

MISUNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL NEWS IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the nature of the Brazilian public comprehension of international news by revealing the quality of such reception with regard to a sample of 170 subjects randomly selected in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil. A questionnaire was created taking as a basis the directives of Bloom *et al* (1972). Evaluated in it are the cognitive and affective dimensions of thought. In the first case, questions were formulated that allowed the establishment of the level of knowledge of individuals, as well as their comprehension abilities, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of a wide range of international news topics. For the affective dimension the following abilities were evaluated: attention, response, valorization, organization and the structuring of a value scale.

KEY-WORDS

International news; reception; taxonomy of bloom; reading and comprehension; newspapers

Journalism has been described as a form of knowledge (PARK, 1940; GENRO, 1986; MEDITSCH, 1998, 1992). In support of this view is the argument that the journalist is capable of capturing in his reporting the events of the world, in particular those that present some meaningful level of risk to the community (WAISBORD, 2002). The extensive literature on this subject also deals with showing the limitations of this effort to monitor events, such as the inevitable degree of subjectivity of the discourse and the political, economic, cultural and ideological restrictions that surround this work. The literature also elaborates on the innumerable linguistic codes used by these professionals, the selection criteria for facts to be included in the public's information diet, as well as other pertinent topics such as the debate over the social function of journalism and its historical development (TRAQUINA, 1993; 2000).

This is to say that the cognitive and emotional processing that journalists apply to events (and it is for this very reason that they are regarded as being the privileged observers of history) is made visible in the literature. Also the images produced in the minds of the readers, watchers and listeners of these narratives are the object of interest of an equally broad range of disciplines. These approach the theme from different perspectives. For example, authors such as Curran (1990) support the idea that it is a false premise that messages in general are open, subject to dissonant varied interpretations, and even possibly anomalous ones on the part of the audience (FISKE, 1986).

It is this polemic concerning the polyssemy of reception that is our interest in evaluating in this study on knowledge derived by the Brazilian public from the international news that is carried by the media in the country. It is worth noting that the non-trivial use of the term 'reception' should restrict the concept to the mental processing of information by individuals. In other words, who produces the knowledge, in the end, is always the public. The maxim of Bloom et al. (1972) asserts that knowledge is the result of a degree of 'internalization' of information by a person. Metaphorically speaking, it is the transformation of *raw* food into *cooked* (BURKE, 2004).

However, contrary to what common sense would suggest, the argument that journalists (together with other information producers) do not have absolute power of control over reception is reiterated in this study. They would like to have it, but they do not. The *digestion* of such content is always a consequence to some degree of the taste of the individuals. In other words, knowledge is always variable, depending on the conditions of each person (factors such as educational level, age, gender, income, personal experiences, among others).

Support for the argument for the existence of a certain degree of independence for the phenomenon of reception arises when the evidence is revealed, with a certain concern, of the difficulties the public has in interpreting texts. For example, the data for 2004 shows that Brazil has 16 million illiterates over 15 years of age (9% of the population). Only 26% of the population 15 years of age or more are completely literate in both reading and writing. And only one in four youths and adults has the cognitive conditions to completely understand a text and relate it with other data. "The rest are classified in the 'functionally illiterate' category" and can "barely manage to identify simple statements, being incapable of interpreting longer texts or those with any complexity", according to the National Indicator of Functional Illiteracy¹. Other data collected by

the Brazilian Chamber of Book Publishers support this diagnosis: 61% of Brazilians have little or no contact with books.

Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) released in June 2004 show that, of the students in the 4th grade of primary school, 55% present critical or very critical levels of reading competence. These students are capable of reading only short simple texts. Those graded as intermediate totaled 39.7%. These are starting to develop reading habits, but are still below the level required for the 4th grade. Only 4.8% are considered competent readers, capable of making a cause and effect relationship in longer texts and of distinguishing more subtle humorous passages.

Another indicator of this human difficulty in processing text is the persistent drop in the number of newspaper readers, particularly among the young². For this public, reading the paper involves mental effort³. Although the vehicle is respected, valued and has prestige⁴, the truth is that, if the downward trend is not reversed, the demise of the newspaper in the United States⁵ is projected for 2078⁶. Such a prospect makes this vehicle a “threatened species.”⁷

In Brazil a similar decline in the circulation of newspapers in 2001 (2.7%), 2002 (9.1%) and 2003 (7.2%) has also been noted, arriving in this last year at an average national daily circulation of 6,470,000 copies⁸. The country occupies the 55th position in the circulation of newspapers in the world. That is, there were 52.3 copies per thousand adult inhabitants (well behind Iceland, in first place with 705.9 copies per thousand). In 2000, this average daily circulation was higher, reaching a mark of 60.6 copies per thousand people⁹.

It should be noted that there was a small recovery in the circulation of newspapers in 2004. According to the data from the Circulation Verification Institute (*Instituto Verificador de Circulação*) (IVC), there was an increase of 0.8% among the newspapers affiliated to the institute. In 2003, the number of dailies also increased, growing to 529 (in 2001 there were 491). Taking into account all types of periodicals, the number of newspapers grew from 1,980 in 2001 to 2,993 in 2003.

However, there exists in the country a curious ambiguity. On one hand, the consumer market for newspapers is not growing with any strength, despite the proliferation of titles. Periods of decline are followed by modest periods of recovery. On the other hand the potential readership that exists in the country justifies the optimism that the National Newspaper Association (*Associação Nacional de Jornais*) usually shows¹⁰. This hope for an increase in circulation derives from demographic data.

One should realize that in 2001 Brazil had about 50.4 million inhabitants under the age of 15. And the younger people, between 15 and 34 years of age, represented a surprising 47% of all newspaper readers in the country in 2003. Another reason for optimism is the drop in the number of illiterates. As stated above, 9% of the Brazilian population aged 15 or more were illiterate in 2004, below the 13.6% in 2000 and the 20.1% in 1990.

From the point of view of this industry, the challenge to be met in Brazil is, in the first place, that of educating this large youthful population sector with low income to acquire a newspaper reading habit. In the second place, to qualify this habit (this depends to a large degree on increasing the number of readers of international news). This mission, however, is difficult. The evidence shows that among new readers there is a clear preference for content that requires, in general, little cognitive processing. To a great degree it is the popular press that is responsible for staunching the drop in circulation of periodicals in the country. This genre of journalism (which mixes in varied doses synthetic news, conspicuous graphicness, parochial agendas, leisure and entertainment and some sensationalism) manages to attract a large number of readers from lower income brackets that had not previously developed the habit of newspaper reading. *O Extra*, for example, is already the second largest newspaper in Brazil, with 286,655 copies in daily circulation. *O Dia* is fifth (circulation of 210,499 copies daily). *O Correio do Povo* is sixth (183,077) and *Diário Gaúcho* is eighth (125,430)¹¹. With regard to this type of press, international news is not, in all certainty, a product of primary necessity.

Its unpopularity is also a fact in the vehicles considered as to be the standards of reference, whether they are in Brazil, or in the foreign press. The study made by Hargrove & Stempel III¹² shows that American readers prefer positives rather than negatives and news about ordinary people rather than that focusing on the activities of governments, politics, economies or disasters. According to Weaver and Mauro, international news is in sixth position in the preferences of men and tenth for women from a total of 17 categories¹³. Research by Nanney¹⁴ in three distinct cities in the states of Ohio and West Virginia, in the United States of America, shows that such international news was in seventh place in the preferences of the public in one city and eighth in another out of a total of 25 categories. Stephens has recorded that 12% of the readers wished for more local coverage, compared to 8% of readers that wanted more international news¹⁵. Additionally, Kim, Wyatt and Katz (1999, 2000) have shown the low popularity of international news. In their studies, this

subject was in last place in the preference of the public among the topics chosen for conversation. The most popular topics were family matters, entertainment and sports.

The Brazilian data is even more categorical and reveals that the country is still fighting to enter the Gutenberg Galaxy. Papers are read as little as books are read. It should be observed that there is no bookshop in 89% of Brazilian municipalities and 6.5 million people do not have the financial conditions to buy a single book¹⁶. As a consequence, this debate over the cognitive capacity of students to interpret texts has been frequent among educators. Schools have perceived the level of youths in making sense not only of what they read, but also of what they hear and see. By hypothesis, and in the face of the magnitude of the challenge, it is easy to imagine a new generation that passes over this typographical era, going directly to the benefits of the audiovisual era.

For this reason, and due to the importance of the mastery of this ability of reading comprehension (interpretation) which clearly marks the elite sector of the communities, the different entrance examinations for various university-level careers in Brazil have made use of tests that evaluate the capacity of the candidates to understand statements, propositions and arguments among other materials. They seek to evaluate, above all, the capacity of the individuals to do something with the data presented to them.

It should be stressed that in the terms of the taxonomy of Bloom et al., knowledge presupposes an increasing degree of complexity in the processing of information in a continuum (from concrete to abstract, from simple to complex). The advantages of the classroom over the press in this particular are evident: the performance of exercises and the monitored repetition of this effort to raise the mind to higher levels of thinking. The patience of the teachers that teach reading, stimulate reasoning, demand analysis, synthesis and application among other cognitive abilities that turn human beings into critical spirits is worthwhile

It could be argued that the media make an effort to act in the same way as these teachers, also as facilitators and 'providers of clues' (KEOHANE, 1998). They try to disseminate in colloquial language information whose nature is selected using criteria of relevance, pertinence, exceptionality, importance, and proximity, among others. These criteria are those that explain the news as a consumer product. The relative informality of journalistic language and the pedagogical presentation in various formats are communicational strategies. They seek to assist the public to overcome this difficulty in making sense of texts, of the discourses

and the images that surround its senses in everyday life. The success of popular journalism is proof that it is possible to innovate and conquer new generations of readers, despite the criticism that some authors make of their editorial options¹⁷.

However, with respect to the derivation of meaning from international news by the Brazilian public, the difficulties remain. There are a series of cognitive and affective obstacles which block the active significant reception of this material by the audience. This type of section requires larger long-term memory storage and faster mental connections between various items of information. For this reason, teachers and journalists can speak but not be heard: they can talk, affirm, explain and give examples and not be comprehended. Newspapers can be published and read but make little sense. The items on a television news program can be narrated and illustrated and not be understood

Such incomprehension of the news disturbs those that, with a great deal of effort, produce this record of the times. They are frustrated by being ignored, with the lack of response or value given to their efforts and event evaluation by the general public. In the eyes of the consumers of news the cost-benefit ratio of such mental effort to understand and evaluate the more complex items is always considered, particularly in the cases in which this ratio appears high (little reward for a lot of effort). Applied research that examines audience preferences quickly discovers that some contents are more popular than others, 'soft' content and 'hard' content.

This is to say, that in the Brazilian case, in addition to international news, science, politics and economics would also be further examples of elite content. This means that the understanding of these topics requires certain cognitive and affective pre-requisites from the audience, a level of initiation in the subject derived from formal education, a certain predisposition to discover and to investigate, a certain cognitive architecture that allows people to make sense of the newly-emergent events.

The fact that we live in a multimedia world does not assure, *a priori* the automatic communicational efficiency of these vehicles. We live, according to hypothesis, in the Information Age (high speed capillary diffusion of data) without people being prepared automatically for a true Communication Age. The argument already presented is that to produce understanding it is not sufficient to simply expose the audience to the news. As has been affirmed, the public needs to do something with it., and it will only derive even the minimum benefit from a maximum effort

when need or internal motivation demands this effort. But these are rare circumstances.

What can be observed is that the comprehension of everyday events is still a challenge for people. This challenge will certainly be greater when the average amount of information stored in the memory of the citizens of a certain community is low. In these conditions of severe lack, the enduring cognitive darkness, which eventually starts to expand, can prevent minimal comprehension of the events, particularly international ones. The seriousness of the issue explains the checking done from time to time, even in developed countries, of the quality of the information stored by the audience concerning recent events and history. Some of the results are surprising.

Research published in 2004 showed, for example, that 10% of Austrians did not know who Hitler was, an increase of 5% in relation to 1985. Additionally 24% did not recognize the name of Josef Stalin, 31% did not identify Winston Churchill, 50% could not identify Anne Frank and 30% did not know what a 'concentration camp', 'Auschwitz', 'Holocaust' and 'Hiroshima' were. The data showed that the level of disinformation was highest in the 16 to 29 year old age bracket¹⁸.

Object

In this study the intention is to verify and evaluate the nature of the 'cognitive and affective shadow' of the Brazilian public in relation to the distant world. In other words, the desire is to study the quality of reception of international news by this selected audience. Over time, the existence of such a shadow has been verified in different countries. It was indicated, for example, in the United States by Erskine (1963) and Patchen (1964). This latter showed that after two years of open warfare in Vietnam involving troops from the USA, 25% of the respondents said that they had never heard anything said about the subject. Another 28% affirmed that they did not know that the Chinese government was communist and 29% did not know of the existence of a second China (Taiwan). Only 54% had heard of Mao Tse Tung. There appeared and was established in the literature concerning the reception of international news the category of "know-nothing". Among the less informed groups, these American studies of the 1960s highlighted women, rural dwellers, Southerners and people over the age of 50. At the other extreme there was an opposite group identified: the elite group, "those-that-know-a-lot"(PATCHEN, 1964; ROBINSON, 1967; FREE & CANTRIL, 1967). Among

their principal characteristics were those of having graduated from college, having a middle-to-upper level of income, having jobs that were usually described as white collar and having served in the armed forces.

To monitor this same phenomenon in Brazil would mean evaluating not only distinct types of receptors but also the ability of these to derive sense and meaning from international events. An eventual result showing cognitive and affective difficulties for Brazilians in the processing of news from the world abroad will suggest that wide-ranging educational action, seeking to improve the quality of the reading and comprehension of this type of content, can be needed.

Such action could include a methodology in the teaching of history and geography that is not only capable of reaching the lower limits of the ability to abstract, as is the case of calling attention, but also of reaching its higher levels (comprehension and application). One could also think about new and more competent publishing formats for the media. Such a concern is not new in the press. It deals with a topic that is common in the studies of legibility, reading and audience preference. For example, among these are the teachings of Brosius about the importance of the format of television news in the retention of content by the public¹⁹. Hobbs & Frost record the positive effects of media literacy teaching on the ability of students to identify the principal ideas in textual, audio and visual material²⁰. Kelly et al., in turn, record the preference of readers for material written in literary style in detriment to the traditional impersonal and informative writing style²¹.

The persistence of this barrier to the interest in and reasonable understanding of international news by the Brazilian public is not only making its popularization unviable, but is also prejudicing the minimal levels of competent vigilance of foreign events by the country's population. The truth is that with a predisposed public, relatively connected to international events, it is easier for the reports to fulfill their mission of monitoring the tragedies of the world. In truth, in these ideal conditions, journalists would be compelled to cover the zigzag paths of the principal world powers, both of their allies and their enemies.

Seen from afar, from Brazilian territory, the succession of these crises in the East and the West is interpreted by Brazilians as a mostly incomprehensible show, whose deciphering is done, because of this, through a relatively superficial journalistic treatment and which can be taken to a large degree as entertainment. An example of this type of disregard is indicated by Alberto Dines²² in criticizing "the bureaucratic conventional soulless coverage" by the principal Brazilian newspapers

of the murder of Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter, by Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan. He is irritated by the indifference of Brazilian journalists to “violence on this scale” toward a professional colleague. He says further, in another comment, that the international newsrooms were “misfiring” in their coverage of the facts concerning the Al Qaeda attack in New York: “For a long time they have been pushed into the corner, undersized, without the support of experienced international correspondents and staffed by juniors without appropriate training²³.”

Problems

Deriving from these Brazilian consumption characteristics of international news is the unpretentious nature of its presentation by a large part of the Brazilian press. Brazilian media tend to simply reproduce the news from international agencies, investing little in the production of this content, even in situations of major importance as in the case of the attack of Osama Bin Laden’s followers on September 11, 2001, in New York. In truth, this case reveals the extreme frailty and lack of preparedness, in particular of television, to report and explain the specific case of this attack and the wider case of political terrorism and international relations.

Among the exposed cracks, one can select (1) the marginal position that journalism occupies in the structure of certain TV networks (*SBT TV*), for example, limited itself to a summary bulletin and kept on the air, on the day of the attack on the twin towers in New York, its morning cartoons.) In general, what can be seen is the intermittent and timid presence of a few who are sent specially to these exceptional scenarios. The correspondent of *TV Globo* in Europe was sent to the Middle East during the American invasion of Iraq, but only went to Baghdad after the war had finished. He stayed in Kuwait for the majority of the time. From there he retransmitted what he heard from the local news, without using any exclusive sources and without adding anything new to what he and most Brazilians were receiving from the international broadcasts. In the case of the printed media, only two journalists from the *Folha de São Paulo* accompanied, from Iraqi soil, the start of the bombardment of Baghdad carried out by the coalition led by the United States, remaining there for 12 days. The majority of the special correspondents stayed in Jordan or in Qatar.

To this list can also be added (2) the lack of response of the television reporting teams (the Bush speech, on the evening of September 11th ,

caught *TV Globo* by surprise and they only transmitted part of it); (3) the existing journalistic structures are inadequate to cover, in depth and responsibly, complex international themes such as this (on *TV Record*, newscaster José Luis Datena went on the air in the morning, shortly after the attack and that night took the role of debater on Adriane Galisteu's variety show); (4) the contextualization of international crises is amateur and sensationalist (Luciana Gimenez, of *Rede TV!* was chosen, on the night of September 11th, to reveal her personal knowledge of American life. Fortune tellers were also consulted.)

In the case of the coverage by Rede Bandeirante, bombastic adjectives took the place of the calm narrative that should characterize reporting in general, particularly this case in which the level of uncertainty regarding the events was enormous. There was also (8) timidity and inability to fill the gaps in the American news which was rather terse in its analyses in the weeks immediately after the attack. The interpretations broadcast on Brazilian TV, on the other hand, revealed (9) ideological sectarianism and knowledge that was hardly specialized, in which what sufficed were trivialities, current information and judgments whose intent was clearly to provide historical and moral alibis for the attackers.

It should be noted that there is a certain degree of correlation between the international priorities of a state and the journalistic agenda of its press. It could be argued, therefore, as a hypothesis that the disinterest of the Brazilian press in covering international events is, to some degree, a reflection of the secondary and peripheral involvement of Brazil in this tense scenario of conflicts and disputes.

Such indifference, despite being undesirable, is understandable. It is lamentable, since the mission of journalism is to be a window to the world. And it is understandable, as affirmed, because the actions with international significance taken by Brazilian figures are limited, to a great degree, to the commercial and financial interests of the country and by the obstacles that are encountered in the promotion of its development. Despite this international agenda not being an anomaly and being characteristic of diplomatic activity in most nations, the Brazilian case shows a certain intention to go beyond this normal staging. Underneath there is always the dream of a powerful Brazil, of the self-image of a leading nation in the hemisphere and of multilateral relations that express the geopolitical desire to occupy a significant position in the UN and to be respected internationally due to the special characteristics of being a country of continental scale, with an extensive internal consumer market and sophisticated production of goods and services.

This has not, however, been sufficient to make its intervention in the international scene a weighty political factor. There is a certain fear in Brasília of aligning with the dominant powers that has been carried down through the years by a tradition of the discretion and relative impartiality of Itamarati (Foreign Ministry) in relation to more controversial and polemic subjects. Due to this, firm, categorical positions are not to be seen with regard to serious topics in the world, as is the case with terrorism, nor marked participation in the international efforts to resolve the key conflicts around the world. The bureaucratic declarations of Itamarati with respect to these crises have been of little relevance to the diplomatic game and have almost never awakened the curiosity of Brazilian and international media.

A study by Paulo Sotero, the chief American correspondent for the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, makes a similar diagnosis²⁴. For him, "Brazil has developed closed in on itself, under the leadership of provincial elites that are fearful of the world. In the rarified atmosphere in which they create and in which they perpetuate their power, questions such as foreign policy or national defense become an exclusive field for the bureaucratic sectors, the military establishment and a few supposed cognoscenti." The theme is rarely common in the media and there are few journalists specialized in the subject.

Until the 1980s, national security was treated in the context of the cold war and the dispute between the old military regime and the political opposition in the country. In other words, the press focused its attention on the existence of a possible internal enemy, according to the language of the strategists of the time. The external world remained relatively far away and the 'responsible pragmatism' of the regime authorized commercial dealings with all countries, independent of their ideology, preventing Brazil from being automatically aligned with the United States and the United Kingdom.

The subject of national and continental security in this scenario never managed to occupy the featured space in the news. Hot topics were causal and specific, as in the case of the development of the Brazilian military industrial base, in the production of Engesa armored vehicles and the massive Brazilian arms exports. In 1984, 32 countries had bought such equipment from Brazil in sales estimated at US\$1.4 billion. This trade was questioned and highlighted by the media at the time of the international oil supply crises and the decision by the authorities to attempt to move closer to the Arab countries in the 1970s.

At that time, the ambience of armed conflict that surrounded the oil wells awoke the Brazilian newspapers. Mobilized by the crisis context established in that decade, readers consumed more international information and became more sophisticated to some degree in their understanding of the world. Other topics that piqued readers' curiosity were the nuclear accord with Germany, space exploration, the relationship of Brazil with the Iraq of Saddam Hussein (to where, in the 70s, consumer goods, weapons, technology and atomic fuel were exported), the production of rockets by Avibras, the research for the production of a Brazilian atomic bomb, and more recently the observation of Amazonia.

The lack of a clear, evident external enemy for the Brazilians has apparently weakened the national public interest in international and security topics. This interest has been strengthened occasionally, for a short period of time, in periods of clear instability in the world, as was the case with the terrorist attacks in New York in September 2001 and Madrid in March 2004, or even by the movement of Brazilian forces that have been quietly transferred from the Southern Region of the country to the Colombian border where incursion by drug traffickers and FARC agents was feared²⁵, or even due to the material published in the local press concerning the presence of Brazilian troops in Haiti and in East Timor.

In countries whose intervention in this game of war and peace is more intense, this interest in international events increases; it is in the indices of public attention such as in the reading of real journalistic coverage. The wide, complex network of connections that their nations have to maintain with other actors on the world stage is clearer to the citizens of these nations. The degree of cognitive awareness of populations that live under these circumstances of relative threat is greater than that which exists in other peoples that are further away from the 'eye of the hurricane'.

The specialized literature elaborates on the distinction that the public makes between 'our war' and 'their war' (NOSSEK, 2004). In the same way it elaborates on the nationalist coloring that inevitably conditions the context of international events²⁶. That is that world events are seen from distinct perspectives. The book by El-Nawawy and Iskandar about Al-Jazeera describes as "contextualized objectivity" the editorial guidelines

of this TV station which has affirmed its desire to place events in an Arabic context. (BERENGER, 2004: 8) The empirical study of Rusciano (1992), which compares the editorials of the New York Times and The Times of India, confirms the nationalist coloration of the coverage of these vehicles concerning the Gulf War of 1990-1991 (BERENGER, 2004: 40). However there is lacking in the international news published in Brazil the appropriate yellow and green coloring (the Brazilian national colors) of international events. The narrative framing and the news diet of these events has been carried out from other perspectives which could be an additional element in the lack of familiarity of the Brazilian public with this news.

Another factor that prejudices the consumption of this type of content is the geographical distance of Brazil from the 'eye of the hurricane', which ensures a relaxation, not just in the coverage but also in the reception of international news. As a result of this circumstance, the country's audience appears to be less anxious and agonized and as a consequence less curious about the details of these dramas involving, among others, armies, diplomats and terrorists.

This 'blindness' to certain strategic content that due to its relevance, despite the distance, affects the citizenry, for this reason deserves to be evaluated. It is worthwhile to inquire generically about the reception of content which has increasing social relevance and which depends, to a large degree, on heavy mediation. At the same time, it is worthwhile to ask specifically what Brazilians do with the international news that is presented to their senses every day. What cognitive level is triggered by the reception of such content? And what typology of the public emerges from this audience evaluation?

Methodology

A questionnaire was created taking as a basis the directives of Bloom et al. Evaluated in it are the cognitive and affective dimensions of thought. In the first case, questions were formulated that allowed the establishment of the level of knowledge of individuals, as well as their comprehension abilities, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of a wide range of international news topics. For the affective dimension

the following abilities were evaluated: attention, response, valorization, organization and the structuring of a value scale. A sample of 170 subjects was randomly selected in the city of Porto Alegre in high movement areas (markets, commercial centers, avenues, bars and cafes) in the period from March to November of 2004. The data obtained are presented as percentages.

Conclusion and Discussion: From Optimism to Pessimism

The data collected from this sample show reception to be a complex phenomenon. It essentially involves internal factors of the individual. It is true that other external elements condition, in various ways, the processing of the information, but to treat this processing of information as something external to the mind is to allow oneself to be fascinated more by such environmental stimuli (sociological, political and cultural contexts, among others) and less, much less, by the cognitive and affective dimensions. It is frequently said of reception that it dispenses with the cerebral architecture, as if it were possible to explain the phenomenon of reception in a non-biological manner. It is clear that people have to do something with the data provided them by the press (among other sources), and this occurs in the human body.

It is correct to say that the media have some power, but not what is popularized in the theoretical approaches that try, in one way or other, to demonize journalism as an instrument of control of public opinion. What has been seen here is a paradox. Despite the existence in the world today of an extraordinary volume of international news, the collected data reveal that the 'digestion' of such information is not an automatic phenomenon. What is shown in the evidence is that the 'cognitive shadow' is, in fact, a serious obstacle to communication between peoples. This limitation also exists in Brazil. Put another way, the subjects of the sample appeared to be poorly disposed toward international news. This diagnosis emerges from the data summarized at Table 01:

Table 01: The reception of international news: cognitive and affective table of a sample of 170 natives (“gaúchos”) of Porto Alegre according to the taxonomy of Bloom *et al.* Summary of results.

Cognitive Dimension		
Knowledge	NO	YES
Specialized terminology	98% did not know	2% knew
Knowledge of current event	62% did not know	38% knew
Knowledge of conventions	12% did not know	88% knew
Knowledge of trends and Temporal sequences	51% did not know	49% knew
Knowledge of classifications and categories	49% did not know	51% knew
Use of abstractions and universals in the subject	75% could not use	25% could use
Comprehension	NO	YES
Translation	55% could not translate	45% could translate
Extrapolation	59% could not extrapolate	41% could extrapolate
Application	NO	YES
Application of learning obtained in the observation of a phenomenon	32% could not apply	68% could apply
Analysis	NO	YES
Recognition of an event that was clearly expressed in the text	53% could not recognize	47% could recognize
Correlation	82% did not prove capable of correlating one part of a report with another	18% proved capable
Synthesis	NO	YES
Production of a singular communication	67% could not produce	33% could produce
Similarity and concept	77% were not capable of finding similarity and formulating a concept	23% were capable

Affective Dimension		
Selection (Attention)	NO	YES
Preference	82% did not prefer the international topics	18% preferred
Perception sensibility	99% showed a lack of sensibility toward critical international situations	1% showed
Disposition to receive disposition	90% showed no disposition toward receiving this type of stimulus	10% showed
Controlled or selective attention	87% showed to not pin a conscious or unconscious way content relating to the world in general refer	13% preferred
Response	NO	YES
Disposition to respond voluntarily, that is, actively pay attention, revealing that something is being done with the stimulus shown	83% no disposition shown	17% disposition
Valorization	NO	YES

<p>The stimulus has value and is internalized. As it is stable, this behavior includes the categories of belief (accepting one value) and attitude (commitment to a belief). Both are raw material for the conscience that controls the behavior.</p>	<p>98% of the public did not show, in a spontaneous manner, interest in the subject matter. In another formulation, it was seen that this value caught the imagination of a minority (8% were interested by the theme of Brazilians in Haiti and only 17% by the War in Iraq).</p>	<p>2% showed interest</p>
Organization	NO	YES
<p>Comparing values</p>	<p>Confronted with two views of the world, 12% opted for a parochial formulation</p>	<p>88% opted for a cosmopolitan world view.</p>
<p>Selection of values spontaneously</p>	<p>98% showed parochial values</p>	<p>2% chose cosmopolitan values</p>

Contrary to what might be imagined, this panorama derives from habits that do not discard the consumption of journalism. It should be noted that of the sample only 7% of those interviewed did not read a newspaper. The remainder did so with variable frequency (43% daily, 20% more than twice weekly, 7% twice a week, 17% only on the weekend, 6% with other frequencies). Fifty-six percent visited journalistic web sites. Thirty percent listened daily to radio news programs (23% did so with other frequencies). Eighteen per cent read weekly news magazines. However, only 8% bothered to watch BBC and 5% CNN, global broadcasters of international news. The public interviewed was much more disposed toward watching television stations whose programming emphasized entertainment (36% insisted on watching Globo, 28% film channels, 17% a local or regional station and 9% sports channels).

As can be observed, the world that is not close to home and available to their senses is being refused by these people.

Apparently understanding this news concerning peoples, realities and events that are distant has shown itself to be a difficult task that demands the spending of energy that a large percentage of individuals do not wish to waste since they, in truth, will not manage to understand. There are evident cognitive and affective blockages. For this reason 'what is happening in the world' is not included in either the familiarity of conversation or in the routine habits of environment checking that people usually have. When such international events are noticed, it is in a superficial, ephemeral manner. International information soon fades. It does not stay in the memory. The mind's storage is reserved for material of another nature. The result is that when it is triggered by some crisis (a terrorist attack, oil shortage, or Brazilian troops being sent to foreign conflicts), this automatic access of the cerebral data base becomes difficult if not impossible. There is a blank, a neural black-out. Therefore, there predominates an approach to world subjects that could be qualified as amateur, unspecialized. Work is done under the circumstances of always having an eye directed to common knowledge. The critical spirit is weakened; in many cases, it becomes unviable.

The table 01 shows that the obstacles to the cognitive processing by the Brazilian public of international news are not just a few. There are noteworthy difficulties in the areas of Knowledge, Comprehension, Analysis, Interpretation and Synthesis of this news. The exception that has been recorded is that of Application, where the majority of this public compared adequately foreign events with domestic ones. This was possible due to there being similar phenomena, Made in Brazil, as is the present case with the wars of the drug gangs and the Brazilian fear of urban violence. These experiences enable the citizens of the country to understand, by analogy, the fear of terrorism that others living in distant lands feel.

There is also, equally, an affective refusal. The level of selection of this material by the public is extremely low as is the response of the individuals to it and its valorization. The results are consistent. People are shown to be in a general way indisposed towards international news.

NOTES

- 1 UOL, 30/09/2004
- 2 They continue to read a variety of materials, but fewer newspapers.
- 3 Culbertson, Evarts et al. *Media use, attention to media and agenda richness*. *Newspaper Research Journal*. v.15, n.1, p.14
- 4 For complex stories and to go deeper into specific themes, the public appears to prefer newspapers. See Culbertson, op. cit.
- 5 Studies show that interest in the news increases with age. However, the prospects for newspapers to remain a source of public information are threatened. There has been in the United States a drop of more than 10% in the number of daily readers of periodicals since the 1960s. Between 1970 and 1980 the adult population increased by 38%, while the number of readers only increased 15%. The journalism industry has therefore concerned itself with identifying the news of the greatest interest to the public, with the intent of supplying this in greater quantity. The *Impact Study* initiated in 2000 is one of the most ambitious research projects concerning newspapers ever undertaken. See www.btp.org.
- 6 Tolley, S. *The abyss that is destroying daily newspaper reading*, in *Preview*, Newspaper Association of America. <http://208.49.239.78/preview.cfm?AID=IS93>.
- 7 Schoenbach, Klaus; Lauf, Edmundo; McLeond, Jack & Scheufele, Dietram A . *Research Note: Distinction and Integration - Sociodemographic Determinants of Newspaper Reading in the USA and Germany. 1974-96*. *European Journal of Communication*. Sage. 1999. V14(2):225-239 p. 225.
- 8 Associação Nacional de Jornais – ANJ (National Newspaper Association).
- 9 World Newspaper Association.
- 10 See the site www.anj.org.br
- 11 Ibid
- 12 Hargrove, Thomas & Stempel III, Guido. *Exploring reader interest in international news*. *Newspaper Research Journal*, Athens:Fall 2002, v . 23, n. 4; pg.46.

- 13 Weaver, David H. & Mauro, John B, *Newspaper readership patterns, Journalism Quarterly* 55(spring 1978):85-91 In op. cit.
- 14 Nanney, Robert. *Do community editors lead or follow their audiences ? A co-orientational study of small daily gatekeepers, Their audiences and Newspaper content*, PhD. Dissertation Ohio University, 1993.
- 15 Stephens, Lowndes F. *The influence of community attachment on Newspaper content, Newspaper Research Journal* 3(October 1981):74-93 In Weaver & Mauro Op. Cit.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Pedrinho Guareschi; Osvaldo Biz. *Diário Gaúcho: que discurso, que responsabilidade social?* Porto Alegre: Evangraff. 2003.
- 18 *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 8/31/2004.
- 19 Brosius, Hans-Bernd. *Format effects on comprehension of television news.* Paper presented to the Congress of the Broadcast Education Association. Atlanta, March 1999.
- 20 Hobbs, Renne & Frost, Richard H. *Measuring the acquisition of media-literacy skills. Reading Research Quarterly.* Sept. 2003, v.38, n.3; p.330.
- 21 *Straight /Narrative ? Writing style changes readers' perceptions of story quality.* Newspaper Research Journal. v.24 n.4; p.118.
- 22 *Repórter decapitado, imprensa brutalizada. Observatório da Imprensa.*
- 23 *Anotações de um observador atônito.* (Notes of an astonished observer) *Observatório da Imprensa.*
- 24 *Imprensa, Defesa Nacional na era da Democracia. O desafio de uma relação ainda por construir no Brasil.* (Press, National Defense in the era of Democracy. The challenge of a relationship yet to be built in Brazil) Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, Redes 2001, Research and Education in Defense and Security Studies, May, 22-25, 2001, Washington D.C. - Panel on Military-Media Relations.
- 25 Signs of change in these circumstances have started to appear with the popularization of university degree courses in International Relations,

and with the civic centers for study and research on this theme in universities as is the case of Unicamp, USP and the Federal University of Minas Gerais.

- 26 See Dietram A . Scheufele. *Framing as a Theory of Media Effects*. *Journal of Communications*. Winter 1999. p .103-122.

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