telenovela *Passione*

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Abstract

The article begins by showing the main concerns, concepts and theories that have characterized Latin American studies on television reception and how the intensity of the transformations in contemporary communication environment requires an adjustment of focus in the present of the “network society” and its “media ecology”. Hereafter, the article presents two parts that respectively analyze the research of television reception in the challenges of the new media in face of the traditions of these studies, and what is new in the methodology of the reception of new media. To provide of what would be the main methodological challenges, the text presents an empirical example of the new practices of audiences of television fiction, identified through studies generated within the project of OBITEL2, discussing some results of an exploratory research on transmedia reception of fans on Facebook about *Passione*, the most watched telenovela in Brazil in 2010.

Key words: reception research; television fiction; transmedia reception; online fandom; participatory culture.

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2. *The Ibero-American Observatory of Television Fiction* - OBITEL, since its foundation in 2005, has served as an intercontinental project for the Ibero-American region, including countries of Latin American, Iberian peninsula and the Hispanic population of the United States. OBITEL is currently composed of eleven national research groups which carry out a work of systematic monitoring and comparison of the fictional programs broadcasted over the year through open television channels in the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Spain, United States, Mexico, Portugal, Uruguay and Venezuela. The results of this monitoring have been published since 2007 under the title of the *Obitel Yearbook*.

Challenges to the traditions of Latin American studies on television reception and the uses of the new media

It can be said that communication and media studies, having reached interactive digital communication, have come to focus on the “new media” and, somehow have decreed the death of the “old media”, suppressing attention with what is happening to the mass media.³

The rhetoric of the digital revolution has been molded around a theory of substitution, with the new media taking the place of the old. However, what is happening is quite the opposite: we are witnessing a process of convergence between old and new media, along with a mutual influence in ways not previously unforeseen. In particular, we have observed significant changes in the conditions of production, distribution and consumption of culture, with great emphasis on the involvement and active participation of the audience, configuring the so-called *participatory culture*.⁴

During our studies on telenovela we have identified the uses the audience makes of certain content as a *resource to make sense* for their identities and for altering the perception of their social conditions. Therefore, telenovela may act on the expansion of the audience capacities by using this *narrative as a resource* in everyday practices and interactions.

[Telenovela has become a] *communication resource* which, when activated, makes possible to share cultural rights, ethnic diversity and sociability, gaining greater awareness and motivation for practices against the conflicts and inequalities of Brazilian society. (LOPES, 2009:21)

That is why to investigate the complexity which television reception studies have reached requires an agenda for re-reading theories and concepts that have marked the tradition of the so-called “Latin American reception research” in the light of the current scenario, accompanied an accurate and critical gaze at the new proposals of transmedia analysis.

We believe that the new media and transmediation environment clearly extends the scope and importance of the arguments present in the thesis of the “active audience”. If this is so, the multiplications of the audience uses and the growing interactivity mean that research of media reception, still considered marginal within the framework of Communication studies, have now a historical opportunity to achieve the mainstream status in the field.

3. There are few books that make a transversal confrontation of the changes that occur in the mass media inside the whole communication ecosystem, among which we highlight that of Carlón and Scolari (2009).
4. Jenkins *et al.* (2006) identify twelve basic skills identified in a participatory culture: Games, Performance, Simulation, Visualization, Transmedia navigation, Networks, Negotiation, Collective intelligence, Distributed cognition, Judgment, Appropriation and Multitasking.

Audiences and users enable as being highly active – selective, self-governed, producers as well as consumers of texts. They are also increasingly plural and multiple, albeit diverse, fragmented and individualized. What follows is that key categories such as choice, selection, taste, fans, intertextuality and interactivity - which have driven the research of television reception - *are more and no less* significant in the environment of the new media. At the same time, the theoretical and political agenda of these studies reach a renewed relevance, raising issues regarding the globalization of negative contents, regulation of media, participation in shared culture, informed and democratic argumentation, etc.

The tradition of Latin-American research of television reception, despite having generally adopted a more cultural approach, has revealed parallel connections between the conventions of television and the decoding. As we shall see, telenovela viewers build understanding about the characters and the secrets of the puzzles of the storylines; they anticipate plots, make assumptions about their end, and remember past episodes, from significant real events, etc., all according to the melodramatic conventions of the genre.⁵ This research tradition is here to be mobilized and innovated for the required engagement with the web studies, with computer and mobile screens, with the practices of online games.

In transmedia environment it seems that people are progressively more engaged with content - music groups, telenovelas, and football teams - than with formats or channels, wherever they are, in any medium or platform. *Fan Studies* become increasingly important as audiences become more fragmented and diversified. The more the media become interconnected, the more the contents increasingly attract the interest of the fan, who follow them in all the available media and incorporating them also into their face-to-face communication. This does not mean that the format is not important, since in television studies the concept of genre has been central to think about the *text-reader* interaction.

According to Livingstone (2004), reception studies that have been based on *text-reader* relationship may be particularly suitable to address the new technological interfaces and their contents. Certainly the texts of the new media raise specific challenges, since they are often of a multimodal, hypertextual and ephemeral nature; they mix production and reception; they result in the emergence of new genres and facilitate the convergence of practices that once were distinct.

Then follows the necessary question: how the consolidated conceptual repertoire of text-reader approach, with its emphasis on openness, indeterminacy, textual address, preferred modes of interpretation and reading, can help to develop an integrated analysis of new media texts and television audiences? The answer is that it is worth devoting to these new object empirical investigations also engaged to innovative methodological explorations.

5. See Lopes, Borelli and Rezende (2002).

Studies of fan television communities generally are focused on specific programs or certain genres such as telenovelas, series, and soap operas, as mentioned by Costello; Moore (2007) and Baym (2000). The difference between the viewer and the fan can be pointed by the engagement with the television narrative and, at the same time, the production of content. Fans relate to that part of audience which not only watches movies or television programs, but also produce fiction contents or assume a critical position and develop their own art, embodying parts of the television narratives on videos, websites, and follow other fans in their enthusiasm. Fans are well away from the concept of ordinary consumers or mere spectators and because they agitate the web so intensely through the phenomenon of *online fandom* and because of their role as opinion makers, this is the public that matters most to the major TV broadcasting companies.

However, the practices of transmedia reception still represent a novelty in the Ibero-American countries. The approaches have been mostly qualitative, generally focused on audience of some programs or formats, as in the studies of Valencise-Gregolin (2010) and Campanella (2010). On the other hand, but on a complementary level, an exploratory research conducted by OBITEL-Brasil, we present below, followed a complementary objective to discern the outlines of the patterns of audience quantitative data, the categories of similarities and differences in the practices of online interaction of people and fiction contents. From television fan sites, discussion groups and other online portals are generally associated with a specific program, our research focused on *Passione*, the main prime-time telenovela on TV Globo in 2010.

The perspective of the active audience: collective habits, participation, engagement, online fandom

Television reception studies are gradually migrating to researches focused on participation, that is, on the practices and processes of interactive engagement with new media, to generate analysis about “user generated content”(UGC).⁶ Fans creativity and their forms of interactivity and a renewed interest in youth culture are other focal points of research.

Among us, there still remains a need to elucidate and to deepen the empirical and theoretical categories of “fan” and “fandom”. Besides being almost

6. “User Generated Content” (UGC). This term, actually, has a broad scope but is usually referred to content that the user is able to alter, modify, expand or edit, such as: discussion forums, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, social networks, photos and videos, reviews and comments, collaboration and photo/audio sharing. These same activities of the user can be approximated to the terms *remixing* (MANOVICH, 2005) and *remediation* (BOLTER, GRUSIN, 1998).

absent in Brazilian communication research, as we turn our attention to empirical research on transmedia, we have to dialogue critically with the abundant international literature on fans, which is highly theoretical and methodological diverse.

Bielby, Harrington and Bielby (1999: 35) provide a very succinct conceptual definition of “fan”: “‘Watching’ television is a relatively private behavior. Being a ‘fan’ however means participating in a range of activities that go beyond the private act of watching and reflects a greater emotional engagement with the television narrative”. Perhaps some of the most widespread and common involved in fan communities are those which combine a diversified and active consumption of official texts and spin-offs with their own interpretative and creative practices.

To control the “texts” problems arise such as overwhelming volume of material, its ephemeral existence and its virtuality. The hypertext depends on the user to “doing it”, as already pointed Eco (1984). Add to the fact that people online are producers as well consumers of content and which routinely perform multitasking in different platforms and devices. The extent of the challenges is evident, further aggravated by the fact that many researchers willing to conduct reception research on the internet are not, themselves, familiar with this media.

Lopes and Orozco (2011) point out that fan studies reveal their relevance in the context in which the audiences are fragmented and diversified, while they are in environments in which transmedia engagement most often takes the form of following contents rather than formats or channels. Thereby, there is increased fluidity and a greater possibility for paths in multiple directions. New sorts of experimentation in media reception stand out through the use of available equipment and software technologies, inexpensive and simple to use which make possible the *mass self-communication* (CASTELLS, 2007), resulting from practices and discursive productions of the audience on the internet, engaged with the fiction plots.

Given the scenario described, it is clear that research on television reception has already led to an accumulation of methodological experiences that can advance reception studies on the new media, which entail new problems to be faced, some of which are just beginning to be addressed. This is what we now demonstrate with a case study of online fandom of the telenovela *Passione*.

A case study of Fandom on Facebook discuss social issues of the telenovela *Passione*: drug addiction, marriage of relatives, abortion, sexual abuse and pedophilia

To do the work of mapping and analysis of the discourses and interactions generated by the expansion of the narrative of the telenovela *Passione* on the space of *Facebook* social network, we make use of concepts such as *transmedia storytelling* (JENKINS, 2008), *creative audience* (CASTELLS, 2009) and *dispersed*

creativity (CERTEAU, 1994)⁷, permeating the interactivity and the collaborative and creative attitudes of the fans, also called actors (LATOUR, 2005) or co-authors.

On the other hand, the architecture of the social networks illuminates the way in which the publics are organized. The identity of human beings and their social insertion largely depend to a large extent on the relationships established with the *other* and the forms of communication that are created in order for these relationships to be integrated and meaningful.

Two vertices appointed by Recuero (2009) have favored our research inside these interactive contexts: actors and connections. The actors, like us, persons or parts of the system, shape the social structures through the interaction and creation of connections or social ties. Understanding how actors construct this space and what kind of representations and perceptions are presented should become the primary goal of the current reception research in which are constituted *fan studies*, both online and offline.

UGC as unit of information in the study of communities on Facebook

When you think of the possibilities of the appropriation of television fiction on *Facebook* through UGC, you should first raise a number of questions as: when get together to talk about issues that affect them in televised fiction, which conversation users develop? What exchanges occur? As from a first exploratory observation, it was observed that the participation in specific groups dealing with television fiction brings pleasure to the users, develops social relations around a common content, the free expression of opinions and criticisms allows to define the fate of the plot beyond the imagination of the author or producers, building opportunities for new stories.

Given the millions of *Facebook* users in Brazil⁸, the focus of the study was directed, in the first moment, to monitoring and tracking the content gene-

7. Certeau is, perhaps, who best expresses the meaning of everyday creativity. The making of the cultural consumer, he says, is a production, a poetics (from the Greek *poiein*: “to create, invent, generate”), but it is hidden, since it spreads over areas defined and occupied by “production” systems (in our case, the television system), that leave no place to consumers where they may indicate what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems. For this, everyday creativity is *another* production, astute, dispersed, silent, because it does not manifest himself through its own products but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order.. “These ‘ways of using’ constitute the thousand practices through which users reappropriate the organized space using techniques of social-cultural production” (p.41). In the logic of these practices there is an *art* or “way of making” and all popular culture is formulated in “arts of making” (*arts de faire*)
8. Founded in 2004 in the U.S, the network has become increasingly popular in Brazil since 2009 and now reaching fifteen million users in the country, of which 77% have over 25 years of age. Source: *The Brazilian Online Audience*. Available at: <http://pt.scribd.com/doc/48622322/ComScore-SOI-Brazil-Webinar-Feb-2011>. Accessed on May 25, 2011.

rated, by mapping the profile or group pages dedicated to the telenovela *Passione*. The methodology of collecting data was the simple observation (non-participative) and the intentional selection of comments directed to the social issues running by the telenovela (intentional sample criteria).

Initial searches pointed to profile and group pages created by the fans that contained a large number of UGC, including links and photos. This is a demonstration of transmedia contents from the plot of *Passione* to the social network through the creation of thematic spaces for comments and shares of content. The “wall” was considered to be the preferred place for collect data on the telenovela. Below we show the table formed by the title, page and number of user-generated content, which was considered the basic source for the study. It is important to observe the number of UGC, since they point out to the spaces in which users interacted most on the subject.

TABLE 1 – TITLE, TYPE, IMAGE, UGC AND NUMBER OF PRODUCERS
ON FACEBOOK PAGES DEDICATED TO PASSIONE

Title	Type	Image	UGC	Producers of UGC
Passione	Profile		5.511	117
Passione	Profile		721	61
Passione	Group		157	32
Passione	Group		72	30
Passione	Group		6	1
Total			6,467	241

Source: Facebook.com⁹

Altogether, the group and profile pages presented 6,467 UGC. Given the large number of people who “liked” or became members of these groups (1,520 records), we observed that the number of fans that acted as content producers is relatively small, as well many of them were present in more than one of the groups investigated.

9. Public data base available at: https://spreadsheets.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AmVuFfwwsCFpdC1DOGIIRE0zLURJQS1XV0JKV20rTIE&hl=en_US Accessed on 07/05/2010.

The conversations were held in different languages (Portuguese, Spanish, English, Italian and Portuguese of Portugal) which is natural, since the social network has just 2.5% of the users in Brazil. Also, *Passione* aroused the interest of the Italian language by the users due that the first scenes were shot in Tuscany. User content from Argentina, USA, Mexico, Chile and Uruguay were recurrent.

Many users who were out of the country or did not live in Brazil were watching the chapters available on the websites of TVGlobo, Globo International, *YouTube* or online TV channels. A number of links were passed on by the fans during the exchange of content. This fact must be taken into account as a positive trend that the viewer connected and originated from various regions can simultaneously engage in such shares, generated by interest or affection on the topic.

In some group and profile pages it was possible to observe the development of many “treds”, whose content addressed both criticism and complements about the plot, characters and opinions on the author position on certain issues:¹⁰

Vera: Silvio de Abreu made a mysterious declaration regarding *Passione* to “*Sem intervalo*”, the column of the “*Estadão*” newspaper. ‘One character in the telenovela has already died, and the public still hasn’t noticed’, the author of the prime-time telenovela told the column. The question is – WHO? - August 17, 2010 - 09:31am.

Pablo (original text in Spanish): The author also said that the telenovela would be a crime story since the first episode, but no one would notice until after episode 100; could it not be that Eugenio was murdered? Could Fred have made Clara switch the medication so that he would die faster and then he would be able to get into the Metallurgy more easily?? Or also that Saulo could be involved in it... these guesses are just mine. - August 17, 2010 - 07:17am

Passione (original text in Spanish): OMG!!! That’s why I love Silvio, I’m enchanted by his mysteries” - August 17, 2010 - 08:26pm.

Ana: The author Silvio de Abreu does not hide his predilection for mysterious crimes. So much so that in almost all his telenovelas, he repeats the infallible formula of “who dunnit?”. In an interview to the UOL portal, the writer revealed that *Passione* has already had its first murder. ‘A character has already been murdered and nobody has noticed’, said Silvio. The author let slip that Eugênio did not die of a heart attack, but instead murdered. Now, if it was Saulo that committed the crime – as many suspect -, this he did not reveal” - August 18, 2010 - 03:32pm.

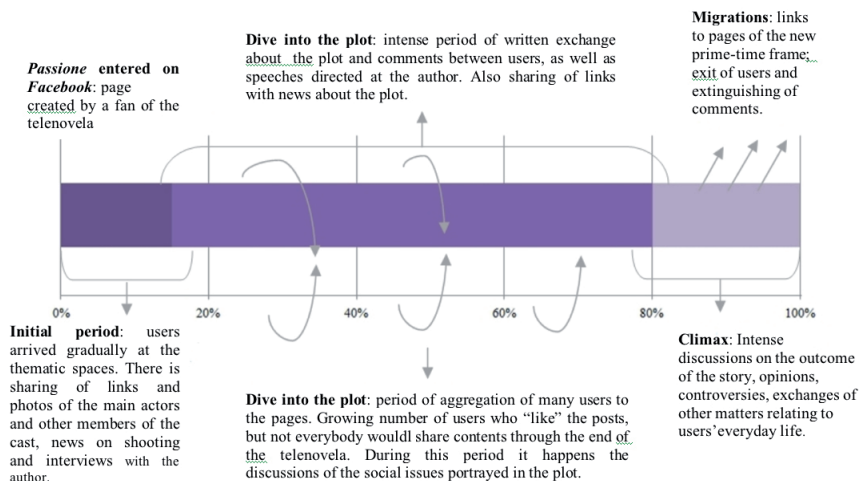
10. Note: all dialogues were originally in Portuguese and in Spanish.

Comments on the final chapter, audience ratings, sharing news about the telenovela in other media, such as magazines, newspapers and television channels were present. The conversations began months before the telenovela aired, creating expectations regarding the cast and the plot. The exchange of content progressed for a short period of months after the end of the telenovela, in which fans expressed missing for *Passione*, posted their critics about the final chapter, the behavior and the reward which the author gave each of the characters for their attitudes. The exchange of personal messages, reflecting the “friendship” developed between users during the narrative was common following the end of *Passione*. As we observed, it was common to these users being connected through other social networks on which they send messages in parallel to what happens on Facebook pages.

The Dynamics of constructing fan pages and the user generated content (UGC)

Groups and profiles pages created for discussing the telenovela were considered by the users as a proper place for debating the plot, as migrating to pages of new telenovelas, where once again they would get together to talk about the fictions that attracted them. Observing such behavior in all the pages examined, it was possible to compose an infograph that shows the dynamics of the pages created by fans on the *Facebook*.

GRAPH 1. INFOGRAPH OF THE DYNAMICS OF CONSTRUCTION OF *PASSIONE* FAN PAGES ON *FACEBOOK*



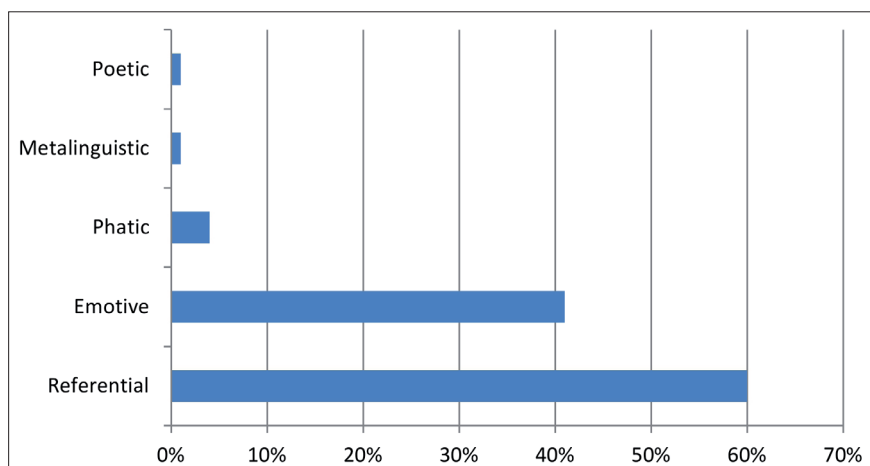
Source: CTVN

Through the dynamics of the web, it was also possible to observe consumer habits and time spent online on *Facebook*. The most active period for

users was evening/night time (6pm to 12pm), coinciding with the time the telenovela was aired on TVGlobo. This data also led to another pertinent observation regarding the audience of *Passione*, which is the habit of watching the telenovela and, at the same time, participating on social networks. This means that the former practice or ritual of watching the telenovela within a space together with family members or colleagues has been multiplied exponentially and has disseminated to reach more distant territories and broke out of the national boundaries.

For a more analytical approach to the conversations, we used Jakobson *language functions* (2003) and try to adapt them to analyze the UGC. The graph below illustrates the use of the language functions most employed. According to the author, these functions are not exclusive, especially if we think on the complexity that surrounds the contents generated on the internet, which may contain phrases, photographs and videos. Due to this, we observed the content inserting it into a predominant function, which sometimes it could not be so well determined.

GRAPH 2. USE OF THE FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE BY FANS ON FACEBOOK



Base: 6,67 UGCs

Source: CETVN

The *referential function* is predominant in the conversations, since 60% of the UGC regarding *Passione* are *descriptive* and directed to the characters, author, actors and the plot that unfolds slowly but also to other issues and information they share among themselves. We also see that these conversations were filled with emotion, demonstrated by a frequency of 40% for *emotive* UGC. There is a visible engagement during the viewing of the telenovela, the positions taken passionately in favor or against the characters, the vehement

expressions, which reflect the true “emotional capital” of the fans, as in the examples:

Leonor: “Silvio, please don’t kill Diana, I adore her, she’s too innocent to die, don’t do it, please, I beg you, don’t put an end to such a beautiful and perfect love that that you created yourself! Please!” December 7, 2010 - 11:33pm

Franko (original text in Spanish): “I want her to die, the romantic pairs always end up together, it’s time for a change, I don’t like of always seeing happy endings ٠٠٠” - December 8, 2010 - 00:21am.

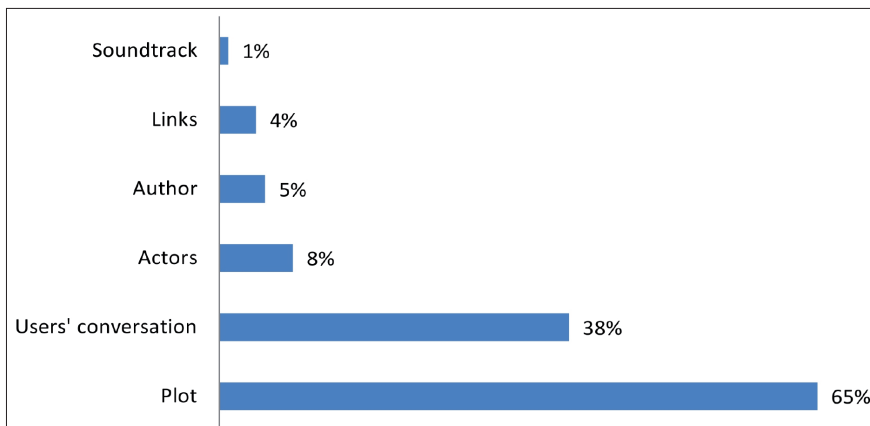
Stefano: (original text in Spanish) “Diana’s death would only make sense to me if Mauro was the true villain :P” - December 8, 2010 - 00:40am.

Giulia: “I hate the 2 of them... DIANA MUST DIE” - December 8, 2010 - 10:07am.

Vera: “What a thing to say Giulia!” - December 8, 2010 - 01:09pm.

In these same emotive discourses one can also note a certain desire for transgression of the traditional move toward a “happy ending”. On the other side, it was evident the limited use of the phatic, metalinguistic and poetic functions, whose amount was less than 10% of the total UGC.

GRAPH 3. THEMATIC CONTENT GENERATED ABOUT *PASSIONE* ON *FACEBOOK*



Base: 6.467 UGCs

Source: CETVN

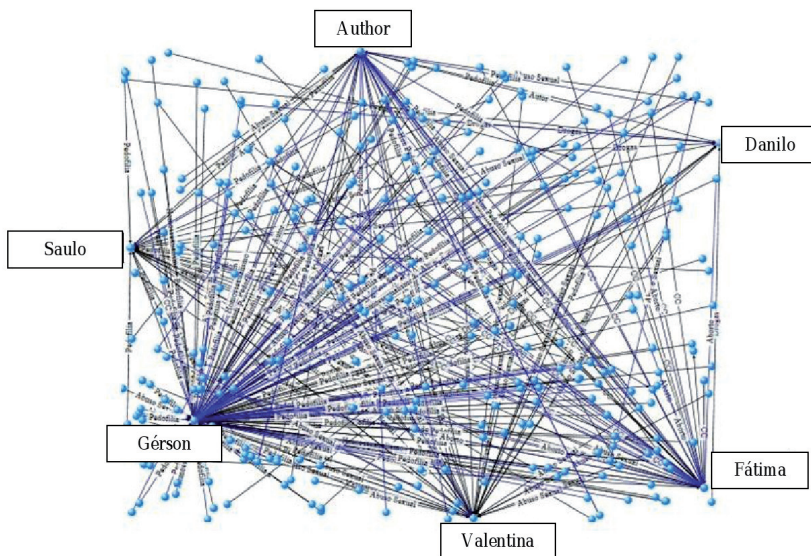
The categories in the graph above demonstrate the prominence of themes shared by the fans. The plot and characters of *Passione* (often their construc-

tion) predominated, followed by other contents the users themselves response and comment about other fans. These categories are not mutually exclusive since it is important to note, in these messages, the shared links brought inside the groups, in general, about news in other media containing photos, videos chapters, soundtracks, news about the plot and the course of future chapters. Interesting to note the content addressed to the author or focused on him, as well as criticisms and compliments to the work of the direction (including technical aspects), the interpretation of the actors and references to other telenovelas in which they have appeared. Such content lead us to identify these fans as the “reader of second level” (ECO 1997), a reader who establishes relationships, not merely to understand the story aired, but also to relate it to the author’s intentions, to ask about the meaning of non-immediate words, of the scenes, in short, of the whole literary or artistic work.

The social issues present in *Passione* emerge wrapped in the user generated contents over the characters. At no time fans refer to them using the term “social merchandising”, as they are often called. These discussions are significant, since they lead the fans to take a position on the issue and point to attitudes that show an *ethos* that represents them into the community.

The characters and the social issues, the private and the public

More than three hundred UGC dealt with the social issues portrayed in *Passione*. We verified that these contents were directed at six main vertices, five of which were the characters involved in the social issues: 1) *Gérson*: who had a secret on his computer, was suspected of pedophilia and sexual abuse in his childhood; 2) *Valentina*: the grandmother who exploited sexually her two granddaughters; 3) *Saulo*, the brother of *Gérson*, who represented the actions of the pedophile in the plot; 4) *Fátima*: the daughter of *Gérson* who, without knowing, falls in love with her cousin. 5) *Danilo*: a young man caught up in drugs; the sixth and last vertex to which comments were directed was the figure of the *author*. On Facebook, fans constantly mention the author as a judge, assessor or holder of the power to solve the social issues in a “conscious,” “fair” or even “brilliant” manner. The graph below shows a visualization of the user content addressed to the six plot vertices mentioned.



Base: 305 UGCs
Source: CETVN

Before we enter the content analysis addressed to the characters, it is worth recall what we point out in another place¹ as being, perhaps, the most characteristic mark of the Brazilian telenovela, ie, the vocation to incorporate issues in its narrative from the public sphere to the private sphere. It is the logic of personal and family relations that presides the narrative of social problems. It is here that seems to lay the power of this narrative, its capacity to translate the public space through the affective relations in lived experience, blending the experience of everyday life in its multiple aspects, subjective, emotional, political, cultural, aesthetics. The fusion of the public and private domains performed by telenovelas enables them to synthesize relevant public issues into current characters and plots, and at the same time, suggest that personal and current dramas may well have a broader meaning.

In a first moment, fans discussions centered on the characters' actions and later turned to opinions and issues experienced by them in daily life, to questions addressed to the author and even the relevance of the themes. Questions were driven to the author even on the appropriateness of the themes. "Gérson" was the subject of the greatest number of UGC related to social issues. Many of them presented only a suspicion of pedophilia and sexual abuse since his secret was delayed to be revealed. The second vertex that draws attention, but with a much smaller number of contents is "Fátima", involved in the issues of abortion and consanguineous marriage. The third vertex marks the presence of the "Author", which is brought at the wheel of discussions by fans as the major responsible for the frame of the issues. The actions of "Saulo" and "Valentina" as protagonists of sexual abuse and

pedophilia received comments during the last months of the plot, when the story of each has been revealed. The theme of “Danilo” and his relationship with drugs did not attract much attention of *Passione* fans.

Particularly important on these discourses on social issues is to note the characteristics of the “reader of second level” in the fan contents, such as a propensity to talk about the screenwriters copyright and the technical aspects of the telenovela, authors, as well as a profound knowledge of the plot. The discussions become increasingly rich when the fans carry out comparisons with social issues recurring in other telenovelas, as evidenced through the speeches on the subject of pedophilia:

Rafael (original text in Spanish): “Is Gerson a pedophile?... rumors on the internet say so.” - June 15, 2010 - 11:24pm

Luisa: “What a horrible subject to bring up in a telenovela, especially in such a charismatic character! I won’t like it if that’s what it is. I don’t think it is” - June 16, 2010 - 01:46am

Passione (original text in Spanish): “An interesting and innovative idea; always and whenever the topic is treated seriously.” June 16, 2010 - 08:02am

Rafael (original text in Spanish): “I agree, it’s very hard for a telenovela, but this problem exists in society, it is also highly popular in the media... but it’s very hard - June 16, 2010 -11:03am

Passione (original text in Spanish): “In *America*, Gloria Perez shows a hint of this topic... But here it is about one of the main protagonists who suffered from this paraphilia...” - June 16, 2010-11:14am

Manuela: “In the scene of the beach it became clear to me that he is a pedophile. The mystery is explained ...” - June 16, 2010 - 02:43pm

Passione (original text in Spanish): “We will see how Silvio de Abreu deals with the issue, I imagine it will be brilliantly, as always in his telenovelas. Guys, a suggestion for the page: enable user posts in a configuration the way they won’t fall into the filter. Because it’s good to know what other viewers think. A warm hug and congratulations for the page. - “ June 16, 2010 - 09:39pm

This short discussion about the suspicion of pedophilia of “Gérson” begins with a survey made by a member of the fandom about “rumors” in other platforms about the secret kept by this character. “Rumors” which are giving signs about the communication ecology in which fans are immersed. Quickly, the subject is considered by another fan as being very hard for a television storytelling. Following, there is a struggle of different opinions.

Is possible to observe in these discussions the use of the “counterword” (BAKHTIN, 2002) by registering differing points of view on controversial issues. Still, some fans claim that the discussion of this issue into the telenovela is important for society. The figure of the “Author” is a recurrent resource for solving a issue for which users have differing opinions. Yet, references to other telenovelas in which the same topic appeared is often used to clarify positions.

It is common to find ruptures of a more emotive language in the discourses of fans on social networks when they dealing with controversial issues. There are also ruptures in the sense of the discourses which often lead to other issues quite far of those that are being discussed under the heading of the initial topic. In addition, guidance on the correct use of the web and the tool (metalinguistic function) so everyone can participate in the discussion is always remembered by the moderator of one fandom, who calls himself “Passione”.

Social issues usually attract the attention of fans, engaging them around what they percieve to be important. Several excerpts can be made in these speeches, focusing on cultural aspects, such as gender, ethnicity and local culture, as shown below through the discussion about abortion made by the character Fátima. In this topic, female fans were especially affected and inserted a large part of the content:

Jorgelina (original text in Spanish): “Fátima had an abortion and is dying because of an infection :o” - June 19, 2010 - 01:03am

Carla: “yeeees, but I’m sure she’s going to live!!!” - June 19, 2010 - 01:04am.

Marcela: “Yes...I didn’t think she would have an abortion :o” - June 19, 2010 - 01:06am.

Vera: “yes, I think so they have to show the consequences! right?” - June 19, 2010 - 02:12am.

Carla: “yes...!!! she’s going to live...!!!” - June 19, 2010 - 10:00pm.

Daniela (original text in Spanish): “Of course she’s going to live xD” - June 20, 2010 - 01:42am.

Another social issue in *Passione*, which involved the character “Fátima” and “Sinval”, was marriage between blood-cousins. The topic was treated with strong feelings, with indignation, sometimes directly, proposing visibility and mutual understanding and, sometimes, as an implicit point, using the opinion of other characters to reinforce the opinions of the fans themselves regarding this controversial issue, or affirming a positive sentiment toward the characters, as we can see:

Dela: “Guys, could it be that the family is going to allow the relationship between Fatima and Sinval, now that we know they are cousins?” - November 6, 2010 - 11:39am.

Ariana: “Cande doesn’t want to.” - November 6, 2010 - 05:19pm.

Valéria: “That is one of the gossips” - November 6, 2010 - 07:04pm

Ariana: “I think that Saulo was not the son of Beth or of Eugenio, that’s why Fatima will be able to have a relationship with Sinval” - November 6, 2010 – 08:01pm.

Rafael: “Sure*” - November 6, 2010 - 08:01pm

Dela: “That’s good! This girl Fatima is really nice” - November 6, 2010 - 08:05pm

Franko (original text in Spanish): “I watched episode 158. Cauã Reymond is back. What a drag. But, what irritates me most is the despicable relationship between Fatima and Sinval. Blood-cousins and only Cande is questioning that... my God...” December 8, 2010 - 06:19am.

Ariana (original text in Spanish): “But they didn’t know they were cousins Franko, also it’s not that terrible... what irritates me is this fixation Silvio has for incest, this topic is always present in his telenovelas ¬¬” December 8, 2010 - 01:57pm

Passione (original text in Spanish): “hehehe yes, in *Belíssima* there were the case of Giovana and Mateus who were cousins but who later denied it and the case of Vitória and Pedro who were aunt and nephew, which was known at the end, but he had already died:P” - December 8, 2010 - 03:02pm.

Franko (original text in Spanish): “Passione, sorry. They didn’t know they were cousins before... but now they know... and now that they know they are cousins they want to get married and have children... for me, this is despicable... By God, they have the same grandmother... Ariana, I know, maybe Silvio de Abreu loves incest LOL.” - December 8, 2010 - 05:53pm.

Passione (original text in Spanish): “Franko but if they love each other, what can you do?...split up? I don’t think so, also they have been very responsible with the topic, you will soon see why...” - December 8, 2010 - 07:09pm.

Ariana (original text in Spanish): “hahahaha yes Franko putting it like that, it looks like he loves a bit of incest in his telenovelas xD” - December 8, 2010. - 07:33pm.

The divergence of opinions is treated with tolerance, no matter how much the fan come to feel strangeness towards the subject, when it is a matter of “social merchandising”. The use of emotive expressions such as “LoL, hebebe-bebe, sorry, but...” bring lightness on the conversation of some points of view. There is always the recurrence and repetition of a reason (non-explicit) for the Author – *the maestro* – having involved these issues in the plot.

Another recurring social issue in the conversations was the sexual abuse represented by the character “grandma Valentina”. The fact that she sexually abused other characters when they were children and had taken her granddaughter to the pedophile “Saul”, turned out to mark all the iniquities of the villain. “Valentina” was perhaps the figure which aroused the most intense emotions on fans along all the narrative of *Passione*:

SPLV: “Gerson confessed he was abused! :O” - October 19, 2010 - 07:11pm.

Ni: “by his own father” - October 19, 2010 - 09:57pm.

Ankita (original text in Spanish): “by a maid...” - October 20, 2010 - 11:12am

Ni: “What maid are they talking about !!!! I´m dying to find out !!! that maid” - October 20, 2010 - 07:12pm

Yamila: “I´ve been thinking about this maid... who could it be!!!” - October 20, 2010 - 11:29pm.

SPLV: “Valentina could have been the maid. What do you think?” - October 20, 2010 - 11:58pm.

Yamila: “I also think it´s Valentina...” - October 20, 2010 - 11:58pm.

Sônia: “I think that´s where the connection between Clara and Eugenio comes from..... I don´t know.” - October 21, 2010 - 02:58pm.

SPLV: “this person or pig could be Olga or Valentina, to abuse a child, who could it be, we have to watch all the episodes with lots of secrets involved... guys, think about the deaths and the Gouveia family, think at night about who the villain could be @@@@” - October 21, 2010 - 08:29pm.

Ankita (original text in Spanish): “Olga isn´t old enough, it can´t be her” - October 22, 2010 - 05:23pm,

SPVL: “You never know !!!! the only one who knows is Silvio !!!! I´m going to die of anxiety @@@@ January is already coming, watch out Silvio, who could this villain be.” - October 23, 2010 - 01:06pm.

Ankita (original text in Spanish): “Valentina is a monster” – January 11, 2011 - 11:47pm.

In fans discourses on sexual abuse, we observed a strong engagement and the use of pertinent language, the use of many exclamations, confessions of anxiety about the outcome for the villains and for the possible attitudes of “grandma Valentina”.

Amongst the UGC stands the recognition give to socio-educational role of TV Globo telenovelas when dealing social issues:

Beatriz (original text in Spanish): “Glued to the tv, the 8pm telenovelas are always highly educational, exciting, they touch our feelings, from the SANTA TERESA NATIONAL PARK IN URUGUAY !!without missing a single episode” – September 16, 2010 - 04:39pm

Passione (original text in Spanish): “thanks Beatriz!!! Without a doubt they are the best telenovelas, they are educational and always show the reality as it is!” - September 18, 2010 - 04:39pm

Vera: “My 2 pennys’ worth: Globo always makes a point of showing subject matters or taboos that affect the population and many ignorant people learn from telenovelas. An issue such as pedophilia, for example, could make it clear to a number of “housemaids” that it is not OK for them to cover up what the fathers or stepfathers of their children are doing to them. I think this would be a good issue. I do not believe that Gerson’s “problem” is that wide-reaching ...on the contrary, despite being monstrous and filthy, it certainly only affects a privileged layer of society that has access to a computer and can pay to see disgusting things and later goes to the shrink”. - November 30, 2010 - 06:54pm

The social issues shown in *Passione* lead to the coexistence of different points of view and to the use of an intense emotive language in the observed fandom. At the same time in which there is unanimous agreement regarding the importance of “social merchandising” in the TV Globo telenovelas, there is also the sharing of hatred, anger and compassion for those characters that interpret such issues in the melodrama. The discussions on the topics, in their transversal nature, promote a debate that at last becomes detached from the narrative and, in turn, fosters reflectivity and engagement (defense or attack) of the fans with the issues discussed.

Final Considerations

They are three, at least, the main results of this work. The first is our concern not to lose the theoretical and empirical insights gathered so far under the title of “Latin American reception research”. Especially since there

are some strong continuities – in terms of themes, arguments and critical issues – with the current discussions on the use of digital media. In the field of Communication we are accumulating an ambitious body of research and practices exactly aiming to generate knowledge about the participation in the new media and communication environments.

The second result was the apprehension of the central role of narrative in the constitution of a way a way to make sense of reality (ies) in which we are embedded (BRUNER, 1997). Reality (ies) constructed not only by the concreteness of everyday life, but also by the fictional worlds with whom we dialogue. Worlds that create and re-create daily life in an endless game characterized, as we already noted, by the *arts de dire* (CERTEAU, 1994); arts directly implicated in knowledges and practices of narratives.

In this context, the study of the audiences of the telenovela *Passione* allowed us to analyze the re-appropriations and transformations that are occurring in an ever faster and deeper ways not only in the consumption of television fiction, but also in the possibilities of interaction and the production of meaning. This, in turn, may lead to transformation of the very status of pragmatic and fictional protocols. (ECO, 1997).

It became clear the adoption in the new transmedia communication environment of strategies that seek to involve and engage the viewer enabling him to assume the condition of fan to participate in transmedia connections as a collaborator and even as co-author. This participation occurs through a wide range of interactions that go from unpretentious individual manifestations to engagements - which can also be individual - more tightly intertwined with the socio-cultural dynamics, configuring the *actor* who, according to Latour (2005, p.131), corresponds not to an action, but “a movement characterized by a multiplicity of groups and entities moving relative to each other”.

In this environment, particularly regarding to the production of fiction, the concept of *transmedia storytelling* (Jenkins, 2008) or transmedia narrative became central because the content can be expanded both in the characters as in the development of the narrative. It is not a repetition of the story, but a breakdown of the main story that gets different elements (characters, environments, conflicts) that take advantage of the qualities that an environment, in this case, the social network Facebook, can offer for developing the narrative. And, even more important, transmediation involves the active participation of the consumer in the creative processes. The lesson is that the transmedia fiction universe should not be thought of as something closed or as something “operated” only by the producers of the communication and entertainment industry. On the contrary, such an environment provides a constant creation and expansion of its content also operated by the interactors that participate in this narrative journey, showing unsuspected *arts de dire* from the telenovela fans. The study revealed strategies and practices and forms of production, circulation and consumption marked by both the verticality (with models based on the production of content by the huge conglomerates) and the horizontality, with content produced by the ordinary people interested in

spreading their creations/ opinions, which express, in the words of Certeau (1994), as much the tensions between “the strategies of the production and the tactics of the users” as the “*arts de dire*” in their daily use of Facebook.

The third result concerns the investigative experience that was to enter the fan communities in their discussions about the social issues presented in *Passione*. Observing the conversations regarding television fiction is like being in front a multitude that acts in the midst of numerous echoes of divergent voices, living and sharing experiences in a single common space. The discursive nature of the social networks acquires a wide range of possibilities for customization through links, videos and other resources. Certainly, the process of observation led us to live a while with these fans to the point of being able to say we had the pleasure to meet them and together experiencing a fiction in a different way. Although the role of the researcher in this study was not to interact, but rather to follow and register the discussions about the socio-educational themes shown in *Passione*.

As we said (LOPES, 2009: 30), the Brazilian telenovela, that long before the advent of the internet was already present in the conversation of its fans could not remain adrift in the midst of digital convergence. Instead, it has been appropriated by numerous platforms, re-semanticized, re-created according with what each medium/platform has to offer, increasing enormously chances of the telenovela of being seen, heard, spoken, and now of being *read* through the discourses of online fandom.

Finally, we believe that this methodological strategy for studying the content on Facebook reveals at least one of the performance standards of online fandom of telenovela. The methodological option of approaching online fandom based on the social issues showed in a particular telenovela has proved to be relevant and productive, since it enabled to monitor/register texts produced by fans on the pages of a social network that is Facebook.

The case study of the telenovela *Passione* on Facebook, based on the activities and discourses of fan communities, was able to capture discussions about controversial issues which reaffirms the central feature what we call “Brazilian telenovela” as well as emphasized the transmedia and social-educational nature of this television fiction. The active posture of the fans stood out by producing content, generating interesting and creative gazes from melodrama. At the same time, they could be rigorous with the performance of actors and pointing out flaws in the plot, scenes, and technical effects. They threw themselves actively in searches for uncover secrets using any hint or clue presented in previous chapters and, therefore, anticipating developments of the narrative, not minding if they came to come true or not. In many ways, fans of the telenovela on social network have shown the *arts of making* their “next chapters”.

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