

**THE PERCEPTION OF THE INFLUENCE OF FILMS ON SPIRITUALITY. MOVING
TOWARDS A CULTIVATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between Christianity and films has been conflicting since the emergence of this medium. The concern that films may negatively affect spirituality has led several Christian denominations to reject films for a long time. More recently, this resistance has diminished, even in churches considered conservative. This study reveals a protestant church's perception of films in the field of spirituality. Through an online survey of 199 Brazilian Seventh-Day Adventists and the use of Cultivation Theory in interpreting the results, it was observed that in the modern Adventist perception, some films, even non-religious ones, can be considered a positive influence for spirituality.

KEYWORDS: Spirituality; Mediatization; Religion; Cultivation theory.

**A PERCEPÇÃO DA INFLUÊNCIA DOS FILMES NA ESPIRITUALIDADE.
AVANÇANDO PARA UMA PERSPECTIVA DA TEORIA DE CULTIVO**

RESUMO

A relação entre cristianismo e cinema tem sido conflitante desde o surgimento deste meio. A preocupação de que os filmes possam afetar negativamente a espiritualidade tem levado várias denominações cristãs a rejeitar os filmes, por um longo tempo. Mais recentemente, porém, esta resistência tem diminuído, mesmo em igrejas consideradas conservadoras. Este estudo revela a mudança de percepção que uma igreja protestante tem dos filmes no campo da espiritualidade. Através de uma pesquisa online com 199 Adventistas do Sétimo Dia no Brasil e o uso da Teoria do Cultivo na interpretação dos resultados, observou-se que para os adventistas modernos, alguns filmes, mesmo não-religiosos, podem ser considerados como uma influência positiva para a espiritualidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Espiritualidade; Mídiação; Religião; Teoria do cultivo.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, there has been a tension between the films and the Christian churches of various denominations (FORBES & MAHAN, 2017). While some churches see this as an opportunity to expand their beliefs, many others have warned about the risks of consumption. For some Christian denominations, films are considered entertainment and therefore interpreted as something dangerous and a threat to spirituality. Besides, there is a fear that the time used in this type of activity and the influence exerted by the content watched may motivate a series of negative behaviors and become a substitute for religion (ELLIS, 2019).

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The focus of this study is Seventh-day Adventists, a church that has strong conservative characteristics and historically has raised concerns about the use of fiction. The relationship of the Adventist church with this type of content has been conflictual since the print media period. It has extended to the emergence of visual media, such as film and television. (ELLIS, 2019). However, new forms of media and frequent exposure to movies have influenced modern Adventists' changing understanding of media's relationship to spirituality (ELLIS, 2019).

This study contributes to the understanding that some media experiences can provoke spiritual responses in the spectators. The article is divided into four main parts: the first presents a brief description of the conflicting relationship between Adventism and films, the difference between religiosity and spirituality constructs, and the Cultivation Theory as a basis for analyzing the Adventist phenomenon; in the second part, is described the methods and metrics used to measure the perception of spirituality in films; in the third part, the statistical results are demonstrated; and in the fourth and final part, the data are analyzed and discussed.

ADVENTISM, FILM AND SPIRITUALITY

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's origins derive directly from William Miller's doctrinal movement between the 1830s and 1840s in the United States. This movement preached the second coming of Jesus Christ and believed it would occur in 1844. However, with the disappointment of this expectation, the Millerite movement dispersed, giving rise to several religious groups, among these, the Seventh-day Adventist Church (BRATOSIN, 2020; FOLLIS, 2014). Actually, the Adventists represent a religious organization with 21 million members distributed in 212 countries. Their participation in the public sphere has been through religious temples, schools, hospitals, healthy food industries, publishing houses, aid agencies, and media centers (WORLD CHURCH STATISTICS, 2020).

The Adventist church originated when the Puritan culture was very adopted; consequently, the Adventism inherited a firm rejection of entertainment and popular culture. Ellis (2019) describes that historically in Adventist literature, there is considerable attention to the adverse effects of films. She explains that the main fear of Adventists regarding films is related to their negative effect on spirituality. Analyzing the relationship between Adventists and film consumption from the Uses and Gratification theory perspective, she found that traditional communication theories were not enough to explain exactly the motivations of this group and suggests that the primary motivation of Adventists could be called "spiritual".

The study of conflicts and tensions between Adventists and films has considerable academic exploration (WHITE, 1963; DOUKHAN, 2013; NELSON, 2017). This subject is

usually explored from the literature written by Ellen Gould White (EGW), pioneer of Adventism. Ellen White did not write specifically about films, but what she wrote about theatre and drama is often applied to films, cinema, and other audiovisual products.

Ellis (2019) notes that the conflict between audiovisual fiction and Adventism has had several moments recorded throughout history in major Adventist periodicals such as the *Adventist Review*. From 1888-1914 several articles were written about the risks of dramatization and live theater. From 1915-1924, in the early days of cinema, arguments against theatrical fiction evolved into the first films. From 1925-1949, with the expansion of movie theaters, Adventists, in unison with other Catholic and Protestant entities, became more rigid in their criticism of Hollywood productions. The years 1950-1989 represented the beginning of a period of transition with the arrival of television sets and videocassettes in homes. Thus, Adventists established recommendations on the consumption of audiovisual productions. From 1990 onwards, with the arrival of digital media, including online films and videos, a change of perspective occurred, and resistance to audiovisual fiction was reduced.

For Kanyat (2017), in the last decade there has been an awakening to film production in Adventism. With the advent of digital media, the conflict between Adventism and audiovisual fiction was expected to continue. However, there was an apparent change in the official attitude of the church regarding consumption and film production during this era. The Adventists saw in this new medium an opportunity to establish links with non-Adventist audiences (NOVAES, 2019).

The Adventist acceptance of the use of films has moved from one point of rejection to the other extreme of acceptance and use. Consequently, it is essential to understand whether modern Adventists perceive films only as a form of entertainment or whether they admit a possible positive relationship between films and spirituality.

RELIGIOSITY, SPIRITUALITY AND FILMS

Recently researchers have recognized that entertainment media have a significant relationship with religiosity and spirituality.

Hjarvard and Lövheim (2012) have observed the growing phenomenon of the mediatization of religion in the Nordic countries. These authors suggest that the media have taken over cultural and social functions previously performed only by institutional religions. Consequently, the films are altering religious expressions and beliefs by transforming them into 'banal religion' and eventually contributing to society's secularization.

Megan (2020) investigated how the modern media presents religion to American children, particularly on special holidays like Christmas. The study revealed that deeper representations of Christianity are being replaced by more commercial, generalized, and secularized versions. These findings illuminate the potential of media to influence children's perceptions of religion.

Tudor (2021) analyzes the relationship between media, religion, and secularism. Observing the audience reaction to the film *Hacksaw Ridge*, the author concludes that in secularized countries such as France, with intellectual roots in the Enlightenment and French Revolution, films with religious bias can be rejected by a significant part of society.

For this study, it is essential to understand the difference between spirituality and religiosity to understand Adventists' perception of the influence of films. Religiosity and Spirituality are complex constructs that describe people's fundamental beliefs about existence that form attitudes and behavior across many different cultures (BAUMSTEIGER & CHENNEVILLE, 2015). Although spirituality and religiosity are closely related, definitions differ and can be considered two separate constructs. Even there is some overlap in the definitions, studies suggest that religious leaders and lay people consider religiosity to be rule-based beliefs associated with the organized practice, while spirituality is more personal, internal, and independent of community relationships (AUSTIN, MACDONALD & MACLEOD, 2018).

Spirituality is a multidimensional construct that includes the search for meaning, the experience of that which is transcendent, a deep sense of belonging, of wholeness, of connectedness, an awareness of the interconnectedness of things, subjective wellbeing, and paranormal beliefs among others (JANICKE & RAMASUBRAMANIAN, 2017).

The theme of spirituality has been observed more and more in films. For Lindval (2005), the boundaries between theology and cinema are gradually disappearing. The author considers this to occur from two opposing sides: (1) films are being increasingly used by religious institutions as an application of the hermeneutical method in the interpretative task of making biblical themes understood, and (2) films are being used by the film industry as a tool to build visions of religious reality, impacting the spirituality of viewers through these images.

Cawkwell (2004) investigated films produced in several countries and found a variety of different underlying narratives on the theme that reflect the core ideas of Christianity, such as salvation, martyrdom, and redemption. Within a more positive vision, the author has developed a Christian filmmaker's guide that clarifies how spiritual messages in cinema, present in various films, can illuminate biblical truths.

Brown (2013) states that there is great potential for the use of films as a promotion of values and beliefs that stimulate intellectual and spiritual growth. He also affirms an existence of a parasocial relationship with spiritual characters, and the spiritual uses and gratifications audiences seek from dramatic programming containing spiritual content.

CULTIVATION THEORY

Many theories may be relevant in attempting to analyze Adventists' perception of films and spirituality. For example, Bratosin (2020) analyzes Adventism's relationship with media through Hjarvard and Lövheim's (2012) Mediatization and Religion theory, in which the media acts as an agent of social change that shapes society's religious perceptions. Novaes (2016, 2019) uses Richard Niebuhr's typology in the classic book *Christ and Culture* to investigate the historical evolution of Adventist thought on the use of television and digital media. Ellis (2019) employs Elihu Katz's Uses and Gratifications theory exploring the motivations that lead Adventists to consume modern media.

For the purposes of this study will be used Gerbner's (1970) Cultivation Theory. The use of this theory could be relevant due to the Adventists' characteristics as "a Christian people-group who have sought in some ways to keep themselves distanced from the general culture's perspective and world view" (ELLIS, 2019, p. 37).

George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (GERBNER, 1970) suggests that media consumption over time can alter individual beliefs about the world (perceptions of social reality) and the feelings connected to those beliefs. For Cultivation Theory, when people make judgments about the world around them, they rely on the smallest bits of information that come to mind most quickly. "These bits of information are formed by what the person consumes in the media over time, and that is cemented in their thoughts" (GRIFFIN, 2019, p. 360).

Cultivation Theory analyzes the phenomenon of communication from three cultural indicators: the institutional process, the message system, and cultivation (GRIFFIN, 2019). The institutional process analysis tries to find explanations from the analysis of the interests of those who disseminate the message. For example, violent content often shown in films may be motivated by film studios' interest in attracting global audiences at a lower cost and higher profit.

In the message system, the explanation for the perception of social reality is found within the analysis of the message itself. Before one can examine how particular messages might affect perceptions of social reality, however, it is essential to know what those messages contain (GRIFFIN, 2019, p. 318).

In the cultivation analysis indicator, the longer a person submits to media, the higher the influence on their world perception. Therefore, the time-varying is essential for Cultivation Theory. For the media to generate effects, a prolonged exposure process involving blurring, blending, and bending of attitudes is necessary (GRIFFIN, 2019, p. 361).

Cultivation analysis indicates that the media can influence both individuals (resonance) and groups of people (mainstreaming). Mainstreaming is the homogenization of viewers' perceptions about reality, which refers to the cultivation of shared meaning among people (MORGAN & SHANAHAN, 2010). Resonance, therefore, is when the viewer perceives his real-life being represented precisely by the media. In such cases, these viewers are especially susceptible to the media cultivating power (GRIFFIN, 2019, p. 362).

Although it is one of the most widely used theoretical models to explain the communication phenomenon, Cultivation Theory is significantly criticized for some limitations. Some critics consider Cultivation Theory naïve or very simplistic when trying to explain the perception of social reality from the media factor alone (POTTER, 2019; GRIFFIN, 2019). In his theory, Gerbner (1970) concluded that the violence displayed on television is mainly responsible for people staying longer inside their homes. However, critics argue that there are social realities in the world that are not generated by the media. People who live in real communities at risk may spend more time watching TV for fear of going out and becoming victims and not the other way around. For Gerbner, et al. (1986, p. 13), “the effects of a pervasive medium upon the composition and structure of the symbolic environment are subtle, sophisticated, and intermingled with other influences.”

Another criticism of Cultivation Theory is the fact that the current media landscape has been greatly altered by the variety of options to which people are exposed nowadays. This makes it impossible for the same media to have the power to generate the same perception of reality and meaning from images in different and dispersed groups. Consequently, this invalidates the concept of mainstreaming and requires that the theory be adapted to continue making sense in the new digital age (GRIFFIN, 2019; HERNANDEZ, 2012; POTTER 2019).

Although it was initially oriented to the effects of television, Cultivation Theory has survived the criticism and several studies have been conducted to analyze other forms of media such as films and games.

Dmitri (2006) experimented with the presence of cultivation effects in participants of online games and, after a month of experiments, concluded that they changed their perceptions of real-world dangers. However, these dangers only corresponded to events and situations found in the game world, not other real-world crimes. Similarly, Hernandez (2012) analyzed college

student attitudes about the dating process following exposure to romantic films. He concluded that female students, as opposed to their male counterpart are inclined to be more romantic and view romantic films more frequently.

For Morgan et al. (2015), Cultivation Theory is still relevant, although methodological modifications are needed to interpret the dynamic environment of digital media. However, these new media continue to use narratives, and since narratives affect us, Cultivation Theory remains relevant.

According to Cultivation Theory, the stories that are presented repeatedly can influence the perception of social reality. This indicates that Cultivation Theory can be a useful lens to investigate whether the frequency with which some themes appear in films has been able to alter viewer attitudes and beliefs about issues such as gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, political preferences, and even spirituality (HERNANDEZ, 2012).

In the specific case of spiritually-themed films, Cultivation Theory can be helpful in elucidating the growing interest of religions in producing films, as well as investigating the frequency of underlying spiritual and moral themes in the message system in various genres of films, and the possible effect of this on viewers' perception of spirituality.

CULTIVATION THEORY AND ADVENTIST SPIRITUALITY

Although Adventists' resistance to films is diminishing with time, concern about the effect of this media on spirituality is still present (NOVAES, 2016; ELLIS, 2019).

Ellis (2019) argues that if the high consumption of media over time affects the perception of social reality, as the Cultivation Theory states, Seventh-day Adventists may be right to worry about the loss of their distinctive characteristics if they become too much exposed to mass media messages (p. 163).

Adventists' analysis of the message system produced by the media industry leads them to conclude that exposure to specific content can affect spirituality positively or negatively, and consequently generate a disinterest in spiritual matters (NOVAES, 2019).

Adventists also criticize the excessive control and intentions of the media industry (the institutional process analysis) and believe that prolonged and frequent exposure to media content can affect spirituality. Mark Finley, a prominent Adventist evangelist, states that children today have spent more time watching television than attending school, Hollywood is shaping an entire generation's with negative values. "Secular, materialistic values that exalt physical beauty above character, make a god out of money, reward dishonesty, and glorify

premarital and extramarital affairs are molding the minds of most of America's youth” (FINLEY, 1991, p. 9).

The Adventist perspective on media influence also makes room for the concept of resonance when it argues that "beholding that we become changed." It means that the effect of cultivation occurs when the frequent examples displayed by the media affect the perception of spiritual reality. For Adventists, the concept of resonance can be viewed positively or negatively. It is positive when media presents a spiritual theme that resembles the viewer's experience and motivates him to reinforce his spiritual development. It is negative when the film presents a spiritual perception that is opposite to that of the Adventist belief, and which may influence him to think differently or put in doubt his convictions (WHITE, 1957)

The concept of mainstreaming, stating that the same message can be used to influence the behavior of several distinct groups of people, is also perceived as an Adventist concern. This religious group has a distinct set of beliefs and consider that they need to differentiate themselves from the worldview and culture of society at large to be more Christlike (ELLIS, 2019 p. 163).

Although several studies (ELLIS, 2019; NOVAES, 2016; KANYAT, 2017; NASCIMENTO, 2017) have begun to map current Adventist views in media influence, many areas remain to be studied. This research will focus on exploring if Adventists perceive a relationship between films and spirituality. Specifically, in this study the hypotheses to be tested are: Hypothesis 1: Adventists perceive that there is a relationship between film and spirituality. Hypothesis 2: Adventist-created films are rated as higher in spirituality than other films. Hypothesis 3: Non-religious films are perceived as having a non-spiritual content. Hypothesis 4: Films (Adventist-created or not) that portray Adventists are perceived as more spiritual.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs both quantitative (Likert-type scales) and qualitative methods (content analysis of thought listing) to gain a detailed insight into the dimension of perception of spirituality in media experiences.

In the quantitative method, the researcher used an online survey to measure and observe the phenomenon of communication through frequencies, degrees, and intensity. However, quantitative research can focus exclusively on micro-elements of the phenomena and not capture the complexity or depth of communication (KEYTON, 2019). For this reason, some participants were also motivated to express their thoughts and opinions.

The online survey presented of six films well known among the interviewed population. Each participant could evaluate the films' possible impact on their spirituality. The survey questions reflected the variables of a spirituality measurement model, which will be detailed further on.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this survey included 300 Brazilian Adventists. When incomplete questionnaires and participants who were under 18 were removed, it reduced the total number of participants to 199, with 102 (51%) being female and 97 (49%) male. The vast majority of participants reported being between 21 and 49 years old (86.46%).

SURVEY PROCEDURE

An online survey was created on the Survey Monkey platform (<http://surveymonkey.com>) for the data collection. Next, the link to the survey access was distributed to groups of Adventist users of the Whatsapp (instant messaging application) and residents in Brazil. When participants accessed the survey, they were informed about the survey objectives, average duration, preservation of anonymity, and confidentiality of information. After consent was given, the respondent was allowed to proceed with the survey.

FILMS

In the survey questionnaire, the six films to be analyzed were presented into three distinct groups: Adventist films (2), religious films (2), and non-religious films (2). Each film was presented to the respondent through an image with the film poster, synopsis, and a link to watch the trailer. Following this, respondents were presented with ten items related to the metrics of spirituality and measured on a Likert-type scale. This scale ranged from totally agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), to totally disagree (1).

It was essential that the respondent knew or had watched the films, so several criteria were used to choose them. For the Adventist films category, the researcher selected the most-watched films on the Feliz7Play, an Adventist film streaming platform (<http://feliz7play.com>). For the religious film category, the highest-grossing religious films in Brazilian movie theaters according to the National Cinema Agency (Ancine), a government institution, were chosen. For the non-religious films category, films were selected from among the films most-watched in the streaming platform Netflix in the year 2018 that had moral and ethical themes, and that were well known in Brazil.

The films selected for analysis in this study were the Adventist films "The Last Battle" and "Freed: The Price of Life"; the religious films "The Ten Commandments" and "Nothing to Lose"; and the non-religious films "Hacksaw Ridge" and "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind".

The Last Battle (2005) was the first Brazilian Adventist feature film, and its narrative is based on the biblical prophecies of the books of Daniel and Revelation. The film tells the story of young Lucas, who has a libertine life, but at a certain point, realizes that his bad decisions will lead to an unexpected end. The story time occurs in the future when the world seems to be ending.

The film Freed: The Price of Life (2018) is an Adventist film and portrays a modern analogy about the story of Jesus Christ's sacrifice. Emanuel, a volunteer physician, has a personal mission to serve the riverside population and tribes of the Amazon jungle in Brazil. However, he becomes a victim of a gang that specializes in human trafficking. In captivity, with three more strangers, he will discover that freedom is expensive and tastes like blood.

The Ten Commandments (2016) is a Bible-based film adaptation. The film tells one of the most famous passages of the Bible: the story of Moses, from his birth to his old age, highlighting the encounter with God on Mount Sinai, the plagues launched on Egypt, his participation in the liberation of the Hebrew people, the passage through the Red Sea and the revelation of the ten commandments of the law of God.

Nothing to Lose (2018) is a religious film. It describes the trajectory of evangelical bishop Edir Macedo, businessman, founder, and spiritual leader of the Universal Church of God's Kingdom and Record TV owner.

Hacksaw Ridge (2016) is considered a war film with biographical drama, which presents the story of Desmond Doss, an Adventist medic in the U.S. army who acted during the battle of Okinawa in World War II. Doss became famous for participating in a war without taking up arms and for rescuing 75 soldiers in battle. Doss becomes the first man in American history to receive the Medal of Honor without firing a shot.

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (2019) is a film that depicts William Kamkwamba, who was born in Malawi, in Africa. When he was fourteen years old, a terrible drought hit the village where he lived. Being an excellent student and very fond of physics, William decides to save his native village from starvation. In the library, he finds books on physics. After studying the books, he got an idea to build a wind generator to provide electricity to his family.

MEASURE OF SPIRITUALITY

Although there are some concerns about the possibility of measuring spirituality effectively (HILL & MALTBY, 2009), several measurement scales were developed in recent years to evaluate a person's spirituality. These metrics have been validated and applied in psychiatric, theological, and social environments (AUSTIN et al., 2018).

The measure of spirituality used in this study was the Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality for Use in Health Research (FETZER, 2003), which includes several metrics and domains for measuring spirituality. The domain of Daily Spiritual Experiences was selected as the most appropriate to achieve the objectives of this research. This domain measures the individual's perception of the transcendent (God, the divine) in daily life and the perception of interaction with, or involvement of, the transcendent in life. The items attempt to measure experience rather than cognitive constructions. This domain makes spirituality its central focus and can be used effectively across many religions ranging from Christianity to Buddhism, for example.

The measures utilized consisted of the following:

- a. I feel God's presence. These questions were developed to address both people whose experience of relationship with the transcendent is one of

- personal intimacy and those who describe a more general sense of unity as their connection with the transcendent.
- b. I find strength in my religion or spirituality, and I find comfort in my religion or spirituality. These items intended to measure a direct sense of support and comfort from the transcendent.
 - c. I feel God's love for me. The emotional support of feeling or perceiving that one is loved may prove important in the relationship of religious/ spiritual issues.
 - d. I feel a deep inner peace or harmony. This item attempts to move beyond mere psychological well-being and involves a sense of wholeness and internal integration with transcendence.
 - e. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation. This dimension attempts to capture how people experience the transcendent. A sense of awe can be provoked by exposure to nature, human beings, or the night sky, and can elicit the experience of the spiritual that crosses religious boundaries.
 - f. I feel thankful for my blessings. This aspect of spirituality is considered central by many people and has a potential connection to psychologically positive ways of viewing life.
 - g. I feel a selfless caring for others. This means, "I care for others without expecting anything in return." The compassion concept is valued in Buddhist, Christian, and Jewish traditions, and may be a useful measure beyond these traditions.
 - h. I desire to be closer to God or in union with Him. This issue evaluates experiences of being drawn to the spiritual, to assess desire or longing.
 - i. I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns. This item attempts to identify the experience of a lively worship service where one's day-to-day concerns can dissolve in the midst of worship. Alternately, it could index the deep, abiding sense of joy/peace that some people experience in their spirituality.

RESULTS

After the online survey was closed, the data were gathered and basic frequencies analyzed with MLAB statistics software (<http://mlab.com>). Distributions were not markedly different than normal, so inferential statistics commenced.

A one-way ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses. The ANOVA is appropriate because this statistical measure compares the influence of two or more groups (the independent variable) on the dependent variable (KEYTON, 2019). In this study, the films were the independent variable and spirituality was the dependent variable. The Tukey's test was used following the ANOVA to determine which differences were significant between variables by creating confidence intervals for all pairwise differences between factor level means (KEYTON, 2019).

The findings produced both expected and unexpected results. The ANOVA test indicated that there is a significant difference between the averages of the 3 film categories, $F(2, 594) = 134,68, p = 0,0$. As the value of p (0.000) is lower than the significance level of 0.05, it is possible to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the independent variable films influence the variables dependent on spirituality.

However, Tukey's tests showed some unexpected behavior in the data (Table 1). The Tukey test is a single-step multiple comparison procedure and statistical analysis. It can be used to find means that are significantly different from each other (SURHONE, TIMPLEDON & MARSEKEN, 2010). The Tukey test revealed that the Adventist film group showed more similarity to the non-religious film group but showed a significant difference with the religious film group.

Table 1 - *Tukey Pairwise Comparisons*

Grouping Information Using the Tukey Method and 95% Confidence

Factor	N	Mean	Grouping
Adventist films	199	4,0254	A
Non-religious films	199	4,0211	A
Generic religious films	199	3,0221	B

Note: Means that do not share a letter are significantly different.

A deeper analysis of the data, separating the films from the groups, allowed us to observe how Adventists ranked each film independently of its category, as shown in table 4 below.

Table 2 - *Grouping Information Using the Tukey Method and 95% Confidence*

Factor	N	Mean	Grouping
NREL – Hacksaw Ridge	199	4,4111	A
ADV – The last battle	199	4,2090	A
ADV – Freed: the price of life	199	3,8417	B
NREL- The boy who harnessed the wind	199	3,6312	B
REL – Ten commandments	199	3,3533	C
REL – Nothing to lose	199	2,6910	D

Note: Means that do not share a letter are significantly different.

DISCUSSION

The statistical results using ANOVA and the Tukey Pairwise Comparison method allow us to classify the Adventist perception of film and spirituality into four categories: high, moderate, relatively, and not spiritual. The discussion analysis will be done from the perspective of the Cultivation Theory factors (institutional process, message system, and cultivation analysis) described by Gerbner (1986).

HIGH SPIRITUAL FILM

It was to be expected that the group of religious and Adventist films would be perceived as the ones that most influence the spirituality of the Adventist viewer. However, the results showed that the film *Hacksaw Ridge* (M=4,4), belonging to the group of non-religious films, was the best ranked, followed by Adventist film *The Last Battle* (M=4,2).

Hacksaw Ridge (2016). Although the movie presents several scenes of violence, it was perceived by the participants of the research as having a high level of spirituality. The resonance vector of Cultivation Theory can explain this perception. Resonance is when the viewer perceives his real-life being represented precisely by the media. In such cases, these viewers are especially susceptible to the media cultivating power. (GRIFFIN, 2019, p. 362). The film *Hacksaw Ridge* presents moral conflicts well known to Adventists, such as guarding the Sabbath time for worship and the principle of not killing. Doss and his faithfulness to Bible precepts has probably led Adventists to identify with the character and to realize that the movie has a high spiritual content because it inspires and motivates them to remain faithful to the principles espoused by Adventism.

The Last Battle (2005). The *Last Battle* film exemplifies the mainstreaming vector in the way Adventists understand the events preceding the second coming of Christ. The return of Christ is one of the central Adventist doctrines and has been systematically advocated

throughout the existence of the denomination. A large number of institutional publications address this theme that shapes a significant part of the Adventist worldview (TIMM, 1995).

Despite the fact the films *The Hacksaw Ridge* and *The Last Battle* have different messages and goals, they have convergence and similarity in some aspects. Present in both films is the Adventist belief in faithfulness to biblical commandments, prioritizing obedience to God above men, and the possible suffering and the reward resulting from their choices. For this reason, understandably, Adventists attributed a high level of spirituality to the two films. Participants agreed that after watching these movies they felt a “desire to be closer to God” (73.66%) and “desire to be in union with Him” (67.65%). These spiritual factors represent the longing for the Transcendent and the desire that some people have to be so close to God that it is not possible to get closer (FETZER, 2003).

MODERATELY SPIRITUAL FILMS

In this group are the films perceived with a moderate level of spirituality. In this group there again appears a non-religious film, but one which was perceived as influencing Adventist spirituality.

Freed: The price of life (2018). Using cultivation analysis is possible to conclude that Adventists consider this film relevant to their spirituality. It may be because the theme of salvation through Jesus Christ's sacrifice is considered a fundamental belief in Adventism. Belief in this doctrine is a condition for anyone to be considered an Adventist. The homogenization of this concept among Adventists occurs throughout their journey in the church and is often revisited through the various contents produced and shared by the institution (NOVAES, 2019).

Approximately 77% of respondents agreed that *Freed* helped them feel God's love. This dimension of spirituality is significant because individuals can believe that God is loving without feeling loved themselves. The emotional support of feeling loved may prove vital to relationship and religious/spiritual issues (FETZER, 2003).

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (2019). More in-depth research would be necessary to understand all the possible reasons that led Adventists to evaluate the level of spirituality of this movie so positively. However, we can suppose that the movie has awakened feelings of gratitude toward God and empathy for the less privileged. Additionally, the sense of reaching beyond what you can see may feel “spiritual” for the audience. The factor “I feel thankful for my blessings” was the most present in the answers (64%). This aspect of spirituality is considered central by many people and has a potential connection to psychologically positive

ways of viewing life. It is important to note, however, that some people find blessings even in the direst circumstances (FETZER, 2003).

The movies *Freed: the price of life* (2018) and *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (2019) have very different characteristics, which makes it impossible to trace a relationship between the two narratives. The theme of the film *Freed* is easily understood as stimulating spiritual feelings, while the movie *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (2019) surprises by the fact that at no time does it highlight aspects of religiosity. However, the effect of its message was perceived as belonging to the spiritual realm or having inspirational influence.

RELATIVELY SPIRITUAL FILMS

In this group, only one film appears. Although the film has quite obvious religious elements, most of the Adventists researched do not recognize a significant spiritual relevance.

The Ten Commandments (2016). Although it is a religious movie, *The Ten Commandments* (2016) did not have a significant spiritual perception by Adventists. It may be due to some inconsistencies with the biblical narrative perceived by Adventists. One participant reported that "I did watch it, but I liked it in parts because I know that many things are different from what the Bible presents, or rather has things added. However, it is a good movie." Despite that, 57% of the respondents agreed that the movie awakens a desire to be closer to God or in union with him.

NOT VERY SPIRITUAL FILM

In that group is the film that received the lowest evaluation. Although it is considered a religious film, Adventists have shown a considerable level of disagreement of its spiritual value.

Nothing to lose (2018). In the perception of the research participants, the film *Nothing to Lose* (2018) has the lowest rate of spirituality. About 80% of the responses indicated neutrality and disagreement with the factors of spirituality. The low rating may be the result of disinterest in watching it, or conflict of content with Adventist beliefs, as demonstrated by the comments of some participants.

"I didn't watch, and I have no interest. I know who he is in real life."

"The reputation of the main character makes the story seem playful."

"I didn't watch because I didn't agree with the principles."

CONCLUSION

This research study reveals that for Adventists, films can positively influence spirituality. Although the activity of watching films is not considered a religious practice, some films are perceived as having the capacity to awaken aspects of spirituality. This discovery confirms H1, that is, Adventists understand the relationship between films and spirituality.

Research has also shown that the perception of film spirituality is not related to the theme or genre. For Adventists, a film can be positively relevant to spirituality when the cultivation effect of resonance occurs, that is, when the film presents elements in which the Adventist identifies himself, or represents his beliefs, dilemmas, and hopes. This indicates that H2 cannot be confirmed when it states that Adventist films (films created by the church itself) are rated as higher in spirituality than other films, but accepts H4 when it states that Films that portray Adventists are perceived as more spiritual, such as *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016) and *The Last Battle* (2005).

This study surprises when revealing that Adventists consider some non-religious films to be motivating for their communion with God and empathy for others (*The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*). On the other hand, they consider that not every religious film can be regarded as spiritual (*Ten Commandment* and *Nothing to Lose*). This discovery rejects H3 that non-religious films are perceived as non-spiritual content and opens space for new questions and suggestions for future studies.

LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study is that it does not distinguish between the differences existing among Adventists. The study also did not analyze whether the perception of the influence of films on spirituality varies according to age, gender, or length of membership. As an example, Ellis (2019) analyzed Adventist motivation for the use of films from three distinct groups of Adventists: traditional/conservative, moderate, and liberal. She concluded that there are significant differences between these groups. This indicates that several factors can alter the perception of spirituality in films.

The research was also limited to the application of Cultivation Theory. Other theories, such as Katz et al (1973) Uses and Gratification Theory or Hjarvard and Lövheim's (2012) Mediatization and Religion Theory, could be added to broaden the understanding of the topic. Likewise, the use of the online survey did not allow us to evaluate the reasons that led people to score some films better than others. Online surveys can also contain low quality data and be heavily biased because there is little demographic diversity among respondents. In-depth

interviews could be useful to achieve a better comprehension of this theme and more robust data.

Another limitation is the number of films evaluated (6). It was also minimal for fear that respondents might refuse to complete a questionnaire that required more time to complete. Other films could be added to obtain more reliability in future studies.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This study sought to reveal Adventists' perception of the influence of films on spirituality. Historically, Adventists have been concerned about the effect that the media can have on their spirituality. Their initial rejection of this type of content has evolved into the acceptance and production of films for spiritual purposes. Today Adventists understand that films are a powerful tool for cultivating the perception of reality, and when used responsibly, they can contribute positively to spirituality.

Further research would be necessary to investigate whether the current Adventist acceptance of films is a result of the effects of the mediatization of religion, as described by Hjarvard and Lövheim's (2012), as well as to understand whether this has caused a possible secularization of Adventism. Also, as a suggestion for future studies, it would be important to analyze films' spiritual significance from other religious groups perspectives.

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