

Arrastão do Pavulagem, (im)material culture and communication practices in agency during the Covid-19 pandemic

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-58442023114en>

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the interfaces between communication and (im)material consumption regarding the event Arrastão do Pavulagem, in the city of Belém, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was used the intersection of netnographic analysis, semi-structured script interviews and snowball sampling. It was possible to observe that the subjects seek to relate to objects that, through contact with the local culture, trigger more frequently, in their subjectivities, sensations of belonging to a particular social group. Such objects trigger memories of past experiences that marked collective and subjective experiences and that, when configured as materializations of popular cultures of the state of Pará and neighboring states, are present in the events held by the Instituto Arraial do Pavulagem.

Keywords: Arrastão do Pavulagem. Communication. Consumption. (im)material Culture. Covid-19.

Introduction

This is how the subject of this research begins: a group of artists linked to popular culture¹ in the state of Pará, mainly musicians and composers who maintained bonds of friendship, organized a meeting with the aim of promoting carimbó performances in the streets of the city of Belém. The collective, known at the time as Pavulagem² do Teu Coração, performed on an improvised stage on Sundays at the República Square, in the city of Belém. Over time, these free performances began to attract a growing audience, who not only attended the shows, but also participated in the parades held on Sunday afternoons. Due to the impact generated, one of the group's founding musicians decided to tour the regions of the state, as reported by Lima and Gomberg (2012):

[...] researching root music, sounds, rhythms and the making of specific instruments to certain contexts, such as carimbó. Over time, they were joined by dancers who investigated the choreography of rhythms from Pará - carimbó, siriá, lundu, xote marajoara, retumbão, samba do cacete, among others (LIMA; GOMBERG, 2012, p. 55).

As a result of the trips made by the founding member of the musical group to the rural areas of Pará, Pavulagem do Teu Coração's performances became broader and more culturally diverse. This diversity, as stated by Blanco (2014, p. 33), brought with it a variety of elements and objects from popular culture that went beyond the exclusive focus on Boi-Bumbá. Pavulagem do Teu Coração thus became Arraial³ do Pavulagem and began to host various cultural events throughout the year, such as the Cordão do Peixe-Boi (which no longer takes place), the arrastões/parades of the months of June and October, the Rodas de Boi, among other programs. Over time, the number of people attending the performances grew to such an extent that the venue and the route of the event were no longer sufficient to accommodate the organizers and the public of this cultural manifestation. As a result, the Arrastão⁴ do Pavulagem began to travel along Avenida Presidente Vargas, one of the main thoroughfares in the center of Belém: initially (for more than two decades) up the avenue and, from 2019 to the present, down it.

1 Abreu (2003) presents two ways of looking at popular culture: the first, from other voices, is equivalent to folklore, "understood as the set of cultural traditions of a country or region" (2003, p. 1). The researcher also points out that culture can be understood as an instrument that makes it possible to understand social and cultural reality, in a multifaceted dimension, and points out that "[...] much easier than defining popular culture is locating it in countries like Brazil, where access to so-called modernity has not eliminated so-called pre-modern practices and traditions" (2003, p. 2).

2 The neologism Pavulagem means "beautiful, handsome and pompous, and in popular language has the meaning of 'the one who likes to appear', or the braggart", as Blanco (2014, p. 33) attests.

3 A reference to the place where festivities in honor of Catholic saints are held.

4 The name given to the street parades held by the musical group Arraial do Pavulagem. It comes from the popular Pará expression "Arrastar", which means to lead a large number of people.

The parades that make up the festival last four days, always on Sunday mornings. This number refers to the four Catholic saints honored during the month of June: Santo Antônio, São João, São Pedro and São Marçal. Each procession of the Arrastão do Pavulagem pays homage to each of the deities mentioned in this paragraph and asks for their blessings. For four consecutive weeks, on Sundays, the main streets in the center of the capital of Pará are taken over by crowds of people who enjoy singing and dancing, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Arrastão do Pavulagem



Source: Authors' personal collection

Under the scorching sun of the mornings in June and July, the members of the Batalhão da Estrela, dressed in blue and white costumes and with their faces painted with multicolored make-up, rhythmically play wind and percussion instruments, performing popular rhythms such as toadas, carimbós and quadrilhas juninas. They balance on stilts, perform acrobatics and sing songs by the Arraial do Pavulagem group and other artists from Pará, from the departure to the arrival of the parades, from República square to Estivadores square, respectively.

The influences coming from the rural areas of the State of Pará and neighboring regions can be seen in the combination of different elements brought from these localities, such as musical instruments and dances, the traditional hats with colored ribbons, the Boi Pavulagem, cavalinhos, “cabeções”, wind and percussion instruments, small flags, among others. Amaral Filho and Alves (2017) characterize the shows as “symbolic products originating in

the manifestations of popular culture, the fruit of traditional oral transmission experience, represented in the social action of a community or social groups” (AMARAL FILHO; ALVES, 2017, p. 3), which are involved in processes of resistance and post-resistance, related to the promotion and recognition that define a particular cultural manifestation.

Another characteristic element of the Arrastão do Pavulagem is the Batalhão da Estrela, a group of players who perform during the parades that make up the parades. The Batalhão da Estrela leads the parades along Avenida Presidente Vargas, through its wings, and is usually surrounded by a crowd of participants who experience moments of fun, singing and dancing to the sound of regional rhythms played by the members of the Batalhão. However, when the Covid-19 pandemic was declared in 2020, these experiences became indefinitely impossible, due to health security protocols, which required social distancing as a measure to combat the spread of the virus.

Thus, the Arrastão do Pavulagem parades, a cultural event that had been held in the streets of downtown Belém for more than 30 years until 2019, were transferred to the online environment of the internet due to the social isolation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The events began to take form of live broadcasts, called Arraial do Futuro in 2020 and Arraial Brincante in 2021, as shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2 - Printscreen of the call for Arraial do Futuro



Source: Arraial do Pavulagem Facebook page

Figure 3 - Printscrean of the call for Arraial Brincante

Source: Arraial do Pavulagem Facebook page

In both years, the parades and other related programs were publicized, broadcast and expanded through the following Arraial do Pavulagem communication platforms: Facebook page⁵, Instagram profile⁶ and YouTube channel⁷. This movement can be observed in accordance with what Castro (2020) highlights as the “technologization of social life [...] which, in short, affects the forms and social practices of communication” (2020, p. 188), according to which it is “one of the social effects of greater magnitude produced by the current Covid-19 pandemic” (2020, p. 188), since there was an expansion of such effects due to the health conditions resulting from the pandemic period.

A cross section of three procedures was adopted as a methodology, in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for different understandings of the study. The first procedure carried out was netnography on the Arraial do Pavulagem Facebook social network, supplemented by data collected through the musical group’s Instagram and YouTube, following the considerations of Kozinets (2014)⁸. We analyzed, based on the images and interactions established, the content present on the Facebook page of the group Arraial do Pavulagem, individually, during the periods from April 16 to July 15, 2020 and from June 2 to July 18, 2021 - a total of 109 posts, corresponding to the dissemination of the digital parades.

5 Link to the Arraial do Pavulagem Facebook page: <<https://www.facebook.com/arraialdopavulagemoficial>>

6 Link to the Arraial do Pavulagem Instagram profile: <https://instagram.com/arraialdopavulagem?utm_medium=copy_link>.

7 Link to the Arraial do Pavulagem YouTube channel: <<https://www.youtube.com/c/ArraialdoPavulagemOficial>>.

8 Kozinets (2014) defines the method as “[...] participant observational research based on online fieldwork. It uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at an understanding and ethnographic representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon” (2014, pp. 61-62) and points out that there are “[...] some social phenomena that go beyond the internet and its online social interactions” (2014, p. 65).

The second methodological procedure adopted consisted of semi-structured interviews with the parade directors, involving five members responsible for the digital drags of the Arrastão do Pavulagem in different roles: directing and scripting the live broadcasts, communications, production and musicians of the Arraial do Pavulagem group - including a founding member of the musical group and a percussionist. The interviews were conducted between August and October 2021, using semi-structured scripts adapted according to the interviewees' roles.

Finally, as a third methodological procedure, snowball sampling was adopted, in line with the studies by Bockorni and Gomes (2021)⁹, in distributing an online form among the participants of the event, following the proof of the target audience established by the authors. The target audience was users of online social networks who had some kind of involvement with the Arraial do Pavulagem, either as visitors to the parades in person until 2019, or as followers of the digital programs in 2020 and 2021. The online form contained 41 questions, allowing for objective and/or discursive answers. In order to select the users who would go on to the other questions, filter questions were used in the form, such as “Do you know Arrastão do Pavulagem?” and “Have you seen Arrastão’s digital parades, the so-called Arraial do Futuro and Arraial Brincante?”.

A total of 104 participants were involved in the methodological procedure used. The form was shared via a link during the period from May to July 2021 - a period that covered consumers' expectations and experiences with digital programming that year. The sharing took place on the following platforms of the authors: Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, in addition to sharing by third parties, following the snowball initiation methodology. From the responses obtained, it was possible to identify some points among the participants of the field research: Most of the subjects are aged between 18 and 27, live in the Belém Metropolitan Region¹⁰ (mainly in the municipalities of Belém and Ananindeua) and have known the Arrastão do Pavulagem in its face-to-face format, attending the parades with family and friends for more than 12 years.

At this point, it should be emphasized that, among other researches already carried out on the topic of the Arrastão do Pavulagem parades, this study differs from the others in that it raises questions, concerns and sheds light on the resignifications arising from the Covid-19 pandemic - in the case of this research, in the fields of study of communication processes and consumption.

9 According to Bockorni and Gomes (2021), snowball sampling is “[...] a sampling technique that has been used in qualitative research in recent years, mainly because it allows us to reach populations that are little known or difficult to access” (2021, p. 106).

10 Established by Complementary Law No. 14 of 1973, at the same time as other Metropolitan Regions in the country, it currently brings together seven municipalities in the so-called “Grande Belém”: Ananindeua, Belém, Benevides, Castanhal, Marituba, Santa Izabel do Pará and Santa Bárbara do Pará.

Communication and experiences of the Arrastão in the city unfolded for the digital world

The approach to the concept of communication is discussed here from the perspective of França (2008), who focuses on it as an experience that takes place within the communication process. França (2008) bases his reflections on Mead's studies of the conceptual matrix of interactions. This perspective was chosen because it implies a mutual influence between subjects, mediated by actions, since, according to the author, the communication process takes place through actions (or significant gestures) that play the role of mediator between subjects. In other words, it can be said that communication involves the development of social processes and experiences. França (2008) emphasizes that communication acquires a practical dimension as a social act (2008, p. 84) and becomes part of the field of interaction, "where one and the other are always, and from the outset, implicated" (FRANÇA, 2008, p. 85), as well as being made up of inseparable phases, which can be observed and marked by reflecting on the effects that these actions have had on the subjects (FRANÇA, 2008, p. 79).

It is worth noting that this research uses França's (2008) insights on communication to study the interactional exchanges between users in the digital social networks of Arraial do Pavulagem. This approach was adopted due to the public health measures resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to conversations taking place in cyberspace. The field research revealed that users experienced mutual affect, which affected them in different ways. It is important to note that the flow of communication on the Arraial do Pavulagem Facebook page, along with the previously established interactions, existed long before this research was conducted. However, with the advent of social isolation, the communication flow and interaction practices acquired new aspects and specific issues, as the Arrastão da Pavulagem moved completely to the online environment, as happened in 2020 and 2021.

Linking the definition of communication used above and its transposition to the digital environment, in which the Arrastão parades took place, Sodré's (2002) discussion of the "*media bios*" emerges. In this approach, Sodré explores the existence, in contemporary society, of a fourth "bios" (or "Existence", as proposed by Aristotle, according to Sodré), which represents a new way of life influenced by the technologization of the media, especially with the presence of the internet. This transformation has led to a series of consequences, such as the "virtualization of the world" (SODRÉ, 2002, p. 34). In an interview with Revista Pesquisa Fapesp, the researcher shares his perspective on the "*media bios*": "I describe the media as the fourth *bios*, which is the media, virtual, life as a spectrum, life as almost the presence of things. It's real, everything that happens there is real, but not of the same order as the reality of things" (SODRÉ, 2008, p. 78).

Going through the content present in the *media bios* that were created on the social networks of the Arraial do Pavulagem from the transposition and recreation of the urban space, during the preparation and realization of the digital parades of the years 2020 and 2021, one notices the prevalence of elements typical of the Arrastão do Pavulagem, which allowed users

to feel in the middle of the parades. The elements mentioned above, during the dissemination of the digital programming of the events held in 2020 and 2021, are illustrations of the Boi Pavulagem, hats with colored ribbons, members of the Batalhão da Estrela, flags, banners, musical instruments and “cabeções”, united by various colors - the same colors present in the ribbons of the hats of the members of the Arraial and the Batalhão da Estrela, as can be seen in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4 - Call for the last *live* of Arraial do Futuro in 2020



Source: Arraial do Pavulagem Facebook page.

Figure 5 - Call for Arraial Brincante's *lives* in 2021



Source: Arraial do Pavulagem Facebook page.

In this way, it becomes possible to understand the urban space that has been transposed to the digital environment of the internet based on the contributions of Canevacci (2016), who proposes the concept of this space as a communicational metropolis, which is the result of “relations *between* digital expansion crossed by the trio communication-culture-consumption (2016, p. 176). According to the researcher, communication is the determining element in the configuration of the communicational metropolis, since it decentralizes the concept of society and the understanding of various phenomena, such as innovations, conflicts and tensions, making them somewhat fluctuating and polycentric (2016, pp. 176-177). By drawing bridges between Canevacci’s (2016) propositions, also about the plurality and fragmentation of the consumer public in this metropolis, and the Amazonian scenario, in which this research takes place, and with regard to the developments and specificities of the content related to the digital parades of Arrastão do Pavulagem, held in 2020 and 2021, we propose dialogues with Santos’ (2010) considerations on publiCIDADE. This dialogue is established by considering the subjects of a city as a consuming public that produces and consumes meanings.

Since this study deals with the interactions between subjects, that generate the communications practices analyzed throughout the text, it was considered appropriate to extend this field of observation and also analyze the interactions between subjects and objects - thus entering the other axis of study of this article: that of material culture and tangible and intangible consumption practices. Thus, the subjects involved in the Arrastão do Pavulagem program - doers, players and visitors - both in its face-to-face format and in its digital format, such as in 2020 and 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, trigger tangible and intangible consumption practices when they come into contact with the material and immaterial dimensions of the event. According to Reilly and Schweih (1998), what defines objects as tangible and intangible is the value that results from the nature of such objects.

Consumption processes in a material culture approach

In this study, material culture is approached from the perspective of Miller (2010), who points out that “a deeper appreciation of things will lead us to a deeper appreciation of people” (2010, p. 12). Thus, by analyzing the relationships between objects and subjects, it becomes possible to observe the ways in which these subjects relate to themselves, to the society in which they are inserted and to perceive the layers that form subjectivities. In his studies on material culture, Miller (2007) points out that “people have always consumed goods made by themselves or by others” (2007, p. 40) - which makes it possible to see consumption as one of its biases.

In the case of tangible objects, it’s the physical, tangible nature inherent in them, which is experienced by the subjects. While the nature of intangible objects is linked to the symbolic dimension that these objects have in the subjectivity of each subject. Therefore, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the consumption practices surrounding the

Arrastão do Pavulagem parades, we decided to analyze these practices through this double lens: tangibility and intangibility.

Regarding the tangible consumption practices of the objects that make up the visuality of the Arrastão do Pavulagem, these can be perceived in two ways: through the production, sale and acquisition of official and unofficial products related to the Arrastão parades. The tangibility of such objects, according to Ferreira and Oliveira (2020), is measured by “[...] tactile, bodily and visual elements of tangible assets give them value because they emerge from their physical resources” (FERREIRA; OLIVEIRIA, 2020, p. 157). Therefore, when subjects come into contact with these objects, they trigger senses such as sight, touch, hearing, among others. The official products evoked at this point can be purchased through the Arraial do Pavulagem virtual store profile, available on the social networking site Instagram, called Lojinha Pavulagem¹¹, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 - Printscreen from Lojinha Pavulagem’s Instagram profile



Source: Lojinha Pavulagem’s Instagram profile

The store’s profile was created in 2021, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the aim of raising financial capital for the maintenance of the Arraial do Pavulagem Institute at times of the year when there is no large circulation of money, since the inflow of financial capital from the sponsorship of events, due to the parades held by the Institute, occurs at certain times of the year, according to the person in charge of the store. Lojinha Pavulagem began to be promoted in a significant way in 2021, during the live broadcasts of the digital parades of the Arraial do Pavulagem digital program, called Arraial Brincante, which took place between June and July 2021, although I observed the dissemination of official products during the digital program held in 2020.

¹¹ Link to the Arraial do Pavulagem online store profile on Instagram: <<https://instagram.com/lojinhapavulagem?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y>>.

According to Miller's (2013) postulates, "[...] the system of things, with their internal order, make us the people we are" (MILLER, 2013, p.83). Thus, material culture, according to the anthropologist's approach, seeks to jointly understand human relations and the material aspects inherent to them, in other words, the relations between subjects and objects. When asked what the characteristic objects of the Arrastão do Pavulagem mean to them, 77.9% of the subjects in the survey said that the objects are a way of being in touch with the culture of the state of Pará, while 60.6% of the subjects said that owning such objects is a way of remembering memorable moments experienced during the parades. According to the anthropologist, the acquisition of a certain material good is positioned in a network of relationships between the subjects involved in the act of purchase and the relationships established by them (2002).

According to Simmel (2006), the sharing of objects and the affections that "coat" these objects is one of the principles of sociability practices and gives meaning to the gatherings formed between individuals (SIMMEL, 2006, p. 69). In the act of sharing objects, it is up to the subjects to maintain the sociable values of these objects, according to the sociologist. Based on this process, it can be seen that the practices of sociability, through the identification with the objects related to the Arrastão do Pavulagem parades, help to reinforce a Pará identity and feelings of belonging to the place where one lives, to the culture of the region and to the event itself, through the materialization of the culture that forms the world in which the subjects live, according to McCracken (2007).

Some of the interlocutors interviewed through the semi-structured interviews were also asked what the objects of the Arrastão do Pavulagem represented to them and/or which objects each interlocutor most associated with the parades. The event's communicator pointed out that the colored ribbon hat was the object she most associated with the parades, and added that she considered this prop to be the object that most identifies the event, pointing out that "it doesn't matter where you are (on the bus, in the street, at the bus stop), but, if you see a person or a group of people wearing ribbon hats, even if you don't know them, you can tell where they are going and they are going to the same place as you" (professional in charge of communicating the digital parades of Arrastão do Pavulagem, interviewed during this field research). The musical group's percussionist also pointed to the colored ribbon hat as the object that most identifies the parades. Finally, the founding member of the musical group and the parades pointed out two objects that identify the parades: the hat with the colored ribbons and the Boi Pavulagem.

According to Barbosa and Campbell (2006, pp. 22-23), consumption is an experience that allows subjects to reproduce themselves physically and socially; it also mediates social relations, confers status, "constructs" identities and subjectivities, and establishes boundaries between groups and subjects. As well as wearing the traditional blue and white clothes, the members of the Batalhão da Estrela wear the event's official hats, as described in the previous paragraphs of this chapter. Since there is a pattern in the making of these props, members of the Batalhão are able to identify other members by the arrangement of the hat's elements, even

if there are no close relationships between these individuals. On the other hand, it is easy to distinguish which members have acquired unofficial hats through contact with street vendors, even though there are similarities between the arrangement of the elements that characterize these props, due to the “status” that comes with wearing such a representative official product, as we were able to observe after collecting the data for this study.

Trindade and Perez (2014, p. 160) point out that rituals, through repetitions elaborated by social groups, allow the perpetuation of these groups and “demonstrate social relations” (TRINDADE; PEREZ, 2014, p. 160). The “demonstrations of social relations” pointed out by Trindade and Perez (2014) were perceived in this study through the testimony of a member of the Batalhão da Estrela, also heard from interactions resulting from the participant observation carried out in 2022, during the parades that make up the Arrastão. According to the interlocutor, it is as if handling percussion instruments such as implements, barrels and marabass boxes (larger, in size, than other instruments) conferred greater status and placed these players on a higher level than those who handle smaller instruments, such as maracas and reco.

McCracken (2003) also points out that ritual is a place of intermediaries also reflects a repetition of movements aimed at constructing, deconstructing and even “objectifying” the symbolic character in the relationships between subjects and objects. The processes of transferring meanings can also be understood in this study by analyzing the ways in which subjects attribute meanings to objects they acquire for themselves or they give to others. When asked if they had any material objects related to the event, 78.8% of the 104 subjects reached through snowball sampling said they had items acquired during the period when the trawlers were held.

Given the large number of positive responses, the 104 subjects were then asked what items they owned and the colored-ribbon hat was highlighted as the main object acquired during the parades promoted by the Instituto Arraial do Pavulagem. 75.6% said they had a hat with colored ribbons. In the words of McCracken (2003), “Goods are an opportunity to make material culture” (2003, p. 104). The anthropologist also points out that culture constitutes the world, determining how it will be formed, allowing a certain culture to materialize, by proposing the concept of culture as a “‘floor plan’ of human activity” (2007, p. 101). Thus, by drawing perspectives between the objects mentioned in the answers above and the studies on material culture, it becomes possible to interpret these objects as materializations of the popular cultures of the State of Pará and neighboring states present in the events held by Arraial do Pavulagem.

Final considerations

This study aimed to understand the interfaces between communication and (im)material consumption in relation to the Arrastão do Pavulagem event, in the city of Belém do Pará, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, between 2020 and 2022 - a period of time that includes

the period of greatest impact of the pandemic, with the transposition of various demonstrations to the online environment, until the period of its control and the relaxation of health safety standards, with the return of the face-to-face format of such demonstrations.

The interaction processes and, consequently, the communication processes established between the subjects involved in the Arrastão do Pavulagem, not only provided interactions between them, but also interactions between the subjects and the material objects that characterize the event. In this way, the communication processes were extended, both inside and outside the environment of digital social networks, and established contact with processes that trigger (im)material consumption practices that reverberate in different ways in the subjects' subjectivity.

Throughout the analysis and reflections, it was possible to grasp the dimensions that affectivity and meaning play in the subjectivity of the subjects and in the act of consumption, by expanding on the motivations and strategies behind consumption practices between subjects and in the marketing of products from the Arraial do Pavulagem. It was also possible to observe that symbolic aspects have a significant influence on these processes. These aspects and influences, in turn, can trigger senses and sensitivities, at the same time as they can evoke memories of experiences, on a micro and macro level, which will guide tangible and intangible consumption practices, as well as experiences with such objects, with other subjects, with themselves, with the Arrastão do Pavulagem festival and with the local culture expressed through the event, in a context crossed, influenced and modified by the pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the traces it left.

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Data availability

Data supporting the research is available on request from the authors.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Editorial data

Received on: 06/21/2023

Approved on: 10/27/2023

Editor: Maria Ataíde Malcher

Editorial assistant: Aluzimara Nogueira Diniz, Julia Quemel Matta, Suelen Miyuki A. Guedes and Weverton Raiol

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