

The netnography of black representativeness in an institutional health communication strategy

A netnografia da representatividade negra numa estratégia de comunicação institucional de saúde

La netnografía de la representatividad negra en una estrategia institucional de comunicación sanitaria

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the representativeness of the black population in one of the main communication platforms of the Ministry of Health, questioning whether the publications are closer to institutional racism or to the promotion of racial equality. Through a netnographic methodology, the study sought to analyze all publications made on the Instagram profile of the Ministry in the second half of 2019, manually stratifying all publications in which it was possible to identify the ethnic origin of a person or a cartoon of a human being, in order to do the respective accounting and analyze the post. When analyzing the publications, it was possible to identify three important points: the number of publications with blacks in relation to whites; the relationship between images with more than one person and how many of those people were black; and whether the images promoted health promotion for the black population.

Keywords: African Continental Ancestry Group; Health Communication; Social Media.

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RESUMO: O presente artigo discute a representatividade da população negra dentro de uma das principais plataformas de comunicação do Ministério da Saúde, questionando se as postagens estão mais próximas do racismo institucional ou da promoção de igualdade racial. Através de uma metodologia netnográfica, o estudo buscou analisar todas as postagens realizadas no perfil do Instagram do Ministério feitas no segundo semestre de 2019, estratificando manualmente todas as postagens em que era possível identificar a etnia de uma pessoa ou da caricatura de um ser humano, para fazer a respectiva contabilidade e analisar o post. Ao se analisarem as publicações, foi possível identificar três pontos importantes: o número de postagens com pessoas negras em relação às pessoas brancas; a relação entre as imagens que apresentavam mais de uma pessoa e quantas dessas pessoas eram negras; e se as imagens promoveram a promoção à saúde da população negra.

Palavras-chave: População Negra; Comunicação em Saúde; Mídias Sociais.

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza la representatividad de la población negra dentro de una de las principales plataformas de comunicación del Ministerio de Salud, cuestionando si las publicaciones están más cerca del racismo institucional o de la promoción de la igualdad racial. A través de una metodología netnográfica, el estudio buscó analizar todas las publicaciones realizadas en el perfil de Instagram del Ministerio en la segunda mitad de 2019, estratificando manualmente todas las publicaciones en que fue posible identificar el origen étnico de una persona o de una caricatura de un ser humano, para hacer la contabilidad respectiva y analizar el post. Al analizar las publicaciones, fue posible identificar tres puntos importantes: el número de publicaciones con personas negras en relación con las personas blancas; la relación entre las imágenes que presentaban a más de una persona y cuántas de ellas eran negras; y si las imágenes promovieron la promoción de la salud para la población negra.

Palabras clave: Grupo de Ascendencia Continental Africana; Comunicación en Salud; Medios de Comunicación Sociales.

INTRODUCTION

The broad area of health communication addresses a fundamental axis of action in favor of the Unified Health System (SUS) when it leaves aside the aspect that I speak and you only obey in the relationship with the community – be it doctor-patient, be it Ministry Health-population, be it in well-informed decision-making.

The communication space must be dialogical, creating a bidirectional communication, in which the sender receives feedback from the receiver. A non-dialogical health communication space, which does not expose content in order to translate knowledge, is not interesting to SUS, because it does not encourage social participation and does not promote health¹.

This relationship is established in the real and also in the virtual environment, and includes social media, which from the internet enable people and groups – even unofficial ones – to create and share different contents and productions in the image format, thus allowing a new form of dialogue and exchange of experiences and knowledge².

We can see that the ruling class in our society uses resources to maintain its own latent culture, delegitimizing others³. Thus, institutional communication is seen as a power of social control, which does not promote, among others, the black population, impairing the quality of life and the social ascension of this group or these individuals³.

This is what Vianna approaches in relation to social determinants, which are expressed in health. This is due to the fact that there is a hierarchy among several factors, whether they are more distant or closer, which, related to the way of life, affect the health situation of groups or people, as is the case of race⁴.

Europe has often been considered as a reference for positive and modern traits seen in the interior. Some authors even argue that colonialism was a necessary phase for modernity: in short, without colonialism, there would be no modernity. Based on this, the concept of coloniality was centralized⁵, and the main marker of relations was race.

Seeking to end this social rupture, the decolonial struggle began, seeking social and political transformation, the transformation of the ways of thinking, acting and living. Decoloniality is a path of continuous struggle⁶ and seeks to rescue Brazilian roots and equality, regardless of race.

Thus, in the light of the understanding that institutional racism corresponds to a social inequality that leaves a group at a disadvantage – not because of choice, but because it was subjected to it³ –, this type of violence proves to be “effectively institutionalized at official levels of government as well as diffuse in the social, psychological, economic, political and cultural fabric of the country’s society”⁷.

Discussing black visibility and representativeness in the media, as in social media, is an issue that becomes important, because it is related to our health:

[...] since they are a space for socializing, influencing, exchanging knowledge, care and information. Contribution of one of the axes of Collective Health, by articulating actions and strategies of Information, Education and Communication in Health (IEC), based on the demands that arise with the intensification of the human relationship with technology³.

These means of communication, in turn, present themselves in a way that directly impacts the daily lives of people, reproducing meanings in society, which can interfere in the population’s

health situation. Thinking about the role of health communication, all the different means for the transmission of information must be considered.

The discourse that communicates and that refers to health does not exist only in an official way³. The various transmitters of information that encourage social participation in a democratic manner are important tools both in the dialogue with health institutions and in decision-making for greater effectiveness of practices in the area.

We can discuss the role of social media as a space for integration and as an important tool for health promotion; we can also discuss the representativeness of the black population in these spaces, in addition to their due impacts.

Based on the assumption that the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) considers the categories “black” and “brown” as black, we can conclude that, according to the 2010 Demographic Census, black people comprise just over 96.7 million people, and white numbering around 91 million people⁸. The number of blacks is slightly higher than that of whites and, therefore, it would be natural if there were at least equal representation between the two groups, but that is not the case.

Even so, even if the population of whites was higher, Brazil could and should promote the population of blacks, due to its historical debt to this group; after all, Brazil was the last country on the American continent to abolish slavery. Millions of people were kidnapped and imported from their countries of origin and brought to be enslaved, that is, it was a condition imposed on them, different from when the word “slaves” is used. This scenario provided a racist culture and the marginalization of the black person, in addition to the first position in the ranking of the slave trade. As a consequence of this astounding moment in Brazilian history, racial inequality has been established and prevails until today, and in many societies the hierarchical social pyramid has skin color as its first point of segregation⁸.

Such a historical situation has caused a series of consequences over time, mainly in the media context, in which black visibility occurs in order to leave the group frowned upon, brought with victimization and marginalization – and sometimes it does not even exist.

Therefore, there is a need to understand the representativeness of black people in the main media and products of health communication. The Ministry of Health (MH) stands out, a fundamental institution in the execution of SUS, which should promote the National Policy on Comprehensive Health of the Black Population (PNSIPN). This policy is an important tool in the search for equity in health, enabling the improvement of health conditions and the right to health of the black population:

Including diverse people, such as black or brown, in a folder, may seem simple, but it will cause much more affinity with the desired audience – considering the Brazilian scenario – than very broad and not inclusive advertising campaigns point out³.

This study focuses on the analysis of the Instagram profile of the MH, justified by the fact that Instagram is one of the largest social media in the world and the most accessed by Brazilians, constituting an important space of power due to the impact of its publications. It is also justified because the Ministry of Health is the main body responsible for the largest dissemination of health campaigns and actions, so it is important to analyze how this body seeks to represent black people in their campaigns.

In this sense, the objective was to analyze the images published in the Instagram profile of the Ministry of Health, taking into account the dimension of institutional racism and the promotion of racial equality.

METHOD

This research has cyberspace as its study environment, based on the perception that it could also be a space for the exchange of information mediated by technologies⁹.

Seeking to correspond to the research objective, a netnography was applied as methodology. Its research field is related to the internet, which, according to Corrêa¹¹, allows the study of objects, phenomena and cultures that constantly emerge in cyberspace from the development and social appropriation of information and communication technologies (ICT).

Netnography is an example of the commutation of the ethnographic method and is a research method that, according to Correa and Rozados¹¹, is based on participant observation and on-line field research, using the different forms of computer-mediated communication as a data source for the understanding and ethnographic representation of cultural and communicational phenomena¹⁰.

Ethnography, from the beginning, has been in charge of observing cultures and human communities located in geographically defined spaces. However, the popularization of the internet and its most diverse uses has changed the way people interact and communicate, enabling other forms of social agglutination, now virtual, online. The emergence of these new spaces required a remodeling of the ethnographic method in order to meet the needs of new forms of socialization in the virtual environment¹⁰.

According to Correa and Rozados, the planning stage of a netnography “involves the definition of the focus and the research problem, the choice of the type of electronic forum

most appropriate to the purposes of the study, and the selection of the virtual community that will be investigated”¹¹.

Thus, the planning stage was carried out by defining the focus of black representativeness in the communication of a health institution, considering whether the posts were closer to institutional racism or to the promotion of racial equality. Elected as a research field, the social media of Instagram of the MH was considered the most appropriate cyberspace location for the purpose of the study.

It should also be considered that the Instagram page of the MH is used as the official means of communication of the institution, in addition to the website, and that it also makes up cyberspace, the environment of social media and the internet.

The posts made in the first semester of 2019 (from January 1 to June 30) were used as analysis material, including photos and illustrations. This is because only through the collection and observation of the images themselves would it be possible to identify and analyze the representativeness of the black population in this social media. It was understood that “the most appropriate empirical field will be the one that allows a greater understanding of aspects that will be investigated”¹⁰.

The data collected on netnography are classified as: filed, when published independently of the researcher; extracted, when obtained through interaction with the researcher; and those of field notes, which are the researcher’s interpretations, properly noted¹⁰.

In this way, it is considered that the research data are of the archived type and that of field notes, since the images were collected mechanically or manually, through screen copies, and enumerated with the help of the Canva platform, and the information was organized in a Microsoft Excel database, with notes.

In the abovementioned period, 627 posts were identified; of these, 343 were excluded according to the exclusion criteria: image that does not have any visible character, or image that has characters whose ethnicity cannot be defined, as in the case of shadows, silhouettes, drawings, among others.

Understanding the process of netnographic analysis, the three macro-categories were established and organized in a table with the registration of the image data. They are: the identification number of each image, the characterization of the characters and the promotion or not of black visibility. The subcategories defined in the research, included in the characterization of the characters, are: the heteroclassification of ethnicity, the disposition of the character in the photo and, finally, whether the role played by the character is that of a health professional or that of a user.

The heteroclassification allowed us to verify the number of characters of each ethnicity and in each image, composing the answer to the main question: whether the MH, through Instagram, promoted black representativeness or not. Although the phenotypic aspects stand out at the time of heteroclassification, it is not possible to disregard the social aspect of the observed group¹¹, because the person is part of a people not only because of their phenotypic character. But, on the other hand, since the historical and cultural formation of the black people in Brazil is still stereotyped in inequalities or in an aggressive and negative way, why can't the same stereotypes be used to corroborate the visibility and positive promotion of this public?

With that, the other two categories observed, referring to the character's disposition in the photo – whether centered, of smaller size or in the background – and the role played – whether it is that of a health professional or that of a user –, finally answered whether or not each image promoted black representativeness.

The advent of categories coincides with what the literature points out: by definition, “netnography involves an inductive approach to the analysis of qualitative data”¹⁰. Thus, they emerge due to the search to answer the research problem; consequently, the results must arise from such observation and interpretation of the phenomena of the study, and not only under the pre-existing theories:

This does not mean, however, that the theoretical basis of the research should be disregarded. [...] The result of the analysis will be an interpretation of the observed phenomena, relating the findings and insights obtained from the empirical data with the knowledge consolidated in the literature¹⁰.

This distinction among the collected data ended up generating the three expected results. It was possible to identify the total number of characters of each ethnicity, the total number of images that feature black characters and, in a qualitative way, whether the material promotes the visibility of the black population or not – the main point of the discussion. The study also responds in a quantitative way, providing the total number of images that have promoted or not such a population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the time frame defined in the study methodology, the MH posted 627 images. All were collected in an online environment for a first analysis, which started on September 18, 2019, after accounting for all publications within the stipulated time. It is worth noting the fact that this article is the result of a work to conclude the undergraduate course in Collective Health, in which the research details are presented in greater depth.

For this purpose, in order to pursue the object of this study, the research sample was prepared with 231 units of analysis contained in the initial universe. The term “character” was used in the research, not “person”, since in many instances animations or illustrations were used, and, though not photos of real people, they also build the social imaginary. It is also noteworthy that in posts with multiple images, only the first was considered, as well as in video posts.

The heteroclassification of race defined in the methodological process was carried out considering the different ways that each person can be seen in society – that is, in relation to the job market, beauty standards, care in health services – and thinking about reduced spaces that, for example, the black population still occupies in Brazil.

Despite the need that has been built up over time and the IBGE censuses for the interviewees to self-classify race¹¹, heteroclassification was inevitable for this analysis, which, on the contrary, is part of the observer’s view.

Starting the netnography, Figure 1 exemplifies the characters of the two groups analyzed, black and white, in addition to pointing out a character without classified ethnicity.

Figure 1. Example of hetero-classified characters with respect to the three race categories of the analysis

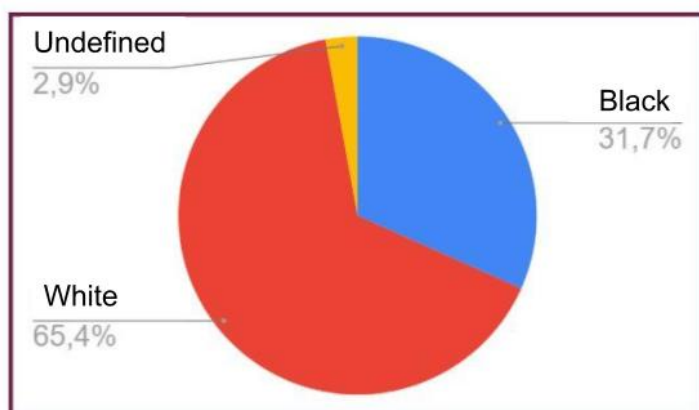


Source: Instagram of the Ministry of Health. Available at: Silva, 2019³

In Figure 1, the woman on the right was defined as a health professional because of the lab coat she wears. She talks and makes gestures with a mother or caregiver, who holds a baby in her arms. In the analysis, the health professional was considered black, the mother, white and the baby, with undefined ethnicity. Similarly, the analysis continued, seeking to classify the ethnicity of each person and character.

Thus, the first result of the research points out that, of the 231 images, a total of 382 characters were found, with 11 (2.88%) who did not have the ethnicity defined by the authors of the work. It is noteworthy that 121 (31.67%) characters were considered black, while 250 (65.44%), white (Graph 1).

Graph 1. Number of characters segmented by ethnic groups analyzed in the images with characters with defined ethnicity from the beginning of 2019, collected from the Instagram of the Ministry of Health



Source: Silva, 2019³

Relating this first result presented to the literature, it is worth mentioning the similar study carried out by Silva and Monteiro (2018) on the representativeness of black women in advertising posters of the Ministry of Health. The results found by the researchers were similar to ours, with a greater presence of white women (75.6%) than black women (29.1%).

It is possible to notice how much the online environments are used as a means of individual and collective expression; they are still social spaces and circulate the different “representations of identity and individuality”¹². Therefore, it is worth emphasizing once again the need for the inclusion of black characters in the communicative content of the MH on Instagram, in view of the small number of black characters found.

The second result was obtained by quantifying the images of the Instagram profile of the MH in racial terms, a result also obtained due to the subcategory of ethnic heteroclassification.

It was noticed that, of the total of 231 images of the object of analysis, only 85 (36.8%) presented at least one black character and, in a strident counterpoint, it was considered that 174 (75.3%) images present at least a white character, after the heteroclassification of the characters of each figure. In other words, the category of whites being the most representative points to a portrait of the white register that goes through black invisibility¹². It is noteworthy that, among all 231 images of the object, there were images with both ethnicities and characters of undefined ethnicities.

In line with the discussion, the understanding of what an image is was considered: in addition to being a visual representation, figure or photograph, it is a composition of

meanings and senses, which interacts with actors and situations¹⁴, which can maintain or reframe the imaginary we have about something – even more when linked to communication¹¹, in this case, social media like Instagram.

The media are one of the sources of the meaning of life in society that emerge from different fields or social groups, and that is why they have become increasingly important in the formation of identity, in living with the other and in the (re)production of cultures¹².

Finally, as for the third result, which refers to the subjective understanding of whether or not the images promote the black population, it is noteworthy that the result was found only after the definition of the three subcategories of characterization of the characters had been carried out. They are the very heteroclassification of ethnicity, in addition to the disposition and roles played by the characters in each image.

Two examples stand out. Figure 2 is a criticized example. Its content is about encouraging people to be physically active, as it is one of the ways to protect oneself against cancer, and contains seven characters. Among them, it was considered that there are five white characters and only two black characters. For this reason, it was considered that the product does not promote black visibility, despite the quota of black people.

In this case, the subcategory of the heteroclassification overlapped, but also the disposition of the characters, since none of those who are black is at the center. As for the subcategory of the role played, the two black characters are women, and one of them is a child. No black man appeared; the white character is a worker – a well-regarded position in society – and, incidentally, is centered on the art.

Figure 2. Example of a production that does not promote black representativeness



Source: Instagram of the Ministry of Health. Available at: Silva, 2019³

Upon realizing these details, attention is suggested not so much to motivation, but to the perception of the fact. Why was the image simply not prepared with more black characters or

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with positive black characters? There is something like the invisible violence pointed out by Sueli Carneiro¹¹, who also specifies the problem by emphasizing the gender issue:

These are the effects of the “whiteness” hegemony on social imagery and concrete social relations. It is an invisible violence that contracts negative balances for the subjectivity of black women, slipping in their affectivity and sexuality. This dimension of racial violence and the particularities it assumes in relation to women from non-hegemonic racial groups has been awakening careful analysis and the recreation of practices that prove capable of building other references¹¹.

Once again, the daily coincidences that form our culture, opinion, stereotypes, social imagery and prejudices appear, which must be eliminated and, for that, for example, rely on the National Policy for the Promotion of Racial Equality (PNPIR)¹⁸, elaborated in this sense:

Considering that the Federal Government intends to provide social agents and institutions with the necessary knowledge to change mentality to eliminate racial prejudice and discrimination so that the perspective of racial equality is incorporated [...] ¹⁸.

An example of a production considered as a promoter of the black population, Figure 3, below, points out four black characters among the five present, which already represents a greater number of black identities. This may positively influence other people and gave the figure the title of promoter of racial equality in terms of content.

Among the five characters, two possible doctors are undoubtedly black, that is, they are represented in an advantageous social position, as a worker, as a health worker and as a highly regarded profession. Therefore, it is also inferred that it is a content that promotes racial equity.

Figure 3. Example of production that promotes black representativeness



Source: Instagram of the Ministry of Health. Available at: Silva, 2019³

Still on Figure 3, although the people are all side by side, indicating equality of power, the only white person, by coincidence, is at the center.

This question of the disposition of people in an image – whether centralized, of a smaller size or in the background – complements the description of the promotion or not of the visibility of a strategic group, when we think that, for the composition of an image with its own meanings, the following are used: plastic elements, such as colors, sizes and framing, in addition to figurative elements. In other words, this elaboration becomes, to some extent, purposeful and guided in relation to these aspects, which may be perceived immediately or not, with certainty or not, positively or not, as Martine¹⁶ explains:

The composition, or interior geography of the visual message, is one of its fundamental plastic tools. It has an essential role in the hierarchy of vision and, therefore, in the orientation of image reading. In any image (painting, cinematographic plan, drawing, synthesis image, etc.), construction is essential – it respects or rejects a certain number of conventions elaborated throughout the ages and varies according to periods and styles¹⁶.

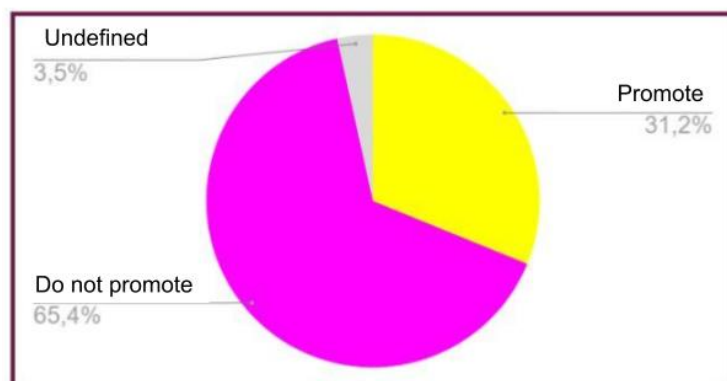
The represented social position – in this case, specifically, regarding the four black characters seen as health professionals – contributes to the discussion, when we consider the issue of the lack of access of this group to the labor market and education, among other social determinants of health. “The distance that separates blacks and whites in the country in terms of occupational position is well known.”¹⁵

Carneiro points out the necessary change:

There is a growing awareness among black women that the processes related to globalization and the new world order require new forms of action and, in this sense, treating communication as a nexus of empowerment has been fundamental in guaranteeing them a positive representation as well as the visibility of the process of mobilization and struggles¹⁵.

Such discussion around all the images collected, enumerating those that promote or not black visibility and observing the disposition and the number of black and white characters for each image, enabled the elaboration of Graph 2.

Graph 2. Number of images with characters with defined ethnicity, collected from the Instagram page of the Ministry of Health in early 2019, related to the promotion of black visibility



Source: Silva, 2019³

It is noticed that, although good examples of images that promote blacks (31.2%), such as the one in Figure 3, were also observed, most of the productions (65.4%) do not corroborate for adequate visibility of black people, as shown in Graph 2.

Finally, with the quantification of the images of the Instagram profile of the MH in the racial aspect and with the realization of the race heteroclassification of the characters of the collected images, analyzing in a more subjective way if they promote representativeness and black visibility, it was considered that, in general, the profile proposal came close to institutional racism.

It was noticed that the voice of the MH, in the social media in question, comes from the need to strengthen the principle of equity in SUS, which refers to the treatment of unequal people in an unequal way, in order to reduce health vulnerability.

It was also considered that the institution does not present or does not positively highlight the black population in its contents, which reproduces the idea of less power or social occupation in regard to these people. The practice of exposing a vulnerable group like the black population in a negative or superficial way, especially in the media, is a fact that perpetuates racial discrimination¹⁵.

It is in the sense of making visible and promoting the self-esteem of strategic groups through the meanings emanating from images that the relationship of social media with health is established³, since the hegemony of whiteness prevails as a single, main or superior culture, maintaining this symbolic violence. This occurs with the daily creation and recreation of stereotypes that, in turn, become a strong trigger of racial discrimination, which also has drastic consequences for individual and collective health¹⁵. When this attitude comes not only

from people, the danger is even greater, due to the power of official institutions, especially health institutions, to legitimize ways of thinking and acting.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the discussion of this analysis, it is clear that, as for what health institutions communicate, at least when it comes to the Instagram profile of the MH and the racial aspect shown, updates are still needed in the content and possibly during production and broadcasting in cyberspace, as in social media.

In order to support the 6th Guideline of the National Policy on Comprehensive Health of the Black Population, which points to the “development of information, communication, and educational processes that deconstruct stigmas and prejudices, strengthen a positive black identity, and contribute to the reduction of vulnerabilities”¹⁷, it is recommended that the products shown on the Instagram of the MH lead to rethink the racial and black representativeness issue.

In addition, the National Policy for the Promotion of Racial Equality (PNPIR) indicates the implementation of such policies in areas such as work, culture and communication, education and health¹⁸, corroborating the conclusion of this study.

In addition to the relationship with the theory of social representation, this work provokes a reflection for the change of society as a whole when talking about the racial issue, but not only in that sense.

As a cultural change that may come to influence the formation of identities with positive, or at least more varied, representations of black people in Brazil, we suggest using or disseminating in online environments – but not only in them – content with black people, even if you are not of that ethnicity. Likewise, we suggest that praise for black children be much more frequent, that curly hair be considered as beautiful as straight hair, that young black people be not in death rates, but in colleges and prominent and taking positions decision-making process.

They are small gestures and daily attitudes that also allow us to reform the social imaginary discussed and that are within our individual reach to face the problem.

Furthermore, it is ratified how essential and urgent it is that changes also happen in the collective and in online environments, such as in the provision of services and in the opinion issues of institutions, especially public and health ones, when we still notice so many racist cases.

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