

Brazilian Identity Constructions and Financial Capital Discourse Advertising: Playing Football to Change the Nation¹

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Abstract: In Brazil football has been associated historically with the construction of nation idea. Nowadays, just before Brazil will host 2014 World Cup, these discourses crop up more frequently. Starting from imagined communities conception and its relation with nationalism, we discuss a recent advertising campaign of “Itaú” bank that connect economics development, football and nationalism. Our study was

divided into two parts: 1st) the analysis of rhetorical strategies which connected football with social transformations in an emerging nation; 2nd) the analysis of this campaign repercussions’ in digital environment to understand audiences’ mediation into Itaú’s arguments. We point out the existence of an emerging social scission and a resistance to adopt football as the main element which defines national identity.

Keywords: audience, nationalism, narratives, identity

THE existence of Brazil's National men's football team is closely related to the way in which the media frame it. It is part of a spectacular view of sport and has its discursive projection on the whole of Brazilian society (Lippi, Souza and Neira, 2008). As a consequence, associated with historic overall results in international football championships, it has become an important part of the Brazilians' identity (Agostino, 2002).

Nevertheless, it is important to contextualize that all identities are constructed as part of a historic course in which the communicative process

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cannot be separated, as Martino (2010), among others, said. The ideas of nation and nationalism have also a communicative and historic dimension (Giro i Marti, 1999). In this sense, in this paper, we suggest a study of Brazilian identity and nationalism associated with football from a communicative approach. Specifically, we propose to study a recent advertising campaign of “Itaú” – the biggest private bank in Brazil and the official 2014 World Cup and Brazilian football team's sponsor – called “let’s play football”, in which Brazilian identity and nationalism are framed as part of a discursive strategy.

Nationalism, identity and football in Brazil

The social history of football in Brazil is replete with fundamental landmarks. The maxim which gives the title to Guterman’s book *O futebol explica o Brasil* [*Football explains Brazil*] (2009), makes sense when we examine the history of the nation during the 20th century and further on. Without the pretension to embrace the whole of Brazil’s trajectory dialoguing with the phenomenon of football, we point out some key-moments of this story, especially in its more recent period, from the second half of the past century on. This moment, posterior to the Second World War, confounds itself with the formation of consumption society as we conceive it nowadays; with the resumption of the world football competitions (interrupted between the 1938 Cup and the 1950 Cup), after the battles which devastated a significant part of the European continent; and with the expansion of mass media, particularly with the advent of television. This means that we approach football in its communicational aspects, by means of the discourses, which constitute it as a historic event and as a narrative, in which the imagery and the daily experiences of each period are being materialized.

One of the main landmarks in the history of Brazilian football is the defeat in 1950 World Cup, hosted in the very country, in the arena built especially to the purpose of the event, the Maracanã stadium, in Rio de Janeiro. Baptised “Maracanazo”, the tragedy of the defeat, in the final disputed against the team of Uruguay, is cyclically resumed. With the competition being hosted again in Brazil in 2014, the ghost of the “Maracanazo” is renewed, in the analyses

and tips about the perspectives of the national team's participation in the party prepared here, at home.

In the same way, the golden age of Brazilian football, which begins with the conquest of the first World Cup title in 1958, in Sweden, followed by the bi-championship in 1962 in Chile and by the third championship won in 1970 in Mexico, is intimately related to the political, social and cultural events.

In 1958, Brazil was governed by President Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1960), responsible for the construction of Brasília, now the capital of the Republic. His developmental profile stimulated industrialization, the opening of roads, the consumption of goods identified as the *American way of life*, as Figueiredo (1998) points it out in his study about the relationships between advertising, consumption and politics in Brazil in the period which goes from 1954 to 1964. The euphoric mood reflected itself in one of the most important moments of the Brazilian musical production, with the success of the *Bossa Nova* on the international scene, being incorporated into the jazz repertoire until nowadays. The development celebrated in the media, which materialized the imagery of the period in question, composed a frame of our society which left out the social problems of a country with high indexes of illiteracy, precarious work conditions, contrasts between rural and urban population, gaps between the misery of a great part of the population and the wealth of a small part.

During the military dictatorship which plunged the country into a period of darkness, initiated in 1964 and radicalized from 1968 on, there was the most revered moment of the history of Brazilian football: the conquest of the Mexico Cup in 1970, the apogee of the Pelé Era. The enthusiasm for the team was orchestrated with the economic indexes constructed by the military government, amplified by means of political propaganda and media and cultural production censorship, in a general way. The dissidents of the regime, those who fought with ideals or weapons, saw themselves in front of an excessively patriotic wave which covered up the suppression of democracy, the serious cases of public health and other social problems and, mainly, the voices of the opposition. The football team was used in the strategy of the regime in order to build up its totalitarian communication, with slogans such as “*Brasil: ame-o ou deixe-o*”

[“*Brazil: love it or leave it*”], or “*Ninguém segura esse país*” [“*Nobody can hold this country back*”].

It is in this historical moment that appears the definition of “Pátria de chuteiras” [Homeland of football boots], expression created by the Brazilian writer and playwright Nelson Rodrigues. Famous for his passionate chronicles about football, the author wrote the canonical narratives which elevated the mythical victorious teams to the category of the gods of the race, of the heroes of the nation. With the first conquest in the 1958 World Cup, we overcame, at least in our imagination, the trauma of the fiascos (not only in sports, but also in the condition of an underdeveloped country), synthesized by the “*complexo de vira-lata*” [slum-dog complex], expression which became popularized and was incorporated into the repertoire of that time. In the conquest of the tri-championship in 1970 the pride of the football country consolidates itself and confounds itself with the *Brasil Grande* [Great Brazil], sobriquet which adjusted itself perfectly to the spirit of that time, in which public constructions with monumental dimensions served as icons of the modernization of the country and as propaganda of the military regime. Guterman (2009, p. 150) points out that “we experienced the apogee of the Cold War. The ‘communist danger’ seen as a threat to democracy, was the aggregating element of the Brazilian conservative forces”. Football duly co-opted onto the strategy of political propaganda, it served the anti-democratic government's purpose of heightening its popularity.

Media industry, hegemony and social reality construction

The classical Berger and Luckman's (2005) thesis proposes that reality is socially constructed. Nevertheless, the linguist and philosopher John Searle (1997) argues that not all reality is a product of social production. He defends the existence of an ontological nature reality and for this reason he suggests the idea that social realities are constructed (not all reality, only social reality is) and this construction is a product of a discursive process.

Following this argument, as a social process, national ideas are constructed on and by societies in a process guided by discourses. In Brazil, as we argued previously, football, nationalism and politics have a common platform from which they mingle, confound themselves and nourish the nation's imagery: the mediatic culture.

Using the concept of mediation, Martín-Barbero (2003) develops the reflection on the way in which the mediatic cultural production spreads through society, being appropriated by the subjects, in the constitution of a repertoire common among peers, which is also being discussed by Morin (2007), in his interpretation of the concept of cultural industry proceeding from Adorno's and Horkheimer's theses (1997). Morin (2007) inquires into the diagnosis of the Frankfurt School, when he considers the apathy, the subjection to the logic of entertainment in a deterministic way, in the process of the formation of the publics since the advent of mass media. In this sense, we must take into consideration the potential of the imagery and of the possible impacts of the mediatic narratives on everyday life as well as on the stimulus to dreams and aims which are being translated into trajectories of the transformation of reality itself.

We understand that it is consumer culture (Slater, 2002) which delimits the subjects' place in the contemporary world, by means of life styles, traces left by the use of goods, by the manifestation of the tastes, by the elaboration of auto-referential narratives which are guided by preferences, interests, experiences already lived or still to be lived. According to Featherstone's (1995) arguments, when we refer to consumption culture, we base our analysis on the concordance with the centrality of the world of goods and the dissemination of the merchandise-form for culture in general. Thus the materiality of goods cannot be dissociated from its symbolic dimension, from its communicational function, as Baudrillard (2007) pointed it out. In the same way, we take into consideration "the market principles – offer, demand, capital accumulation, competition and monopolization – which operate 'within' the sphere of life styles, cultural goods, and merchandises" (Featherstone, 1995, p. 121).

Considering the material, symbolic and mediatic spheres of consumption, which interpenetrate and complete each other, our analysis on football in contemporary times approaches the discussion about sports as a mediatic

spectacle, as a place of the visibility of global brands, as a cultural product in itself and as a social space in which are being discussed the questions that permeate the imagery of time. By analysing the North-American context and the crisis of public values in the area in which digital medias promote new forms of social bonds and put again the power spheres under the auspices of neo-liberalism, Giroux defends that “recognizing how the social is being subordinated to market-driven interests points to the need to create new spaces and the vocabulary for a politics in which a plurality of public spheres can promote, express, and create the public values necessary to a thriving democracy” (Giroux, 2011, p. 13). In the sense the authors points out, we attempted to understand how the debate on football, in the appearance of the subjects, brands and institutions on the internet, creates tension with regard to the meanings of *brasilidade* [Brazilianity] and delimits the symbolic disputes of the public and private spheres.

According to Wisnik (2008), football puts itself into a circle of mercantilization, which intends to embrace everything, from the stadiums and the uniforms to the mediatic transmissions, from the footballer’s image to the national imagery. Gastaldo (2002) identifies that the ritual “match of Brazil” is related, by means of the historical influence of advertising and of the market strategies, to certain consumption “traditions” as it is the case of beer, the drink which is most associated with the match – we can affirm that this invented tradition (Hobsbawm, 2008) does not restrict itself to the Brazilian context, it is something that is recurrent in the football world. Nevertheless this logic of private investment of big global corporations and brands, in search for profit and gains in image, often come across the imponderable, the unexpectedness of the match and of the results. Thus what is being conceived as a market strategy involving football is “the nearest possible to a completion and to the impossibility to complete itself” (Wisnik, 2008, p.352).

As a consequence, it is difficult to understand football without its relation with material, symbolic and media consumption. Sponsorships, brands or corporations have also been historically part of big sport events and have been growing since the 1950s (Ford, 1993). In this context World Cups and Olympics were not organized without advertising money. In this sense, sponsorship means a sort of appropriation – symbolic and material – of some images and culture

related to football. This sort of plunder translates into brands the symbolic universe and the social-historical features related to each historical moment as well.

Methodology

We have used a qualitative approach to develop the present research. Considering it, our study was divided into two parts. Firstly, we analysed the rhetorical strategies that are present in Itaú's "Let's play football" advertisement, which connected football with social transformations in an emerging nation such as Brazil. After that, secondly, we carried out an analysis of the repercussion of this campaign on Youtube, in which we studied the audience's discourses, its mediation and appropriation as well. In this second part, we focused on the audience's incorporation into Itaú's rhetorical arguments or its resistance to it, which links both parts of the research.

The main reasons to justify this approach concerns two arguments. Firstly, it is important to point out what Itaú Bank means to Brazil. It is the biggest private bank and the second market share institution (Febraban, 2011). Nevertheless, it is remarkable that banks are part of the financial market which represents the capitalism flow, the extension of money as part of role society. As Marx said in the *Capital*, money is the universal good that translates the value of everything as the main motor-driven of capitalism's engines. Hence, at the present capitalism stage, advertising had replaced this and established that everything in everyday life has its equivalent in the use of money (i.e., MasterCard "Priceless" campaigns on "here are some things money can't buy. For everything else, there's MasterCard"). In addition, this sense is closely related to the present economic stage of Brazil and Itaú's campaign summarizes it.

However, the spreading of financial advertising in our society and its presence on media landscapes have been more linked with discourses that are far away from that money connection, which provides us a second argument on the study of the mentioned object. In a certain way, we could specify that in Itaú's campaign the advertising discourses are related to a complex symbolic system

that could be defined as a life or vital philosophy surrounding the brand, which constitutes a certain way of seeing the world.

Taking into account ways of seeing the world, we are obliged to consider the materiality of communication, its linguistic configuration, and its ways of throwing images of enunciators shaping a dialogic process with readers as its audience. In this sense, when we propose to observe Itaú's brand advertising we are trying to imagine a social dialogue between a financial market institution – that trades signs and significances with its possible consumers – with social discourses and with its spirit of the times with its “Zeigeist” as well.

For these reasons, we assume that discourses are building up a way to say things that frame communicated ideas. In this sense, Dominique Maingueneau's (1997) idea of discursive *ethos* allows us to understand discourse comprehension as a way to achieve character features that also constitute it. We could assume that it is a methodology of tonalities and styles of speech study that performs senses of discourses and their displacement from the original place of speech - where and with which intentionality someone or something is communicated. Considering our research object, the point of our analysis is to decode the enunciation processes taking into account the place and the meaning of each enunciation and its relations with audiences as a direct dialogue.

Specifically when discourses are materialized in advertisements, we can assume the advertising *ethos* (Casaqui, 2005), which is a derivation from Maingueneau's discursive *ethos*. This adaptation engenders the assumption that all advertising discourses are a dialogue with a commercial backstage relation which implies that they endorse a corporation's set of ideas and the symbolic universe of the brand with the final intention to convert subjects into consumers of the announced goods.

Assuming these assumptions on the idea of *ethos*, there are different types of advertising *ethos* according to different enunciation tonalities mobilized by each speaker. In this sense, there is a sort of messianic *ethos*, which is part of a discourse in which some form takes the responsibility to guide and point out the future. Our assumptions are that by means of Itaú's advertisement citizens are exhorted to become more consumers, to increase their consumption as part of

a nation construction, using for that purpose the Brazilians' connections with World Cup and football as well.

Results and discussion

As we said previously, our study was based upon two parts. At the first analytical stage we had carried out the analysis of Itaú's advertising campaign discourse in order to decode the main message and the discursive *ethos* as well. Hence, we moved our research forward in order to check how the audience had received the main message present in it, which allowed us to verify the discursive dialogical process, which means to analyse the decoding process and the discursive chains the audiences had performed on it since the original message.

Itaú Bank – one of Brazil's major financial institutions, the official sponsor of the Brazilian football team and of 2014 FIFA's World Cup – launched in 2012 the campaign entitled #vamosjogarbola (*Vamos Jogar Bola* [Let's play football]). This advertising campaign had provoked a polemic by using football representations. It synthesizes the importance attributed to football in Brazil's culture and also the way in which the totalizing discourses engender a polemic within society. The advertisement summons the Brazilians: "This is an appeal of Itaú to all those who love this country: let's play football. To play football is to go forward. It is rolling up one's sleeves. The big football party is going to be held at 'our home'. Let's play football to do it. To play football changes people. To play football changes the future".

The messianic *ethos* is a discursive form that represents the enunciator's strategies: when he uses his voice to point out the right way to be followed as a means to change the nation and build up the new future, Itaú conceals its own private corporative character and its trade interests. However, this voice intentionality is deconstructed by the audience through the reception process, as we will detail further on.

Images of a black boy playing football in Brazilian streets catching the delighted look of people during their daily works and activities suggest a sort of world's fascination with playing football that, such as Itaú has framed it,

are impregnated with a nationalist spirit mixed with narratives of economic development and entrepreneurship. In this context, each national citizen is invited to give his contribution to this euphoric game that is – theoretically – defining Brazilian identity and the capacity to change the nation. The appeal of these images signalizes the way towards a mythic landscape, en route to a Brazil designed by the colours of the bank – it is not for another reason that the chromatic code is based on orange, which is the colour of Itaú's brand, mixed with yellow and green, which also allude to Brazil's national flag and football team uniform.

The tone of the euphoric audiovisual narrative appeals to emotion. The discursive form used to accomplish it was based on a combination of image and music. A symphonic orchestration goes from less to more pompous and grandiloquent melodies followed by a voice chorus repeating the slogan "let's play football" in a looping. These voices of the chorus represent the Brazilians' adhesion to Itaú's system of ideas communicated in the advertisement. This form of unison symbolizes the totalitarianism of the discourse, which looks like a sort of political ideological propaganda that it reverberates.

The publication of this audiovisual document on the video-channel of *Youtube* engendered a polarization of the Brazilian internet surfers' opinions: part of them adhered to the patriotic appeal and manifested their sympathy for the campaign. Nevertheless it is also important to remark that the Itaú Bank campaign also works with national pride as a discursive issue, which means to declare some sort of Brazilian superiority over other countries.

In this sense, it is interesting to point out two things with regard to this national feeling. Firstly, the memory of the glorious past of a country blessed by God – as Alfonso Celso said in 1908 – to put into context the huge variety of natural resources in Brazil and remember the victories during Pedro I's Empire, when the independence process began and national identity construction appeared as a political issue. And secondly, we must point out the 20th century disaster, when this sort of national pride feeling was used in the Second World War or in Brazil (Dictatorial period). However, this discourse of national pride has become more frequent during Lula da Silva's government – Brazil's former president – that used to remind the Brazilians of Brazil's achievements, such as the Olympics

and the World Cup venues or the oil finds or the gains in social policy and Itaú Bank is reinforcing this in its advert.



Figure 1: “Let’s play football” advertisement images.³

The campaign “Let’s play football” was aired at the beginning of April 2012 and three months later, at the end of July 2012 the two official versions of the video on Itaú Bank's official Youtube channel had reached more than 3,50 million views. In this universe, 80% of the people who had evaluated the video “did not appreciate” it, which already indicates a trend of the audience to refuse it. It must be remembered that, in terms of engagement, as Saffo and Brake (2010) said, the fact that a video is watched by a wide range of audience is not synonymous of success; regarding the social media, the acceptance of a message requires the active participation of the audience, which often means a positive assessment.

Hence, a qualitative analysis of the overall 227 comments posted on Youtube shows that 68.7% criticized Itaú Bank in general and the campaign in particular. Only 12, 5% of the comments expressed empathy with the bank’s message. We also found 18, 5% of spam messages in this sample.

3. Source: Advertisement published in Folha de S. Paulo (April, 6th 2012) and Serafina Magazine (April, 29th 2012), respectively from left to right.

It is remarkable that the critical comments we analysed in general show a common dialogue displacement. Frequently, these comments began criticizing the campaign itself and then criticized Itaú Bank (services, prices, market position and strategies). In this context, were also found negative comments laden with all the general critics of Brazil (political system, corruption, social inequalities, problems in the system of public education, among others), which means for these enunciators that Itaú has summarized all the debauched, corrupt and shameful realities of Brazil.

Following the postulate of Van Dijk (2003) or Fairclough (2009) that all discourses are social practices, we could notice a social resistance movement of the audience to the main message, which in such a way destroyed and subverted the messianic ethos. A more significant part of them expressed their revolt against the reductionism with which the nation is portrayed, by pointing out that playing football neither represents our cultural diversity nor is it the key to the solution of our social problems which afflict a country with continental dimensions, such as the access to education, to respectable dwelling conditions, security, public transport.

Itaú's nation project, which has got media visibility and was repeated exhaustively on the main TV channels, attempts to superpose onto the noises and fissures surrounding our most recurrent identity features the idea that we are "the football country". This nation project is based upon the appropriation of social memory, of its dislocation in order to compose the corporative discourse. The commercialization of a collectivity's memory, of the invention of a shared tradition is emptied of democratic character, mainly when it strives for the obliteration of other memories which are unfavourable to the discursive process, which counts on the mediatic propagation in order to legitimize itself. In his study on the relation between conversation and democracy, Schudson points out the reverse of what we observed by analysing the totalizing communication of Itaú Bank "Democracies require public memories; writing greatly enhances the capacity of public memory" (Schudson, 1997, p. 305). The symbolic universe of the brands mobilizes one's own memories, organized around euphoric readings of the world and of the corporation's role in this scenario destitute of any dialectic or dissonance. As Giroux concludes, in his thesis on social subordination to the

market: “as the anti-public values and interests of the market become a template for all of society, the only institutions, social relations, public spheres, and modes of agency that matter are those that pay homage to the rule of mobile capital and the interests of financial titans” (Giroux, 2011, p. 12)

The audience’s contra-hegemonic polemic related to the football supporters - treated as a question of passion for Brazil – is far from facing the presence in the media of the football topic and the way in which it occupies the national agenda. In periods next to the World Cup the euphoria is being spurred on, sustained by the brand discourse which constructs the scene of an atmosphere of supporter enthusiasm without dissidences, in which the corporations take part, this climate does not escape from the media discourse, which serves as a support for the construction of the social reality through advertising language.

In this sense the effectuated world edition clearly adopts a persuasive character. Nevertheless its strategies involve rhetorical elements, such as the reality effect (Barthes, 1994), the realistic aesthetics which compose the frame of life. The *mediascape* (Appadurai, 1999) also recurrently uses the orchestration of voices, the presence of common and famous characters who relate fragments of their lives, in order to give legitimacy, through their personal experiences, to the vision of the world it conveys.

Conclusions

As a conclusion, the analysed campaign gave us the possibility to reinforce Néstor García Canclini’s (2010) idea expressed in his “consumers and citizen” book: there are imagined communities around the idea of nation, in our time, that constitute fights in convergences, the negotiations between the public and private spheres; between the patriotic, historical and cultural constituted trends and its appropriations by the market and corporations. The audience’s discourses on Brazilian football, established as a community of consumers, throw a discursive game on these examples, when someone is not identified with the designed systems of ideas he openly fights against it on social networks. Therefore we identified trends of imaginary crisis on the “nation with boots”,

an invented tradition (according to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger), and it seems that this matter is under examination. In the analysed advertisement, there are probably three causes to justify this phenomenon.

Firstly, taking into consideration Habermas' (2003) concept of nationalism and identity, it is important to highlight that the identity of a nation is being constructed inter-subjectively, from the communicative acts that are constructed and appear in the public space and, as a consequence, are perceived like a public good by individuals who share the same culture and territory. To take possession of this in-material form that is considered public, Itaú Bank, as a private actor, is exposed by the audience that perceives the privatization of something which it already considers as its own property; the idea of nation or the national football team as something that builds the nation, or even its relation with World Cup.

Secondly, we have to consider the long philosophical tradition that worked with the pair identity/otherness. In this sense, the discourse analysis of the audience's comments indicates that the main part of the audience does not identify itself with the otherness. Images and texts identify as "unreal", as a fictional product – which, in a discursive sense, means a breaking of the trueness agreement. We are also reminded of Bauman's (2001) argument on the faith that identities desperately need real recognitions and belonging in order not to disappear or to become liquid.

Finally, in the third place, the analysed data show that the lack of otherness undermines or does not allow any kind of social change. As Nancy Fraser argues (2006), the idea of social transformation mainly requires the idea of recognition. Without this, there is not any action of the individuals in the public space. In other words, without the audience's self-recognition in "Let's play football", the possibility that the messianic nationalism exhorts the Brazilians to recognize the values framed by the advertisement does not exist.

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