

Couch, Travel Tips and Company: Facebook-mediated collaborative consumer practices and constructed mobilities among women

Thaís Costa da Silva^a

Abstract

Modes of travel consumption have become complex and dynamic in contemporary times, greatly influenced by the use of information and communication technologies. Some are associated with political issues and resistance movements by minority groups. Faced with hindrances to their mobility, such as poor security or discrimination, some of these groups overcome adversity by creating collaborative-consumption mobility alternatives. In this context, the article seeks to investigate how the digital materialities and narratives built and circulated within the collaborative travel group Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO, on Facebook, stimulate and optimize multiple modes of travel consumption as well as multiple modes of women's mobility. The method of analysis was comprised of participant observation, interviews, and a literature review. This study is intended to contribute to current reflections on the plurality of modes of travel consumption, the limitations working against the mobility of women who seek to travel, and the methodological processes adopted to better understand them.

Keywords: *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO*; Collaborative travel; Collaborative consumption; Women's mobilities; Gender.

Resumo

Couch, dicas e companhia: mobilidades construídas e práticas de consumo colaborativo entre mulheres mediadas pelo Facebook

Os modos de consumo em viagens têm se complexificado e dinamizado na contemporaneidade, muito influenciados pelos usos das tecnologias de informação e de comunicação. Alguns deles são associados a questões políticas e a movimentos de resistência de grupos minoritários. Diante das problemáticas que dificultam suas mobilidades, como a segurança precária ou a discriminação, alguns desses grupos criam alternativas de consumo colaborativo para superar adversidades. Nesse contexto, o artigo busca investigar de que forma as materialidades digitais e narrativas construídas no grupo de viagens colaborativas Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO, vinculado ao Facebook, estimulam e otimizam múltiplos modos de consumo em viagens e de mobilidades das mulheres. Como método de análise adotou-se a observação participante, a aplicação de entrevistas e uma revisão bibliográfica. Intenta-se, com essa investigação, contribuir para as reflexões acerca da pluralidade dos modos de consumo em viagens, das limitações encontradas na mobilidade das mulheres que buscam viajar e dos processos metodológicos adotados para melhor compreendê-los.

Palavras-chave: Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO; Viagens colaborativas; Consumo colaborativo; Mobilidades das mulheres; Gênero.

a. PhD student in Communication at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil. Professor of the Tourism, Journalism, and Publicity and Advertising courses at the Hélio Alonso University, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil. E-mail: thaisunirio@yahoo.com.br

Resumen

Couch, consejos y compañía: movilidades construidas y prácticas de consumo colaborativo entre mujeres mediadas por Facebook

Los modos de consumo en viajes se han complicado y dinamizado en la contemporaneidad, muy influenciados por los usos de las tecnologías de información y comunicación. Algunos de ellos se asocian a cuestiones políticas y a movimientos de resistencia de grupos minoritarios. Ante las problemáticas que dificultan sus movilidades, como la seguridad precaria o la discriminación, algunos de esos grupos crean alternativas de consumo colaborativo para superar adversidades. En este contexto, el artículo busca investigar de qué forma las materialidades digitales y narrativas construidas en el grupo de viajes colaborativos *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO*, vinculado a Facebook, estimulan y optimizan múltiples modos de consumo en viajes y movilidades a las mujeres. Como método de análisis se adoptó la observación participante, la aplicación de entrevistas y una revisión bibliográfica. Se intenta con esta investigación ofrecer contribuciones a las reflexiones acerca de las pluralidades de modos de consumo en viajes, de las limitaciones encontradas en las movilidades de las mujeres que buscan viajar y de los procesos metodológicos adoptados para mejor comprenderlos.

Palabras clave: *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO*; Viajes colaborativos; Consumo colaborativo; Movilidades de las mujeres; Género.

INTRODUCTION

Staying in people's residences, traveling to and from a destination by hitchhiking, getting to know different places with the company of a resident as a tour guide. Travelers' search for experiences to get closer to the daily lives of their destination's native residents is increasingly common. These experiences are generally also more economical, allowing tourists to extend their stay and travel more often, by ceasing to consume or consuming less of the more traditional and costly tourism products and services.

This mode of travel is often linked to solidary and collaborative practices, which are structured and strengthened by the articulation of travelers in networks. Consistent with the idea of gift-giving, described by Mauss (2015) as part of the exchange systems of Polynesians, Melanesians and the American Northwestern tribes, the premises of these practices are associated with the giving-receiving-giving back triad of interactions – even though this cycle is subjected to many disruptions and discontinuities. Offering one's home to receive a stranger or being granted lodging by means of solidarity networks, without monetary exchange, are examples, among many, of how these interactions occur.

With the increased use of the internet, especially in the last decade, many of these network articulations have expanded to the digital medium. A variety of platforms, whether or not specialized in collaborative travel, now mediate and streamline communications between travelers. Their material specificities, as well as their symbolic and political dimensions, have the ability to attract users or modulate their behavior in different areas.

Within this niche market, comprised of travelers who choose collaboratively offered products and services, there are groups that are even more segmented and who also choose to communicate using digital platforms. This is the case of a group known as *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO*, on Facebook, which brings together cis and transgender women interested in sharing accommodations

(referred to using the slang couch), hitchhiking, obtaining travel tips, exchanging opportunities or even finding company for travel activities.

Linked to these communicative processes is the complexification of modes of consumption, the perception and appropriation of tourist spaces, and the trait of mobility. The latter is very dear to contemporary society, and yet not everyone can enjoy it. Thus, it is necessary to understand the dynamics and particularities of these networks, and how solidarity interactions reverberate in the modes of touristic consumption and in the mobility of these women. To this end, this article discusses the narratives present in the group, which has a feminist denotation and encourages these practices within a specific segment.

This article seeks to investigate how the narratives and values constructed in the Couch group *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* stimulate multiple modes of travel based on collaborative ideals, contributing to enhance participants' mobile quality. It is also intended to evaluate how the digital materialism of this social network is configured and what is its role as a facilitator of these consumption processes, based on the understanding that physical and digital medias are not separate from each other.

It is worth mentioning that, among the various conceptions of the term consumption, we chose the approach advocated by Canclini (1992, p. 3, our translation): "the set of sociocultural processes in which the appropriation and uses of products occur"¹. In this sense, consumption is associated with symbolic values and the different individuals use these products. Among them are touristic products, a set of goods and services united by interaction and interdependence relations of considerable complexity (Ruschmann, 1991).

METHODOLOGY

The methodological procedures adopted here were based on the collection of empirical data, supported by a theoretical framework and employing a qualitative approach. In order to investigate the types of narratives and modes of consumption evidenced and defended in this touristic consumption network, an ethnographic work was carried out in a virtual environment. This work included participant observation in the *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* group between April 2017 and December 2018. Our goal was to develop an inside understanding of the group's functioning (Gil, 1999).

On the premise that the internet is a space of varied and significant social interactions and meaning productions, and that these are inseparable from the offline environment, we chose to maintain the use of the term ethnography throughout this article – as suggested by Fragoso, Recuero and Amaral (2011) – instead of 'virtual ethnography,' 'netnography' or any other correlated term seeking emphasize the online character of the research. Our methodological process, however, does consider the particularities of research in this environment, highlighting the identified textual and imagery elements, as well as the researcher's physical distance and the characteristic mediation

1. Free translation of the following excerpt in Spanish: "como el conjunto de procesos socioculturales en que se realizan la apropiación y los usos de los productos".

performed by electronic devices. Such an investigation is comprised of the description and analysis of the human group in question: their behaviors, values, and material productions.

This investigative tool allowed us to identify material characteristics of the platform that have a bearing on users' modes of articulation and the way information is shared. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with active members of the group, in order to assess their perceptions regarding the experience of participating in this network, as well as their usual modes of travel consumption. Considering that research on mobility must employ mobile methods, able to follow the object's multiple displacements (Buscher, Urry & Witchger, 2011), the collected data establishes a dialogue with the dynamic character of this network and of touristic activity in general.

DIVERSE MODES OF CONSUMPTION AND COLLABORATION

Forms of travel consumption have diversified over the years, together with the products and services offered by touristic companies to fulfill the multiple aspirations of travelers. To follow these movements, Brazil's Ministry of Tourism routinely conducts research on the consumption habits² of Brazilian and foreign tourists, producing statistical data on various aspects of this activity. By employing a quantitative-approach methodology, this data collection effort is able to present information such as tourists' profile, the period in which they travel, where they stay, and how they pay for their trips –relevant data for activity planning and organization.

However, we believe that these data alone are not sufficient for an understanding of tourism's modes of consumption, since they also entail less-conventional uses and appropriations. As Canclini (1992) points out, it is necessary to start from an interdisciplinary research, encompassing knowledge of anthropology, communication and economics with a multifocal perspective able to comprehend the particularities of this form of consumption. For De Certeau (2007, p. 98, our translation), statistics "only capture the material used by consumer practices . . . and not the characteristic formality of these practices, their surreptitious and cunning 'movement,' that is, the activity of 'doing with'" (i.e., doing together). These 'cunning movements' that De Certeau (2007) refers to as tactics operate on the rationalized and circumscribed places of dominant touristic strategies, taking advantage of opportunities to be in unexpected places.

In the field of travel, the appropriations and uses of tourist spaces can be multiple. Involvement and affection among travelers and touristic products are distinguished according to the means of access, the cultural traits of hosts and travelers, and even the communicative processes that permeate these relationships. However, the touristic structures of cities are part of a rationalized and often exclusionary logic of consumption; this makes it difficult to move away from established standards.

For Hernández, Mendoza and Villarreal (2009), the current model of touristic globalization has to be rethought, since it is often imposed or controlled by

2. Cf. Ministério do Turismo (2009).

the industry's great entrepreneurial powers. Touristic consumption is seen as "a social attitude of 'choice' within a market driven by highly ideological tools, integral to the interests of those who dominate the production of touristic goods and services" (Hernández, Mendoza, & Villarreal, 2009, p. 701, our translation)³. Thus, these market relationships have a deep effect over environments and their characteristic interactions.

Tourism is characterized by tourists' purchase of spaces for fruition during a limited period of time. This reality transforms a considerable portion of the space (natural or urban) into merchandise, subjecting it to the exchange circuit and establishing domination; producing, reproducing, ordering and directing how spaces should be appropriated for touristic activity. (Albach, Gândara, Hack Neto, & Vieira, 2012, p. 114, our translation)

Tour packages that restrain the possibility of closer experiences alongside the destination's inhabitants, hotel chains with homogenized services, and poor transportation in some regions remind us of the strategies pointed out by De Certeau (2007) as dominant structures. However, within these structures' gaps, 'tactical' action allows for divergent modes of consumption to occur. Travelers who plan alternative routes, stay in inhabitant's homes, and seek to relate to the destination's environment: these are examples of non-traditional practices that result in a diversification of the market. Such movements must be better understood in order to enable a deeper analysis of tourist activity.

Many of these forms of consumption are also associated with economic models that are currently gaining strength. Collaborative economy activities, for instance, have been intensified internationally. This model advocates consumption sharing, collective production, and the exchange of goods and services with or without monetary values. Although there are very divergent definitions of collaborative practices – including likeminded terms such as the economy of sharing, trust, or gift-giving – they have been greatly reinforced in corporate discourses, especially those related to the travel market.

These interactions, to which Gansky (2011) attributes the term *mesh*, interfere with our lives and our relationships with goods and services. They are accompanied by a resistance movement against consumption that, according to Fournier (1998), can range from avoiding the market to minimizing or boycotting it. The standardization and massification of products and services as well as environmental concerns are some of the factors that motivate consumers to move away from the dominant economic model, seeking alternatives that meet their aspirations.

Botsman and Rogers (2011) argue that collaborative consumption is actually the reinvention of old market behaviors, which are now taking place by means of new technologies, at a much larger scale that enables previously unfeasible forms of interaction. Technologies would in fact play a key role in the development of these practices. The collaborative spirit that moves people to lend some utensil

3. Free translation of the following excerpt in Spanish: "una actitud social de 'elección' dentro de un mercado guiado por herramientas con altos contenidos ideológicos que integran los intereses de aquellos que dominan la producción de los bienes y servicios turísticos".

to a friend, offer someone a ride, or even take in a guest, has gained in proportion with the advent of the internet and its digital platforms.

However, even among initiatives that declare themselves collaborative, there are dominant structures that have planted their feet on the market by employing a collaborative discourse. Movements with a more solidary character can also be captured by dominant structures – these are typical operations of a flexible and informational capitalist economic model.

Thus, large companies such as Airbnb, Uber or BlaBlaCar concentrate much of the capital and profit of their respective areas, consolidating themselves as contemporary economic powers that use collaborative discourses, despite maintaining inequalities in their capital distribution, network organization, and access to services. In this sense, “modern capitalism lives under a disequilibrium between competition and cooperation, thus making cooperation itself less open, less dialogical” (Sennett, 2012, p. 159, our translation). These asymmetries and paradoxes are stimulating new initiatives and calling so-called collaborative economy into question.

“MINAS” (GIRLS): MOBILE AND CONNECTED

Although collaboration practices in the field of travel using different communication interfaces have a long history before the emergence of the internet, this tool enables the popularization and internationalization of new initiatives. Social networks have strengthened themselves in digital platforms that provide a larger and more agile field of interaction. In the last decade, various mediating channels have been created within communicative processes. Internationally recognized platforms include Hospitality Club⁴, launched in 2000, Couchsurfing⁵, created in 2004, and Airbnb⁶, founded in 2008.

However, specific-interest groups choose to socialize in more restricted environments that bring together people with similar characteristics and purposes. Among the various examples of these restricted environments are WarmShowers, a community for free hospitality practices among bicycle travelers; WWOOF, a group of people interested in staying in organic farms; and *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO*, a collaborative travel network with feminist ideals, which is the object of this study.

Since October 2014, the *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* group (until December 2018, its name was *Couchsurfing das mina*), linked to the Facebook digital social network, brings together cisgender and transgender women to share information and travel-related services. Inspired by the aforementioned collaborative hosting platform, Couchsurfing, its intent is to

allow for contact between women and transgender people in order to provide free accommodation, tips and company on their travels around the world. Always in

4. Cf. <https://bit.ly/2YfYYa6>.

5. Cf. <https://bit.ly/1Nl7ist>.

6. Cf. <https://bit.ly/RRlgYG>.

line with the group's rules and following its sense of purpose: mutual respect and exchange of experiences. (Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO, 2017)

The group is closed; to participate, in addition to having a Facebook profile, a person must be granted access by one of the seven moderators. These moderators also fulfill the voluntary role of overseeing compliance with rules and ensuring the harmony of the group. However, the network organization work is much more distributed, also being performed by other members, who collectively produce the content available on the platform.

During the study's period, the group had more than 40,000 members, a number that varied daily as people entered and left the network. Most members are active, but there are constant publications criticizing many members' lack of interaction, especially in publications pertaining collaborative lodging requests.

There is also a concern regarding the prohibition of cisgender men participation. Although only transgender people are allowed to participate, many members still have a male appearance and/or name, which casts doubt on their gender identity. When this type of situation occurs, there is a profile investigation to assess a member's gender identity.

Among the types of publications available, there are requests and offers for free accommodation, rides, destination or tourist-attraction tips, and requests for company, among other subjects related to economical and collaborative travelling. To facilitate the search and optimal visualization of the information, the beginning of each publication must contain bracketed tags, which indicate what the publication refers to.

These tags point out, for instance, whether the post is a request or offer for accommodation (i.e., whether it is couch-related), to what destination it refers to (e.g., Rio de Janeiro), along with other possibilities. Among these publications, many are marked "Urgent," referring to situations that need to be resolved quickly, due to unforeseen travel or personal problems.

Behaviors such as this are a reminder of what Turkle (2006) understands as a 'self' tied to socio-technical communities. Modern people's constant state of connection leads to the immediate availability of communications mediated by technological devices, which are continually at-hand and which are felt as extensions of our minds.

As this information links people to the actions of others, thus producing a kind of social space, here the circulation of information and meaning ties the functioning of subjectivity to the network. This certainly has an impact on professional practices... but also on consumer practices, electoral decisions, political engagements, love, and sexual behaviors. (Ramos, 2015, p. 63, our translation)

Networked individuals are in a constant transit between online and offline territories, each with its own dimensions and characteristics. These dimensions and characteristics overlap and intersect in what Haesbaert (2007) has called network-territories. Given the plurality of identities among members of groups such as the *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO*, the multi-territorial character of network-territories is a result of their flexible, multi-identity and

multi-functional attributes. These attributes are, as Haesbaert (2007) points out, common to all of contemporaneity.

Participants of said networks have “mobile lives” (Buscher, Urry & Witchger, 2011) that establish different relationships with time and space, according to their environment. These mobilities and transivities, their subjectivities and modes of presence change and reconstruct themselves in their association to the places of sociability – many of them mediated by technology – to which our “mobile lives” are inextricably linked.

TRAVEL STORIES, MOBILITIES, AND COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION

In the *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* group, language is also a mark of the different types of interaction. Tours are called *rolês*; *mana* (equivalent to the English slang for sister, ‘sis’) is how group members refer to each other (even though the group’s name contains the word *mina*, or ‘girl’ in singular form); lodging is simply *couch*. Such terms are easily understood and reproduced in the vast majority of publications and comments. This characteristic language contributes to creating an identity for the group, no matter how diverse it may be.

Another striking feature present in this network’s narratives is the appreciation of the *couchsurfing spirit*. This expression is associated with a lifestyle that values exchanges above purchases, and proposes a reduced acquisition of objects, i.e., a more conscious form of consumption. In an interview with ‘sis’ Nathaly, she declares that she had identified with this lifestyle even before joining the group. She was already part of other solidarity networks, such as the Couchsurfing platform and some non-travel-related groups for the exchange of goods and services. That is why she decided to join the group.

However, Nathaly claims that not all members of the network understand or appreciate the “couchsurfing spirit.” According to her, sometimes participants have to explain the correct behavior to people.

For example: When you’re asking for a place to stay, it’s kind of awkward when you say things like: Oh, I don’t want to be a bother, I’m just going to sleep, take a shower and leave. That is hardly the goal here. So sometimes we have to explain this to people: Look, couchsurfing is not like that. I have a friend who is very firm about this; she is constantly explaining these things to people. Because really, not everyone understands. So there are a lot of people who do it for the sake of information, I mean, they do it precisely for this exchange [of information]. Because not everything has to come with an immediate return. You can help someone without expecting anything in return. And that is something we learn by travelling. I mean, it’s great to be able to help someone understand the philosophy of couchsurfing, to be able to live it, to stay somewhere and be given something. (Nathaly, personal communication, July 13, 2017)

Several testimonials displayed on the group’s page show that the “couchsurfing spirit” entails the desire to make new friends, live with the people who are

offering the accommodation, and take full advantage of the visited destinations, beyond traditional tourist attractions. As in the gift economy (Mauss, 2015), the group's operation is based on reciprocal relations, but without the obligation of retribution, as Nathaly explains. Free lodging is only part of this experience, although it is an important factor.

In one group post, the importance of the couchsurfing spirit is reinforced by the account of a solidarity lodging experience lived in Ireland and mediated by the Couchsurfing website. The member recounts that four years after the experience, guest and hostess decided to meet for drinks in a Munich bar. "CS is not just about hosting; it's about making friends." Among the post's comments, there were sentences such as: "Friends for life. Only those who've lived couchsurfing for real could understand..."

Although this ideal is not shared by all members of the group, the above narratives evoke a type of travel that values "doing with" (De Certeau, 2007), a mode of consumption that has little expression in statistical data of research on the subject of consumption. Discussions about behavior within networks tend to mold and stimulate practices based on these premises. While there are many differing opinions on this and on other subjects, positions tend to converge on the desire to establish a deeper connection to the people actually living in the tourist destination.

Although participants maintain a discourse of appreciation for each other's tips, this content does not necessarily correspond to information about alternative activities or travel programs. Many of the recommended destinations are part of cities' traditional touristic itinerary, widely advertised on institutional websites, portals and blogs. For instance, in one post requesting tips about Salvador, one of the recommendations was Pelourinho, one of the destination's main tourist attractions.

However, there are also many tips that address particular issues of the group, such as experiences of women traveling alone, measures to avoid harassment, affordable accommodation recommendations, and attractions with free entrance. This information contributes to increased mobility among network participants, by encouraging people to travel alone or with company, even in face of gender-related risks and prejudices.

Sheller (2017) points out that mobility and immobility are associated with unfair power relations. According to the author, mobility justice is a contemporary political and ethical issue. The contemporary world faces a series of crises related to how we move. The possibilities for mobility differ according to race, social class, skills, and gender. In this sense, the group's role is to promote discussions that facilitate these women's access to travel in various ways.

In narratives that report lived experiences, "[the narrator's] tracks are frequently evident in his narratives, if not as those of the one who experienced it, then as those of the one who reports it." (Benjamin, 2006, p. 367). For this reason, narratives have more potential to engage their readers than the information and types of language most commonly used on tourism websites and portals. Furthermore, narratives often have an utilitarian dimension, attempting to provide the reader with council, as Benjamin (2006) points out.

When asked how she usually organizes and plans her travels, Mariane states that she makes good use of the tips shared by other members of the group, but also consults institutional websites.

I almost entirely rely on the group. I think it's safer. It's a bunch of people who want more or less the same out of a trip. It really influences where I go, where I stay. I take it very seriously. This is the first page [I look for], [I use] the other [websites] mostly to fill in the gaps. But this here is more of a solidary space, in others I get kind of wary. But I do look for information in other sites, yeah. (Mariane, personal communication, July 10, 2017)

In response to the same question, 'sis' Nathaly only made mention of collaborative travel tip sources, such as Facebook groups, including *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* and TripAdvisor⁷. These sources are best suited to the particularities of travelers who prioritize personal reports over hard information. These reports are in fact travel stories. According to De Certeau (2007), travel stories are practices that take place in space; they organize the traveler's comings and goings, and their narrative fabric describes itineraries and routes.

CULTURE AND POLITICS ON A DIGITAL PLATFORM

The group's link to a broader digital social network (Facebook) has positive and negative connotations for its operation. Facebook is a huge network, riddled with inequalities and usage policies that users have to follow. Its algorithm censors specific types of publication, restricts access to a variety of free content, and stores a large amount of personal information on participants, which is managed, controlled and marketed by the company itself.

'Sisters' Nathaly and Mariane have different opinions on this subject, especially in regards to security concerns. For Mariane, the platform's features meet her demands well. She feels more secure in Facebook than in Couchsurfing when requesting lodging via the group, since Facebook allows participants to directly check each other's personal profiles. She also emphasized the search box feature, which makes it easier to find the necessary information.

Nathaly, on the other hand, believes that the Facebook group has limited functionality, and that Couchsurfing features such as paid verification of user data provide a greater sense of security. Moreover, she points out that "the Couchsurfing website has some filters; you are able to see the person's last access to their profile, their references [and so on]" (Nathaly, personal communication, July 13, 2017). The ability for users to indicate in their profiles whether lodging is available or not also facilitates interactions, she said. Generally speaking, however, Nathaly uses the *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* group to make the initial contact, and accesses the person's Couchsurfing profile later on.

Concern about safety issues was quite noticeable in the interviews, as well as in discussions on the platform, revealing behaviors associated with moral panic, as Ramos (2015, p. 71, our translation) explains:

The notion of moral panic has good use as an expression of the intense media production on risks that women and children are supposedly subjected to when

7. Cf. <https://bit.ly/29D1rDr>.

circulating in the segment of the public sphere constituted by the internet, where they may interact with falsely identified people.

The effect of these media warnings are noticeable in various group publications. For Sheller (2017), discourses and practices such as these are culturally formed by mobility-spheres – constellations of actors, actions and meanings influenced by mobility regimes that govern who and what can move, when, where, how, under what conditions and meanings.

Sheller also points out that social factors such as gender and sexuality mold movement abilities and styles in regards to other people, normative social orders, and the environment. The movement possibilities of individuals build social differences among them. For this reason, the group investigated in this research insists on its political character as a facilitator of women's mobilities.

The material aspects of the platform are related to various modes of interaction and even to different perceptions on collaborative consumption and its particularities. This is apparent in certain functionalities and tools. Thus, the media and the devices involved in the social relationships taking place in the digital and physical environments play a significant role in the production of subjectivities and in users' decisions about what to consume and in what form.

The media arrangements around these communication processes – comprised of articulated interfaces and devices, such as the internet, smartphones or desktop computers – employ grammars and languages that are capable of promoting new realities, as Pereira (2008) argues:

Contemporary culture, marked by an overdose of digital technologies, develops new media arrangements that generate new environments and modes of perception, and thus new modes of communication that must be better understood. (Pereira, 2008, p. 67, our translation)

The author, however, is not premised on a deterministic position in which media arrangements would be seen as the only factors influencing consumer perception. The consumer-subject is understood here as a social, communicative subject, who interacts and is influenced by the most variegated cultural mediations, including technology, as posited by Martín-Barbero (2001). From this perspective, the consumer subject also undergoes mediatization processes, in which media forms serve as the basis for different ways of constructing social realities. According to Barreto Filho and Rodrigues (2016, p. 10, our translation),

a reflection on the mediatized consumer and the processes of mediatization of consumption demands an understanding of consumption as a cultural mediation, linked to other mediations identified as enhancing [the process in which] the molding of brands' communicative mediation with their consumers [takes place], in a given cultural context. This analysis of communicative devices must identify rules, strategies and tactics for media uses and creations that are coherent with the instituting logic of individuals' cultural being; [such an analysis] must leave the realm of the pure study of the marks of this process [and go on to focus on] the type of theoretical engagement and methodological model able to evaluate the gradients

of the interaction between subjects and brands, surpassing abstraction, embodying itself and revealing its creative and participant dimension.

The kind of materiality the author is referring to, in this case, is made up of the group's rules and the tools for maintaining it and making its information available, including the management tools offered by Facebook. These are concrete and objective elements that contribute to the overall functioning of the network. In this sense, as explained by Barros (2015), the digital materialism of groups such as *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* – constituted by the relations between their members and the desired goods, arranged in a virtual platform space – has the potential of modulating perceptions, interfering in the ways of traveling, communicating and even appropriating the visited spaces.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on an analysis of the narratives and materialities observed in the *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* group, this article sought to reflect on how travel consumption and mobility modes can be facilitated and streamlined by digital platforms such as the one studied here. It is our belief that, for a deeper understanding of the behavior of these traveling consumers, it is necessary to diversify the usually adopted research methodologies, considering both qualitative and quantitative approaches and encompassing different areas of knowledge.

The profiles of contemporary travelers have diversified themselves, largely because of the growing use of communication and information technologies that act as mediators and allow travel planning and organization at an individual or collective level. With the strengthening of an economic model that encourages collaboration and solidarity practices, travel exchanges and partnerships have also gained importance and now find in digital social networks an adequate space for the interactions between these agents.

Although some platforms have consolidated themselves within these collaborative movements, such as Couchsurfing, smaller initiatives with similar purposes have been created to further segment these niches, articulating groups with similar interests and profiles. The object of this study, the *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* group, brings together women who share ideals of female empowerment and sorority. Thus, their use of the platform entails a political perspective.

Despite technical limitations, restrictions on the use of the platform, and the control exercised by Facebook, the network maintains frequent interactions between participants and hosts various cultural, social, political and economic discussions. Their ideals are often emphasized and preached to new participants and to those who have not yet adapted to the so-called “couchsurfing spirit.”

The group's ideals reinforce behaviors that are supported by affectivity in regards to spaces and individuals. This takes place on the basis of a collective production, both in terms of discussions within the group and *rolés* (tours) that are planned as social activities. The desire to “be together” and to “do with” (De Certeau, 2007) contradicts many of the most standardized tourist practices and becomes more feasible with the use of network articulations.

However, it is noteworthy that access to these social networks is intrinsic to the multi-territorial character (Haesbaert, 2007) of these individuals, who avail themselves of “mobile lives” (Buscher, Urry, & Witchger, 2011). Due to the inequalities of the capitalist economy, not everyone can count on the same possibilities.

While the social relations evidenced in the *Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO* group provide many people with opportunities for travel, the cognitive skills and access to technological devices required for one’s integration to this network are still far out of reach for most of the Brazilian population. For Sheller (2017), it is necessary to understand not only what constitutes itself as mobile or potentially mobile, but also the where, when and how of resistances or counter-movements against dominant power.

REFERENCES

- Albach, V. M., Gândara, J. M. G., Hack Neto E., & Vieira, V. B. (2012). O pensamento de Lefebvre e os usos e consumos dos espaços turísticos. *Revista Hospitalidade*, 9(1), 105-117.
- Barreto Filho, E. T., & Rodrigues, M. C. P. (2016). O lugar do sujeito consumidor entre mediações e mediações do consumo: uma perspectiva latino-americana. In *Anais do 25º Encontro Anual da Compós* (pp. 1-17). Goiânia, GO: Universidade Federal de Goiás.
- Barros, C. (2015). Consumo e “materialismo digital” na rede social pinterest. In *Anais do 24º Encontro Anual da COMPÓS* (pp. 1-19). Brasília, DF: Universidade de Brasília.
- Benjamin, W. (2006). The storyteller: reflections on the Nikolai Leskov. In D Hale, *The novel: an anthology of criticism and theory 1900-2000* (pp. 361-378). Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, Publishing.
- Botsman, R., & Rogers, R. (2011). *O que é meu é seu: como o consumo colaborativo vai mudar o mundo*. Porto Alegre, RS: Bookman.
- Buscher, M., Urry, J., & Witchger, K. (Eds.), (2011). *Mobile methods*. London, LN: Routledge.
- Canclini, N. G. (1992). Los estudios sobre comunicación y consumo: el trabajo interdisciplinario em tiempos neoconservadores. *Diálogos de la Comunicación*, (32), 1-9.
- Couch das mina e trans #ELENÃO. (2017). Description [Facebook group]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2GBwyN1>
- De Certeau, M. (2007). *A invenção do cotidiano: 1. artes de fazer*. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes.
- Fournier, S. (1998). Consumer resistance: societal motivations, consumer manifestations, and implications in the marketing domain. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 25(1), 88- 90
- Fragoso, S., Recuero, R., & Amaral, A. (2011). *Métodos de pesquisa para internet*. Porto Alegre, RS: Sulina.
- Gansky, L. (2011). *Mesh: porque o futuro dos negócios é compartilhar*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Alta Books.
- Gil, A. C. (1999). *Métodos e técnicas de pesquisa social* (5ª ed.). São Paulo, SP: Atlas.
- Haesbaert, R. (2007). *O mito da desterritorialização: do “fim dos territórios” à multiterritorialidade* (3ª ed.). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Bertrand Brasil.
- Hernández, C. G., Mendoza, M. G., & Villarreal, L. Z. (2009). Reflexión crítica sobre el consumo turístico. *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo*, 18(6), 691-706. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2yt7bID>

- Martín-Barbero, J. (2001). *Dos meios às mediações: comunicação, cultura e hegemonia* (2ª ed.). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Ed. UFRJ.
- Mauss, M. (2015). Ensaio sobre a dádiva: forma e razão da troca nas sociedades arcaicas. In M. Mauss, *Sociologia e antropologia* (P. Neves, trad., pp. 183-314). São Paulo, SP: Cosac Naify.
- Ministério do Turismo. (2009). *Hábitos de consumo do turismo do brasileiro*. Brasília, DF: Ministério do Turismo. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2T0G1Cu>
- Pereira, V. A. (2008). G.A.M.E.S.2.0: gêneros e gramáticas de arranjos e ambientes midiáticos moduladores de experiências de entretenimento, sociabilidades e sensorialidade. In H. Antoun (Org.), *Web 2.0: participação e vigilância na era da comunicação distribuída* (pp. 65-82). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Mauad.
- Ramos, J. S. (2015). Subjetivação e poder no ciberespaço: da experimentação à convergência identitária na era das redes sociais. *Vivência Revista de Antropologia*, 1(45), 57-76. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2YEo6GV>
- Ruschmann, D. (1991). *Marketing turístico: um enfoque promocional*. Campinas, SP: Papirus.
- Sennett, R. (2012). *Juntos: os rituais, os prazeres e a política da cooperação* (C. Marques, trad.). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Record.
- Sheller, M. (2017). Mobility justice and power. In *1ª Escola de Ciência Avançada em Mobilidades: Teoria e Métodos*. São Paulo, SP: Escola de Artes, Ciências e Humanidade, Universidade de São Paulo.
- Turkle, S. (2006). Always-on/always-on-you: the tethered self. In J. Katz (Ed.), *Handbook of mobile communications studies* (pp. 121-138). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Received on: 05/16/2018

Approved on: 11/24/2018

CONTRIBUTIONS

Thaís Costa da Silva: Defined the research problem and objectives; developed the theoretical proposition; performed the literature review and theoretical foundation; chose the methodological procedures; carried out data collection; data analysis; performed the calculations and projections; wrote and performed a critical review of the manuscript to the RTA rules.