ARTICLES

GOVERNED ON THEIR OWN TERMS: FANS' PROSUMPTION OF AVENGERS ENDGAME MEDIA PARATEXTS

Governados em seus próprios termos: Prossumo de fãs em relação aos paratextos midiáticos de Vingadores: Ultimato

Gobernados en sus propios términos: Prosumo de los fanes hacia los paratextos mediáticos de Avengers: Endgame

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ABSTRACT

Based on the Foucauldian framework, this research aims to analyze how fans' prosumption of media products' paratext reveals consumers' governmentality. The Netnographic Foucauldian Genealogy was adopted to analyze the fans' interaction with media paratexts of the movie Avengers: Endgame. Results show that fans' opinions ranged from acknowledging the quality of paratexts to feeling disappointed with them. Thus, it is possible to state that fans allow themselves to be governed by the entertainment industry to safeguard their fan condition.

Keywords: governmentality, prosumption, media paratexts, fan studies, genealogy of power.

RESUMO

Com base no referencial foucaultiano, a presente pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar como o prossumo dos fãs em relação ao paratexto dos produtos midiáticos revela a governamentalidade de consumidores. Para investigar esse fenômeno, uma genealogia foucaltiana netnográfica foi aqui adotada como método para analisar a interação entre os fãs como respostas aos paratextos midiáticos do filme Vingadores: Ultimato. Os resultados mostraram que a opinião dos fãs variou desde o reconhecimento da qualidade dos paratextos até a decepção com eles. Assim, é possível afirmar que o fã se orienta a ser regido pela indústria do entretenimento a fim de resguardar sua própria condição.

Palavras-chaves: *governamentalidade, prossumo, paratextos midiáticos, estudo de fãs, genealogia do poder.*

RESUMEN

Con base en el marco foucaultiano, la presente investigación tiene como objetivo analizar cómo el prosumo de los fanáticos hacia el paratexto de los productos mediáticos revela la gubernamentalidad de los consumidores. Para investigar este fenómeno, se adoptó la genealogía foucaultiana netnográfica como método para analizar la interacción entre los fanes como respuesta a los paratextos mediáticos de la película Avengers: Endgame. Los resultados han mostrado que la opinión de los fanes varió desde reconocer la calidad de los paratextos hasta sentirse decepcionados con ellos. Así, es posible afirmar que los fanes se inclinan a regirse por la industria del entretenimiento para salvaguardar su propia condición.

Palabras clave: *gubernamentalidad, paratextos mediáticos, prosumo, estudio de fanes, genealogía del poder.*

INTRODUCTION

Fans are specialized consumers who have been investigated for how they act, both productively and collectively, in communities – i.e., fandoms – that establish cultural and economic meanings to consumption based on negotiations, productions, and social exchanges (Fuschillo, 2020; Scaraboto, 2015). Thus, investigations about fans have become recurrent among studies within Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) in recent years (Cavalcanti et al., 2021; Chen, 2021; Sugihartati, 2020) since they expanded the concept exponentiated by Kozinets (2001) seminal study, who addressed fans as a subculture of consumption.

The unique way fans interact with each other and with media texts they consume has been addressed in CCT-associated research as productive consumption when they engage in power relationships mediated in market contexts (Cavalcanti et al., 2021; Hewer et al., 2017). In broader terms, fans' proactive practices lead to consumer empowerment before market government forms (Cova & Cova, 2012). This empowerment process is a resistance exercise that enables questioning social practices (Cherrier, 2009; Mikkonen & Badje, 2012), as well as the transformation and maintenance of the social context fans live in based on individual consumption choices (Denegri-Knott et al., 2006; Shankar et al., 2006).

More specifically, power relationships observed in prosumer interactions emphasize how forms of government intersect with co-creation practices (Cova et al., 2011). Thus, according to consumer researchers focused on exploring governing forms mediated in market relationships, Michel Foucault's theory is a fruitful perspective (Denegri-Knott & Tadajewski, 2017; Zwick et al., 2008) to interpret power relationships (Chen, 2021; Zajc, 2015) or discursive practices (Denegri-Knott et al., 2018; Thompson, 2004).

Consequently, some consumer-research scholars rely on Foucault's thoughts to better understand the empowerment of consumers who play a key role in building the public discourse they are connected to (Papaoikonomou & Alarcón, 2017; Shankar et al., 2006). According to Foucault (2007), individuals often adopt certain behaviors and propagate them to their peers as empowerment exercises, which the author call resistance.

In this perspective, empowerment refers to the consumer's resistance demonstrated by their behaviors toward forms of government that seek to conduct their practices. Such behaviors can be interpreted as a productive exercise that can endorse, question, or even subvert marketing ideologies (Cova & Dalli, 2009; Denegri-Knott et al., 2006). Resistance, therefore, is a productive force that results in power relations. Foucault (2006) warns that resistance co-exists with forms of government, not to annul power relations, but precisely to ensure that it is a dynamic of power and not the domination of one part over another.

Thus, the governed may choose the forces conducting them, sustaining a government mentality. Thus, it is understood that a certain form of government is adequate to lead their lives (Foucault, 1991, 2001). Therefore, governmentality represents how the repercussions of power relations are heterogeneous and defined by the sum of productive forces that act simultaneously to guide individuals socially (Foucault, 2014).

In broader terms, consumer research understands governmentality as how consumers behave and pursue pleasant experiences based on the knowledge system established among several marketing agents with whom they come into contact during their practices (Moisander & Eriksson, 2006; Shankar et al., 2006). Thus, marketing governmentality means consumers and organizations are taking care of each individual and maintaining the population by meeting its needs; it is the sophistication of the process to manage people, production, and products (Özgün et al., 2017).

When it comes to the governmentality of the entertainment industry, marketing strategies elaborated for media products are usually expanded and re-signified by the audience, especially fans (Cavalcanti et al., 2021; Guercini & Cova, 2018). One of these marketing strategies is usin of media paratexts, which are additional content to media products that complements or expand consumption experience (Hackley & Hackley, 2022; Souza-Leão et al., 2023).

The concept of paratext was originally proposed by Genette (1997) to indicate the important role played by complementary content in the literary context. It was later reformulated by Gray (2010) to address the growing variety of media product marketing strategies and complementary materials and actions (e.g., movie trailers, teasers, limited editions) accounting for producing fan positions and interactions.

Thus, media paratexts illustrate how to investigate and manage the intense relationship between fans and the products they consume (Hills, 2010; Sugihartati, 2020). Moreover, the role of media paratext is closely associated with fans' actions, who appropriate and reframe its content (Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017).

While fans' paratexts are produced within their interactions and to facilitate such relations, the entertainment industry produces media paratexts seeking the resignification and spreadability to be exercised by its consumers, extrapolating the agency of its authors (Souza-Leão et al., 2023; Sugihartati, 2020). Accordingly, media paratext seems to illustrate Foucault's (1984) understanding of how a text goes beyond the agency of its creator, gaining meaning through its circulation and reproduction when its readers produce discourses about it.

The topic we address suggests that media paratexts elaborated by the entertainment industry are a marketing strategy encouraging fan prosumption. Thus, this study aims to analyze how fans' prosumption of media products' paratext reveals consumers' governmentality.

The study's major contribution is to improving CCT discussion about governmentality (Beckett, 2012). In this sense, we explore Foucault's theory to ground the understanding of marketing governmentality. Therefore, it is also possible to contribute to discussions about consumer empowerment as a resistance exercise that is usually associated with a movement against the form of overnment ruling them (Denegri-Knott et al., 2006; Papaoikonomou & Alarcón, 2017; Shankar et al., 2006).

Although previous studies are enlightening, they do not address how the two aspects evoking the Foucauldian epistemology can propose the interpretation of new government forms observed in consumer practices. Thus, the originality of this study lies in investigating consumer governmentality substantiated by empowerment exercised through fans' proactivity. Such an

exercise-related empowerment governmentality differs from those previously investigated, mainly because it emerges as the art of government substantiated by the governed one: the fans.

Thus, we focused on investigating the interaction among fans of media paratexts about the conclusive film of one of the most emblematic cinematic sagas in the last decades, Avengers: Endgame (Havard et al., 2019; Ryoo et al., 2020). This movie concludes the first major shared saga in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), which comprised more than 20 movies over 12 years – from 2008 to 2019 (Medina-Contreras & Sangro-Colón, 2020). The unprecedented repercussion of this movie in the entertainment industry has prompted movie directors to issue a warning that real fans should not disclose the movie's content – i.e., spoilers – to other fans (Ryoo et al., 2020).

The next sections comprise the theoretical foundations adopted (*a priori*) to support the research problem elaboration, characterizing fans as prosumers of media paratexts; discussing how consumer empowerment can sustain marketing governmentality; presenting Foucauldian concepts, which propitiate ground for such articulation. Next, we present the Netnographic Foucauldian Genealogy as the investigative path adopted in the research, which aligns with the study's theoretical orientation and corresponds to a methodological approach adopted in recent marketing studies. The research results are presented in two sections, which refer to the analytical description and a theoretical framework (*a posteriori*) to interpret them, anchoring the study's contribution to the research field. Finally, the concluding remarks present the theoretical and practical implications of the research, its limitations, and indications for future research.

FANS AS PROSUMERS OF MEDIA PARATEXTS

Fans are specialized and productive consumers (Fuschillo, 2020) who engage in collective practices by appropriating available technologies (Cavalcanti et al., 2021; Sugihartati, 2020). They interact in social spaces known as fandoms to support one another in new ways to link to entertainment products (Hewer et al., 2017). This interaction is possible because these products are media texts that are easily propagated and shared (Hackley & Hackley, 2019).

Gray (2010) has investigated fans' ability to produce their own texts about the entertainment industry in content named fans' paratexts. However, it is necessary to differentiate between fans' paratexts created by consumers and those produced by the entertainment industry. On the one hand, fan paratexts are multi-format productions – i.e., fan art, fan fiction, fan videos – mostly playful and non-profit to be shared with other fans (Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017; Souza-Leão et al., 2023). On the other hand, media paratexts represents a billionaire industry thanks to its products and also to a marketing strategy that carefully elaborates complementary texts, which can expand them (Hackley & Hackley, 2022; Sugihartati, 2020). This process can raise the question about who the authors of these paratexts are. According to Foucault (1984), whenever readers seek to know a given text's authorship, they bow to certain knowledge. Therefore, it is possible to understand that fans conduct does not exist *a priori*: it is something produced by

a certain discourse that relates them to an intimate understanding of the media text and its producers (Cavalcanti et al., 2021).

According to this perspective, media paratexts have been increasingly explored by the entertainment industry through marketing communications in the form of movie trailers, teasers, and promotional art, among others (Gray, 2010; Kosnik et al., 2015). This strategy has proved so relevant that it accounts for the investment of up to a third of the production costs with media products (Gray, 2010; Kosnik et al., 2015; Ryoo et al., 2020). Nonetheless, this approach has a strong echo thanks to content spread by fans, mainly through Web 2.0 technologies (Chen, 2021; Sugihartati, 2020).

Considering how media products deliver meanings that are encoded and recoded by fans to configure their own consumer experience (Kozinets, 2001), media paratexts become a fundamental resource to help broaden their enjoyment (Hackley & Hackley, 2019; Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017). Additionally, media paratexts can be understood as a way to lead consumers to market productivity (Chen, 2021; Fuschillo, 2020) – for example, through fans' paratext production. By adding new meaning layers to products for fan consumption, media paratexts become a source of knowledge production (Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017) and reflect how discourses are established and manifested in media texts (Hills, 2010).

According to Sugihartati (2020), fans' reaction to media paratexts is an exercise in spreadability when they expand the meanings and reach of content, attesting to their qualification as prosumers. Thus, fans' paratexts can be understood as prosumption. As Gray (2010) indicates, fans reproduce extra content deriving from media texts they consume, and create and make their versions of it (i.e., fans' paratexts) available to fandoms they belong to or interact with. Thus, media paratexts can be interpreted as a stimulation to fans' creative work since it leads them to behave in a way that benefits media products (Cavalcanti et al., 2021).

This interpretation reflects how market organizations can influence consumers' behavior (Beckett, 2012). Further, it gives clues to how power relationships are exercised through government forms that guide social arrangements by reproducing perpetuated behaviors displayed in everyday practices (Foucault, 2006).

CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT AS SUSTENANCE FOR MARKETING GOVERNMENTALITY

Consumer government is a topic of growing relevance among CCT studies due to the understanding that market cultures establish spaces for power relations, mainly those between consumers and producers (Denegri-Knott & Tadajewski, 2017; Zajc, 2015). Thus, Michel Foucault's concept of governing has been widely adopted in CCT research (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Thompson, 2017).

The forms of government can be structured by practices adopted by active and empowered consumers willing to be part of a social context that represents their individual consumption choices (Denegri-Knott et al., 2006; Shankar et al., 2006). However, Papaoikonomou and Alarcón

(2017) have criticized the focus given to individuality in consumer empowerment processes. According to the aforementioned authors, it is a collective construct that enables elaborating alternative ways of social organization based on consumption practices.

According to our understanding, the following process is likely to happen: consumers' individuality elaborates their empowerment to align themselves with collectivities, which disposes them to their own context. Thus, our perspective expands the proposition by Shankar et al. (2006), namely: consumer empowerment works as the exercise of power towards marketing practices aimed at governing consumers themselves. Whenever consumers pursue power and give meaning to its existence, they exercise their freedom to choose their marketing practices. In broader terms, consumer empowerment has been associated – based on the Foucauldian concepts – with a resistance exercise type (Cherrier, 2009; Mikkonen & Bajde, 2012).

Accordingly, it is worth mentioning Gay's (2004) explanation of the concept of Foucault's resistance exercised by consumers: it is a practice adopted by individuals who aim to improve their own skills and the context they interact in; it can also be the means for emancipation in light of demands from external authorities, although it is not an antagonistic exercise. Consequently, the Foucauldian notion of resistance is expressed in the consumption environment; it is a productive and reactive force to exert the power consumers relate to.

Accordingly, Cova and Dalli (2009) described consumer resistance as an effort made by individuals to improve their consumer relationships. Additionally, it goes against Cova and Cova's (2012) idea about prosumption functioning as a governance form associated with consumers' resistance. Thus, consumers' resistance is a productive force capable of modeling how governance is performed. Ultimately, the relationship between resistance and power requires a suitable government mentality (Cherrier, 2009; Mikkonen et al., 2011).

In consumer research, governmentality can be observed in how market power relations are sustained and refined through consumer practices. It is common for consumers to accept or adjust prior knowledge established in market relations to maintain pleasant experiences. Consequently, they are propagating to other marketing agents – i.e., other consumers and managers – how they should act in the face of the rationality that already governs them and that can, and usually should, be adjusted or improved (Moisander & Eriksson, 2006; Shankar et al., 2006).

Governmentality means both taking care of each individual and maintaining the population by meeting its needs; it is the sophistication of the process to manage people, production, and products (Özgün et al., 2017). Organizations tend to propagate certain truths as statements to govern conduct. Consumers may assume such statements as beliefs – often through peer interaction – or take them as knowledge to drive their practices. In both cases, it reflects how consumers choose to be conducted by marketing governmentality since it serves their interests (Zwick et al., 2008).

Furthermore, market arrangements are accessed by producers to establish standards aimed at governing consumers through their behaviors and interests. Such standards are framed when

consumers reproduce certain behaviors while they conform and bind to it. This process allows organizations to profile those who govern and define the preferable kind of behavior (Beckett, 2012). According to Denegri-Knott et al. (2006), this process is a consumer resistance exercise, representing the consumer empowerment established when individuals take ownership of the marketing discourses they are interested in.

GOVERNMENTALITY IN FOUCAULDIAN THEORY

According to Foucault (2014), government dispositifs are heterogeneous dynamic arrangements that bring together several power relations accounting for ruling certain social practices. Since power is an exercise, dispositifs are configured as a complex multiplicity capable of adapting to social contexts and to individuals to be ruled.

These dispositifs explain the dynamic relationship between governors and governed; power and resistance. According to Foucault (2006), resistance is *sine qua non* to power; they (resistance and power) are forces affecting each other mutually and productively. Resistance does not seek to nullify power, nor does it aim to neutralize it. The coexistence between resistance and power allows it to work as a government and prevents it from becoming dominant.

Consequently, Foucault (1991, 2001) discusses how individuals' resistance is sustained and shaped by their association with a given governmentality. This is because governmentality is a set of associations (e.g., confession, trust, selflessness) that bring together individuals within communities based on the common goal of self-salvation (Foucault, 2007, 2014). Foucault (2001) proposed the concept of governmentality after reflecting on how free individuals choose to be governed to have their will met. It happens when power is indirectly exercised through the definition of action possibilities limited or guided to be productive. Thus, subjects are encouraged to perform productively, and it binds them to the governmentality regime, according to which the conduct of one reinforces the conduct of others (Foucault, 1991).

According to Foucault (2007), there is an inescapable lifestyle perpetuated by the economic liberalism dispositif, which brings together several resistance processes produced by economic interests capable of simultaneously encouraging individuals' competition and collaboration to meet singular and cultural interests. This Foucauldian perspective emphasizes the role played by economic government as the substance shaping society and citizens as political individuals based on economic logic.

Thus, Foucault (2001) indicates how political individuals produce their will through associations with neoliberalism. In this perspective, neoliberalism stimulates individuals to pursue communities and allies with the common goal of representing their self-salvation. These communities and social contexts enable individuals to align their wills with the moralities governing them. Further, explain how forms of government guide the governed choices towards practices and values that can save them – if one considers the context they live in.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The method adopted can be called Netnographic Foucauldian Genealogy (NFG) since we performed genealogical analysis within netnography research. This is because we understand that the delineation of our empirical field would benefit from netnographic research, but the theoretical-epistemological orientation of the research required Foucauldian genealogy. It is worth mentioning that Kozinets (2020) indicates that different analytical methods can be applied to netnography. Besides, netnography has been used in the last decade through the lens of high social theories (e.g., Actor-Network Theory, Butlerian, Deleuzian, Foucauldian) (Cavalcanti et al., 2021; Kozinets et al., 2017), which is pointed as a path to expand CCT discussions (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Thompson, 2017). Thus, the first of the following subsections points out netnography steps to build the research corpus following its quality criteria. The other presents Foucauldian Genealogy as an interpretative lens to elucidate its analytical stages adopted in this study.

Netnography social media research

Kozinets (2020) has defined netnography as qualitative social media research that builds on ethnography and other qualitative technics. This definition points to the singularity of netnography as a particular method, which is one (i.e., netnographic praxis) of its four main elements, the others being cultural focus, social media data, and engagement.

By engagement, Kozinets (2020) means the need for researchers to immerse in the field. In this sense, it is worth pointing out that the authors of this study acknowledge themselves as MCU fans, accomplishing a process of cultural *entreé*. This process provided us with the sensitivity to capture details of the observed context, which are commonly particular to its members.

Regarding social media data, among platforms accessed in this research, YouTube and Twitter stood out for capturing fans' reactions to content and digital trends (Dijck, 2013). Our data collection focused on periods of engagement and interaction among fans about Endgame-associated paratexts produced by MCU. First, all comments about all seventeen movie trailers – record number for a single movie – posted on Marvel Studios' official YouTube channel between December 2018 and April 2019 were filed before the movie was released. This period spans from the movie's first trailer, made available on YouTube to its release in theaters around the world. Next, interactions about the hashtag #ThankYouAvengers - proposed by the cast and film producers to thank the 12-year journey of movies, which reached the status of the most commented topic on Twitter at the time - were equally collected and filed between April 22 and May 31, 2019, after the movie was released. The temporality of data obtained on Twitter corresponds to the time interval between hashtag release and its saturation – when it stopped

being used on the platform for more than seven days in a row – forty days after the first message was published. Additionally, we followed the aforementioned author's suggestion about avoiding software data analysis to capture the particularities of the investigated ethos.

Data collection and archiving were performed based on two free scraper applications used to monitor specific social networks, namely: YouTube Comment Scraper, which collects messages, reactions, and interactions of videos available on the platform (see Feng et al., 2019); and Buzz Monitor, which presents time strata (e.g., by hour, day, week, or month) of messages posted on Twitter, and provides engagement in social networks and hyperlinks to the original post (see García-Perdomo, 2017). Data were exported through JavaScript software and converted into PDF format. In total, more than 1.2 million messages were posted by the fandom. However, they were subjected to depuration, so only posts with comments written in English about the MCU movie or the cinematographic saga were considered. Thus, 449,568 messages were analyzed: 278,096 of them were available on YouTube, and 171,472, on Twitter.

## Foucauldian genealogy of power analytical procedures

Foucault developed the Genealogy of Power to identify and understand the dispositifs governing society. Genealogical analysis enables identifying the conditions allowing exercises of power and social articulations established by them. Accordingly, it also reveals how social actors behave to prevent different forms of government from working oppressively (Foucault, 2007).

Foucauldian genealogical analysis enables the clarification of ambiguities and exploration of coexistence conditions that produce government forms based on consumption practices (Tadajewski, 2006; Thompson et al., 2013). Thompson and Tian (2008) have used Foucauldian genealogy to perform a critical reflection on how the consumption of selective popular memories keeps the hegemonic status of certain social groups. According to the aforementioned authors, its analysis enables tracing the profile of horizontal nexus relationships that sustain market competitiveness among several agents often mentioned in consumption discourses and ideologies.

These aspects play a fundamental role in our study. We focused on investigating how marketing communication contents – i.e., media paratexts – produce analogous market discourses capable of transforming consumers' behavior. Consequently, genealogical analysis enabled interpreting consumers' behavior – i.e., fans interactions – as the very basis of the dispositifs governing them.

Thus, genealogical analysis starts from discursive formations (see Fig. 1), which are the starting point to identify power diagrams that reveal how power relations are configured and provide the right conditions to configure dispositifs. Therefore, Discursive formations are linked to power diagrams through power operators that refer to the forms of conduct capable of ruling different agencies and social structures (Foucault, 1977, 2006).

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Figure 1. Analytical Process
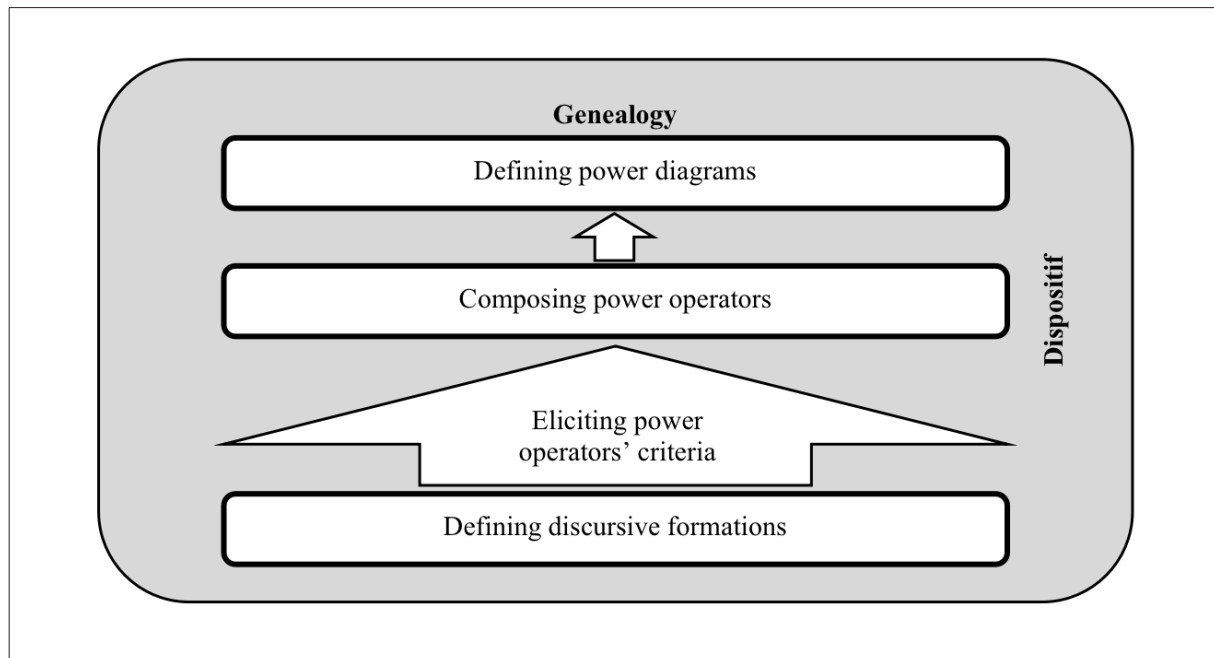
Source: Based on Foucault (1977, 2010).

Therefore, power diagrams are defined based on the convergence of power operators. Power operators, in turn, are defined based on how certain criteria elicited from discursive formations are combined (Foucault, 2010). Table 1 presents definitions of these criteria, and Figure 2 illustrates the whole analytical process.

Table 1. Power Operators' Criteria

| Power operators' criteria	
Differentiation systems	Comprised by alterities between forms of conduct that reveal how power forces are produced on top of each other within synergistic relationships. They show which exercises of power conduct the actions of others (e.g., linguistic or cultural differences, legal systems, economic conditions).
Types of objectives	Evidence the convergence of interests between forms of conduct by taking into consideration that each of them presents specific purposes associated with the exercise of power. They allow analyzing the motivation behind the actions of some individuals over others and are evidenced as a means for maintaining social positions (e.g., privileges or status, exercising a profession, accumulating capital).
Instrumental modalities	Correspond to power technologies used for governing purposes practiced through exercises of power. They are the instruments that make governing possible (e.g., word effects, surveillance systems, control rules).
Institutionalization forms	Establish how institutional structures – be them simple or complex, open or closed, and so on – and contextual aspects (i.e., knowledge, norms) ground power relationships.
Degrees of rationalization	Correspond to the ways power relations operate. They concern identifying better approaches to enable the exercise of power, the intensity of power instruments' effectiveness, the likelihood of obtaining certain results and the efforts involved in it, and so on.

Source: Based on Foucault (2010).

It is worth mentioning some efforts related to debugging and analysis of the research corpus. First, in view of the large amount of data collected, the analytical stage lasted twelve months. In this sense, there was an important learning curve in the process since the comments showed blocks of similar themes, reproducing discursive patterns. On the other hand, the analysis followed the chronological order, according to which messages were published. However, although the data collected comprised two periods, as previously described, they did not show different results, revealing the same pattern of media paratextual production. In this sense, at the initial contact with the data, the comments were analyzed in the process of association with meanings relevant to the context in which they were produced to allow the inference of discursive and non-discursive practices.

RESULT DESCRIPTIONS

Our analysis revealed one dispositif based on bundles of relations from two power diagrams, three power operators, and four discursive formations, as shown in Figure 2. Next, we describe these categories and their relationships, and illustrate them through examples of data extracted from the research corpus.

Figure 2. Analytical Map of Categories Associated with the Genealogical Stage
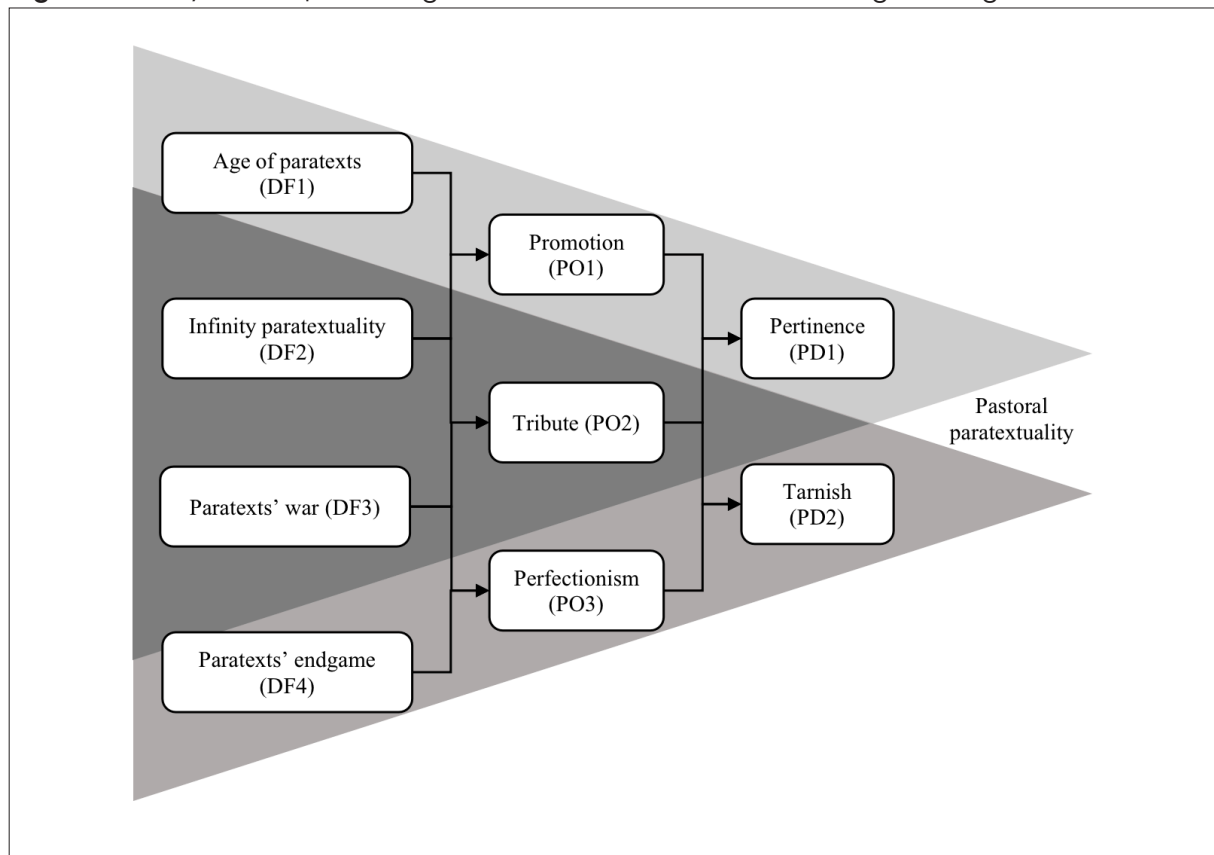
Age of paratexts (DF1) refers to fans' concept about how paratext by MCU has proposed and established a new functionality for extra content in the film industry. Their speeches show their perception that the entertainment industry as a whole has adopted this approach.

Close to this perception, the second discursive formation points out an infinity paratextuality (DF2). It reflects fandom belief on how MCU's paratexts play a fundamental role in building the shared narrative established by the media franchise between its productions. Likewise, consuming each extra content available intensifies fans' relationship with the cultural object(s).

On the other hand, the fan discussions on paratexts quality indicate the third discursive formation called paratexts' war (DF3). It presents the divergence of opinions among fans about the paratexts of Endgame. Fans present contrary positions (e.g., satisfied and dissatisfied) about the extra contents of the movie and argue among themselves about the quality, validity, and need or paratexts.

Finally, when fandom points out the extra content of Endgame as poor, it also sheds light on the last discursive formation identified in the study, namely: paratexts' endgame (DF4). This formation indicates fans' dissatisfaction with the extra content, either due to distrust or disappointment. It comprises criticisms by some fans who consider that the movie paratexts have diminished rather than promoted the fandom's interest in the production since they failed to translate the important role played by this production in popular culture and suffered the negative influence of political issues.

Promotion (PO1) is the first power operator identified. It reflects positive reactions from fans to use extra content produced by Marvel Studios to promote Endgame. It is based on fans' understanding that they live at a time when popular culture is featured by using paratexts (DF1) and on the fact that this content type must be promoted at higher quantity and quality level (DF2).

These power operators account for presenting how *viral* content (instrumental modality) helps keep the target audience cohesive and growing since they lead fans to address likely records (rationalization degree) to be achieved by the movie through fan appreciation (institutionalization form) which, in turn, indicates how fans react to MCU's paratextuality. Thus, fans refer to *trending* and *conclusion* (differentiation systems) to express their excitement about the echo reached by movie previews and hashtags on the Web or about content that materializes at the end of a twelve-year-long movie saga. The objective of each excitement type is to corroborate *media resonance* and *nerdy legitimation*, respectively.

The second power operator indicates how fans simultaneously express expectations about and demand for the paratexts they consume. This operator, called tribute (PO2), aims to highlight the role played by paratexts in endorsing the conclusion of a popular culture phenomenon. It is equivalent to the conjunction of discursive formations that consider infinite possibilities brought by paratexts to the fandom (DF2) and the ones addressing discussions and reservations about the validity of such material for this audience (DF3).

It is an operator founded on the understanding that paratexts are a celebration of nerd culture (rationalization degree), which is regulated by the combination of commitment and conclusion (differentiation systems). These two factors target the confirmation of relevance of

the saga and nerd legitimation, respectively (types of objectives). It is something ruled by fan appreciation (institutionalization form) to the epic status of the saga conclusion and accounts for generating demand for adequacy (instrumental modality) application in any content associated with the movie.

The operator called perfectionism (PO3) presents the negative positions of the fandom about the design of Endgame paratexts. According to fans' perspectives, the movie previews have disappointed them in different aspects (e.g., lack of or too much content; possible political influence). The operator can be observed in how fans address the role played by paratexts in the MCU (DF3) and, simultaneously, how they question whether such content should be essential to understand the movies (DF4).
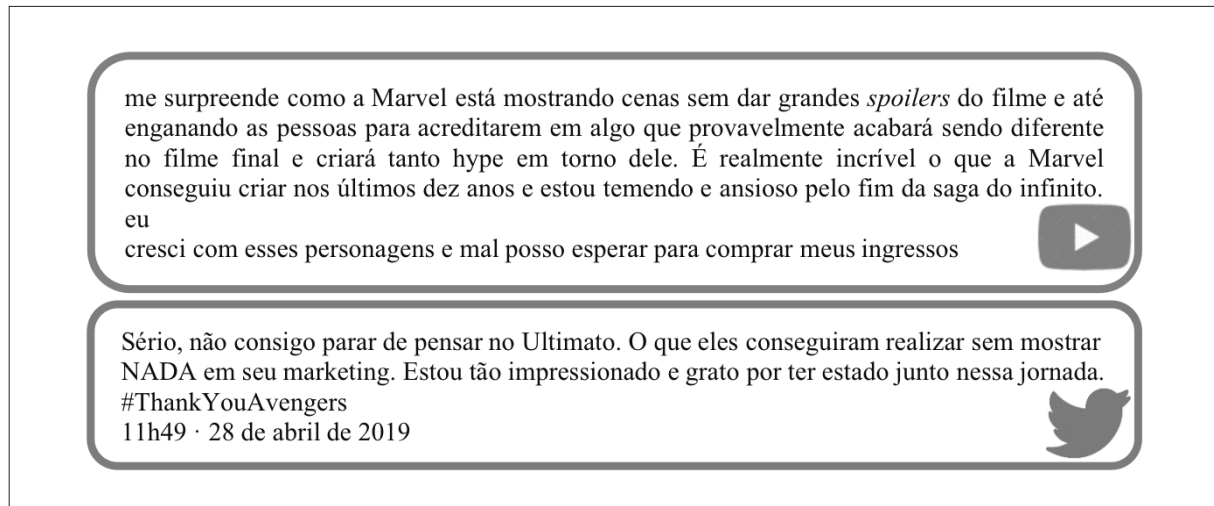
Commitment and conservatism are the differentiation systems shaping such a power operator. The first one reinforces the feeling that, since Endgame is the movie concluding the cinematic saga of MCU, any content of it – including its paratexts – must have exquisite quality. The other differentiation system reflects the movement of part of the fandom that rejects the growing space given to political agendas that go beyond fictional universes in popular culture. Both differentiation systems express the demand for content adequacy (instrumental modality), which is understood as preciousness on the part of some fans (institutionalization form) who always seem to find details to criticize. They aim to confirm the relevance of the saga, which is represented by the movement that demands the cinematographic studio to show respect for the nerd culture (rationalization degree).

Pertinence (PD1) is the power diagram encompassing fans' acknowledgment of the importance of being attentive to any extra content of an MCU-concluding movie. It reflects the power relations supported by two of the observed power operators, and it indicates that, according to fans, paratexts promote (PO1) and pay tribute (PO2) to the cinematographic saga. According to fans, the extra content on Endgame appeases their anxiety and encourages gratitude, and this process leads them to acknowledge the echo achieved by the movie on the Web and the validity of being one of the most important productions in the history of cinema.

Thus, it was possible to observe interactions that illustrate the power relationship exercised between fandom members regarding the Pertinence that Marvel Studios led to the promotion of, until then, the most important film ever produced. At first – before the release of the film and in the comments on the trailers published on YouTube – fans thanked the media paratexts for their care in promoting the films in ways that made them feel that their long relationship - a journey of more than ten years of interconnected films - of a fan with the MCU was being honored. At another time - after the premiere and in messages published on Twitter - fans expressed their gratitude for the film having done justice to all their long-lasting expectations. In both cases and throughout the process of contact with the media paratexts, fans highlighted Marvel Studio's care in promoting the film without presenting narrative content – i.e., avoiding spoilers – which they considered a way of protecting their consumption experience as fans of media objects.

Figure 3 illustrates the first power diagram – and all the genealogical analytical movements that give it substance – based on comments collected in each of the analyzed social networks.

Figure 3. Example of Pertinence (PD1)

me surpreende como a Marvel está mostrando cenas sem dar grandes *spoilers* do filme e até enganando as pessoas para acreditarem em algo que provavelmente acabará sendo diferente no filme final e criará tanto hype em torno dele. É realmente incrível o que a Marvel conseguiu criar nos últimos dez anos e estou temendo e ansioso pelo fim da saga do infinito. eu
cresci com esses personagens e mal posso esperar para comprar meus ingressos

Sério, não consigo parar de pensar no Ultimato. O que eles conseguiram realizar sem mostrar NADA em seu marketing. Estou tão impressionado e grato por ter estado junto nessa jornada. #ThankYouAvengers
11h49 · 28 de abril de 2019

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h4cAU2Jz_Q and https://twitter.com/
search?q=%23thankyouavengers&src=typed_query

This YouTube post features a fan praising the paratexts of Endgame for stirring the feelings of fans in the 30-second video "Honor." On the other hand, in the message available on Twitter, a fan who had watched the movie reports that she remains impressed with the fact that such a broad marketing strategy did not present spoilers about its content. Both reports enable perceiving the pertinence (PD1) of MCU paratexts by the way they created expectations and kept on surprising fans, even after they watched the movie. It brings up two operators, namely: promotion (PO1), which contrasts with other content in the entertainment industry by feeding fans' hype without revealing the plot of the movie itself; and tribute (PO2), when videos remind the fandom that characters who died in the previous movie – i.e., Infinity War –would not be forgotten, but avenged in the last movie of the saga.

The two operators share the perception that MCU uses infinity paratextuality (DF2), and it can be observed when YouTube fans declare that they can no longer wait to watch the movie. On the other hand, the message on Twitter focuses on Endgame promotion (PO1) since the fan indicates that Marvel Studios managed to establish a new way of producing movies by using paratexts in an age of paratexts (DF1).

Tarnish (PD2) was the other power diagram identified in this research. It refers to the time when fans' relationships reveal how they were disappointed, at some level, with the extra content of Endgame. It indicates the power webs established by two of the identified power operators, when part of the fandom required the paratexts to work as tribute (PO2) to the cinematographic saga and be as perfect (PO3) as possible.
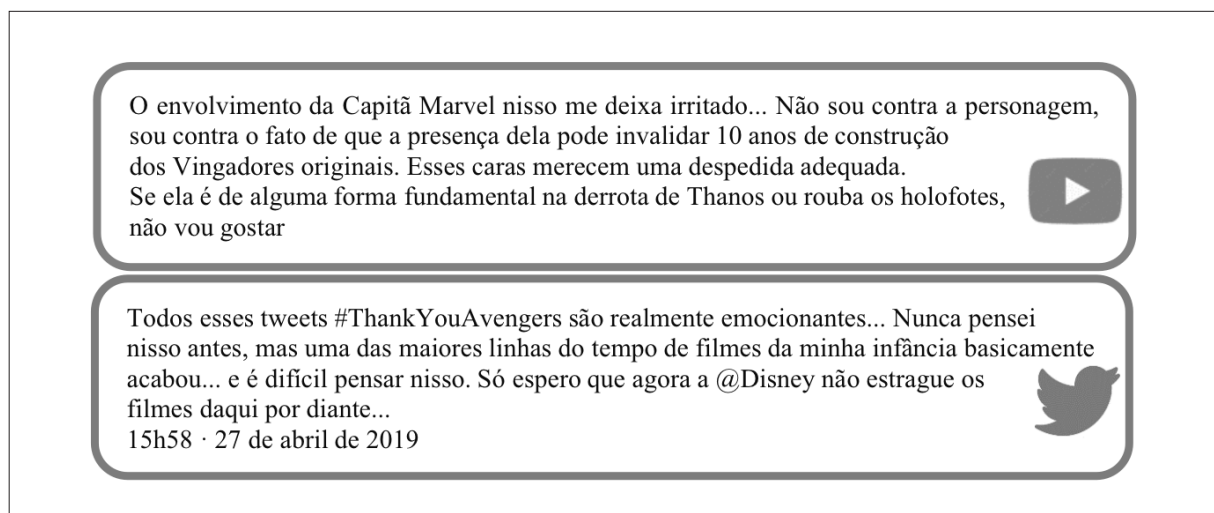
It is a fandom movement that continuously elaborates criticisms of the paratexts consumed by them, even those not central to the consumption of movies. This process is evident in the

combination of operators: one is associated with the desire for a celebration that lives up to the conclusion of one of the most relevant narrative universes of cinema (PO2), and the other one is evident when fans believe that Marvel Studios has disappointed them with Endgame paratexts.

Thus, we could identify power relations exercised by fans and the Tarnish they felt concerning the media paratexts of Avengers: Endgame. In their responses to the trailers and teasers on YouTube, they postulated adjustments and care that could have been made to the film's narrative. On Twitter, they sent messages in which they worried about the future of the MCU, considering the changes in protagonists that would occur in the films following the outcome of some characters who had to say goodbye in Endgame. In both moments, the fandom showed gratitude for how Marvel Studios managed to conclude the cinematic saga in the film released in 2019. However, Disney could and should continue improving their productions' content to guarantee extraordinary experiences for their fans.

Figure 4 presents an example of the second power diagram – and all the convergence of previous analytical categories that substantiated it at the archaeological and genealogical stages. It comprises comments aimed at teasing movie producers in different tones.

Figure 4. Example of Tarnish (DP2)

O envolvimento da Capitã Marvel nisso me deixa irritado... Não sou contra a personagem, sou contra o fato de que a presença dela pode invalidar 10 anos de construção dos Vingadores originais. Esses caras merecem uma despedida adequada.
Se ela é de alguma forma fundamental na derrota de Thanos ou rouba os holofotes, não vou gostar

Todos esses tweets #ThankYouAvengers são realmente emocionantes... Nunca pensei nisso antes, mas uma das maiores linhas do tempo de filmes da minha infância basicamente acabou... e é difícil pensar nisso. Só espero que agora a @Disney não estrague os filmes daqui por diante...
15h58 · 27 de abril de 2019

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QbltzlUV6w and https://twitter.com/search?q=%23thankyouavengers&src=typed_query

Based on the comment about the "Movie Clip" available on YouTube, a fan complains about the central role given to Captain Marvel in the promotional video and questions whether it would be repeated in the movie. On the other hand, the message extracted from Twitter expresses his relief after reading other fans' tweets on the topic, who reassured him that Marvel Studios did not ruin the movie. These statements confirm the tarnish (PD2) observed in how part of the fandom disapproves or gets suspicious of the movie based on its paratexts.

Based on the highlighted messages, Endgame paratexts work as triggers for fans to express non-positive expectations about content produced by MCU. This factor establishes the entanglement of two operators: paratexts must work as tribute (PO2) to the cinematographic

saga, and, more critically, they must meet fans' perfectionism (PO3), as well as do justice to the narratives and characters pervading their emotional memories (e.g., childhood).

Both operators are associated with two discursive formations. One is exclusive to the most critical operator (PO3) and presents the paratexts' endgame (DF4), according to which fans question – based on the movie promotion on the Web – whether Marvel Studios still manages to maintain one of the most important sagas in the history of cinema. The other one is aligned with the two operators (PO2 and PO3) and indicates the paratexts' war (DF3), according to which part of the fandom sets conflicts among themselves and with movie producers about the protagonism given to a character who is inconsistent with twelve years of MCU.

RESULTS REFLECTIONS

Both power diagrams illustrate how fans' movements – individuals and collectives – represent a specific type of consumer empowerment. This empowerment – herein understood as exerting prosumption practices – is not a matter of breaking the power relationships governing it but of resisting them since the Foucauldian notion of resistance is productive and reactive to government forms.

Thus, the observed power diagrams – pertinence and tarnish – depict the resistance of consumers interested in being governed, not in acting as docile bodies. Consequently, we herein consider that media paratexts work as one of the marketing technologies addressed by Becket (2012) to govern and influence consumers' behavior. In addition, its content can mobilize consumers by aligning them with organizations' interests. However, we consider media paratexts an exponentially broader government form since they gain strength from fan engagement. It has been assimilated as the government form enabling fandom maintenance.

Based on the power diagrams and how they were configured with significant overlap of criteria used to generate them, we could identify a conjunction substantiated by a single dispositif, here defined as pastoral paratextuality. This dispositif indicates how fandom resistance runs through positions that are both for and against. In this sense, "paratextuality" refers to this dynamic with which fans react to media paratexts, while "pastoral" indicates the form of government they want to follow.

According to Foucault (2001, 2007), pastoral power is governmentality where individuals acknowledge the existence of a given power capable of guiding them to a way of life that is not only beneficial to them, but also divine. Among several power relations and resistance exercises, the pastoral dispositif illustrates how multiple practices converge to the salvation provided by the governors and sustained by the governed ones. It is one of the governmentalities that drive individuals, institutions, and even other forms of government (Foucault, 2006).

According to Özgün et al. (2017), pastoral power is observed in consumer relations when consumers assume that organizations' decisions have beneficial effects on both the management of the products consumed by them and their consumption practices. In the context of this

research, since fans can either approve or disapprove of content and quality of media paratexts (as presented in Fig. 2), their empowerment lies precisely in their ability to react to them as a way of indicating how they want them to be produced. Thus, accepting to be governed remains a sort of empowerment. According to Shankar et al. (2006), consumer empowerment is an exercise aimed at choosing power relationships. Therefore, based on pastoral power, whenever consumers accept whoever governs them, they choose the power relationships they are associated with; thus, they exert a certain consumer empowerment type.

The function of pastoral power lies in always providing necessity and satisfaction to the flock (Foucault, 2001). The entertainment industry produces media paratexts capable of feeding fans' expectations through content capable of pervading their imagination to guarantee fandom condition and relationship. Based on this understanding, the entertainment industry acts as a pastor who leads the fans' condition, both as the incarnation of each fan who protects the fandom relationship. Thus, pastoral paratextuality improves fans' experience by completing and enhancing the consumption of the media texts they are linked to. This content becomes an obligation and a treat from the ones producing these texts.

In an attempt toward a theoretical generalization based on our research, we advocate that paratextuality encourages fans' empowerment. Consequently, paratextuality represents a marketing power structure that produces fan resistance and sustains the governmentality that governs them.

According to our findings, there is neither government unilaterally imposed by organizations nor unlimited consumer freedom. Paratextuality evidence shows how producers' narrative strategies can be interpreted and appropriated by consumers in different ways. Thus, rather than opposing or adhering to producers, consumers accept to bow down to their government in whatever way suits them. Accordingly, the interface between mass-mediated market ideologies and consumer interpretive strategies can be understood in the light of knowledge established to pastor consumer communities (Fyrberg-Yngfalk et al., 2014).

Pastoral power reflects the convergence of will. Once organizations want to govern consumers for marketing strategy purposes, and consumers are up to be governed to productively consume in their own way, their interests match. Accordingly, it reflects Foucault's assertion that governmentality is an exercise over free individuals; otherwise, it would be domination. Thus, the forms of government presuppose that governed and governing align interests. The balance of this dynamic lies precisely in the possibility of resistance by free individuals to act when they do not agree with how they are governed (Foucault, 1991, 2001).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research findings have indicated pastoral power as the form of governmentality of consumption evidenced in the prosumption of fans in relation to paratexts of media products. This governmentality is dynamic since it is driven by the entertainment industry and supported by the intense fan prosumption practices.

The unique prosumption practices exercised by fans towards media paratexts show active behavior in compliance with the entertainment industry's marketing strategy. Thus, this fan behavior reveals how they want to position themselves in relation to media products they are linked to, although they are not interested in breaking up with the marketing agent producing them.

However, why do fans allow themselves to be guided by this pastoral power? It may happen because of their dependence on these producers, who account for maintaining the media products and, through them, their own fans' condition. This behavior appears to be adopted to save the fandoms and, consequently, the very fan culture they are part of. Fans position themselves as individuals to be guided to fulfill their desire to intensely consume media texts – be it in quantity and/or in quality – including paratexts. Therefore, fans accept to be governed as long as such a government complies with their will.

We interpret this acceptance as a way of resistance since fans want to be governed in their own terms rather than in the entertainment industry's terms. Accordingly, as consumer communities, fandoms work as a form of resistance to typical market configurations (Chen, 2021) since they allow their members to escape the power relations often exerted over them (Fuschillo, 2020; Kozinets, 2001). However, fans do not seek to break away from media products consumed by them; they rather operate to reconfigure market arrangements where they perform their consumption practices to meet their desires (Zajc, 2015).

Thus, media paratexts are used to reach new fans and intensify fans' relationship with the original text (Gray, 2010; Hackley & Hackley, 2019). By feeding fans' bond to media products, the entertainment industry shows devotion to these fans; this devotion is as productive as, or more productive than, the entertainment industry itself and based on Foucauldian terms, it configures itself as pastor's salvation. Therefore, paratextuality works as pastoral technology, as political dispositif driving fans; the entertainment industry produces media paratexts to govern the audience, whereas fans accept to be governed to protect their fans' condition.

This investigation contributes to the CCT field by exploring the use of paratexts as consumers' governmentality. Accordingly, the study's original contribution lies in proposing media paratexts as a stimulation to fans prosuming their marketing governmentality.

Thus, when fans spread and discuss media paratexts, they endorse a governmentality that guarantees them the experience of their will. Therefore, it is not a docilization of their practices but a resistance exercise in which the fans choose to delegate to the entertainment industry the form of government they believe can best benefit them.

Consequently, on the one hand, our contribution extrapolates the understanding of Pellandini-Simányi and Conte (2021), who suggest that forms of government perpetuated by market discourses and by its dispositifs govern individuals as docile bodies. On the other hand, it aligns with the understanding of Parmentier and Fischer (2015) about the expressive capacity of market components to establish and maintain relationships with consumers by encouraging their engagement. Thus, the interests of different agents (e.g., industry, consumers) are met through a complex assemblage that involves actors, practices, and a wide range of relations (e.g., producers, consumers, interaction, communication, and media platforms).

A limitation of this research is the fact that its scope is limited to fans' prosumption practices reacting to media paratexts production of a single movie production. However, it is worth emphasizing that Endgame can be understood as a unique case since it was one of the media products that most widely adopted the strategy of releasing content to trigger fan anticipation (see Ryoo et al., 2020), not to mention that it became the highest-grossing film in history (see BBC, 2019). On the other hand, fan practices observed in social networks such as Twitter may not fully represent their involvement with media products (see Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). Nevertheless, the massive use of Twitter and YouTube by both consumers and marketing professionals typically articulates the engagement of fans who use social media (see Kozinets et al., 2017) to media product content repercussions and to spread cultural convergence (see Chen, 2021).

Based on the results discussed in our study, it is possible to suggest that media paratexts work as a broad marketing communication strategy (see Hackley & Hackley, 2022; Souza-Leão et al., 2023). Accordingly, if one takes into consideration a theorization in line with the presented findings and conclusions, it is possible to see the relevance of conducting further investigations focused on the resonance of media paratexts as a marketing strategy used to drive consumers' behavior. These investigations should not only focus on fan consumption but also on consumers of other product types, mainly of products with high symbolic value. Thus, this expansion should be based on the investigation of other media paratext types, such as advertisements and other marketing communication actions.

Further research on the art of governing consumption could also find fertile ground. On the one hand, approaches regarding phenomena relating to neo-tribal and online communities would meet the main consumer culture agenda; specifically, it would be intriguing to investigate how fan consumption penetrates the celebrity-fans relationship. On the other hand, the study gives a floor for discussions on how consumer empowerment can be understood as a biopolitical marketing mechanism (see Zwick & Bradshaw, 2019); particularly, important insights could come from studies about co-creation practices and consumers' work appropriation relationship.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Bruno Melo Moura: worked on the Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Software; Validation; Visualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – proofreading and editing.

André Luiz Maranhão de Souza-Leão: Conceptualization, funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing – proofreading and editing.