

“Resume doesn't need a face”: Analyzing the Public’s Reaction to Magazine Luiza’s Trainee Program

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Resumo

In Brazil 54% of people identify themselves as Blacks. The scenario inside the organizations is noticeably different. What is the public’s reaction when a company takes action on this inequality? In 2020 Magazine Luiza launched a Trainee Program exclusive for Black professionals, and we used Content Analysis to analyze the comments on the post on LinkedIn when the company announced the Program to ascertain it. Our findings show that the majority of those criticizing the initiative were men with high education level and senior positions. Their comments contained ironic and anecdotal statements. They questioned the company’s real intentions and see it as promoting racism against both Blacks and Whites. People who advocated for the Program argued based on solid facts. This group was composed mostly by young professionals who consider Brazil’s structural racism and the unfair competition for Black professionals to believe that the initiative is legitimate and much needed.

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Abstract

In Brazil 54% of people identify themselves as Blacks. The scenario inside the organizations is noticeably different. What is the public’s reaction when a company takes action on this inequality? In 2020 Magazine Luiza launched a Trainee Program exclusive for Black professionals, and we used Content Analysis to analyze the comments on the post on LinkedIn when the company announced the Program to ascertain it. Our findings show that the majority of those criticizing the initiative were men with high education level and senior positions. Their comments contained ironic and anecdotal statements. They questioned the company’s real intentions and see it as promoting racism against both Blacks and Whites. People who advocated for the Program argued based on solid facts. This group was composed mostly by young professionals who consider Brazil’s structural racism and the unfair competition for Black professionals to believe that the initiative is legitimate and much needed.

Keywords: Diversity Program, Case Study, Content Analysis, Race in Brazil

Introduction

Racism restricts the access of Black people to work opportunities and to reach higher education levels, two aspects that are interconnected and to which the Black population has been neglected over the last decades (Andrews, 1996; Machado Júnior, Bazanini & Mantovani, 2018; Osorio, 2009). In Brazil, only 7% of Black men and 10% of Black women who are 25 years old or older attended University (IBGE, 2018). Also, 68,6% of managerial positions are occupied by White people, while only 29,9% are occupied by Black people (IBGE, 2019). In this context, organizations play an important role in maintaining or challenging the racial order, since they supposedly are a neutral race arena (Ray, 2019).

Previous research on racial diversity has explored the theme from individual and organizational levels. Some studies were conducted to understand how Black people experience work and career mobility in organizations (e.g. Souza & Dias, 2018), while others addressed implications of diversity Programs and affirmative action implementation, based on perspectives of employees and managers (e.g. Saraiva & Irigaray, 2009). Although the studies on diversity in the workplace have raised (Manoharan & Singal, 2017) it has been little explored in the literature how the public reacts to companies’ initiatives on diversity. Analyzing this aspect could contribute academically and managerially to better understand other barriers besides internal ones that diversity practices may face when challenging the idea of race neutrality in organizations and the racial democracy myth in Brazil (Andrews, 1996; Costa Vargas, 2004).

In this paper we aim to analyze the public’s response to the implementation of an affirmative action by Magazine Luiza in 2020, when the company launched its Trainee Program exclusive for Black professionals. We gather some of the comments on Magazine Luiza’s post on LinkedIn when the company announced the Program. Using Content Analysis, we categorized in what way people reacted to the announcement of the Program – negatively or positively –, explored the emerging themes in the comments, and examined if opinions differ among gender, age, level of education and occupation.

Theoretical Background

Countries that have a history of slavery had their development based on a racist system (Ribeiro, 2016), and the relation between the slavery past and the current dynamics of work relations is still notable (Teixeira, Oliveira & Carrieri, 2020). The dimension of racial relations in Brazil affects even work positions that do not require higher levels of study, as domestic workers. On her research regarding the perception of being White by White individuals in the city of São Paulo, Schucman (2012) presents statements like the following, brought by one of her interviewees, a White nanny: “I’ve got a job because I was White and the other person was Black” (Schucman, 2012, p.76). Black women are part of the race and gender group that has the lowest monthly salary in Brazil (IBGE, 2018). In the Southeast region of Brazil 20% of the Black women work as domestic workers, compared to 10% of White women in the same position (IPEA, 2016). This discrepancy comes from the country's history, since in times of slavery domestic work, including the care and even breastfeeding of children was performed by enslaved Black women (Freyre, 1978; Sanches, 2009).

There is a pattern of denial of miscegenation on social dynamics in Brazil (Costa Vargas, 2004; Schucman, 2012), that ends up ignoring that racism in Brazil is structural (Almeida, 2019) and thus its existence should not be refuted. The process of ignoring social constructions of race in Brazil makes managers and executives to not realize that “organizations are racial structures that reproduce (and challenge) racialization processes” (Ray, 2019, p. 27). The Brazilian society keeps a symbolic place to individuals socially perceived as Whites, which guarantee them social positions and places while they, regardless of class, actively produce and reproduce the racialized social structure of which they are part (Schucman, 2012). Thereby, the White individual contributes to the maintenance of such social structure, where they will keep having the benefits of its racial identity privileges – which works to increase the inequality of opportunities to Black individuals.

Some organizations have included Black workers on their Diversity Programs to decrease the inequality and increase the chances of people from this group to reach management positions. One of the recent Programs focused on hiring individuals from this minority was promoted by Magazine Luiza. In 2020 the company launched its Trainee Program focused on hiring newly graduated Black young professionals. The initiative reverberated in online and offline interactions. Some people perceived the Program as necessary and non-discriminative, while others said it was a way of veiled racism and discriminatory to Whites.

Methodology

To understand how people reacted to the Trainee Program we blended two methods: Case Study and Content Analysis. Case Study serves as an opening to further analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2011), where context cannot be ignored, since it contributes significantly to understand the entire perspective of the case (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Hartley, 2004; Yin, 2009). On the case study the researcher takes part as an interpretive role and create meaning from their findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Stake, 1995).

The data was gathered on LinkedIn in October and November of 2021. The post regarding the Magazine Luiza’s Trainee Program launched in 2020 was found on the company’s profile, and its comments were analyzed manually. LinkedIn was chosen among many social media platforms because it provides a profile of the person commenting, which is not possible on other platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, or Facebook. We chose Magazine Luiza’s Trainee Program exclusive for Black people because the initiative had a big repercussion in online and offline interactions. Although the company has launched the Program on the same terms on the following year, we consider that the first announcement would bring more lively, provocative, and stimulating comments and discussion.

After collecting the data, a content analysis was carried out using *a posteriori* data categorization as it allows a deepening of the meaning of the content on comments regarding

the topic (Bardin, 2011). The comments were first divided into two major categories: those who expressed support to the Program, and those who were opposed to the Program. On a second step these two major categories were broken down to minor categories, according to the meaning of the comment and the reason for support or opposition.

Although LinkedIn profiles show pictures and personal information, the comments are presented on this research anonymously. We present a sociodemographic profile of the commenters of each major group, including age range, gender, education level and professional position at the time of the comment. The age was calculated by the year when the person started college minus 18 minus 2020, year when the comment was made. The ages are presented in a range to minimize errors. When the information was not disclosed on the profile the data is presented as N/A.

Findings

As Luiza Trajano stated (2020), the Trainee Program never had the intention to fix a problem on social inequality, but to increase the number of Blacks in leadership positions at the company. The implementation of the Program brought a debate outside the organization, which is clear by the data we present on this study. The post on LinkedIn received 1,222 comments, of those we have read the first 640, on a chronologically order, and analyzed 133. Not all the 640 comments brought an argument to base the opinion on the Trainee Program, and therefore were left out of our analysis. We considered we have reached data saturation at 640 comments, so no further comment reading was necessary. Our analysis identified two types of people's reaction from the comments sample: opposed to the Program, and in favor of the Program. Both sections had their comments categorized *a posteriori* (Bardin, 2011), according to the meaning of its content, being then divided into minor categories.

4.1 Opposed to the Program

As part of the discussion of those against the initiative we have identified in our sample 29 people that generated 53 comments on LinkedIn's post. The sociodemographic profile of this group is composed by 75.86% of men. In the job position analysis, 48.3% were working as businesspeople, or in positions of middle and higher management. In terms of age, the majority were in the age groups between 30 to 44 years old (65.5%). It is interesting to note that only 3 of the 29 people were between 20 and 29 years old. On an education level, the vast majority attended higher education, where 37.93% have held a graduate degree, and 34.48% have completed an undergraduate degree.

The major category "Opposed to the Program" was broken into six minor categories that have emerged from the data: (i) Perceives company as promoting racism and exclusion; (ii) Questions the company's intentions; (iii) Questions internal promotion practices; (iv) Worries about post-hiring internal reception; (v) Expresses the valorization of merit; and (vi) Brings the legality of the Trainee Program. For research purposes we further analyze the comments of the two categorizations that had the most comments, "Perceives company as promoting racism and exclusion" (20 comments), and "Questions the company's intentions" (13 comments) (see Table 1).

4.1.1 *Perceives company as promoting racism and exclusion*

The categorization that had the most comments is where people "Perceives company as promoting racism and exclusion". Here, they understand the Program as a way of promoting racism and discrimination against Blacks and Whites, instead of advancing on social inclusion and inequality issues. In this category we can find comments mistakenly conceptualizing racism

Table 1
Data Categorization

Major categories	Minor categories	Description	Comment examples
Opposed to the Program	Questions the company's intentions	Questions the real reason for the Program and believes it can be a company strategy to gain attention	“This seems more like a self-promotion to try to gain audience and increase sales with the target audience. This is the most emblematic case of 2020 of action and, especially, of communication that went wrong. And it wasn't a little wrong. A lot of controversy, a lot of explanation and no real contribution to the racial (and especially economic) issue in Brazil.” (O26)
	Perceives company as promoting racism and exclusion	The Program being exclusive to Black people is seen as a form of exclusion and racism against Blacks and Whites	“Honestly, I am impressed how racism is prevailing in the business environment. We are fully aware of social differences and opportunities, for Blacks as well as all races. Brazil is an unequal country, we know it is, however this type of separatism hiring by race does not solve anything. [...] I understand that diversity must be worked together with racism, what you are doing is nothing more than separating between races and not making the proper social inclusion.” (O11)
In favor of the Program	Understands a historical and societal racism	Draws attention to the historical and social context of racism and exclusion in Brazilian society	“Despite the abolition of slavery over 100 years ago the majority of the black population lives on the margins, without access to quality education, which in turn, reduces access to academic training, thus decreasing their participation in leadership positions.” (F50)
	Sees an unfair competition	Emphasis on the inequalities that occur between Whites and Blacks in the labor market	“If the perpetual cycle of exclusion and social inaccessibility is not broken, promoting special conditions for the underprivileged population, we will never promote the so-desired social equality. (...) Unfortunately, the black population is a minority in university classrooms, so it continues to be a minority with education and the possibility of a career advancement. This selection process is inclusive and has a social character, it is not racist.” (F50)

Source: research data

as well as questioning the racism against Blacks and even Whites (the so-called “Reverse Racism”). This can be noted in comments such as “What a shame a company of this size doing reverse racism in the 21st century, it makes me sick to my stomach” (O15), “Exclude all other people for not being Black is also racism” (O16), and “I think it's absurd that they want to ‘fight discrimination’ by creating discrimination! This is racism.” (O17). It is important to note that racism through discourse presents ideas that seem rational at first to explain racial inequalities, which helps to maintain racism (Almeida, 2019). These ideas easily penetrate in a social context where a racial group is marginalized, building a cyclic dynamic. When there is a hegemonic group anecdotally stating what is racism and what is not – even when they are not victimized by it, but reproducing it (Schucman, 2012) the concept is depleted. This is clear in some comments where people anecdotally explained why the Trainee Program was promoting racism.

Previous researchers have questioned how significant the role of diversity Programs on the reintegration of certain socially excluded groups is (Alves & Galeão-Silva, 2004). In this sense, some comments questioned the social inclusion promoted by the Program, even suggesting that Magazine Luiza should have other requirements in order to promote proper social inclusion, such as hiring professionals who have studied in public schools. Some comments state that, since Magazine Luiza is promoting social inclusion, Whites should be included too, since “we have many Whites, Asians, Indigenous, etc. living on the streets, and just like Blacks, occupying the prison system” (O24). It is important to note that, as Luiza Trajano said in an interview, the Trainee Program never had the intention to fix a problem of social inequality, but to increase the number of Blacks in leadership positions at the company: “[It] was not a loose initiative, and was not to change Brazil, it was to change our own reality [...]. It was not to create any social impact.” (Trajano, 2020). Although promoting social inclusion was not the intention of Magazine Luiza through the Trainee Program, it is important to note that companies are mechanisms to modify society, where race matters should be taken into consideration in its processes and policies (Alves & Galeão-Silva, 2004; Ray, 2019).

4.1.2 *Questions the company's intentions*

The second minor categorization with more comments among those within the major category “Opposed to the Program” displays comments of people questioning the real intentions of the company behind the Trainee Program. Some explicitly adjective negatively the initiative, using words like “hypocrite”, “opportunism”, and “self-promotion”, such as on “I saw it as pure marketing, and a lot of people falling for it. It's just to cause a stir” (O12) and “Hypocritical way [of hiring] to get clicks, likes and trying to knock it out of the park” (O02). Other comments consider that the problem was not the Program *per se*, but how it was promoted. Although some people saw the Program as a way of getting attention from the media it is essential to point out that it is more expensive to hire and select professionals from a discriminated group than those from a general pool of candidates (Alves & Galeão-Silva, 2004). One person questioned whether the release of the Program is related to the Black Lives Matter movement, that, although it started in 2013 (Tatum, 2017), gained more visibility in 2020, after the murder of George Floyd in the United States. He commented “I totally disagree with this that, for me, is nothing more than a ‘MEDIA ACTION’ by Magalu [...] I see this as pure opportunism, launched when the whole world has been talking about an anti-racist movement [...]” (O08).

Probably no research would be able to disclaim the real intentions of the company behind the creation of the Trainee Program. Either way, Magazine Luiza is committed to continue the Trainee Program as being exclusive for Black professionals, since the hiring process was launched again in 2021 in the same terms. As Luiza Trajano said (2020), “our Program has to be perfect, because the world... Brazil is watching it”.

4.2 In favor of the Program

Concerning those in favor of the initiative we have identified that this group is composed by 58 people that generated 80 comments on the LinkedIn's post. The sociodemographic profile of this group is slightly balanced between men (56.9%) and women (43.10%). In the age profile, 75.86% were between 20 and 34 years old, which may explain the founding that half of the people were working as analysts. On an education level, the majority attended College (51.72%) or Graduate School (31%). It is curious to note that there was only one Businessperson and three professionals in Higher Management positions advocating for the Program in this group in our sample.

This category was broken into four minor categories that have emerged from the data: (i) Understands a historical and societal racism; (ii) Sees an unfair competition; (iii) The Program is a reference for change; and (iv) Responding to negative comments. For research purposes we further analyze the comments of the two categorizations that had the most comments, "Understands a historical and societal racism" (34 comments), and "Sees an unfair competition" (32 comments) (see Table 1).

4.2.1 *Understands a historical and societal racism*

Having a racist society is expected in a country with a history of slavery (Ribeiro, 2016; Almeida, 2019), and some commenters used this lengthy episode of Brazil's history to justify their support to the Program, as a "historical reparation". It is notable the number of comments explaining how racism is a consequence of slavery, and how the lives of Blacks evolve throughout time until the present, e.g. "I think that a lot of people still don't understand that despite the abolition of slavery, the side effects of these more than 300 years of slavery are highly alive in our society!" (F50). Also, there were comments illustrating situations where Blacks can face racism in Brazil, such as "Racial discrimination exists and is often manifested in a veiled way, either with security following a Black person in the Duty-Free Shop or the director of a company that does not hire Black people [...]." (F07). Here, it is important to remember that racism does not need an action of a conscious order to exist, and that is why it is present in our routine, our relationships, and in individual truths, of which they are an imperceptibly part (Almeida, 2019).

One of the consequences of slavery is the structural racism (Almeida, 2019), which was conceptualized, even not explicitly, by some people in their comments. As the following excerpt from one of the comments, asking "Are Whites killed for being White?" (F25). The comments regarding structural racism – where most part were made answering to those opposed to the Program, in an instructive way –, are important to clarify that what brought Black people to the situation where they find themselves in was their racial condition, not their individual choices (Almeida, 2019). When we ignore the social inequalities in Brazil, imposed by the history of slavery and, consequently, the structural racism, we reinforce a meritocratic and neoliberal speech, where everyone can reach higher professional and social positions (Littler, 2017). The neoliberalism in some comments is also presented when the Program is (negatively) related to social inclusion (Gidley et al., 2010) as observed in the previous category.

4.2.2 *Sees an unfair competition*

Trainee Programs focused on a diverse group are important to introduce minorities in a business context. Nowadays it is still possible to hear discourses attesting that Black individuals are not suitable for high-level intellectual work, such as doctors and judges, which builds an image of subordination in this population as a social group, since "racism, as a political and

historical process, is also a process to create subjectivities of individuals whose conscience and affections are somehow connected with social practices” (Almeida, 2019).

Previous research has shown that there is a direct relation between education and employment rate (OECD, 2012). Therefore, it is expected that the lack of employment Black professionals face in the job market could be explained by the discrepancy that starts in the basic education and is carried through the undergraduation level (IBGE, 2018; 2019). Some people approached this social scenario to explain their support to the Program, where they could link the deficiencies on education system in Brazil to lower opportunities in the job market, e.g. “go back 10, 20, 30 years and tell me: who used to sit at universities? Who did exchange/language courses? Who was in the best private schools? Who had the money to pay for preparatory courses? Don't answer social class, answer SKIN COLOR” (F10). This relation makes sense, since the population from a minority group are set aside of opportunities of education and qualification, ending up as less qualified for certain positions – usually the higher positions (Alves & Galeão-Silva, 2004; Osorio, 2009).

In this minor category is possible to find comments regarding the observation of the dynamics where social problems are found, which must encompass racial relations, as these influence the exercise of power and the reproduction of culture in social contexts, including organizations (Almeida, 2019; Conceição, 2009). We identified some people bringing their racial identity into their positioning about the Program, and we have identified both Blacks and Whites bringing their identities to talk about White privilege. For example, indications of racial identity when they said things such as “As a blonde woman with blue eyes, parents present, homeowner, top private education, totally privileged, I know on my routine the advantage I have.” (F46), or “Don't come to witness what you don't know and have never been through for being ten times better and losing the job to a White person” (F01).

Final Considerations

On this paper we aimed to understand the public's reaction to the Trainee Program exclusive for Black people launched by Magazine Luiza in 2020. To support our research, we analyzed 133 comments on the company's post on LinkedIn and carried out a content analysis *a posteriori* (Bardin, 2011).

The comments that are part of the minor categories “Perceives company as promoting racism and exclusion” and “Questions the company's intentions” were based on personal opinions, bias and (why not?) racism. Throughout the comments interaction some people tried to explain in their own words why the initiative was considered racism, and why it promotes exclusion within society. It is important to clarify that in a substantial part of the comments when people conceptualized racism this was done mistakenly, which highlights the importance of having a racial discussion and literacy in the Brazilian society.

Nowadays the myth of racial democracy is still so strong that it can make people disbelief that Blacks face marginalization and exclusion, and therefore suffer a different social and political reality than Whites (Costa Vargas, 2004). If we consider that this group was composed mostly by well formal educated men in privileged job positions, it makes necessary to include racial literacy sections not only on basic education, but further, on Undergraduate and Graduate degrees in a variety of fields. Findings in this major category also makes us concerned about the power dynamics and behavior at work, since these people are most likely hiring and promoting employees, making decisions, and dealing with individuals in a business scenario inserted in a country with a majority of Blacks.

Although there is specifically the minor category “Expresses the valorization of merit”, in which meritocracy appears explicitly in the comments, we identified that the meritocratic discourse appears indirectly in most of the comments against the Program. Accompanying this

idea colorblindness comments are recurring, and the argument regarding the so-called “reverse racism”, where one wants people to be treated the same regardless of the color of their skin, “[...] be them white, pink, yellow, black [...]”, as one comment said.

In response, commenters of the minor categories “Sees an unfair competition” and “Understands a historical and societal racism” responded with historical, demographic, economic and societal facts and data, in more extensive and elaborated comments in comparison of those written negatively criticizing the Program. It is notable that people who were opposed to the Program used more ironic words than those in favor of the initiative, as well as people who defend the Trainee Program were trying to educate others in the post with concepts and examples.

The finding that people in favor of the Program were younger than those opposed to the initiative brings up the supposition that it was due to the probable contact with a more diverse group in universities after the approval of the Racial Quota Law, in 2012. In other words, maybe the interaction with people from a different race, class and social reality on a regular basis has brought different points of view about life and society in comparison to those who are older and attended university on a time when this was a White space.

It is concerning the veiled racism in some comments. The gravity of the racist discourses lies in the fact that they easily reach the category of common sense. Conversely, it was a relief to find, among the comments, people able to rightly explain what racism really is, as “the discourse as a racist practice provides a set of ideas considered rational to explain racial inequality, helping to continue racism” (Almeida, 2019, p. 49).

This research can help us to understand some of the reasons why some people are against Programs that seek to repair structural inequalities. The myth of racial democracy, where race doesn’t play an important part in the daily lives of all Brazilian (Costa Vargas, 2004), and consequently everyone has the same opportunities, chances, and conditions to attain success, regardless of race, jointly with the idea that the labor market and organizations are neutral (Ray, 2019) make it difficult to see the existence of racial injustices. For a further understanding, future studies could examine the public’s reactions when the company launched the Program in the following year, since it is interesting in a Case Study to reconduct the research to find if there were changes due to temporal aspects (Yin, 2009). Also, interviews could be conducted, where participants declare their race, age, salary range, and other sociodemographic aspects, to identify if the opinions regarding the Program differ among different profiles, and whether the support for such Programs are generational or not.

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