

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES IN THE PORTRAIT INTERVIEW SHOWS ON THE TVR CULTURAL CHANNEL

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Résumé : *La chaîne culturelle de la Télévision Publique Roumaine, avec un profil unique dans le paysage médiatique roumain, a repris son activité en 2022, après 10 ans d'interruption, représentant la promesse du service public de télévision de promouvoir les valeurs culturelles et d'élargir l'horizon de connaissance du public. Cette chaîne se donne pour mission de présenter des formats variés, avec des thématiques issues de tous les domaines culturels, assumant le rôle d'amener des personnalités marquantes dans l'espace médiatique et de créer un lien entre les personnalités culturelles et le public.*

De par sa vision, ses thèmes et ses valeurs, la chaîne culturelle de la TVR peut être incluse dans les caractéristiques d'une « télévision de qualité » (McCabe & Akass, 2007). Les recherches indiquent une tendance croissante à affirmer la qualité de la télévision à travers le prisme de la « critique évaluative », marquant ainsi une association entre qualité et valeur et développant des critères de qualité spécifiques (Cardwell, 2007). Aborder de multiples aspects liés à la structure, aux caractéristiques stylistiques, à l'expressivité, au style visuel innovant ou à la sélectivité est le résultat d'une interprétation interconnectée, garantissant ainsi une compréhension approfondie du concept (Jost, 2013).

Parmi le large éventail d'émissions de la chaîne culturelle, nous nous concentrons sur trois émissions d'interviews de type portrait – « Ediție Limitată » (« Édition limitée »), « Portret de excelență » (« Portrait d'excellence ») et « Interviurile TVR Cultural » (« Les Interviews de la TVR Culturelle ») – où les caractéristiques de qualité se renforcent à travers la construction des identités médiatiques et discursives (Charaudeau, 2006 ; Chabrol, 2006 ; Lochard, 2002) des protagonistes, qualifiés de « figures marquantes du monde international des lettres » (dans le cas de l'émission « Édition limitée »), de « modèles pour ceux qui débutent dans le monde des arts » (dans les « Interviews culturelles de la TVR ») et de « valeurs authentiques » (dans « Portrait d'excellence »).

Nous avons sélectionné 15 éditions parmi les émissions de 2023, afin d'analyser, à partir du modèle socio-communicationnel de l'école française d'analyse du discours (Charaudeau, 2006 ; Lochard, 2002), les constructions identitaires des personnalités participant aux émissions, dans une dynamique interactionnelle configurée dans le dispositif médiatique.

Mots-clés : identités médiatiques et discursives, stratégies discursives, dynamiques interactionnelles, télévision de qualité.

1. Introduction

Current research proposes a complex and varied set of criteria through which “quality television” can be defined: themes and programme structure (Cardwell, 2007: 26-28), stylistic diversity (Lasagni et al., 1995: 147), authenticity and artistic status (Schlütz, 2016: 102-104). However, these criteria cannot be questioned without referring to the current dynamics of the media in which television broadcasters are feeling the economic pressure and the desire to include techniques of attracting the audience, most often leaving production quality in second position.

Nevertheless, public service television claims a high quality of programming as well as “the right and moral obligation to offer this quality to the public” (Neveu, 2015: 365). Quality, viewed as “public television’s remedy to commercial television’s shortcomings”, defines public service television programs as examples that aim to educate and culturalized people (Jost, 2013: 286-288). The quality evaluation criteria with which public television identifies itself refer, among others, to the respect by television of its mission to the public and ethical values, the inclusion of genres that legitimize quality, original expression of creation, but also the valorisation of discursive style (ibidem: 292-301). Quality is also assumed by public television through well-established roles: to serve the public interest (Moe, 2011) and to inform correctly by producing independent and well-documented journalism (Foster, 2018).

In this exploratory study we aim to analyse how the concepts of three portrait-interview shows — the “Limited Edition”, “Portrait of Excellence” and the “TVR Cultural Interviews” — that bring to the attention of the viewers cultural dialogues with personalities from this country and from abroad -, and the discursive practices within their dispositives allow a deeper understanding of the Romanian Public Television’s relation to the concept of quality, through its Cultural Channel.

2. Theoretical framework. Quality television programs

Public television legitimises its status as “quality TV” through the distinctiveness of its productions, genres and media formats. In order to understand why these elements are indicators of quality, it is necessary to reflect on the meaning of TV genres and formats.

Basically, it is the genre of a program that “classifies” it and places it in the distinctive criteria (Chandler, 1997). Approaches to television genres involve aesthetic, ritualistic and ideological perspectives that create a “system of conventions that permits artistic expression” (Feuer, 1992: 145), the interaction between the media industry and the audience, and, finally, genre can also be determined by the dominant ideology in a society (idem). Television studies define genre by a “repertoire of elements” that includes: narrative, iconography, style, setting, and distinctive features (Lacey, 2000: 133). Genre is also determined by institutional issues and the link to production models and type of media institution (Neale, 2024: 6). When analysing a television programme, it is essential to consider not only the genre but also the format that defines it. Recent research conceptualises television formats as: licensed remake, proof of concept and production method (Chalaby 2015); recipe (Moran & Malbon, 2006: 20); process of replication, adaptation and marketing (Bourdon, 2013: 122). The format participates directly in the construction of television “authority” (Chambat-Houillon, 2009: 252). Although the format is categorized as a

“reproducible product” (Jost, 2013: 299) that has the distinct character of multiplying the media dispositive (Ominetti, 2014), in some situations, such as public television, the format brings an “implicit renewal” of creation (Chambat-Houillon, 2009: 245). Creativity and originality are especially highlighted in TV formats that propose cultural and artistic themes. Through their distinct characteristics, genre and format highlight their crucial role in defining and maintaining the quality of audiovisual productions.

The analysis of quality indicators and criteria should be seen in close connection with aspects that can enhance the creativity and originality of television programmes, such as discursive practices within the dispositives of programmes and discursive constructions of identities, roles and statuses assigned to participants in broadcasts. According to linguist Patrick Charaudeau (2006), a person’s identity is constructed both socially and discursively, namely through speech acts attributed to discursive strategies. Thus, the speaker individuates and projects a certain image of the self.

3. Research methodology

This research aims to analyse the construction of discursive identities of the participants in three shows of TVR Cultural broadcaster. The analysis is situated in the context of the development of the channel’s cultural legitimization strategy by promoting legitimate culture, educational objectives and setting the criteria for inclusion in quality television through the discursive identity approach in portrait-type interview shows.

The questions underlying the current study are: Q1: How are the discursive identities of the participants in the three shows of the TVR Cultural Channel constructed within the dynamics of interaction with the moderators?; Q2: What types of strategies and discourses underpin the identity constructions in the dispositive of the shows?; Q3: How is the discursive construction of the identities of the participants in the shows integrated into the strategic project of cultural legitimization of the channel?.

For the methodological framework, we chose to apply the socio-communicative model of discourse analysis defined by the representatives of the French School (Charaudeau, 2006; Lochard, 2002). The construction of identities cannot be achieved outside a media dispositive that governs the dynamics of interaction between participants. Therefore, the second research method used is the dispositive analysis (Charaudeau & Ghiglione, 2005; Lochard, 2000; 2002).

Based on the “principle of otherness”, the construction of discursive identity involves a double process of recognition of the individuality of the other (Charaudeau, 2009: 27) through the manifestation of social attributes, but also through speech acts inscribed in the dispositive of each show. Therefore, between the journalist and the guest in the show there is a reciprocal asymmetrical process of captation, in which the “framing of intentionality” takes precedence (Charaudeau, 2006: 347). The relevance of identity research also comes from the attributes of television to substantiate the presentation of identities within a continuous, evolutionary and fluid process (Lochard, 2002:156) in order to inscribe social and identity configurations in creative and attractive ways.

The identity of the guests in a TV show is the result of a complex mechanism of construction through the composite of social identity, media identity and discursive identity. According to Patrick Charaudeau (2006: 342), the construction of identity through discourse is the result of the fusion of social identity attributes with traits developed through speech acts. From Guy Lochard’s perspective (2002), media identity is entirely

determined by the dispositive of the TV programme. In the discursive construction of identities, the first level of analysis is social identity. This refers to a set of identity attributes such as profession, religion, function, etc. (Lochard, 2002: 149-150). The specific social characteristics of the speaker give legitimacy and recognition of position, both in society and within the discourse. Since we are talking about a media dispositive within which discourse takes place, the next step of analysis is media identity. This involves, according to Lochard, two essential parameters that are interdependent: media status and the communicative role (Lochard, 2002: 151). Media status refers to the positions assigned by the dispositive to both journalists and guests in the shows. On the other hand, the communicative role guides the communicative activities that each individual has to perform in the TV programme. “The media identity projected by the dispositive over-regulates the social identity” and participants assume media identities through “strategies of conformity, explicit or tacit ‘resistance’ or through strategies of ‘cooperation’ and accordance with the dispositive” (Beciu & Lazăr, 2015: 41). The last level of analysis is represented by discursive identity, which from Charaudeau’s (2009) perspective corresponds to the way in which the speaking subject “defends his/her self-image”, namely his/her ethos, and manifests his/her dual intention of “captation” and “credibility”. The framework governing the construction of identities is the situation of communication. Within this situation, the discursive strategies that determine identity construction are defined by legitimation, credibility and captation (idem). “The strategy of legitimisation consists especially in recalling or reinforcing a position of authority” of the speaking subject that “comes with a ‘self-justification’ discourse” (Charaudeau, 2002: 18). The credibility strategy brings the subject to the situation of being believed (“being of conviction”), through the truth of what he/she says, through sincerity. “The stake of credibility is expressed by a discourse of authentication of the facts, mostly based on testimonies” (Charaudeau, 2002: 19). As for the strategy of captation, the subject, relying on beliefs, uses it to impress, to share his/her values and emotions with the interlocutor (Charaudeau, 2002: 20).

Based on the two research methods, we developed a grid for the analysis of identity constructions that combines the characteristics of the contract of communication and the media dispositive (Figure 1). The contract is the governing element of speech acts and involves “constraints for the communicating subject” while for the interpreter it acts according to a reference mechanism (Charaudeau, 1998). Within the contract of communication (Charaudeau, 2009), we analysed the purpose of the show, the identity of the partners in the dialogue, the themes treated and the physical space for the dialogue to take place. The media dispositive was examined through verbal and visual staging (Charaudeau & Ghiglione, 2005). In the verbal staging category, we included the discursive behaviour of the protagonists, the management of verbal exchange, media status, media identities and discursive identities. We also analysed the way in which the principle of cooperation or non-cooperation in identity constructions assumed by the participants of the show unfolds. For the visual staging, we took into account the perspectives of the visual axes used in the broadcasts and the focus effect. Both the implementation of verbal and visual components contributes to a deeper understanding of public television strategies of constructing discursive identities within the dispositives of the shows.

The communication contract				
the purpose	the identity of partners in the dialogue	the theme	the physical space for the dialogue to take place	
			studio	outside
The dispositive				
the verbal staging		the visual staging		
verbal exchanges management	discursive behaviours of the protagonists	axes of vision or points of view		
media statuses of the participants (professional protagonists and their guests)	discursive strategies	frontal vision	accompanying vision	overview
media identities assigned to participants	discursive identities	focusing effect		
identity investments and reinvestments through the principles of cooperation and non-cooperation		eye to eye	personalization	effect of objectification

Figure 1. The grid for analysing the identity constructions in the dispositive. A socio-communicational approach to discourse analysis according to Charaudeau, 2006; Charaudeau and Ghiglione, 2005; Lochard, 2000; 2002.

The corpus on which we applied the analysis grid includes a total of 15 editions of the shows “Limited Edition”, “Portrait of Excellence” and “TVR Cultural Interviews” produced by the Cultural Channel of the Romanian Public Television. For each show we selected 5 editions from the period when TVR Cultural Channel launched its new broadcast programming (October – December 2023). All the selected shows belong to the genre of the portrait-type television interview, a media genre that clearly highlights the construction of discursive identities.

4. Results

4.1. *The contract of education at the TVR Cultural Channel*

Romanian Public Television has well-defined roles in the media¹ landscape, fighting more than commercial television for the right of citizens to be well informed and to have access to quality, educational and diverse content². Having as its main objective of promoting the values of Romanian and universal culture, the public television offers, through the TVR Cultural Channel, a grid of programs with various genres and formats, all circumscribed to cultural themes, whether it is about *popular culture* or *high culture*.

A primary mission of this Channel is to prioritize quality through substantial and well-documented programmes, to the detriment of “the sensational or the superficial” (TVR 2022 Report: 5). Also, the Romanian Public Television aims to culturalize its audience by bringing to the viewers’ attention outstanding cultural role models and personalities “in a present doomed to pragmatism”³.

¹ <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/4122>.

² http://mediatvr.tvr.ro/media-tvr/other/201911/rof-al-srtv_89130600.pdf.

³ http://www.tvr.ro/tvr-cultural-emisiuni-in-premiera_38627.html#view.

Last but not least, TVR Cultural Channel endeavours to “connect cultural personalities with the general public”⁴. Through its programmes, the Channel acts as a cultural mediator, offering culture consumers cultural content in the form of its own productions or broadcasting exceptional cultural events (TVR 2023 Report: 36).

The formats and concepts of the shows proposed by TVR Cultural Channel meet these objectives. The formats of the “Limited Edition”, “Portrait of Excellence” and the “TVR Cultural Interviews” shows consist of a dialogue between the moderator and a guest. These formats contribute to the construction of a television “authority”, by building the “figure of an author around the moderator” (Chambat-Houillon, 2009: 249-250).

In the “Portrait of Excellence” and the “TVR Cultural Interviews” shows, the guest is a notable personality in various cultural fields in Romania: music, acting, ballet, literature, etc. In the “Limited Edition” show, the format expands the boundary of cultural values by including interviews with international personalities such as tenor and conductor José Cura, soprano Sonya Yoncheva, writer Celeste Ng, etc. The interviews are complemented, in this format, by archive sequences of the artistic performances in which these guests evolved.

By materialising the formats in an original way, the concepts of the shows give them a distinctive character. These concepts aim to bring consistency and diversity of content, and support “the role of public television as the most important broadcaster of premium audio-video cultural content on the Romanian media market”⁵.

The concept of the show “Limited Edition” proposes meetings with “significant figures from various creative fields”⁶. The concept of the “Portraits of Excellence” show revolves around “collection interviews” with people from various fields of activity who represent “true benchmarks and authentic values”⁷ in an attempt to combat the “uniformity and superficiality of identities”. The third show in the analysis corpus, “TVR Cultural Interviews”, introduces a concept through which viewers discover “the world of artists who can be models for those just starting out in the arts”⁸. Both the formats and the concepts of the analysed programmes focus on highlighting quality productions, which inspire and educate the public by offering model identities, identities that start from the social attributes of the guests and continue with those discursively developed during studio interactions.

Our analysis starts with circumscribing the contracts of communication in these shows through their components: purpose, topics, the identity of the participants in the dialogue and the physical space in which the discursive exchange takes place. In the established communication situation, discourses are strategically centred on producing knowledge and educating the public (in the shows “Limited Edition” and “TVR Cultural Interviews”), and on promoting role models who embody excellence in the cultural world (in the show “Portrait of Excellence”). Topics such as the discovery of talent, the evolution of a career, sources of inspiration, professional and personal affirmation, trends in the evolution of classical music, the cultivation of musical and artistic heritage, the influence of classical literature on contemporary writing, the contribution of classical composers to contemporary opera music, etc. are addressed in these programs. The guests

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ *Idem.*

⁶ http://www.tvr.ro/editie-limitata_40383.html.

⁷ http://cultural.tvr.ro/emisiuni/portret-de-excelen--a_43263.html.

⁸ http://cultural.tvr.ro/emisiuni/interviurile-tvr-cultural_44478.html.

are primarily noted for their professional social identities: soprano, conductor, tenor, actor, writer, journalist, doctor, lawyer, first ballerina, etc.



Figure 2. Text-based display specifying the social identity of the guest in “Limited Edition” (December 15, 2023)

At the discursive level, the guests’ identities are (re)constructed in an interaction space circumscribed thematically to the show’s concept.

The “Limited Edition” and “TVR Cultural Interviews” programs are filmed in the institutions where the interviewed artists work: the Odeon Theatre, the Bucharest National Theatre, the Romanian Athenaeum or the Romanian National Opera. Through this setting outside the studio, consistent with the topic addressed, the TVR Cultural Channel values the contract of “realism” that it proposes to its audience.

Moderator: “Today we are once again at the Bucharest National Theatre (...) with the actress Ana Ciontea (...) A guest whom many important directors such as Felix Alexa, Andrei Șerban or Gelu Colceag have chosen in the casts they sign.” (“TVR Cultural Interviews”, November 18, 2023)

Moderator: “Limited Edition filmed today at the Odeon Theatre with the actress who probably identifies better than anyone else with the most recent decades of this theatre’s history, Dorina Lazăr.” (“Limited Edition”, December 23, 2023)



Figure 3. Romanian National Opera, the place of the dialogue in “TVR Cultural Interviews” (October 28, 2023)

The filming space remains unchanged in the editions of “Portrait of excellence” in which the cultural dialogues take place in the intimate and refined setting of a teahouse in Bucharest with a “*fin de siècle*” scent.



Figure 4. The place of the dialogue in “Portrait of excellence” (November 18, 2023)

Within the dispositives of the three shows, the visual staging (Charaudeau & Ghiglione, 2005: 51) is realized through the axis of the “accompanying vision” (see Figures 3 and 4), thus producing an effect of “focusing” on the guest and, implicitly, on the interactional exchange. This is a vision that personalizes the guest and, at the same time, places the moderator and guest in an “intimate relationship”.

In the opening of the shows, the moderators address the viewers directly, the “frontal vision axis” that is adopted staging the effect of contact with the viewers.

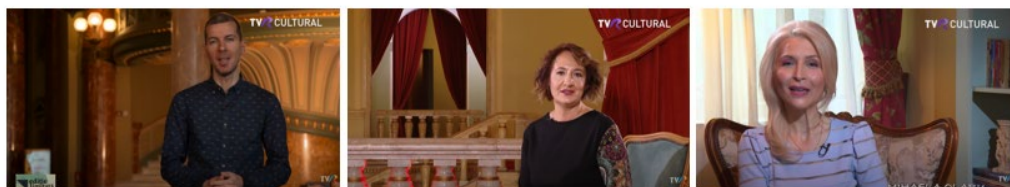


Figure 5 Frontal vision axis in “Limited Edition” (November 18, 2023), “TVR Cultural Interviews” (October 28, 2023) and “Portrait of excellence” (November 18, 2023)

4.2. The construction of discursive identities in the portrait-interview shows

The construction of discursive identities is dependent on the specificity of the media dispositive (Lochard, 2002), involving “the intervention of professional mediation processes” (Lochard, 2002: 147). The imposition of communicative roles and media statuses reinforces media identities that are in line with the discursive constraints (Charaudeau, 2002) of the dispositive.

In the case of the shows “Portrait of Excellence”, “TVR Cultural Interviews” and “Limited Edition”, the media identities consecrate statuses of competence and excellence, based on the high level of training and professional experience of the protagonists. The media status assigned by the dispositives to these personalities is one of “expert”, “authority”, “cultural mentor” due to the recognition of their expertise in the fields of knowledge and of their contribution in sharing culture with the public.

Moderator: “Tonight’s edition brings you back to the world elite of opera because my guest is one of the absolute sopranos of the moment: Sonya Yoncheva!” (“Limited Edition”, November 18, 2023)

Moderator: “The man who for many years has been the interface of the Romanian Orthodox Church, is a man who breathes among words, culture and spirituality. A genuine Christian intellectual.” (“Portrait of Excellence”, December 9, 2023)

Moderator: “He is considered one of the best specialists in neurology and psychiatry in Romania. (...) he has written numerous treatises, medical works and monographs, so that his colleagues recognize his merits and learn more about the most important organ in the body, the brain.” (“Portrait of Excellence”, December 16, 2023)

In the dispositives of the analysed shows, the moderator has total control over the ritual of the communication exchange and the discursive behaviours of the participants in the dialogue. The moderator assigns himself/herself the status of “master of ceremonies” and “host” in managing the interaction with the guests.

Moderator: “« Limited Edition », intensely musical with one of the great stars of the opera theatre! My guest is the Argentine tenor, conductor and composer Jose Cura.” (“Limited Edition”, November 11, 2023)

Moderator: “Dear viewers (...) my guest today has won numerous awards in her rich career and she is the only soloist in the world who won all the international Mozart awards in Barcelona, Vienna and Toronto. Welcome to the “Portrait of Excellence” show, Mrs. Felicia Filip!” (“Portrait of Excellence”, November 18, 2023)

Through the questions they ask, the moderators want to make the guests reveal relevant aspects of their personality, thus contributing to the construction of their complex identities.

Moderator: “What does each new role change bring to you? Like you said, it transforms you. Which role has had the biggest impact on your career?”

Cristina Dijmaru: “There are ballets where the emphasis is more on the technical side, such as Don Quijote, where the virtuosity and pirouettes are more important, and there are roles like Juliet or Manon where the actress in you has to come out more. As time goes on, I like roles like these a lot more, dramatic composition roles.” (“TVR Cultural Interviews”, October 28, 2024)

In the “Portrait of Excellence” show from November 18, 2023, the discursive behaviours of the moderator and the guest, the soprano Felicia Filip, go consonantly in the direction of building the guest’s “musical identity of a professional”, having as components the operatic performance, the work engagement, the aesthetic pleasure, the musical expertise, the vocal range, the emotions in music, the emotional connection with the audience.

Moderator: “She is a striking personality, a resounding name in music, an exceptional voice. She is a soprano whose career began in Bucharest and took place on the biggest international stages. (...) What qualities do you need to become that soprano who, as I said and which happened to you, conquered the world?”

Felicia Filip: “It’s a bunch of qualities, I like to say, a multitude of components of this notion called talent. (...) My debut in the international career was very, very successful. (...) I was then invited to sing in Frankfurt, in Toulouse. Everywhere I could say, on four continents. (...) Also, an extremely beautiful story, with a title that consecrated me, is about Violeta from Traviata, Verdi. (...) So my debut in the international career was very, very successful.”

In constructing their discursive identities, the guests in these shows rely on “strategies of credibility” applied in accordance with the principle of “cooperation” (Lochard, 2002), that is, of accepting and proving through examples their media identity pre-assessed by the moderator, as it happens in the show “Portrait of Excellence” from December 9, 2023:

Moderator: “For some years now he has been the head of the press office, being the first layman to become the spokesperson of the Romanian Patriarchate.”

Vasile Bănescu: “Not only as a priest can you serve the church and the faith. You can do it as a lay person, like you and me, because the church is not only made up of clergy.” (“Portrait of Excellence”, December 9, 2023)

Moderator: “Mr. Vasile Bănescu, you are the man who so powerfully conveys messages in the public space. Both as the spokesperson of the Romanian Patriarchate, and as the man who, every time, intervenes in the public space and says what he thinks about different situations in any area, and that is a wonderful thing.”

Vasile Bănescu: “I am glad you emphasized that because it is very important to think before we speak and it is very important to think about the message we have the honour and responsibility to send in the public space.” (“Portrait of excellence”, December 9, 2023)

By resorting to the strategy of credibility in the “interactional dynamics” (Lochard, 2002) with the moderator, the guests also strengthen their identity through a discourse of testimony, based on personal experiences that add a touch of authenticity and transparency.

Felicia Filip: “I returned home with two important prizes. I was followed by the story of Mozart, the story itself of what it means to fight back, to be victorious and to understand through what you do that, first of all, you know yourself, you have analysed yourself and you know how much you can do.” (“Portrait of Excellence”, November 18, 2023)

Jose Cura: “I’m in a privileged situation. When I conduct, I think about what I would want from the conductor if I were singing. (...) You can talk to any of the singers I’ve worked with and they will tell you that they work easily with me because I know exactly what they need and when they need it.” (“Limited Edition”, November 11, 2023)

We can emphasize that, in accordance with the concepts on which these shows are based, and with the underlying logic of their dispositive, televisual mediatization consolidates exceptional social identities by forging them into media identities of iconic figures of the cultural world, then (re)configured, within the interactional mechanism, into discursive identities that capitalize on the quality, originality and expertise of the guests.

5. Conclusion

TVR Cultural Channel’s analysed shows initiate cultural mediation and build knowledge by providing a deep insight into arts, literature, classical music, medicine, etc. “Limited Edition”, “Portrait of Excellence” and “TVR Cultural Interviews” belong to the same genre and serve an identical purpose: that of promoting legitimate culture by valuing identity models framed in the pattern of “excellence” both in life and in career. The moderators of the shows facilitate the formation of an elite self-image of each guest by

articulating the identities assigned in the media dispositive, according to the proposed concept of the show, with those configured within the discursive exchange. The identity strategy staged in these shows determines the creation of an “ideal social space” (Lochard, 2002: 156) within which the model of excellence in identity construction is configured in a coherent way. The substantiality of these programs, together with the quality of the cultural themes, reinforces the mark of authority of the public television Cultural Channel, delimiting itself from uniformity and sensationalism.

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