


Social Inequality and the Pandemic: An Analysis of the Photographs Shared by @covidphotobrazil and @everydaybrasil Profiles

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to discuss the central role of digital photography as a media that provokes reflections, discussions, debates, and possibly empathy. It is intended to analyze the social function of photographic research during the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil through the Instagram platform and discuss the relationship between social inequality and pandemic. For the selection of the images, we chose the profiles @covidphotobrazil and @everydaybrasil, which catalog and share images about the pandemic, made by different authors and in different regions. The analysis was made in the light of discussions on the dimensions of iconology and iconography by Panofsky (2012)

and adapted to photography by Kossoy (1999). We analyzed 12 photographs, and from them we discussed political and social contexts of social inequality in Brazil, about the worsening of unemployment, hunger, inflation, and the political crisis in the context. We also discussed hunger, education, public transport, housing, employment and basic sanitation. As a result, we consider that the photographs are invitations to reflect on the reality of the north of the country in coping with the pandemic. The role of social science that investigates the data and information that contextualize images in contemporary history is considered extremely important. The analyses made are subjective and different looks on these same can perceive things that have gone unnoticed. The collective debate of the images that mark the Covid-19 pandemic is necessary precisely for this reason. We regret that the uses of the platform do not make explicit or bring the debate in the comments linked to the images we analyzed. This is partly due to the proposal of the platform and its audience, and partly due to the visual illiteracy of our society. Still, the comments on the images register a collective cry for social justice and express the Brazilian's faith in the divine force to solve the public health crisis aggravated by the political and economic crises.

Keywords: Covid-19, Digital Photography, Brazil Social inequality.

1 INTRODUCTION

Understanding the relationship between photography, memory, citizenship and respect for the lives of peripheral populations requires a visual literature and social debates on these historical problems of social inequality and their documentation. Thus, we believe that it is essential to analyze the readings of these images, that they are widely shared and that there is an understanding of their symbolisms.

The pandemic has been a time of greatest suffering for those who are homeless, unemployed, in informal and underpaid activities. Research shows that the pandemic reinforces the inequalities of the most vulnerable, deaths are more numerous in the peripheries with poor infrastructure and without basic services.

In this context, the present study proposes to analyze some photographic images made during the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil, based on concepts of iconography and iconology proposed by Panofsky (2012) in 1932 and later adapted to the photographic language by Kossoy (1999). The work leads us to the discussion about the possibilities of the digital in the production and circulation of images and its impact on the creation of memory on the representation of the victims of the new coronavirus and on the transformative power of photography in recording and altering history.

2 GOALS

2.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To understand the central role of digital photography as a media that provokes reflections, discussions and debates. To this end, we chose as the object of analysis images that portray social inequality during the Covid-19 crisis released by the profile @covidphotobrazil and @everydaybrasil

2.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- a) to debate the importance of photography in the social debate regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil;
- b) understand the role of social inequality in the worsening of the pandemic scenario in the country;
- c) identify how Instagram profiles @covidphotobrazil and @everydaybrasil contribute to the debate on social inequality and its role in the difficulty of coping with the pandemic in Brazil.

3 METHODOLOGY

This is a bibliographic research and a case study. The study articulates qualitative methods of direct observation, through the description and qualitative evaluation of the photographic images posted in the @covidphotobrazil and @everydaybrasil profiles, and some comments from spectators linked to them. The selection of images was based on the theme of social inequality and occurs randomly and subjectively.

For the analysis of the published photographs, we start from the discussions of the iconological and iconographic dimensions, proposed and described by Panofsky (2012), in 1932, later adapted by Kossoy (1999), who added specificities of the photographic language. It is believed that these methods

can contribute to the photographic analysis and understanding of the representation of Covid-19 memory in Brazil.

The iconographic analysis refers to the plastic reading of the image, created from a point of view of the author of the image and eternalized by the instant in which the shutter was activated. The photographic moment documented in photography allows us to recover precious data for the reconstitution of memory and history.

Iconological analysis seeks information and contexts through documents or the account of the author of the image in order to "unveil the historical and social fabric of the image, as well as evaluate its cultural and ideological dimension" (UNFRIED, 2014, p.05).

In this sense, it is necessary a theoretical basis that articulates the problem of social inequality in Brazil and its role in the worsening of the Covid-19 pandemic. To deepen the iconological interpretation of the images, according to Kossoy (1999), we can look for the speech of the photographers whose images are chosen, either through interviews in newspapers or by direct contact through social networks.

4 FINDINGS

The final results of this research include 12 analyses of photographs produced in the context of social inequality during the Covid-19 pandemic, shared on pages @covidphotobrazil and @everydaybrazil.

To understand how the photographic language is able to signify, Santaella (2012) emphasizes the importance of taking into account how it is produced, emphasizing its producer and the means available for this.

Thus, the first step for this analysis is to seek to know who is the photographer who produced it, for which vehicles it works, its origin, its profile on the platform and the information about the image that it may have shared

The second step in understanding the image is to analyze how the language in question is able to represent something that is outside of it, that is, its object or referent, commonly called content. (SANTAELLA, 2012, p.74).

Among the ways of reading a photograph are: the perception of feelings that photography produces in us and the identification of what was photographed. Exploring the details of the photo refers us and allows us to know the reality that it was constituted "to contemplate the atmosphere that it offers to the look, because the immanent signification of the subjects and themes photographed is inseparable from the singular arrangement that the photographer chose to present" (SANTAELLA, 2012, p.30).

We add to this the study of the interaction characteristics of the Instagram platform that add icons and comments that influence the construction of image meaning such as number of likes, tags, hastags and comment analysis.

Only then can we move on to the question of interpretation. What kinds of interpretive effects is that language able to produce in the receiver? The meanings of a language depend on this trinomial: its characteristics internal, their references and the interpretations it entails (SANTAELLA, 2012, p.74).

Erwin Panofsky proposes in his studies that iconography is the classification, description, identification and interpretation of meanings of images, that is, it deals with the theme or subject.

Iconology as opposed to iconography refers to the interpretation of symbolic values and seeks to discover their meaning. According to Panofsky (1991) iconology is an interpretive method that comes more from synthesis than from analysis, the latter being an essential requirement for iconographic interpretation.

In short, the difference between iconography and iconology lies in the way the works are read; Iconography starts from the concept of analysis, decomposition of a whole into parts, already the iconology of interpretation.

For the understanding of works of art, Panofsky proposes in his work the so-called "Iconographic Method" which is divided into three levels of meaning. The first of these concerns the level "Pre-Iconographic" or "Pre-Iconographic Description", where it is sought to effect the recognition of the work and a description that seeks the primary and natural meaning of the image.

The second level is called "Iconography in the strict sense", a phase that attests to works based on text and documents, that is, the iconographic analysis, properly said that aims to discover the secondary or conventional meaning of the work of art.

In the third level proposed "Iconological Level", initially designated "Iconography in a deeper sense" seeks to discover the inherent meaning or content of the work of art. At this stage it is possible to understand the ultimate meaning of the work and the context in which it was created, in it the values and symbolic values of the work are unveiled.

Boris Kossoy adapted the iconography and iconology from Panofsky's methodology. The Brazilian researcher maintained the definitions already proposed by Panofsky and introduced specific elements of photography, so that it was possible to use them in photographic analyses.

For him, in the iconographic analysis of the photographs, the process that originated the photograph is reconstituted, so that the elements that contributed to the documentary materialization and also the identification of the details that make up the content of the photograph are determined. In addition to the retrieval of the information of the photographic image, to thus obtain an identification of the iconic details that make up the content.

In his adaptation Segundo Passoy (2001), the stage of "Iconological Interpretation" would be the moment for us to remember that photography is a representation from the real. It presents two basic paths for iconological decipherment: the first path proposes to rescue the history of the subject and the second concerns the dismantling of the conditions of production, that is, the process that resulted in the representation under study. According to him, "It is sought by iconological interpretation, to decipher the inner reality of the photographic representation." (KOSSOY, 2001, p. 60).

Boris Kossoy points out that the reading of photographic images despite the levels, is a subjective process that depends on the ideology, sensitivity, attention, personal tastes and knowledge of the reader.

4.1 PROFILE REVIEWS @ COVIDPHOTOBRAZIL



Source: Instagram/covidphotobrazil, 2021 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CM2kCQgldZ8/>

The photographs chosen here were produced by Bahian photojournalist Felipe Iruatã during the health crisis caused by Covid-19 in Salvador on the second day of curfew in March 2021. The first photograph was taken outside a public transport bus. From a medium plane angle, it shows some passengers crowded in a bus, what draws attention is when realizing that it was being photographed one of the passengers makes negative sign with his hand and most of the other passengers who appear in the photograph look at the camera, evidencing a relationship of consent with the photographer. Their looks show fatigue and dissatisfaction with the lack of basic distancing.

The second photograph was taken inside a public transport also in Salvador, with the image taken from a top-down frame, or plongée angle. In it we can see the inside of the bus crowded with several people, one next to the other without the possibility of complying with the physical distancing indicated by the Ministry of Health.

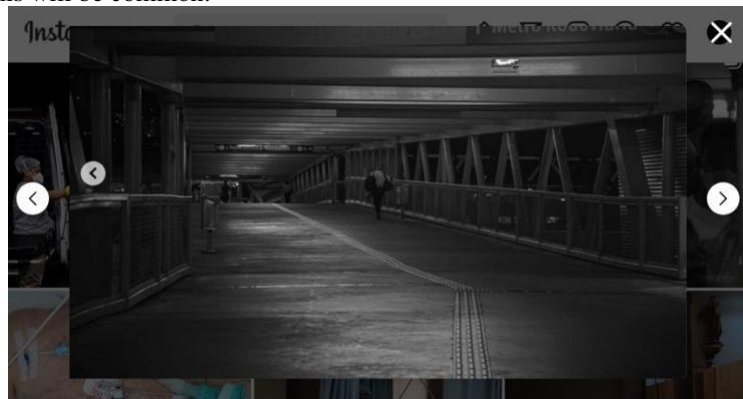
In Brazil, during the pandemic, remote work was a reality for only a small portion of the population. Most of the workers, in order not to lose their jobs, had to leave home and expose themselves to the virus in public transport, as the image indicates. According to a study by the Brazilian

Institute of Economics (Ibre) of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (Ibre/FGV), the distance modality was adopted by only about 10% of the country's workers even at the height of the pandemic and social isolation. The survey found that telecommuting during the pandemic was a privilege concentrated in the wealthiest and most urbanized regions of the country. "The poor infrastructure of households in other regions, both from the point of view of equipment and internet access, has greatly limited the home office in the North and Northeast."

The images made in black and white are part of an album with 5 other photographs and were liked by 731 users¹. The post is tied to the caption: "Second day of curfew at 6pm in Salvador."

While the bus stations are full, the city sits empty. Same contradiction and same social abyss." So we can see in the third image chosen made by the same photojournalist, taken from an open plan showing an almost deserted street, where we can see only a few people in the last plane.

The album was shared by @covidphotobrazil, features the Instagram tag of its author @felipe.iruata and the post received comments among them are: "While the government does not release a descending aid so that the worker can protect himself at this time, scenes like this will be common."



Source: Instagram/covidphotobrazil, 2021. [https:// www.instagram.com/p/COIjglsnpNt/](https://www.instagram.com/p/COIjglsnpNt/)

The image and its respective caption were produced by freelance photojournalist André Coelho during the health crisis caused by Covid-19 in April 2021 in Rio de Janeiro. In April, the state of Rio

¹ Review made on August 22, 2022.

de Janeiro surpassed 700,000 confirmed cases of Covid, and set a record for the moving average of deaths with 270 deaths per day, according to the State Department of Health.

The photograph taken from an open frame made in the street, used to portray people and at the same time contextualize situations and environments. The image depicts in its foreground a man who has just received a lunch box probably with food, with the mask on his chin, he appears to cry while talking to one of the volunteers of the NGO Covid Without Hunger. In the background, we see a line of people waiting to also receive lunchboxes.

The photograph was shared by Instagram @covidphotobrazil and bears the marking of the profile of the photojournalist @a_coelho. The post was liked by more than 786 people and accompanies the caption "Rio de Janeiro, April 2021 - Volunteers from NGOs such as @covidsemfome and @acaodacidania donate food to homeless people in Rio de Janeiro. Hundreds of people who live on the streets of Rio, or who have ended up on them because of the pandemic, receive at least one plate of food a day in the city center, much less than a year ago due to the drop in the number of donations.

Among the hashtags are: #fome #ong #pandemia. The image is part of an album with 9 other photographs. He received several comments, among them are: "My God, hunger and pain were already absolutely present in this region before the pandemic... Now, it's heartbreaking."



Source: Instagram/covidphotobrazil, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/COIBmoTHNN3/>

The image was produced in April 2021 by photojournalist Victor Moriyama during the Covid-19 pandemic in the city of São Paulo. Victor is a regular contributor to The New York Times, covering the Amazon and Latin America and is currently working on a long-term project investigating social inequality in Brazil and the impacts of capitalism on social relations.

In the photograph taken in the open plan, we see a line seen from behind with people, most of them homeless, waiting for the distribution of food baskets. The National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil, conducted by the Brazilian Research Network on

Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security (Rede Penssan), indicates that in the last months from 2021 to 2022, 9 million Brazilians went hungry and more than half of the households in the country faced some degree of food insecurity. According to the researchers, the number found of 19 million Brazilians who went hungry in the novel coronavirus pandemic is double what was recorded in 2009, with the return to the level observed in 2004.

The photograph was shared by Instagram @covidphotobrazil and bears the marking of the profile of its author @victormoriyama. The photo was liked by more than 366 users: "São Paulo, April 2021 - In recent days I have been following the advance of poverty and the increase in food insecurity in the Covid-19 pandemic in São Paulo for the @nytimes. I spent many days alongside the tireless warrior I admire so much @sophiabisilliat and her association @treinonalaje who does a fundamental job of distributing food and food baskets in the four corners of the city and downtown."

The publication is part of an album with other photographs and is linked to the hashtags: #covidbrasil #fome #pandemia #brazil. The album received comments such as: "Gotta tag the idiot who said to make sense through the Internet for him to learn that Brazil is not only the universe of privileges that he lives".



Source: Instagram/covidphotobrazil, 2021 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQWCfnInA8v/>

The images were produced in São Paulo by photojournalist Tommaso Protti during the health crisis caused by Covid-19 in 2021, The Italian photojournalist and documentary filmmaker who currently resides in São Paulo has been working as a freelance photographer, dedicating himself to documenting contemporary issues in Latin America.

In the first photograph we have the portrait of a woman, sitting on the couch of her house with her hands resting on her thighs with a countenance that seems to be a mixture of tiredness and worry,

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perhaps sadness. Made from a frame of medium plane, draws our attention to the wall behind the sofa in the background, on it is written "Jesus looked at me in fact never stopped looking". The image was made from a frontal angle, which refers to a posed photo.

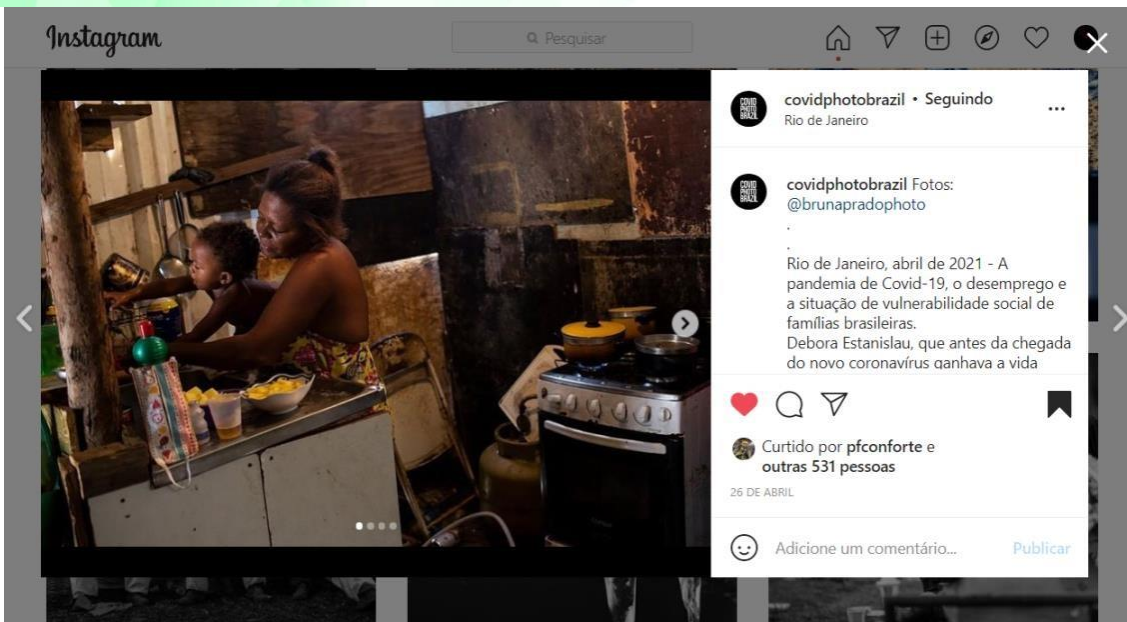
Linked to the image, the information that the photograph shared by the @covidphotobrazil brings the Instagram marking of its actor @tomprotti. The post was liked by 741 users, with the caption: "São Paulo, June 2021 – Yesterday, the official death toll from Covid-19 in Brazil reached 500,000, the second highest in the world, behind only the United States." Photography makes part of an album with seven other photos for a series of reports documenting the social effects of the pandemic, investigating how it has increased poverty and inequalities in the country. published by UOL Notícias. Among the hastags are: #fome #covidbrasil .

Among the comments of album: " Congratulations @tomprotti and all. Heartbreaking images of an invisible 'political' war against the people."; "A beautiful work, but a sad and bleak scenario, may God bless all of us Brazilians!!!".



Source: Instagram/covidphotobrazil, 2021

The image, also produced in São Paulo in July 2021 by photojournalist Tommaso Protti, closes the album composed of 8 photos. The photograph, taken from an open frame, in its foreground shows people in street situation, one of them sleeps on a mattress, wrapped in a blanket and to the side in the center of the image, we can see two men talking, one of them wraps the other with his arm on his shoulder. In the background we see some blankets and also a tent.



Source: Instagram/covidphotobrazil, 2021 <https://www.instagram.com/p/COJRc5vHCLY>

The image and its caption were produced by photojournalist Bruna Prado during the covid-19 pandemic in April 2021 in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The photojournalist is a founding partner of Estúdio Prado, a producer of corporate, advertising, editorial, promotional and sports photographic images. Coordinates the EP Galeria project (from Estúdio Prado), with photography training.

In the photograph, made from a medium frame, we have in the foreground, the portrait of Debora Stanislaus with her son on her lap, in the kitchen of her house and in front of a dishwasher sink. In the background comes a stove with some pots and in the background the wall of the shack made plywood board.

The photograph was shared by Instagram @covidphotobrazil and carries the marking of the profile of the photojournalist @brunapradophoto. The post was liked by 533 people and accompanies the caption: "Rio de Janeiro, April 2021 - The Covid-19 pandemic, unemployment and the situation of social vulnerability of Brazilian families. Debora Estanislau, who before the arrival of the novel coronavirus was making a living as a maid, is unemployed and lives with four of her children in the Cidade de Deus favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Among the hastags: #desigualdadesocial #photography #everydaysocialjustice #everydaybrasil. The image is part of an album with 4 other photos that depict the day of Deborah and her four children. The album received reviews and they are: "Unjust country!!!! So rich and so poor."

4.2 PROFILE ANALYSIS @EVERYDAYBRASIL



Source: Instagram/@everydaybrasil, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CTw3Zy0FaCU/>

The image and its caption were produced by photojournalist Marcia Foletto in September 2021 in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Marcia Foletto has worked for 24 years at the newspaper O Globo and is seen as one of Brazil's leading independent photojournalists.

The photo was taken from a plongée frame in the middle plane and depicts a woman sitting on her bed with her hands and hair covering her face, in front of her appears a plate with only crackers like water and salt. The photo was posed and the woman identified as "C" reports that during the covid-19 pandemic she lost her job and came to live on the streets.

The photograph shared by the @everydaybrasil features the Instagram tag of its author @marciafoletto, was liked by more than 380 users and accompanies the caption: "C. lost her job in the pandemic. She had to give up the house where she lived and leave her daughters with her ex-husband. He came to live on the street and today is in a small apartment paid for by a friend, in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro. With no work and what little he earns from emergency aid, he had only one packet of biscuits to spend the week. Afraid of jeopardizing the child custody process, C. told her story, but declined to be identified." The photo received commentary, among them: "The sad situation of many Brazilians in this bewildered moment."



Source: [instagram/everydaybrasil](https://www.instagram.com/p/CZb4jllOkYI/), 2022 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZb4jllOkYI/>

The photographs chosen here were produced by photographer Brenda Alcantara, graduated in Social Communication - Radio Tv and Internet. The photographer has a work focused mainly on Human Rights. The images are part of an album with 8 other photographs and were taken in the Caluete Quilombola Community in Garanhuns, Pernambuco in February 2022 during the pandemic caused by Covid-19

The first photo, taken from a medium shot, shows the figure of María Elena da Silva, as she opens her old refrigerator where we can see few foods. In the second image we have the family closet as the center of the photograph, and in it we can see only two bags of corn flour which, according to Maria, would be the food served throughout the month.

Families like Maria Elena's who were already living in a situation of vulnerability began to live in much more complicated situations, according to the research *Inequality of Labor Impacts in the Pandemic*, coordinated by the director of the Getúlio Vargas Social Foundation (FGV Social), Marcelo Neri. Over the course of the pandemic, the income drop among the richest 10% stood at -7.16%, and represents less than 1/3 of the income drop of the poorest half of the population, which tells us a lot about which people have been most affected by the pandemic.

In September 2020, because of the higher amount of emergency aid, the number of people below the poverty line fell to 4.63%, or 9.8 million Brazilians. Already in the first quarter of 2021, when emergency aid was suspended, but returning the Bolsa Família, it reached 16.1% of the population, or 34.3 million poor people.

The album was shared on Instagram @everydaybrasil and features the tagging of its author @brendaalcantarafoto. The post is tied to the caption "The nightmare of sleeping without dinner returns to the Brazil. Hunger returns to the political debate while 57 million citizens are malnourished due to the crisis, the pandemic and the cut in social programs.

María Elena da Silva, 44, along with her family of 11 members, went to bed hungry. The post received more than 330 likes, as well as comments such as "Another of the numerous examples of absence of this government."



Source: [instagram/everydaybrasil](https://www.instagram.com/p/CHp6P5TFH9U/), 2022 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CHp6P5TFH9U/>

The situation is also repeated in the family of Julliane, a solo mother of 3, who has lost all her income over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. The strong increase in social inequality was mainly due to the increase in unemployment and, according to the survey "Inequality of Labor Impacts in the Pandemic" who lost the most were the residents of the Northeast Region with -11.4% of income loss. In the South region the impact reached -8.86%, of the population and, in relation to gender aspect, women who had double hours of child care at home, as well as Julliane.

Presented a loss of -10.35% against -8.4% of men.

The photograph was also produced by photographer Brenda Alcantara in 2020 in Brasília Teimosa, Recife – Pernambuco. The posed image was taken from a medium plane and shows Julliane and her family, her three children are all wearing masks and one of the children, a girl is in her arms while the other two boys are next to their mother, in the surroundings we can see what appears to be a village of houses with clothes on the clothesline.

The photo was liked by more than 700 users and accompanies the caption "What are the effects of the Coronavirus where everything has always been missing?"

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research aimed to discuss the central role of digital photography as a media that provokes reflections and focuses on the importance of photography in the social debate regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil.

The methodology used was the bibliographic and case study, the analyses were made from the discussions of the iconological and iconographic dimensions, proposed by Panofsky in 1932, then adapted in 1999 by Kossoy who added specificities for the analysis of the photographs.

There were 12 analyses, including 8 of the Instagram @covidphotobrazil profile and 4 of the @everydabrazil profile. The images clearly portray the pandemic and the way it has opened up social

inequality in Brazil at various levels and different scopes such as: hunger, education, public transport, housing, employment and basic sanitation. Covid-19 has wreaked serious havoc in Brazil, causing an increase in poverty levels and helping the country return to the United Nations hunger map

During the process of analyzing the albums it was possible to notice that many comments were limited to clapping the photographer for the record of the historical moment or tears for it, making the debate around these images inferior to what it should be. This situation may be due to the lack of knowledge of people in general about reading images and messages involved. Thus, the need to expand people's knowledge about what exists in each image is highlighted, helping to "see" things not seen before, because they are something subjective in dependence, in part, on their worldview.

It is necessary to emphasize the importance of talking to others about the images, as it always helps us to "see" things that we have not seen before. Precisely because it is something subjective that depends on a number of factors as proposed by Kossoy.

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