

THE MEDIA AND THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SPORT: THE ATHLETES AS MODELS OF BEHAVIOR.

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Abstract

The media has changed the communication processes and raised new communicative interactions between the social actors. These processes generate specific codes which produces perception, reception and social behavior effects. This study intends to identify how the athlete is represented as a social actor of sport in the media discourse. Reports of Revista Veja – national circulation and high visibility in the brazilian printed media –, in the sport section from January of 2007 to January of 2008 were analyzed. It was verified the mythical figure of the athlete as a social actor of sport, and his representations as a behavior model.

keywords: Printed Media – Athlete – Content Analysis.

Introduction

Newspapers, radio, magazines, movies and television are historic and social events in the history of the media. Since its advent in the audience receiving the message was perceived as homogeneous - and it set up what has been termed as mass media - until the new technologies in contemporary society, communication processes of the media generate codes (BRIGGS, BURKE, 2004) .

These codes are specific effects of perception, processes of reception and social behaviors. The media has transformed the communication processes and raised new communicative interactions among social actors. In this light, this study sought to identify how the athlete became a social actor in the sport media discourse.

To this end, we analyzed reports of Revista Veja – which has a national circulation and high visibility in the Brazilian media - present in the sports section from January 2007 to January 2008, which include the expectation and realization of the Pan American

Games in Rio in 2007 and period before the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008.

Given this goal, we viewed sporting culture as part of contemporary culture, defined as "[...] a set of actions, values and understandings that represent the predominant mode of being in the global society, in relation to their sports activities", has symbolic meanings that have been incorporated - given the strength of the media appeal and its leverage - the company (Pires, 2001, p. 15).

Given that, the whole culture and sport phenomenon tend to a process of increasing globalization and no longer abdicate the participation of media in their production, distribution or processing (Thompson, 1995). Thus, the sport and the media are understood in a reciprocity relation.

In this sense, the media is as an industry that produces and transmits symbols and meanings that are implied by a number of factors, which interfere with the structure, organization and reorganization of perceived reality in which the receiver is inserted. The discussion of the sport through this process of spectacle, their meanings and symbols of the possibilities of intervention in education must raise questions involving the distinction between passivity and activity, understanding the unconscious consumer as an alienating factor of the creative potential and imagination (KELLNER, 2006).

In fact, the media discourse influences the information and/or knowledge that one has about one fact, the patterns of linguistic, social actions, attitudes and emotions. In this sense, it ceases to be merely instrumental to be structural. Communication changes the place of culture in society becoming structuring and restructuring.

Thus, economic and informational globalization contributes to the decentralization of knowledge that can and should be mediated, understood and discussed avoiding childish consumption. Fischer (2002, p. 89) suggests that discourse analysis of media in educational research needs

[...] dealing exactly with the complex network between the specific languages in relation to the directions that are in circulation and built in it, elements that do not separate the way of being and belonging within the practices of production, transmission and reception of media products.

In this vein, we understand the sport as a modern phenomenon, which not only drew on the context of the Industrial Revolution (especially the English model), but carries the deep-rooted values that make the athlete, for example, a role model, a mythical figure, a hero.

To go on with the analysis, we selected the stories/interviews which had focused on aspects related to an athlete or a group of athletes. Those which, in spite of being different sports, had a central theme we excluded, for example, health, sports organization, etc.

Thus, from January 2007 to January 2008, 26 reports in the sports section of *Revista Veja* were found. Of these, 13 comprised the corpus of this analysis by addressing the specific issue to which this study was to investigate (two were in a particular special section of the Pan American Games Rio/2007, which replaced the sports section during the event mentioned).

A Content Analysis (CA) was the technique that allowed the description of the messages identified in the reports and/or interviews. Through systematic and objective procedures, inferences of content relating to the conditions of production/reception of these messages (inferred variables) were produced according to the theoretical framework from which we come to the questioning of this study.

A observation file (OF) was developed for the systematic analysis of reports and/or interviews present in the sports section. It contained: the title and their relevant information; authorship and/or interview; description, photos/illustrations, and the record date, edition and pages. It is worth mentioning that this documentation in the OF facilitates the identification of the articles as they are accessible in printed editions and, more recently, its content is in digital data (free access) in the website of the *Revista Veja*.

The OF used in this study resulted from their use and further studies made in a report in the same journal, which addressed the theme of the study, but in another period. To fill the OF, in the relevant information item, describe each entry as well as some fragments that could at the same time facilitate the analysis and ensure the reliable use of words and phrases.

Identified and highlighted in this analysis the following categories: (1) the athlete as a symbol of national identity, (2) the athlete hero, (3) the athlete village/transgressor. We believe that the

first category has a direct influence on the other, this can be verified throughout the text.

It is important to remember that the CA can be quantitative and qualitative. There is a difference between these two approaches: a quantitative seeks to establish a frequency of words that repeat the content of the text (according to purpose of the study), the qualitative considers the presence or absence of a particular characteristic or set of content features in a given message fragment and is, therefore, attentive to its rhetorical component (MINAYO; NETO; DESLANDES, 2003). This study emerges from the qualitative approach of the CA.

The athlete, the hero, the villain

It was noticed that the figure of the athlete in the reports examined was associated with some common elements that interact among themselves, according to the categories noted. They are: the hero, the villain and, in a broader context, a model of behavior linked to factors of identity.

In " Jovem de Grande Valor: Em apenas um ano Breno passou de Júnior a craque do São Paulo, e agora, vai para o Bayern de Munique" (2007a), it is observed that achieving financial aspirations is linked to the mythical figure of the athlete which does not succumb to various difficulties in their path and heroically beats it, after a long wait. They are long considering that many of these athletes have come to the boys divisions based clubs.

The report highlights the speed with which football player Breno lived the aspiration to play in a big club, become an idol and earn a lot of money to achieve these wishes. A "meteoric" rise, which is due to his "mature and resourceful" football playing. Becoming an idol in one year, playing in a great club and winning lots of money identifies him as a hero. It is the idealization of success in this speech.

This process is repeated in the said magazine. Overcoming adversity - which shows in these speeches the heroic status awarded to the athlete - from socioeconomic issues pervade even the physical characteristics, scope troubled family, health problems, etc.. This is where we identify the symbolic significance in the sporting context mediated by the media. Pires (2001, p. 16) points out that this symbolic meaning refers to "symbolic meanings that are assigned to

the signs represented by the social conduct and behavior of members of various segments of the sport."

The report on the Belgian tennis star Justine Henin, for example, focuses on her victories, "despite her short stature" and troubled history (her mother died when she was 12, at 17 she broke up with her father and moved in with her boyfriend) . The reason of her conflict with her father (intention to control her career) is mentioned as a very frequent event in the world of women's tennis (SALVADOR, 2007c).

The narrative then details the difficulties of the athlete in relation to her health. The discovery that the athlete suffered from chronic asthma (the reason that would prevent her from going to the Beijing Olympics) is reported as another factor that might make her give up. These factors combined attach symbolic meaning to enhance the athlete's victories, crediting her a strong and combative personality.

The "good boy reputation" of soccer player Kaka is directly linked to his success in the Italian football, especially the winning of championships (SALVADOR, 2007b). According to the text, the player aims to be a symbol of the Brazilian team and is not afraid of the demands of post-winning demands that usually falls on players. One can see that his behavior pattern is stressed (such as the fact that he even manage his money and investments). Finally, when asked why his name does not appear in the gossip tabloid, the "good boy" said "simply because I like to hang out with my wife or my friends for dinner and I'm always home early" (SALVADOR, 2007b, p. 128).

The athlete's exemplary image is easily identified, as well as the association that his success is linked to this factor. The symbolic meanings that we see in this speech do not restrict the behavior "model" of the athlete to his professional work. We found a mediation of these meanings that also enter the social relations, family, etc..

However, the athlete is also about to become a "villain". The story about player Richarlyson begins with a quotation from a statement that it would be the athlete in which he denied being gay. This statement was a response to rumors that arose after the celebration of a goal in which he performed a dance move. According to the player's statement, such rumors could be harmful to his career.

The statements by the judge, who filed a criminal complaint made by the player against the administrative chief of the Palmeiras club

(whose statements were part of these rumors) are considered unfortunate and biased. The so-called "bloomers" of the said judge were illustrated in the following fragment: "the acceptance of homosexuals in Brazilian association football undermine the uniformity of thoughts of the team, the connectedness, balance, and the ideal to the fan who goes to the stadium with their child to watch their favorite team" (BRAZIL, 2007, p.100).

The "concern" of the judge to the athlete as role model for people who watch his sports performance - which becomes a peripheral issue - and therefore sees the influence of his behavior on the family, the team thought, the interaction and even the fans' passion for their favorite team.

In terms of football, we emphasize that this story allows interpretations that seem to converge with what Helal, Lovisollo and Smith (2001, p. 66) found out about the strong appeal of this sport regarding to the construction of the Brazilian national identity. We emphasize that values, habits and a moral discourse around the sport, in this case about homosexuality, are at stake.

We identified that this moral aspect, especially considering the popularity of football in Brazil, is the applicant given the fact that the concern from the athletes themselves is remarkable. It therefore perceives and/or incorporates "its role" as the model it is and the influence it has, fears the loss of prestige for the public to help create an identity (apart from questions of "love for the shirt").

The identity factor draws our attention to the narrative about player Richarlyson. The collaborations by Pires (2001, p. 16) makes us identify how influential the media discourse can be to "help make family" and to determine "roles" for each of the segments and/or actors in the sports arena. More than that: these speeches leverage a true "merger" of these roles in the sporting culture itself.

The report on golf athlete Angela Park is also characterized by the relationship between sport and national identity. This is the glimpse of expanding the sports identity to unpopular sports in Brazil, under the umbrella of nationalism. Particularly noteworthy, there is the growth of golf in the country regarding the number of players and golf courses, pointing as a decisive factor for the popularity of the sport - and still missing - a national idol (TEIXEIRA, 2007).

It looks at the attempt to disclose the course through idols of other

sports such as: Ronaldo (football player) and Rubens Barrichello (Formula 1). A rookie in the professional golf league in the United States, Brazil's Angela Park stood out and achieved great results in the U.S. Women's Open league (most important tournament in the world).³²

The athlete was nicknamed as golden girl by the American press. The president of the Brazilian Golf Confederation, Alvaro Almeida, said: "To be perfect, the only thing missing is Angela having a very Brazilian last name, such as Silva[...] would be more reasons to call her our golfer" (SALVADOR, 2007c, p.126).

The same point - nationalism - is identified in the "Brazilian Phelps: the World record makes Thiago Pereira a great potential of swimming in Beijing" (BORTOLOTTI, 2007a). From the title - whose heroic, champion reference is made by reference to a prominent player on the international stage - to the "hope" of medals conferred on Thiago Pereira, one sees the interplay between the heroic figure and national representative.

In fact, according to Rubio (2002, p. 3), "the spectacle of modern sport and overvaluation of the deeds and achievements of the athletes have suggested a relation between the protagonist of the sporting spectacle and the spectacular figure of the hero."

The narratives of the said magazine also transit between technology and the mythical figure that consolidate the athlete as hero. In "Próximo do limite: mesmo sem as principais estrelas, o Pan do Brasil reunirá máquinas humanas em busca de novos records" (2007), that is notorious. The study of specific training of athletes as Jadel Gregorio (triple jump) and Thiago Pereira (swimming), points out that, although it doesn't level with Olympic games, Pan American games also brings the ability to overcome their athletes "It's in the ability to go where no other human has ever reached that the high-level sport resides (Soares, 2007, p.75).

It is highlighted that the loss of a record involves genetic, technological, psychological, etc. factors: "The Olympic competition is a great laboratory of the limits of the human body" (Soares, 2007, p.75). The Bureau is designated as the opportunity for young talents make fame in the scenario of international competitions; "in the universe of super athletes, time has a different meaning from what it represents to the rest of humanity (Soares, 2007, p. 76).

This discourse pervades athletic performance and technological support, enhancing the legendary condition of athletes for having different representations of time and space than the "rest of humanity." It denotes the idea that the construction of the myth contributes to an understanding of reality whose roots cannot be found solely in rational explanations. In fact, there is a climate and a set of interests to perpetuate the passion for sports, this reciprocal relationship between media and sport have been mentioned according to the propositions of Thompson (1995).

Converging with this, Rubio (2002) suggests that the attempt to perpetuate the passion for sports culminates in the "production" of the sports idol. The specialist media uses this "manufacturing" as a cornerstone, which is based on your goals, and asserts the maxim: there is no (income) sport without idols.

The speech of Revista Veja, however, brings into focus that Brazil is not a sports force, and that "our heroes" are not at all "heroes", going against this principle. However, it would be a mistake to ignore that the speech occurs in a tone of regret. In "Contra Hermanos e juvenis é fácil: O Brasil nunca teve tantos ouros. Mas, poucos atletas podem repetir o feito nas Olimpíadas" (2007), the limitations of "our soldiers" in high level sport are shown.

We highlight the best Brazilian participation in an edition of the Pan American games warning: "To a stranger, it could even seem that the country is a sports force" [...], however, "[...] the ragged and tattered Latin Americans competed with the youth teams of the United States and of Canada" (BORTOLOTI, 2007b, p. 88). Thus, there is no reason for euphoria and expectation about the chances in the Beijing Olympics.

Advances are recognized although "we are far ahead of the Olympic squad" (BORTOLOTI, 2007b, p. 89). Budgets of the confederation of athletics, gymnastics and swimming are cited as good rates of evolution. We note that the text points to a possible direction: "Only with money and planning will Brazil leave the company of the tattered and torn that have their only real party in the Pan American Games (BORTOLOTI, 2007b, p. 89).

With heroes who are not that much of heroes, the discussion about the "loss" of some of these idols emerge. The expanding export of football players becomes a recurring theme in the magazine. For such

an expansion two risk factors are: the speed with which Eastern Europe and Asia began to incorporate Brazilian players in their teams, and the fact that Brazilian clubs do not expect the player to earn fame and experience, selling them at prices not so high as they could.

Pepe, the player, is not mentioned as an example in this context (FAVARO, 2007). He was sold at 18 years of age by Corinthians from Alagoas for 40 thousand dollars to Marítimo, six years later he was sold to Real Madrid for 30 million euros. Helal, Lovisolo and Smith (2001) note and reinforce the strong identification with the Brazilian football. We understand that the feeling of loss that we identified in the discourse of nostalgia denotes a strong identification with the national football, paradoxically, personified and mystified in the figure of the idol/hero.

However, there are those who cease to be heroes even if only temporarily. Having been so, they lose this status for some "transgressing" reason to the strong ideological discourse about morality in which modern sport is wrapped. Doping is one of those reasons, as perceived in " Fraude na piscina: exame antidoping flagra Rebeca Gusmão, vencedora de duas medalhas de ouro no Pan " (2007).

The doping of swimmer Rebeca Gusmao, in the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, made "Brazil" lose the first gold medals in women's swimming, according to the text. On the opening day of the Games, the swimmer underwent a doping test in which it was identified high levels of testosterone.

Furthermore, DNA testing revealed that some of her urine samples collected during the competition, belonged to different people. This fact confirmed that the suspicions that Rebecca had used steroids were substantiated. We see a resented narrative in which the loss, more than just the athlete's, was a loss for the nation.

From the appropriation of the considerations of Kellner (2006), on the media and sports-show where "celebrities are the icons of media culture, gods and goddesses of everyday life" (Kellner, 2006, p. 6), we realize that these "resentful" statements brought to the athlete a loss of her condition as a "goddess". So she became a protagonist of an idol/hero in a cyclical and suspicious manner. It happens as she went from "the pride of nation" (with the winning of medals), to the "bad example" (with busted exams).

Elsewhere, it also falls on the athletes in women's football in Brazil, especially player Marta, a suspicious speech. The talent of the player is not denied, but it falls on the responsibility of all staff in accordance with what was identified in " O brilho das meninas: com grandes dribles de Marta, a seleção chega à final da Copa do Mundo feminina "(2007).

It emphasized the merits of the Brazilian women's football, especially player Marta Vieira, who, after scoring the fourth goal in the victory of the team over the American arch-rivals, received a standing ovation. The Brazilian striker scored two goals in the match, one was told with skill comparable to Brazilian great players like Pele and Zico.

His dribbling was compared to samba steps (identity appeal verified) and Marta was given the title of world's best player by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA). They stressed the difficulty of the game against the German team and called it "Marta will have to elaborate her dribbling even more carefully" (Jacobson, 2007, p. 129).

The new title, according to the text, would make women's football national passion (with investments and championships, as the male version). The conquest of the title, as it was possible to see - and obviously all the mythic ritual instilled in the celebration ceremony -, influences the achievement of the status of hero and nationalism is then awakened.

We noticed that the identity factor, as noted by authors Helal, Lovisolo and Smith (2001), regarding football mode, is also present in women's football. However, the text analysis suggests identification much centered on talent and performance of an athlete in particular.

The article that introduced the "ace" of the Brazilian triple jump - Gregório - that after the Brazilian Athletics Grand Prix, entered history as one of the top ten athletes in the world triple jump, reinforces the idea of nationalism. It is said that the 26-year-old athlete from Paraná wants to increase his collection of titles by winning an Olympic medal. In an interview, he acknowledged that he still needs to improve.

We found that the desire to improve and get the Olympic medal goes through a process of symbolic significance mediated by mass

media coverage that tends to collectivize it nationally. On the other hand, what is the effect - and consequent social representation - which the increasing expression of achievement will bring? Possibly to be seen as a national hero, an idol, a pride for the nation, speech (not coincidentally) cast, potentiated and "sold" by that same media.

Issues raised in this dialectic are what bring representatives of the athlete (as a social actor), sometimes cyclical, paradoxical, reticent. These representations go beyond sports, by the social values that historically constructed that the "being an athlete" brings imbricate in itself.

Conclusion

Based on the understanding that the income sport makes up what Kellner (2006, p. 6) calls the "show field", we realize that the spectacle of modern sport and the overvaluation of the achievements of athletes have suggested a relation between the protagonist of the sporting spectacle and the heroic figure in the reports analyzed.

In sports, the myth is the representation of the hero. Sports myth has unique characteristics, they are talented and charismatic, and their life histories are narrated in order to become paradigms of social concerns (HELAL, Soares; LOVISOLO, 2001). The representations have, as inherent in themselves, the symbolic. According to Pesavento (2003, p. 41), "they say more than what they show or state, they carry hidden meanings, socially and historically constructed, they are internalized in the collective unconscious and appear as natural."

The production and placement of media discourses on this show field suggest the presence of these representations also in the investigated narratives. Such representations signal that, coming from the sports scene, the athlete as a social actor symbolizes, produces and plays the nationalism rooted in sports competitions, they take the heroic, mythical figure and brings with it a pattern of behavior that sometimes, being the transgressor or subverted, becomes the villain.

These ideas permeate the social imaginary and influence issues such as national identity (which are very frequent in the reports analyzed), the moral discourse about sport and athletes in particular. However, we corroborate with Kellner (2006) on these dominant discursive constructions being likely to be obeyed or rejected in the formation of the identity.

We find, therefore, that the impact of the behavior of an athlete goes beyond the sports theme. Thus, it mobilizes broader sociological debates that pervade the culture of the sports idol, which is at the same time, promoted and mediated by the media. These discussions encourage questions about the significance of the relation of income sport performance and discursive formations from the creation of mythical, heroic and/or transgressing characters, in various social aspects.

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