

Social representations of teaching fostered by the media during the COVID-19 pandemic

Representações sociais de docência fomentadas pela mídia durante a pandemia de Covid-19

Representaciones sociales de la enseñanza promovidas por los medios de comunicación durante la pandemia de Covid-19

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Highlights

Social representations allow social groups to name, interpret, and act upon the world.

Social media provide material for the construction and sharing of social representations.

Teachers were portrayed as unwilling to work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Abstract

This manuscript reports on a study aimed at understanding the possible social representations of teaching expressed on a social media platform, identifying the role of the media in constructing these social representations. Information was collected from a journalistic profile based in the municipality of Uberaba (Minas Gerais, Brazil). A total of 1,163 comments were selected, of which 319 related to teachers were analyzed. The results showed that teachers were portrayed as professionals who did not want or like to work, received payment without performing their duties, and should not have been prioritized for vaccination over other professions. It was also found that the content of the news stories influenced how the social group of users of this profile represented teaching.

[Resumo](#) | [Resumen](#)

Keywords

Social Representation. Teaching. Social Media. Pandemic.

Received: 07.22.2024

Accepted: 03.27.2025

Published: 04.16.2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26512/lc31202554959>

| Introductory notes

The coronavirus disease pandemic of 2019, or Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) – the name that gave rise to the English acronym adopted worldwide – became one of the greatest challenges faced in the twenty-first century. The impacts of this disease are still immeasurable, but they have directly and indirectly affected the health, education, and economy of the global population (Pires-Brito et al., 2020).

Social distancing measures were adopted in order to reduce or interrupt the transmission of the disease through physical separation between infected and healthy individuals, as well as protecting those at risk of developing severe forms of the illness, such as the elderly and people with comorbidities. These measures included the cancellation of events, the temporary closure of schools and workplaces with an emphasis on teleworking, the closure of borders, and the recommendation for the population to stay at home (Silva et al., 2020). As part of the physical closure of schools, remote teaching was adopted. In this regard, it is important to highlight that:

[...] the term remote "teaching" came to be used as an alternative to distance learning (DL). This is because DL already has an established presence, coexisting with in-person education as a distinct and regularly offered modality. In contrast, remote "teaching" is presented as an exceptional substitute, adopted only during this pandemic period, when in-person education was suspended. [...] certain primary conditions would have to be met to implement remote "teaching," such as access to virtual environments supported by adequate equipment (not just mobile phones); access to quality internet; ensuring that everyone was properly familiarized with the technologies; and, in the case of teachers, also prepared for the pedagogical use of virtual tools. (Saviani & Galvão, 2021, p. 38)

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the major challenges facing the education system across Brazil. During the pandemic, teachers found themselves needing to develop activities that did not require in-person interaction and to build emotional and pedagogical bonds with students through WhatsApp groups, Classroom, among other tools, in order to support "remote teaching." It is also worth noting that remote teaching took on various forms in Brazil, not always through virtual platforms, but also through printed materials or in hybrid formats, combining online and printed activities.

During the period of social distancing, social media played a fundamental role in providing information and in people's daily lives. Platforms such as Facebook and Instagram became central to allowing people to remain connected even during crises like the one experienced. It is also worth noting that the use of these platforms, which intensified during the pandemic, had already been observed in previous years among the Brazilian population, whether for following the news, passing time, or exchanging ideas and information with others.

Social media have been, and continue to be, facilitators of communication (Alexandre, 2001). In this respect, social media can also be understood as disseminators of messages, information, and images, and they have the power to influence opinions and attitudes (positioning) through directional communications such as the press, radio, newspapers, television, social media, among others (Silva & Ichikawa, 2019).

In this direction, the study reported here was developed based on concerns about how teachers were portrayed in comments posted on a journalistic social media profile during the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it possible to identify the role of the media in constructing these social representations.

| Social representations and the role of social media

The Theory of Social Representations (TSR) was developed by Serge Moscovici in France in the 1960s, through a study that aimed to understand the social representations of psychoanalysis among different social groups in French society (Moscovici, 1978).

According to Arruda (2002), the most widely accepted definition among researchers in the field of social representations is that of Denise Jodelet (2001, p. 22), who understands social representations as:

[...] systems of interpretation that govern our relationship with the world and with others, guiding and organizing conduct and social communication. Likewise, they intervene in various processes, such as the dissemination and assimilation of knowledge, individual and collective development, the definition of personal and social identities, the expression of groups, and social transformations. [...] as both the product and the process of an activity of appropriating external reality through thought and of the psychological and social elaboration of reality. This means that we are concerned with a mode of thought, considering both its constitutive aspect—the processes—and its constituted aspect—the products or content. A mode of thought whose specificity lies in its social nature.

The purpose of the Theory of Social Representations (TSR) concerns the study of a specific and delimited phenomenon: theories of common sense, seeking to understand how knowledge mobilized in informal communication is situated (Alves-Mazzotti, 2008; Arruda, 2002; Guareschi, 2000; Jodelet, 2001; Miranda et al., 2019; Ortiz & Magalhães Júnior, 2018). It is important to emphasize that "social representations are not merely 'opinions about' or 'images of,' but collective theories about reality, systems that have a particular logic and language, a structure of implications based on values and concepts" (Alves-Mazzotti, 2008, p. 62). According to Jodelet (2001), social representations guide social groups in jointly naming and defining different aspects of everyday life, in interpreting them, making decisions, and, occasionally, positioning themselves in relation to these aspects. For Jodelet (2001, p. 22), a representation can be understood as "a form of knowledge that is socially elaborated and shared by a social group, serving a practical purpose, and thus contributing to the construction of a reality common to a given social group."

Thus, representations are the result of the daily interactions and communications of social groups. According to Miranda et al. (2019, p. 143), social representations are "constructed through communication among individuals and, by their nature, cannot be created by an isolated individual; rather, they present a social nature of construction and, as a result, guide individuals in their daily praxis."

Social representations are expressed both in informal and formal communication, with informal communication taking place through radio, conversations among friends, and phone calls. Publications posted on social media by news outlets, for example, are considered formal communication, which, according to Guareschi (2000), becomes a privileged site for the storage of social representations, where any interested individual can access them. In turn, comments posted on social media can be understood as a form of informal communication where social representations may emerge and become established.

Facebook is one of the social media platforms that contribute to the construction of social representations, as it allows individuals to interact with one another by commenting on posts. Facebook is one of the mass communication media. According to Alexandre (2001, p. 113), "[...] mass communication is directed at a large audience (heterogeneous and anonymous); moreover, it simultaneously reaches a vast audience within a short period of time, involving thousands of people in the process." As Jodelet (2001, p. 12) says, "social communication, in its interindividual, institutional, and media aspects, appears as both a condition of possibility and a determinant of social representations and social thought."

A social representation has an individual dimension insofar as it must be anchored in individuals in order to be understood as existing (Guareschi, 2000). Social communication plays a primary role in the phenomena of representations, both in their emergence and establishment. Social representations manifest themselves in different ways and through different means. The ways refer to how they appear, encompassing habits, customs, and individual cognitions. The different means refer to how social representations are conveyed to people. Social media are excellent means for carrying social representations to individuals (Guareschi, 2000).

It is possible to observe that social media make an important contribution as spaces for the construction and sharing of social representations among the individuals who use them. They operate more effectively in individuals' daily lives, contributing significantly to the construction of representations of the world they are part of (Milanez, 2008). Moreover, they allow individuals, within their private sphere, to access specific social information and content, as well as new means of producing concepts and behaviors.

This movement allows for a greater diversity of representations, as communication professionals use criteria and resources to select, emphasize, and intervene in the symbolic construction of events. Thus, it can be inferred that social media can strongly influence individuals' social representations (Almeida, 2005; Guareschi, 2000). Social representations, which can be created and maintained by the social influences of communication, can shape realities in our lives, in addition to serving

as a main link for establishing connections through which people relate to and connect with one another (Guareschi, 2000; Moscovici, 1978).

| Methodological procedures

This article reports part of a master's research project conducted by the first author, under the supervision of the second author of this manuscript. The study developed was qualitative in nature, understood as one that investigates the universe of meanings attributed to phenomena by the research participants (Minayo, 2002).

Information was collected from a journalistic profile based in the municipality of Uberaba, Minas Gerais (MG), on a public Facebook page. This community was selected due to its representativeness in the city. The profile has approximately 265,500 subscribers, corresponding to 78.6% of the total population, which, according to the 2022 census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), is 337,846 inhabitants (IBGE, 2023). The profile was created in February 2012 with the purpose of disseminating information about the city and surrounding region. This community posts daily journalistic content on a variety of topics.

Entry into the community took place through so-called lurking (i.e., joining a community solely as an observer, without active participation) or in a "silent" manner, so as not to interfere with the existing social relations and practices within the virtual community, particularly to avoid influencing the production of discourses/comments (Fragoso et al., 2011).

Posts and comments related to the period of school closures and reopenings in the city of Uberaba during the pandemic were observed, spanning March 2020 to February 2022. Comments were selected based on references to teachers, school closures and reopenings, vaccination, and students. It is important to note that school closures and reopenings were closely tied to vaccination efforts, and comments addressing this topic were therefore included in the selection. As an exclusion criterion, comments that did not pertain to any of the aforementioned themes were not considered. During the organizational stage, the selected comments were entered into a spreadsheet with the following columns: date of publication, main topic, and selected comment.

The data analysis was based on Content Analysis (Bardin, 1977), which comprises a variety of communication analysis techniques, but can generally be divided into three stages: (1) pre-analysis, (2) material exploration, and (3) results processing, inference, and interpretation. The pre-analysis stage involves the initial contact with the material, during which preliminary impressions emerge and lead to the subsequent steps. In the material exploration stage, the raw data is refined and organized into units with similar content—that is, units that share common characteristics. Quoting Bardin (1977, p. 177), "[...] categorization is the process of classifying the constituent elements of a set by differentiation and, subsequently, by regrouping them according to type, based on predefined criteria." This is followed by the processing of the results obtained in the previous stage, along with inferences and possible interpretations.

A total of 1,163 comments were selected, and five categories were created based on their analysis: (a) school closures in Uberaba, MG; (b) vaccination; (c) school reopenings in Uberaba, MG; (d) teachers/teaching; and (e) students. All comments were drawn from posts published on the profile under investigation. The criterion used was semantic. For example, all comments that referred to teachers were grouped under the category “teachers/teaching.” Table 1 shows the number of comments in each category defined during the analysis.

Table 1
Number of comments in each established category

Categories	Total of comments in each category
School closures in Uberaba, MG	3
Vaccination	259
School reopenings in Uberaba, MG	512
Teachers/ teaching	319
Students	70

Source: the authors.

Based on the data compiled in the table above, a considerable number of comments were found to relate to teachers (319 comments). Therefore, only these were discussed in the study presented here.

Systematizing the data produced: teaching as a profession and the perception of Uberaba’s population shaped by local media

In total, six categories were created based on the analysis of data related to teachers. One of these categories includes two subcategories. Of the 319 comments analyzed about teachers, fifteen could not be categorized due to fragmented content and/or views that differed from the more commonly shared perspectives observed. Table 2 presents the number of comments included in each category. The category “teachers don’t want to work” was the most prominent of all six.

Table 2
Relationship between the categories created and the number of comments in each

Category	Subcategory	Number of comments
School as a student warehouse		7
Teachers do not want to work		163
Vaccination	Priority	19
	They should not have priority	50
Precarization		37
Appreciation		23
Equal treatment		5

Source: the authors.

In the category “school as a student warehouse,” there are a total of seven comments, all of which share a common thread: the view of teachers merely as caregivers. This can be seen in the following excerpt: “[...] in short: I’m tired of having my son at home, cutting himself. I don’t want to talk to him or get help, I have no patience for my son, I’ll just pay the babysitter. Oops... the teacher to watch him” (Comment 56).

It is worth noting that irony was a recurring feature in these comments, which may suggest that the individuals posting them do not agree with this social representation of teaching, but rather anchor their view of how society behaves toward teachers in this representation. The individuals who posted such comments may have come into contact with other people and/or information aligned with the content of this representation. Libâneo (2012, p. 23), in his discussion of public schooling, points to certain characteristics that may help explain how teachers are portrayed,

[...] characterized by its missions of assistance and support (framed under the term inclusive education), it is turned into a caricature of social inclusion. Policies aimed at universal access end up undermining the quality of education, for while access rates are publicly celebrated, social inequalities in access to knowledge are growing deeper—even within schools—due to the impact of in-school factors on learning. The school’s roles are inverted: the right to knowledge and learning is replaced by minimal learning aimed at survival.

In this emptying out of the role of public schooling, one can also observe a shift in the social function of teaching: once regarded as one of the main agents in the construction and socialization of humanity’s accumulated knowledge, it is now reduced to a caregiving role (Almeida & Pimenta, 2011; Libâneo, 2012; Saviani & Galvão, 2021).

The category “teachers don’t want to work” includes a total of 163 comments. The most dominant representation in these comments portrays teachers as professionals who do not want to work, who are being paid without fulfilling their duties, and who should be fired and/or have their salaries cut. It is worth noting that during the pandemic, thousands of Brazilians experienced wage reductions or job losses (Barbosa et al., 2020). According to Ortiz and Magalhães Júnior (2018, p. 32), “[...] social representations serve a conventional role, shaping a phenomenon according to reality and helping to interpret it in relation to others.” This suggests that the situation may have led individuals to post such comments: in failing to understand the role of the state in mitigating these impacts, they directed their grievances toward the individual (the teacher).

Another factor that may have influenced such comments was the sudden reorganization of life around working from home for much of Brazilian society. With the closure of schools to prevent the spread of COVID-19, school activities took place remotely and with the support of teachers for several months. As Lunardi et al. (2021, p. 1) note, “[...] the involvement and development of the family’s role in remote classes reflect transformations in how these parents actively support their children’s participation in class.” With the overnight shift to remote classes and non-in-person activities, many parents found themselves having to take a more active

role in their children's lives, which may have opened their eyes to the teaching–learning process and led to greater concern with their children's school experience. The excerpt, “[...] Only those who have children know what it’s like to worry that they’re learning absolutely nothing” (Comment 22), highlights this concern. Saviani and Galvão (2021, pp. 42–43) further point out that:

[...] in so-called remote ‘teaching,’ there was little teaching, little learning, little content, few class hours, and little dialogue. In contrast, there was an abundance of assignments. On the students’ side, they were supposedly expected to become ‘autonomous’ and pursue knowledge on their own, overwhelmed by the multiplication of readings, videos, podcasts, webinars, etc. [...] On the teachers’ side, they were buried in assignments to correct, email and app messages, online forum discussions, and more to keep up with.

It is important to emphasize that remote education refers to spatial distance, whereas what took place during the pandemic was emergency remote teaching—a temporary solution (Lunardi et al., 2021).

The “vaccination” category was the only one to reveal subcategories with opposing representations: “Priority for a safe return!” which included 19 comments, and “They should not have priority!” with 50 comments. The most representative subcategory was the one in which individuals expressed the view that teachers should not be prioritized for vaccination, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

I’d like to understand why teachers think they should be prioritized for vaccines. Some sectors never stopped, like supermarkets, garbage collection, gas station attendants, and other professionals. They never stayed home, and I don’t see anyone thinking they should be a priority. (Comment 18)

In the subcategory concerning the prioritization of vaccination for a safer return to in-person classes, respondents expressed the view that it was necessary to vaccinate education professionals to ensure the safety of everyone in the school environment, as illustrated by: “[...] If education were truly a priority, teachers and school staff should have been the first to get the vaccine.” (Comment 14)

The “precarization of teaching work” category included 37 comments. This category encompasses comments whose main theme is the precarization of teaching work—that is, comments acknowledging that teachers’ workloads increased during the pandemic and that schools lacked the necessary infrastructure for a return to in-person classes, as illustrated by: “[...] I’m working double at home, I don’t even have time for my family. I want to go back to school, but only vaccinated. Remote work isn’t easy—I have 29 students in the same class, which is the case for many teachers.” (Comment 57)

With the onset of social distancing, teachers found themselves having to adapt overnight to the digital environment: “[...] the new was imposed without concern or respect for the social, material, technological, logistical, emotional, and physical conditions of teachers, students, and families” (Insfran et al., 2020, p. 13). This sudden change laid bare the vulnerability faced by teachers under the newly established conditions. Matos and Faria (2020, p. 300) reiterate that during the Covid-19 pandemic,

[...] the need to adapt to remote learning—the only safe way to continue activities—arose in both public and private settings. Limited access to the internet and technological resources; the intensification of psychological issues such as stress and anxiety; the lack of interaction between the main participants, teachers and students; the increase in responsibilities and working hours; and the lack of training are among the main dilemmas experienced.

The precarization of teaching work became more evident and intense during the pandemic. Education, along with teachers, faced the dilemma of having to adapt to a new reality while operating in a context marked by the latent inequality in access to technology (Matos & Faria, 2020). Some features of this precarization process help explain the comments made by respondents, as noted below:

[...] as teachers are among the main targets of the mechanisms that precarize working conditions in education, it is necessary to analyze the most relevant elements that characterize teaching work—such as the spaces in which it takes place, the conditions of work and professionalization, training, among other fundamental aspects, and especially the relationship between this work and the prevailing social structure—in order to seek possibilities for transformative action that resists a segregating and exclusionary economic logic.” (Santos et al., 2021, p. 40)

Based on the excerpts above, it can be inferred that the comments were written by teachers who experienced the precarization of their work—facing increased workloads and a sudden shift in how they worked—and by parents who were moved by all these changes. Moll (2021), in a study aimed at uncovering the representations teachers have been constructing about what it means to be a teacher in the context of emergency remote teaching imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, identified elements such as challenge, concern, and fear. The study also noted the absence of important aspects in these representations, such as solidarity, social bonds, and continuing education in technology, which, to some extent, resonates with the findings in this category.

The “appreciation” category includes a total of 23 comments, which share similarities, such as viewing the teacher as a professional who deserves respect and appreciation, as illustrated in the comment below:

[...] I think now we’ll never again hear of brave dads or hotheaded moms trying to argue with or attack teachers, because after spending 24 hours a day with their little angels at home, they’ve probably realized it’s not at all easy to deal with what teachers go through with 15, 20, 30 kids locked in a classroom. And whenever a teacher used to call a student out or something like that, suddenly the brave parents, moms, uncles, or neighbors would show up. Hopefully now everyone learns to appreciate teachers more. We have to take something good from all this bad we’re going through! (Comment 33)

In the same vein, it is worth noting that “[...] while they were following the remote classes, pedagogical responsibilities were assigned to parents. This experience enabled a sense of empathy regarding the teacher’s role—in other words, it fostered a perspective that recognized the importance of the teacher’s work” (Lunardi et al., 2021, p. 2). As cited, the pedagogical experience parents went through during the pandemic may have influenced the appreciation of teachers. Gatti (2020) discusses the process of teacher recognition and appreciation when—

[...] thinking about the teacher, this is about their recognition as a worker—a professional category with a strong impact on fundamental aspects of human civilization. The right to difference and to recognition has been strongly asserted by various movements in contemporary society. These movements have had an impact on education, especially in the disputes surrounding school curricula, and therefore on teacher education and their work. (Gatti, 2020, p. 91)

With the abrupt closure of schools and, as previously mentioned, the way teachers had to quickly adapt overnight to meet the demands of emergency remote teaching, many families with school-aged children and adolescents came to witness, empathize with, and recognize the importance of the teacher in fundamental aspects of education—both in remote and in-person settings.

The “equal treatment” category includes a total of five comments, which share similarities, such as questioning the difference between public and private school teachers when it comes to returning to in-person classes, as illustrated in the following excerpt: “[...] what’s the difference between teachers in private schools and those in public schools? Private school teachers are going back without a vaccine, taking all the risks.” (Comment 86)

The COVID-19 pandemic brought severe consequences and numerous changes to social relations, along with losses in economic, cultural, and labor aspects. In this context, the pandemic laid bare the social and labor inequalities that already existed in the country. Within this scenario, teaching labor relations were clearly affected, as private education, in its most capitalist form, appropriates and reinvents itself (Cajaiba & Santos, 2021). The comments made by individuals questioning the distinction between private and public school teachers with regard to returning to classes without group vaccination may be explained by empathy and the perception of equal treatment of these professionals during the pandemic period.

In sum, the representations of the investigated social group regarding teachers are not merely opinions about them—they are values shared collectively by individuals during a period in which everyone was undergoing a unique experience.

[...] individuals’ and groups’ points of view are then regarded both in terms of their communicative function and their expressive function. Indeed, images and opinions are commonly presented, studied, and considered only insofar as they reflect the position and value system of an individual or a collective. Indeed, they represent just a fragment drawn from the symbolic substance painstakingly developed by individuals and collectives, who, by changing their way of seeing, tend to influence and shape one another reciprocally. (Moscovici, 1978, p. 49)

Still according to Moscovici (1978, p. 62), “a representation spreads and brings together experiences, vocabularies, concepts, and behaviors that come from very diverse origins.” Today, in the digital age, people are confronted with an overwhelming flow of information from all kinds of sources—whether through conversations with others or on social media, as in the case of this study. Events that arise suddenly and affect individuals in some way prompt them to seek out and make sense of these events by connecting them to something already familiar in

their routine or prior knowledge. This understanding takes shape in the routine of these individuals—in the home, in family life, at work, in social media comments, and, in short, in their interpersonal relationships. It is common practice among human beings to seek explanations for events, to look for explanations, to make judgments, and to take positions (Alves-Mazzotti, 2008).

These social interactions gradually create “consensual universes” within which new representations are produced and communicated, becoming part of that universe not merely as opinions, but as true “common-sense theories”—schematic constructions aimed at accounting for the complexity of the object, facilitating communication, and guiding behavior. These “theories” help to shape group identity and the individual’s sense of belonging to the group (Alves-Mazzotti, 2008, p. 21).

As previously mentioned, it is possible to see that the interactions among members of the social group in the comments on posts referring to teachers—on the journalistic page that serves as the focus of this study—fostered spaces for the creation of so-called “consensual universes”; representations were produced and passed on. The representations of teaching shaped the group’s identity and the individuals’ sense of belonging to that group.

| The possible influence of the media on the construction of representations of teaching

A total of 33 news reports published between 2020 and 2022 were analyzed. Given that a detailed analysis of all the reports would be unfeasible within the scope of this manuscript, the following analysis will focus on those reports that generated the highest number of comments.

The news report from July 7, 2021, titled “Classes in the state school system haven’t even started and are already going to be suspended,” prompted 57 comments that were grouped into five categories, with the most prominent being “Teachers don’t want to work” (n=43), followed by “Precarization of teaching work” (n=7), “Appreciation of teaching” (n=4), “Vaccination: They should not have priority” (n=2), and “Vaccination: priority for a safe return” (n=1). The report opens with an ironic and emphatic tone: “Classes in the state school system haven’t even started and are already going to be suspended,” implying that teachers were not working remotely. It is possible to infer that the representations constructed and reproduced in journalistic texts were connected to other representations that reinforced the meanings they conveyed. This helps explain the strength and recurrence with which this social group expresses such a representation of the teaching profession, as Jodelet (2001, p. 32) explains:

[...] There are representations that fit us like a glove or that intersect individuals: those imposed by the dominant ideology or those tied to a condition defined within the structure of society. But even in these cases, sharing implies a social dynamic that accounts for the specificities of the representations.

The second most prominent report in terms of number of comments is the one titled “On Wednesday (28), an open-ended health strike was declared in state schools in

Minas Gerais,” published on July 29, 2021. In total, this report received 51 comments, distributed across the following categories: “Teachers don’t want to work” (n=47), “Precarization of teaching work” (n=2), “School as a student warehouse” (n=1), and “Appreciation of teaching” (n=1). The most prominent comments fell under the category “Teachers don’t want to work,” which may be explained by the way people understand the concept of a strike—not as a right, but as an excuse not to work, as seen in the following comment prompted by this report:

It’s way too easy to get paid at home, huh? First the excuse was COVID-19, now they’ll come up with a strike even because students might give each other lice... This is turning into a joke—just laziness from the profession... Let the students sort themselves out—who cares. It’s going to be the dumbest generation the planet has ever heard of. Three years thrown away, because there’s been no real learning at all. (Comment 239)

Based on the examples above, it is possible to infer that the news report may have reinforced the representation of teachers as unwilling to work, given that most of the comments fall into this category and cite the strike as a justification for not resuming work.

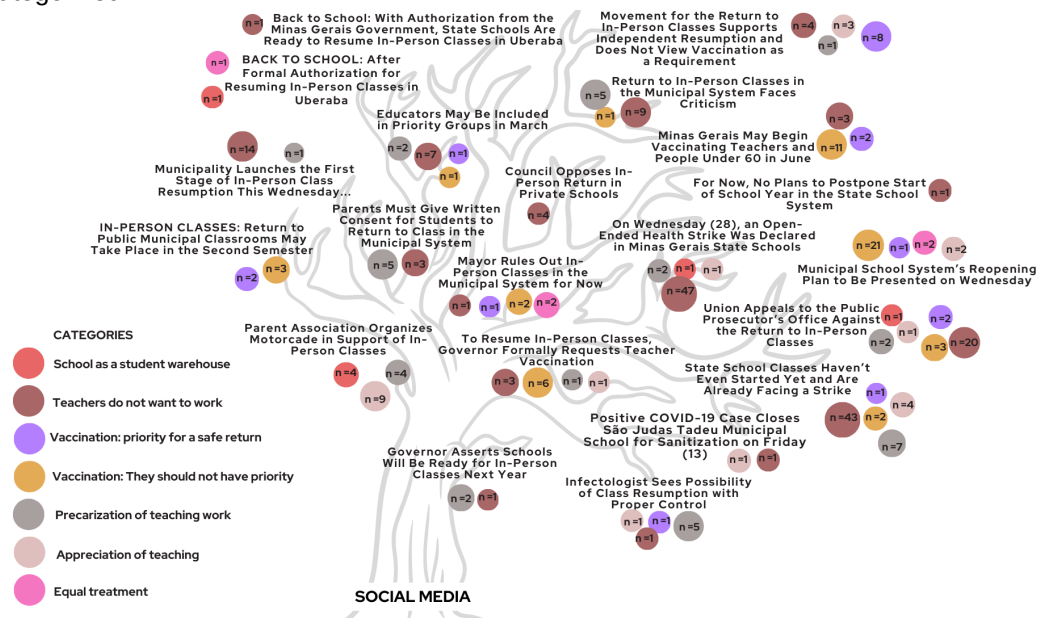
Another prominent report, which received comments that fit into six categories, was titled “Union appeals to the Public Prosecutor’s Office against the return to in-person classes,” published on January 31, 2021. The categories were: “Teachers don’t want to work” (n=20), “Vaccination: They should not have priority” (n=3), “Vaccination: priority for a safe return” (n=2), “Precarization of teaching work” (n=2), “Appreciation of teaching” (n=1), and “School as a student warehouse” (n=1). In total, 29 comments were classified into these categories. Once again, the most prominent category of comments was “Teachers don’t want to work,” which may be explained by the fact that the report discussed the union’s attempt to block the return to in-person classes in Uberaba schools. Reports that referenced the union and its efforts to prevent teachers from returning to in-person teaching for safety reasons were interpreted by the social group under study as evidence that teachers were not working and did not want to return.

Jodelet (2001, p. 17) says that social representations “circulate in discourse, are conveyed through words and media messages, and become crystallized in behaviors and in material and spatial organizations.” Based on this, it is possible to observe that the local media in Uberaba, during the pandemic period, provided material for the dissemination and propagation of certain representations of teaching—the most prominent being that teachers did not want to work and/or were not working. According to Alexandre (2001, p. 113), “we are bombarded and surrounded by information, through images and sounds that, in one way or another, consistently attempt to create, alter, or solidify attitudes or opinions in individuals.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the news reports and the nature of the comments made by individuals. It presents a tree that symbolizes the influence of social media on the possible creation and establishment of social representations. In this tree, each news report title appears on a branch bearing fruits, with each fruit

represented by a colored sphere that corresponds to a category and the number of comments within it, all connected to the report that prompted those comments.

Figure 1
Illustrative representation of the news reports that received comments subsequently categorized



Source: the authors.

According to Guareschi (2000), representations, grounded in the culture and memory of social groups, are based on foundations that form a stable and enduring core. Thus, it can be inferred that the most prominent representations that emerged are those already established in the social group under analysis. Therefore, this social group sees teachers as professionals who do not work and/or do not want to work. As Jodelet (2001, p. 8) says, with regard to representations, these should:

[...] be studied by articulating affective, mental, and social elements and by integrating, alongside cognition, language, and communication, the consideration of the social relations that affect the representations and the material, social, and ideal reality upon which they act.

Thus, based on these reflections, we can infer that the construction of established representations of teachers by the social group, identified through the analysis of the comments, occurred through the articulation of the language used in the news reports on the journalistic page referring to the teaching profession, as well as the way in which the social group had already formed its view of teachers, taking into account the reality in which they were situated. According to Guareschi (2000), social representations can manifest in different ways and through various mechanisms. Social media are excellent means for conveying social representations to individuals. In this sense, the tree in Figure 1 represents how fruitful social media can be.

| Final considerations

The study presented here, by investigating the possible social representations of teaching expressed in comments on a journalistic profile on social media, made it possible to highlight important considerations: by portraying teaching in a negative light and discrediting the profession, the social group centered its grievances about the precarization of living conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic on the individual (the teacher), as if seeking someone to blame for that precarization. Based on the analysis of the comments, it can be inferred that the reality shared by the social group under investigation contains certain dualities: teachers are seen as individuals who, during the pandemic, did not want to work and/or did not work, but there is also a subgroup within this social group that recognizes a worsening precarization of teachers' work.

In turn, by aiming to identify the role of the media in the construction of these social representations, the analysis also highlighted that the content of the news reports influenced how the social group represented teaching. It was observed that the narrative chosen to describe the events experienced aligned with the social representations expressed in the comments, indicating that social media functioned as a vehicle for the dissemination and crystallization of social representations about teachers.

The results point to the need for a better understanding of the country's educational reality, in order to overcome simplistic views that place the blame for systemic problems on teachers and disregard the complex web that underpins the profession and its practice—especially in a context of precarized living conditions, during an unprecedentedly challenging period such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Contribution to the preparation of the text: author 1 – Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing; author 2 – Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

| Resumo

O manuscrito relata uma pesquisa que visou compreender as possíveis representações sociais sobre a docência expressas em uma rede social, identificando o papel da mídia na construção dessas representações sociais. A coleta de informações se deu em um perfil jornalístico do município de Uberaba (Minas Gerais). Foram selecionados 1.163 comentários e analisados 319 relacionados aos professores. Como resultados, os professores foram retratados como profissionais que não querem ou gostam de trabalhar, que recebem sem exercer sua profissão e que não deveriam ter prioridade na vacinação antes de outras profissões. Foi possível compreender, ainda, que o conteúdo das reportagens influenciou como o grupo social de usuários desse perfil representou a docência.

Palavras-chave: Representação Social. Docência. Rede Social. Pandemia.

| Resumen

El manuscrito relata una investigación que tuvo como objetivo comprender las posibles representaciones sociales sobre la enseñanza expresadas en una red social, identificando el papel de los medios de comunicación en la construcción de esas representaciones. La información fue recopilada de un perfil periodístico de la ciudad de Uberaba (Minas Gerais). Se seleccionaron 1.163 comentarios y se analizaron 319 relacionados con docentes. Como resultado, los docentes fueron retratados como profesionales que no quieren o no les gusta trabajar, que cobran

sin ejercer su profesión y que no deberían tener prioridad de vacunación antes que otras profesiones. También fue posible comprender que el contenido de los relatos influyó en cómo el grupo social de usuarios de este perfil representaba la enseñanza.

Palabras clave: Representación Social. Enseñanza. Red Social. Pandemia.

Linhas Críticas | Journal edited by the Faculty of Education at the University of Brasília, Brazil
e-ISSN: 1981-0431 | ISSN: 1516-4896
<http://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/linhascriticas>

Full reference (APA): Santos, L. S. dos, & Miranda, C. L. (2025). Social Representations of Teaching Fostered by the Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Linhas Críticas*, 31, e54959.
<https://doi.org/10.26512/lc31202554959>

Full reference (ABNT): SANTOS, L. S. dos; MIRANDA, C. L. Social Representations of Teaching Fostered by the Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Linhas Críticas*, 31, e54959, 2025. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.26512/lc31202554959>

Alternative link: <https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/linhascriticas/article/view/54959>

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