The Welcoming Pope: Images of Pope Francis in the Catholicism under mediatization

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Abstract: In the context of the society in mediatization more and more the social fields are inserted in an ambiance in which borders are constantly tensioned, meaning that social practices are crossed by the logic of other fields, rather than their own place of knowing. It is perceived that the social/political/religious conjuncture interpenetrates with the logic of mediatization, and this phenomenon arouses transformations in all Christianity. The objective of this work is to analyze the circulation of Pope Francis' images in the media which formulate, in the collective imaginary, a mediated *totem* image of the *Pope of embrace* or of *the welcoming Pope*, what adheres to the new media technologies.

Keywords: mediatization. Circulation, image, Catholic Church, pope Francis

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Le pape accueillant: images du pape François dans le catholicisme sous l'emprise de la médiatisation

Résumé : Dans le contexte de la société dans la médiatisation, les domaines sociaux sont de plus en plus intégrés dans un environnement où les frontières sont souvent stressées, ce qui signifie que les pratiques sociales sont traversées par des logiques d'autres domaines et ces pratiques laissent son propre lieu de connaissance. Il est possible de percevoir que le contexte socio-politique-religieux pénètre les logiques de la médiatisation et ce phénomène provoque des transformations dans tout le christianisme. L'objectif de ce travail est d'analyser la circulation des images du pape François dans les médias qui formulent dans l'imaginaire collectif une image

« totem » médiatisée en tant que Pape de « l'étreinte » ou « d'accueil » qui adhère aux nouvelles technologies médiatiques.

Mots-clés: médiatisation, circulation, image, Église catholique, pape François

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1. Introduction

The present work is the result of discussions about the concepts of mediatization, circulation, and studies of image and imaginary. These are concepts approached and worked within the research line of Mediatization and Social Processes of the Post-Graduate Program in Communication Sciences at Unisinos - Brazil. For the reflections developed here, we seek to deepen the theoretical knowledge concerning mediatization, as well as to dialogue with the propositions of our master's research project. It is necessary to introduce that the discussions about the concept of mediatization were fundamental for the progress of the research, as well as the understanding of the media processes, present today, in a context that crosses the other social fields. The phenomenon of mediatization is present in a society that transforms itself, involving increasingly complex processes, and that in its particularity do not finalize the concept. That said, we work with the evolution of a society in the process of mediatization, and not of a society already mediated.

The purpose of this work is to analyze the media circulation of the images of Pope Francis. We start with the assumption that circulation operations, among which reverberation, have the potential to steady, in the collective imaginary, a totem image, which adheres to the new technologies. It is the representation of the Pope of the embrace or the welcoming Pope. Inserted in this context, the attempt is to realize that values can be evidenced from the pontiff's mediated image, and what this brings to the established notion of Catholic religiosity.

For this analysis, we focus on the studies of mediatization as a general scenario, and from Rosa's studies of circulation and image, we turn to the context in which the images are worked in the scope of circulation as a space of value. The need to understand this concept is justified because, as a leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, even though he is already seen as an icon because of the position he occupies, stands out for having a more open, and above all, a mediatized posture, thus, a tensioned posture of the speech places of the Church. This leads us to understand that what is evidenced is a relation of symbolic power and an attempt to establish a belief.

2. Mediatization: a concept under construction

In the context of the society in mediatization, more and more social fields are inserted in an ambiance in which the boundaries are constantly tensioned, meaning

to say that social practices are crossed by the logic of other fields, not only their own place of knowing. It is perceived that the social/political/religious context interpenetrates with the logic of mediatization, and this phenomenon arouses transformations in all Catholicism.

In order to understand the phenomenon of mediatization, we rely on the Latin American studies present in the works of Eliseo Verón, Antonio Fausto Neto, Pedro Gilberto Gomes and José Luiz Braga. This perspective is relevant to us because it addresses mediatization as the production of complex feedbacks, of a non-linear nature. We understand that communication cannot be understood as a predictable and linear activity, according to cause and effect logic.

It is important to highlight the evolution of the studies on mediatization, which, in turn, passes through an important transformation in society. We start from the concept of media society, in which its characteristic is of mediator instance. In this context of the media, there would be a social/technical mediation acting as an intermediary link between producers and recipients in the construction of a relationship. Throughout the historical process, those who made this mediator link were the media.

Braga (2012) explains that mediation 'corresponds to a process in which an element is interspersed between different subjects and/or actions, organizing the relationships between them'. He also emphasizes that this concept is maintained in all cases in which the expression names a process. The meanings of this relation vary according to the mediating element; 'according to the subjects whose relationship is intermediated; and according to their mode of action' (Braga, 2012, p. 32).

From an epistemological perspective, Braga (2012) emphasizes that mediation is the relationship of the human being with the reality around him.

> The idea of mediation corresponds to the perception that we do not have a knowledge of this reality - our relationship with the 'real' is always mediated by a 'being in reality' in a situational way, from a point of view - that is social, cultural, psychological. The human being sees the world through the lens of its historical-cultural insertion, by its 'moment' (Braga, 2012, p. 32).

In this mediation scenario, the media meant a representational instance of what was happening in society, and the receivers would only have knowledge of the content offered through this mediation. In Braga's conception (2012), today the concept of mediation becomes more complex, and that means that we cannot consider the media as a foreign body in society. This scenario is now known as the society in mediatization. 'Even though the longest established interaction processes [...] continue to define patterns of communication, and inferential logic, that organize society and its attempts'. It is these patterns, which, according to the author, become more complex 'involving the growing diversity of mediatization - which is

much broader and more differentiated than simply referring to the use of media' (Braga, 2012, p. 35).

> So today, what attracts strongly our attention are these processes - whose actions are not restricted to the object 'means' or to the object 'receivers and their mediations', but include them both in highly diversified formations and yet articulated to other formations (Braga, 2012, p. 35).

Mediatization is characterized by the continuity of processes, by non-linearity. A society in mediatization is characterized by a scenario in which the agents involved in communication are, by nature, located in distinct poles (production and reception), but are in contact. Fausto Neto (2006) proposes that the relation between them is marked by mismatches, and no longer by the logic of linearity.

> The society in which mediatization is engendered and developed is constituted by a social/organizational nature insofar as we move from stages of linearity to those of discontinuities, where notions of communication, associated with homogeneous totalities, give way to the notions of fragments and to the notions of heterogeneities (Fausto Neto, 2006, p. 3).

Fausto Neto (2009) clarifies that the concept of mediatization is in the development of technical phenomena, that transform themselves into media, and which are intensified in society, changing the social, technical and discursive processes of production, circulation, and reception of messages. Such phenomena produce mutations in the ambiance itself, in the processes, products, and interactions between individuals, in the organization and in social institutions' (Fausto Neto, 2009, p. 4).

When thinking about mediatization, Gomes (2009, p. 7) points out that 'digital technology is placing humanity at a different level, although it has roots in the previous process, represents the constitution of a new social ambiance'. Gomes (2016, p. 180), warns of the complex relations of the media in society, and that in their totality they 'qualitatively alter the sphere of human life". The author considers that the plurivocal concept of mediatization thus allows for various meanings and senses, but also misunderstandings about their use. Thus, the society in mediatization

> [...] creates for the people a new way of being in the world, where means are no longer used only as enabling instruments of personal relationships but are part of social and individual self-understanding. Identity is built from interaction with the media. The person is not an "I" who uses instruments as an extension of his body, but an individual who understands himself as a being who values his relationships and connections through the existence of the technological instruments of communication (Gomes, 2016, p. 187).

When we work with the concept of the mediatization of religion, we realize that digital social networks provide a new model of communication and social interaction. In this perspective, Hoover (2014) explains that 'the media not only

cover and represent religion; in fact, [they] interact with it in ways that are changing both media and religion (2014, p. 46).

In this sense, this communicational process ends up being represented as an interactive communication model, which, according to Bratosin (2016), includes a gradual model directed to communication professionals. In this case, the press appears as a reliable source of information. In communication and religion interface, this appears with a strong incidence of media on the religious doing. From the author's perspective, this communicational model is, also, characterized as the importance of media about the dissemination of religious activities and practices, as well as an adaptation of social actors guided by media.

In this view, Borelli (2007) indicates that media causes the religious field to be permeated by media cultures and logics "having to restructure to them, as a strategy of permanence with their audiences" (p. 26). In turn, the religious field is marked by negotiations, and subjections, because in order to maintain relationships with its faithful or other public "the religious field has changed some of its modes of functioning" (p. 26). The author emphasizes that some actions are "adequate to media logics as a strategic form of operationality of the field itself because one must make it work so that it can be recognized" (BORELLI, 2007, p. 26).

In another perspective, Sbardelotto (2005, p. 6) states that, in this media logic, it does not mean that religious practices are being replaced by media, "even if it is only through media that religion continues to maintain its space in social life". That is, there is a process of resignification, of production of other meanings that are embedded in the processes of mediatization.

The media makes the religious field permeated by cultures and media logic 'having to be restructured to them, as a strategy to stay with their audiences'. In turn, the religious field is marked by agencies, and submissions, because to maintain relationships with its faithful or other publics 'the religious field has changed some of its modes of functioning' (Borelli, 2007, p. 26).

Sbardelotto (2012, p. 6) states that in this mediatic logic, it does not mean that religious practices are being replaced by the media, 'nor that only because of the media, religion continues to maintain its space in social life'. Borelli (2007, p. 26) emphasizes that some actions are 'adequate to media logics as a strategic form of field operation since it has to be made to work so that it can be recognized'.

From this perspective, we reflect on the mediatization of religion. That is, the media do not only appear as instruments to enhance the relations between religious institutions and society, but they cross the making of religion, changing the experience and the forms of contact. In this sense, we realize that social networks have made possible a new model of communication and social interaction.

3. *The welcoming Pope* in Catholicism in mediatization

The social/political/religious context interpenetrates with the logic of mediatization, and this phenomenon arouses transformations in all Catholicism. It is understood that there is a need on the part of the church to appropriate the discourse of inclusion, possibly in view of the decline in the number of faithful in recent years, and that a new pontific profile was needed to conduct this new dialogue. Considering this concept, we can understand some emblematic questions of the performance of the pontiff, designed to produce a mediatized image of his representation. Added to this, there is the language and the way his messages are transmitted to comprehend the changes in his way of communicating the Church speech and communicating himself.

The phenomenon of mediatization points to a growing complexity of communication, being necessary to observe the practices of the religious field from a communicational perspective, that is also crossed by the logic of other social fields. Therefore, studying mediatization demands that we observe it as 'a *new matrix* that is grounded on new rationalities with which it accomplishes strategies of meaning production' (Fausto Neto, 2006).

As Sá Martino (2016) puts it, it is not the media that transforms the social processes, because when looking at the media with this exaggerated importance, we would be looking at the society of the media. 'The media, in themselves, do nothing when they are not placed in the set of human relations" (Sá Martino, 2016, p. 35).

> The media can only interfere in religious practices and experiences because these social relations existed *before* any bond with the media. [...] The media, therefore, has no "effects" on religious practices, on churches and denominations. They fit into a much more complex plot (Sá Martino, 2016, p. 35).

Within this complexity, we realize that the Catholic Church has been appropriating of various media formats, including the advances of recent years, in which Pope Francis has taken part in social networks, like Twitter and Instagram. It is necessary to point out that, because of welcoming, charismatic and jovial gestures, Pope Francis' figure has become popular, being on a magazine cover and classified as the Pop Pope.

Attentive to this new media communication architecture, which takes into account a new conjuncture of the relationship between producers and receivers, we perceive 'the transformations that have taken place in the circulation scope', we place our observation in the 'zone of interpenetration' (VERÓN, 1997), in which there is a discursive memory that triggers the strengthening of an image of Pope Francis. Therefore, in addressing the insertion of the Catholic Church in the context of mediatization, we turn back to the institution's appropriation of the digital networks. To indicate the production of meanings about Pope Francis, we have Figure 1, in which the pontiff hosts a single mother and her son.

Papa Francisco abençoando um bebê na Sala Paulo VI. Foto: Daniel Ibáñez (ACI Prensa)

Figure 1. *Pope welcomes single mother with her son*

Source: Anonymous (2017)/ACI Digital

We can infer that, on the part of the Catholic Church, there is a need to circulate an image of *the welcoming Pope*, in which he calls all to be embraced. The image above was published in January 2017 by the ACI Digital website, along with the article '*The request of Pope Francis for single mothers ... and for single fathers*'[1], *that brings Pope Francis'* speech drawing attention for the reception of single mothers. The site refers to the interview conducted by El Sembrador – ESNE channel and released on Sunday, January 29.

We have here the discourse of welcome to single mothers, and also to single fathers. This episode draws our attention because it is a speech delivered by an institution that, until then, had little pronounced on the subject. On that occasion, t54he Pope uses a discourse of care, expressing the message: 'God knows, God is the great Father, and He knows the history of each one, how he or she arrived in that situation'.

In the photo above, the welcoming is represented by the acceptance of the single mother and her son. These are moments in which the Pope expresses some kind of

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2   Retrieved   from: <http://www.acidigital.com/noticias/o-pedido-do-papa-francisco-para-as-maes-solteiras-e-para-os-pais-solteiros-36490/>

welcoming, and we stress here the welcoming of people who are excluded not only socially but also by the Catholic Church itself, according to its dogmas and doctrines. Images such as this, which represent receptivity, become media circuits formalized by Pope Francis' welcoming embrace, and his sayings that reverberate in digital media.

This influence that the media starts to have on the Catholic institution generates multiple meanings, and sometimes even contradictory ones. An example of this is when the Pope as a leader encourages people to take certain actions in favor of others, and at the same time, social actors have arguments that not even the institution itself does. As Hjarvard (2014) emphasizes, 'such a process entails a multidimensional transformation of religion'. The author addresses this transformation and presents a notion of circulation, in which the media, as conductors of the communication, 'circulate a wide variety of messages containing representations of religion' (Hjarvard, 2014, p. 136-137).

Bratosin (2016) points out, as the main challenge for mediatization, the "double interdependence", in the form of transmission of information about the experience that is lived, and the content of that experience. That is, there is a process not only of influencing, but a change in the significant conditions of religion. Thus, there is a change in the way of the religious doing, because we can perceive an interdependence of media and religious fields (Bratosin, 2016).

Differently, from Hjarvard's institutionalist notion, Fausto Neto (2010) works with the idea of circulation as the result of differences between the logic of production and reception.

> On the one hand, there are grammars that are strongly structuring, within institutions, of media discourses. And on the other hand, the emergence of multiplicities of grammars that are based and are oriented in diversities of logic originating from the world of the actors and the individuals, articulating them to a work. Instead of the homogenization of meanings, the diversity and heterogeneity of strategies (Fausto Neto, 2010, p. 10).

This difference, to which the author refers, is characteristic of the ambiance of mediatization, and in this scenario the images come into play, constituting circuits, articulating the logic of social actors and traditional media. In this perspective, Rosa (2014, p. 28) identifies that 'to think the images today is to think them in the ambiance of mediatization'since the social processes are permeated by the media. 'However, talking about the symbolic construction of images demands addressing the symbolic power put into play in this sphere'.

In addressing social relations, Rosa (2014) explains that they 'are increasingly intersectioned by media devices, whether journalistic or not, in a conception of device that is not instrumental, that is, the device is seen not only as an apparatus'. Therefore, 'to understand the devices as a place of intersection is to consider them,

on the one hand, arenas of power and, on the other, spaces pervaded by power' (Rosa, 2014, p. 28).

We understand that circulation ceases to be an invisible or unfathomable element. Thanks to the complexity of technical language and device operations, the communication process establishes 'new objects and, at the same time, analytical procedures that allow the intelligibility of its operation' (Fausto Neto, 2010, p. 3).

The notion of circulation proposed by Verón (2004) puts tension on the production and reception discourses, as shown in the following chart. The production of meaning, considered by Verón (2004), occurs between the two instances (production-reception). Here we situate the words of Pope Francis as an image that is constituted in circulation.
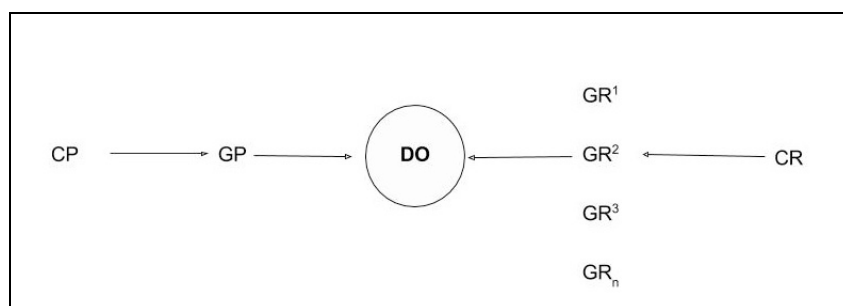
Figure 2. *The discursive circulation (Verón, 2013*

Source: The social semiosis 2 - Eliseo Verón (2013)

The discursive circulation scheme, proposed and discussed by Verón (2013), presents the Discourse / Object (DO), which is the materiality to be analyzed. In our work, the DO is the image of Pope Francis, who evidences in his sayings a certain Condition of Production (CP), and in a particular Production Grammar (GP). 'On the recognition side, the graph schematizes the non-linearity of the semiosis circulation, indicating the necessary plurality of DO recognition grammars (GR^1, GR^2, GR^3 ... GRn), which in turn require, for its explanation, a return to the conditions of recognition (CR)' (Verón, 2013, p. 293). For this reflection, we have, on the side of recognition, the comments of social actors, who interpret the sayings of the pontiff.

Figure 3. *Pope Francisco on Twitter*

Source: @Pontifex_pt

Above, we have a picture of a post of the Pontiff on Twitter[2], pleading to give importance to the people from the periphery. In this case, we see the image of Pope Francis calling the faithful to welcoming, while social actors alleged contradictions in the very practice of the institution. The tension shown is that the image of the Franciscan, who welcomes the poor, who exercises charity, is not in line with that of the pope in an attempt to establish an image of acceptance. This does not mean that the Church is included in this displacement that has more rhetorical force.

At both poles, they operate distinct logic that indicates the non-linear character of communication, that is, 'by situating the status of circulation as the source of this new complexity - communication as a process away from equilibrium – [it]

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[2] Retrieved from : <https://twitter.com/Pontifex_pt/status/878213547477651456>

enhances the notion of divergence rather than mismatches' (Fausto Neto, 2016, p. 19).

The author emphasizes that a 'certain discourse in circulation in society will produce a multiplicity of effects since such a strategy will deal with an existence and multiplicity of other discourses' (Fausto Neto, 2007, p. 23). The circulation does not occur in the dual instance of production and reception, it ceases to be this dead zone because it is dynamic, it is not static. It is a significant and, above all, symbolic work.

Undoubtedly, the constitution of social fields and the technical/discursive struggles for the production of meaning are complicated by the intervention of new processes and devices, such as the media, drawing attention to its centrality and the symbolic work of the receivers. The threshold of the transformations of the *media society* to a *society in the process of mediatization* generates structures and dynamic bundles of relations (Fausto Neto, 2010, p. 58).

This bundle of relationships is evident in the images circulating on the Pope's profile on Instagram and Facebook. Rosa (2015) speaks of images as a symbol of an event. In this case, we observe Pope Francis' gestures transformed into an event from its inscription in several media, representing its value in circulation. In most cases, the sentences or situations are pinched and passed on, valued by both social actors and journalistic institutions. Thus Rosa (2015) points out that when an image becomes a symbol of an event, 'bigger is its value of circulation on devices of media institutions and on media devices of individual actors is increased, enlarging its power of transcendence' (Rosa, 2015, p. 139).
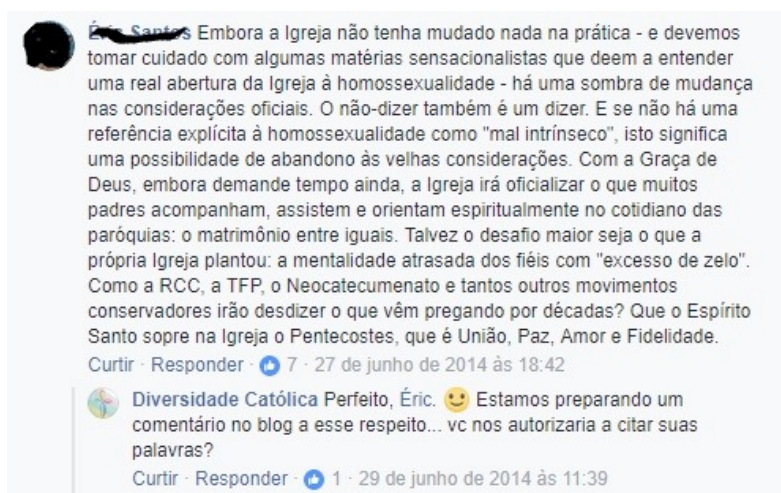

Figure 4. *Article from Jornal Hoje website - Rede Globo - Brazil*

Source: Portal G1 - Jornal Hoje

The headline above[3], published on April 8, 2016, by Jornal Hoje in Portal G1, presents the symbolic power, and gradually shapes the grammar of acceptance, thus constituting a social imaginary as a fixation that the Pope Francis welcomes everyone. This image of *the welcoming Pope* is formed as an immaterial image, which is triggered at the moment when we see or read certain actions of the pontiff. Such an image construction is not restricted to photographs but is present also in the discourse when it refers to an attitude of acceptance of the pontiff.

We have noticed a post on the Catholic Diversity page, in which the page shared an article on O Globo on June 27, 2014. That is, there is the production of a circuit of flow from the first speech of the pope towards homosexuals. The shared subject "Gays and their children should not suffer discrimination of the Church, says Vatican", refers to the document Instrumentum Laboris. According to O Globo, the document addresses the difference between "the official teachings of the Church on issues of sexual morality and their acceptance and understanding on the part of believers worldwide".

On the publication of the Catholic Diversity page, we observe the comments, and we show the tensioning of the reception that occurs only in words.

Éric Santos Embora a Igreja não tenha mudado nada na prática - e devemos tomar cuidado com algumas matérias sensacionalistas que deem a entender uma real abertura da Igreja à homossexualidade - há uma sombra de mudança nas considerações oficiais. O não-dizer também é um dizer. E se não há uma referência explícita à homossexualidade como "mal intrínseco", isto significa uma possibilidade de abandono às velhas considerações. Com a Graça de Deus, embora demande tempo ainda, a Igreja irá oficializar o que muitos padres acompanham, assistem e orientam espiritualmente no cotidiano das paróquias: o matrimônio entre iguais. Talvez o desafio maior seja o que a própria Igreja plantou: a mentalidade atrasada dos fiéis com "excesso de zelo". Como a RCC, a TFP, o Neocatecumenato e tantos outros movimentos conservadores irão desdizer o que vêm pregando por décadas? Que o Espírito Santo sopre na Igreja o Pentecostes, que é União, Paz, Amor e Fidelidade.
Curtir · Responder · 7 · 27 de junho de 2014 às 18:42

Diversidade Católica Perfeito, Éric. Estamos preparando um comentário no blog a esse respeito... vc nos autorizaria a citar suas palavras?
Curtir · Responder · 1 · 29 de junho de 2014 às 11:39

Figure 5. *Comment on publication in fanpage*

Source: Fanpage Catholic Diversity Facebook

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3   Retrieved from: http://g1.globo.com/jornal-hoje/noticia/2016/04/papa-fala-sobre-acolhimento-de-homossexuais-e-divorciados.html.

In this image of commentary, we can observe that there is a criticism on account of the Church having not concretized anything in relation to homosexuality. In the commentary, the social actor still alerts to sensationalist texts that evidence changes that are characterized as "a shadow of change in official considerations". Even with criticism, the commentary reveals the prospect of change by quoting that "not-saying is also a saying." That is, it emphasizes that if the Catholic Church does not refer to homosexuality as "intrinsic evil", there is a possibility that, over time, there may be changes in the old considerations.

With these examples, even being a first exercise of observation of the circulation of Pope Francis' image, we can perceive that there is a tensioning in the image of "The Welcoming Pope". And this influence of the medium on the Catholic institution generates multiple senses, and sometimes even contradictory ones.

And within the sphere of social networks, where there is the possibility of answers, we perceive that, in response to a message of welcoming, social actors manifest themselves contrary to the Church. These words, in the flow of social networks, point to 'awkward circuit' (Braga, 2012). They are repercussions in the profile of the Christian religious field, putting in tension the sphere of the legitimacy of the sayings of the authorities of the field itself.

General considerations

In relation to the above, we understand that in the mediatization of the religious field there is a place of legitimacy and *illusion*, where there is the attempt to establish, as a certain image of the Catholic Church, from Pope Francis' sayings and actions. However, it is in this space that the senses can gain truth value, as they can also be contested.

In the media discursive circulation of the pope's words, when he refers to the welcoming, there are flows that take different forms (Braga, 2012). These assumed forms are integrated into other circuits, especially attempted, in which the recognition of these words gains the form of new productions, that seek to put in tension the place of the legitimacy of the sayings, as a way of demarcating other positions.

Within the context of mediatization and circulation, we understand that the object is not depleted in the cited examples. From the studies and upon the concepts of mediatization and circulation of images, the research gains new unfolding, since it is impossible to contain the circulation. We emphasize that this text is still embryonic in relation to the current research.

We continue with more questions because, in a satisfactory way, theories only show us directions, motivate us to seek answers, however, it is in the work with the empirical corpus that we actually move forward. And certainly, the objects do not

end, and it is in this process that we understand the importance and the complexity of this ambiance in the Communication studies.

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