CULTURAL RUNS BATTED IN: CONSUMPTION ACCULTURATION BETWEEN BRAZILIAN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL FANS[i]

Abstract:
The singularities involving fan prosumption have been highlighted as an emerging theme in consumer research. Among the possibilities for carrying out such investigations, it is worth dwelling on the consumer acculturation process that occurs when fans reframe values of local and global culture through virtual interactions about sports products and brands. One of the sports leagues associated with consumer acculturation is Major League Baseball (MLB), a representative media product of the U.S. culture that has interest in Brazil as a promising market for expanding its audience. Thus, the present study aims to understand how virtual interactions of Brazilian MLB fans lead to forms of consumption acculturation. To meet this objective, a Netnography was carried out between 2018 and 2022 based on messages published by Brazilian MLB fans on Twitter. Three forms of consumer acculturation were identified: assimilation, integration, and marginalization. Each indicates Brazilian fans' interest and effort in prioritizing U.S. cultural signs and values in the MLB. However, the fans' prosumption roles on the acculturation process represent the positioning of cultural identities via consumption when they recognize their relationship with cultures and others through market relations.

Keywords: Consumption Acculturation, Fans, MLB, Netnography, Cultural Identity.

IMPULSIONANDO CORRIDAS CULTURAIS: ACULTURAÇÃO DE CONSUMO ENTRE FÃS BRASILEIROS DA MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

Resumo:
As singularidades envolvendo o consumo de fãs têm sido destacadas como um tema emergente nas pesquisas do consumidor. Dentre as possibilidades de realização de tais investigações, destaca-se o processo de aculturação dos consumidores que ocorre quando fãs ressignificam valores das culturas local e global por meio de interações virtuais sobre produtos e marcas esportivas. Uma das ligas esportivas associadas à aculturação do consumidor é a Major League Baseball (MLB), produto midiático representativo da cultura estadunidense que tem interesse no Brasil como um mercado promissor para ampliar sua audiência. Assim, o presente estudo busca compreender como as interações virtuais dos fãs brasileiros da MLB levam a formas de aculturação do consumo. Para atender a esse objetivo, foi realizada uma Netnografia entre 2018 e 2022 a partir de mensagens publicadas por fãs brasileiros da MLB no Twitter. Foram identificadas três formas de aculturação do consumidor: assimilação, integração e marginalização. Cada uma indica o interesse e o esforço dos fãs brasileiros em priorizar os sinais e valores culturais dos EUA na MLB. No entanto, a função de prossumo dos fãs no processo de aculturação representa o posicionamento de identidades culturais via consumo que reconhecem sua relação com culturas e outras por meio de relações de mercado.

Palavras-chave: Aculturação do consumo, Fãs, MLB, Netnografia, Identidade cultural.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although consumer acculturation is often associated with the insertion of massively mediated and globally disseminated products (Sharma et al., 2017; Li & Shao, 2023), this process can also be enhanced by the actions of consumers themselves (Chernev et al.,2011; Luedicke et al., 2010). Considering the extrapolation of physical barriers through the virtual ambiance, consumers commonly have access to multiple cultures simultaneously (Bartikowski et al., 2022; Sepehr et al., 2022).

Broadly, the acculturation process can be understood by how a culture's members – individually or collectively – come to know, interact, or seek to give new meaning to their values through contact with a foreign culture. Thus, acculturation is a phenomenon initially investigated by anthropological studies (Berry & Sam, 1997), which gained interdisciplinary validity since some of its consequences – e.g., globalization, glocalization, and hyperculture – have been accessed for marketing researchers to expand consumer cultural studies to interpret and propose forms of acculturation based on consumption (Askegaard et al., 2006; Cleveland et al., 2016; Luedicker, 2011).

Among the massively market-mediated products that CCT studies have investigated as inherent to consumer acculturation, sports leagues encourage their audience to consume their content in multiple media – e.g., TV and social media (Moura et al., 2023). It is the case of U.S. sports leagues, characterized by a massive and globally mediated broadcasts that have sought for decades to adapt and expand audiences to cultural and ethnic segments that go beyond the country borders and citzens (Ha et al., 2014; Hayduk & Walker, 2021; Wann et al., 2017). Major League Baseball (MLB) is one of the biggest sports leagues in the U.S. – i.e., alongside the NFL from American football, and the NBA from basketball – identified as the first sports product that allowed the expansion and diffusion of the country culture throughout the 20th century (Seifried & Meyer, 2010).

In addition to the countries that host the MLB franchises – i.e., U.S. and Canada -, the league is considered as a leading of international sports league consumed in countries of Latin America and Southeast Asia (Arth et al., 2019; Hong et al., 2005). However, countries with a large consumer audience of sports and international sports leagues that are not naturalized to the baseball have been arousing the interest of the MLB itself to expand its consumers. Among the available options, Brazil stands out due to its geographic proximity with U.S. and the growth in the participation of successful Brazilian athletes in the MLB itself, who started to be used as ambassadors of the league in this country (Azzoni et al., 2017). Nevertheless, several local marketing actions and partnerships with relevant brands in the Brazilian sports context have driven MLB consumption and increased the audience in the country (CBBS, 2020; Gazeta Esportiva, 2019; MKTEsportivo, 2021).

However, despite the growing interest of U.S. sports league managers in expanding their audience in large foreign consumer markets, they still need to overcome cultural barriers (Ha et al., 2014). One of the ways to deal with such barriers is precisely how the U.S. sports league calls for and encourages in its broadcasts its audience to assume a participatory role on social networks regarding the content they watch, establishing consumer acculturation through their interactions (De Souza-Leão et al., 2023).

Considering that they cannot watch the games in loco, many fans of U.S. sports leagues converge on television content through an appropriation of social networks to discuss their content and better understand what they are watching (De Souza-Leão et al., 2022). In these virtual interactions, they usually seek to familiarize themselves with unique aspects of the consumption of U.S. sports leagues - e.g., fantasy games, team and athlete statistics - and, simultaneously, be recognized for their participation in the virtual community, whether by other fans or by own broadcasts that increasingly praise such participation, incorporating messages published on social networks into television content (Moura et al., 2023). Furthermore, virtual discussions expand the number of people interested in a subject, encouraging members of social networks to interact with

the fan community and, possibly, seek to understand better the media object being discussed on the social network (Cavalcanti et al., 2021a)

Generally, such participatory action by the audience is characterized as fans' prosumption practices, who collectively try to expand ties between peers and with the media objects they consume (Fuschillo, 2020; Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022). Specifically, the interaction of foreign fans about the peculiarities of U.S. sports leagues establishes a collective intelligence about the topic on the Web, available to any interested party searching for the subject on social networks (Moura et al., 2023).

On the one hand, the consumption of multiple cultures illustrates fans' prosumption practices through a technology's appropriation and convergence to dialogue between peers and interact or met products and brands associated with foreign cultures (Cruz et al., 2021; De Souza-Leão & Moura, 2021). Fans are consumers of cultural and entertainment products, members of participatory cultures that are gaining more relevance among marketing studies and consumer research that seek to map and understand the productive effects of their interactions in the online and offline environment (Canavian, 2021; Feireisen et al., 2020; Fuschillo, 2020).

On the other, among the segments of cultural products consumed by fans, sports are emblematic for presenting several possibilities for these consumers to express their continuous interest and build ties with their peers (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Bond et al., 2021). Nevertheless, sports are an entertainment segment capable of expanding its audience globally through the interest in adapting and associating with local cultures to which it has yet to establish itself (Giulianotti & Numerato, 2018), expanding and stimulating acculturation from their fans interactions on social media (Davis & Gibbons, 2023; De Souza-Leão et al., 2023).

Considering such arguments and contexts, the present research aims to understanding **how virtual interactions of Brazilian MLB fans lead to forms of consumption acculturation?** The research aim derives from the interest in expanding discussions about the influence of massively mediated products and brands in consumer acculturation. Its originality lies in exploring a sports league closely related to global culture – i.e., the U.S. – through interactions and appropriations exercised by fans of a local culture unfamiliar with the singularities of the sport they consume.

2. CULTURAL PROSUMPTION OF THE FANS

Introduced by Kozinets (2001) as a consumer subculture, the concept of fans has been gaining prominence in the marketing research due to their productive capacity (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Fuschillo, 2020) and their proactive behavior (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015; Scaraboto, 2015). The role of fans was enhanced by the dissemination of electronic equipment and social networks, which allow large-scale interactions to occur (Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022).

Social networks allow fans to take a more active role, creating and sharing content that contributes to their experience (Canavian, 2021; Chen, 2021). As Jenkins (2008) states, social networks are propitious spaces for fan consumption practices since they allow and stimulate the building of participatory cultures.

A participatory culture is a social space that demands the adaptation of media products since the existing cultural convergence enables more interactions between consumers, enhanced by technological appropriation by users, who become more proactive (Burgess & Jones, 2020; Fuschillo, 2020). In the participatory culture context, members of virtual communities begin to work towards the co-production of media products, emphasizing fandoms – i.e., *fan* king*dom*. Thus, fans can be interpreted as prosumers (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Chen, 2021; Zajc, 2015), productive consumers who alternate between consuming and producing roles (Cova & Cova, 2012).

The concept of prosumption, introduced by Toffler (1980), has been gaining prominence in consumer research with the spread of Web 2.0. About this theme, Ritzer et al. (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Ritzer & Miles, 2019) discuss how this virtual scenario enhances

the prosumption phenomena. On the one hand, as a consumer, the prosumer is responsible for building only his experience. On the other hand, as a producer, they assume the role of creation or content sharing, this assumes the role of producer, allowing the media product to reach new audiences.

Consequently, it is common for managers to consult the virtual environment to understand their audience and guide them toward a behavior closer to their interests (Ritzer & Miles, 2019; Zajc, 2015). Among fans, this alignment happens more voluntarily since they take on the task of expanding the product consumed (Chen, 2021; Fuschillo, 2020). Therefore, fans also assume responsibility for converge television content to the Web, seeking to enhance the cultural context they are part of (Canavian, 2021; Feireisen et al., 2020; Moura et al., 2023).

In this perspective, Askegaard et al. (2005) consider that fan consumption permeates the existence of a "hyperculture" in which a symbiotic relationship between different cultures is established. This phenomenon happens through more adept consumers, such as fans or prosumers, who use aspects of the culture to which they are attracted to modify the local culture. The authors also define that hybrid cultures result from relationships established between members of communities in the act of consuming a particular product or brand, in a movement of sharing habits.

Broadly, it reflects how massively mediated products are increasingly potential mediators of the consumer acculturation process (Cleveland & Bartsch, 2019). For example, it is common for brands massively consumed by globally dispersed fans to seek to adapt to the new markets they are entering (Bartra et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2017). In this process, brands and their products encourage the acculturation process of individuals belonging to the culture reached (Das et al., 2022; Zhang, 2009).

3. ACCULTURATION THROUGH CONSUMPTION

When individuals are inserted and accustomed to consuming products from the local culture and come into contact with marketing agents from a foreign culture, they begin to deal with the phenomenon of consumer acculturation (Bartikowski et al., 2022; Kizgin et al., 2020; Li & Shao, 2023). According to Cleveland et al. (2009), the interrelation of acculturation and consumption is mainly based on the concept of acculturation proposed by cultural studies to interpret how market relations lead consumers to position themselves in the face of multiple cultures with which they have contact through consumption.

Berry and Sam (1997) proposes four ways individuals react to new cultures: assimilation and integration refer to adherence by individuals, while marginalization and separation are forms of opposition. By practicing assimilation, individuals incorporate habits from the external culture for a certain period, as the native culture is left aside; in turn, integration is when this incorporation is carried out without giving up the local culture. As a way to discord about both cultures, marginalization concerns individuals who disapprove of a foreign culture without this being linked to the exaltation of local culture. At the same time, separation exists through the aggrandizement of native culture.

Mendoza and Martinez (1981) present a similar typology, about four acculturation patterns, among which three concepts overlap with those of Berry. Cultural change works similarly to assimilation. Cultural incorporation is analogous to cultural integration. However, the authors call cultural resistance what Berry treats as separation. As originality, they do not discuss the relationship of cultural marginalization but of a transmutation in which an unprecedented subcultural entity is produced to deal with the alterities of local and domestic cultures.

Despite the conceptual proximity between the two contributions and the fact that both allow for a broad discussion of acculturation processes, it was Berry's typology that ended up becoming the most popular and emblematic for the discussion of consumption acculturation (Das et al., 2022;

Demangeot et al., 2015; Ha et al., 2014; Luedicker, 2011; De Souza-Leão & Moura, 2021The acculturation of consumption is based on several aspects: the influence of preferences and behaviors of its members (Alden et al., 2006); the development of identities through consumption (Belk et al., 2013); and values capable of guiding daily activities (Chernev et al.,2011; Luedicke et al., 2010).

Thus, consumer acculturation shows how global cultures are enhanced by consumers capable of developing identities without ties to nationalities but to routine elements whose origins can be diverse (Das et al., 2022; Sobol et al., 2018). Such empowerment derives from the interpretation that consumers function as key elements in maintaining cultures due to their ability to express opinions on the subject (Berry, 2008; Segev et al., 2014).

Consumers are, after all, capable of consuming new cultures and introducing them to those who do not have the opportunity. In this way, they disseminate acculturation by playing a productive role during consumption (Askegaard et al., 2005; Cruz & Buchanan-Oliver,2017). Therefore, it is common for the maintenance of local culture to be associated with personal aspects, such as affection for a particular food or musical genre (Martin, 2012; Peñaloza, 1994).

4. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The methodological approach of the present study is Netnography, an adaptation of the ethnographic model to investigate consumer tribes and subcultures through their virtual interactions (Cavalcanti et al., 2021b; Coombes & Jones, 2020; Lugosi & Quinton, 2018). Netnography was presented by Kozinets (2001) as an alternative to investigating mutually established consumer ethos both online and offline.

Among the locus to carry out a Netnography, social networks stand out as a public space that provides dialogues between members of the consumer ethos and the managers of the products consumed. It is a method that allows observing, capturing, archiving, analyzing, and interpreting consumer cultures in decentralized and fluid events (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Ashman et al., 2021; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2022).

According to Kozinets (2020), netnography starts with the **community choice** when a researcher(s) determine the community to be analyzed through some criteria, with its relevance to the object studied, the substantiality of its volume of interactions, and the richness of the data, expressed in its variety. As a consequence of the previous stage, the **cultural entree** defines how the researcher(s) adapts to the community in question, intending to develop a complete understanding of its particularities. The next stage concerns **data collection**, which is the selection and archiving of data concerning the research's time. It determines how the various elements – e.g., photos, videos, textual messages – that make up the interactions of the investigated consumer ethos are collected. Additionally, it must explain whether it used software for monitoring and archiving the collected data. The last stage, the **data analysis**, covers the evaluation and treatment of the research corpus. It must be carried out through analytical rounds that allow strangeness to the results. The analytical procedure refers to attributing codes to patterns in the observed interactions of the consumption ethos. From the proposal of the codes, it is possible to perform the abstraction, comparison, verification, refinement, and a (possible) theoretical generalization in categories or dimensions.

Our study's first two stages were both attended since some researchers have consumed MLB since 2018. On the one hand, we selected the community through Twitter interactions with the hashtag #MLBnaESPN. Such clipping reflects the virtual locus with more significant interaction between MLB fans, initially proposed by ESPN Brasil channels so that their audience interacts with the broadcasts of league games in the country. On the other hand, it is valid to be explicit that one of the authors has been an MLB fan for years, interacting about it on Twitter. His knowledge worked as a cultural entree when the other authors were presented with the singularity of the U.S. League and how its Brazilian fandom interacts on Social media.

To operate the Data Collection, the present study appealed to a Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) specialized in monitoring social media. Specifically, we chose Buzzmonitor since it is a CAQDAS that allows us to see present-time data strata - e.g., by hour, day, week, or month - of messages posted on Twitter, as well as provides engagement in social networks and hyperlinks to the original post (see García-Perdomo, 2017). Thus, data were exported through JavaScript software and converted into PDF files - covering January 2018 to October 2022 - totaling more than 24.000 pages about the 5 MLB seasons observed.

The Data Analysis was processed in rounds. The first one concerns the codification process, in which one of the researchers was responsible for coding the patterns observed in the interactions of the research corpus. At the end of this round, the three researchers were responsible for abstracting, comparing, and arranging the codes into categories associated with the study's theoretical foundation. This process reflects the start of the next round: the categorization process. In this round, the two researchers who did not conduct the coding were responsible for the refinement and theoretical generalization of the research results and conclusion. Finally, it is valid to point out that the steps were performed in a non-linear way, with researchers consulting the corpus whenever they deemed necessary.

In addition to the netnographic stages, it is worth noting that the present study also sought to meet the quality criteria proposed by Kozinets (2020) for carrying out a Netnography. Namely, the present study follows with **rigor** the application of the methodological guidelines, as explicitly indicated in how each of the four stages of the research was met. **Resonance** is available to present tangible aspects of the investigated consumption community. **Likelihood** is met by presenting direct examples of interactions between members of the consumer ethos. Both criteria – i.e., resonance and likelihood – are displayed in the results description section. In a complementary way, **coherence** and background are met in the same section when the categories identified in the analysis are associated with concepts from the literature that underlie the problem of the study. **Innovation** and **reflexivity** were addressed while interpreting the results, located in the reflections section. Finally, the **instruction** and **praxis** of the study are present in the final considerations, in which the study's contributions, developments of a research agenda, and its limitations are elucidated.

5. RESULTS DESCRIPTION

During the research analysis, ten codes were identified that explain patterns in the interactions of Brazilian MLB fans. Despite dealing with an autonomous theme, each of the codes complements and helps in understanding others. Such complementarity between the codes allowed the refinement of their meanings into three categories that reflect how individuals react to contact with new cultures. The nomenclature and a brief definition of the codes and categories are explained in Table 1.

Name	Definition
Base Hit Acculturation	
Consumption of the MLB leads some of its Brazilian fans to reach the first base of U.S. values when they highlight and incorporate aspects of this foreign cultures with which they have contact through broadcasts of the sports league.	
[Code 01] Brazilian fans change their routine for the MLB	It concerns the attempts of Brazilians to follow the most significant number of MLB games. To this end, fans indicate how the league calendar, time - i.e., US time zone - and the number of games impact their day-to-day.
[Code 02] Brazilian fans root for MLB teams	Indicates Brazilians' preference for certain MLB franchises. In highlighted messages, fans value some teams' historical and sporting performance, extending interest in the cities where they are located.

[Code 03] Brazilian fans travel to consume the MLB	Represents reports from Brazilians who traveled to the US or Canada to attend an MLB match in loco. In these messages, fans highlight that the sports league is an excuse or motivation to travel internationally and experience another culture.
[Code 04] Brazilian fans look for other international leagues from the MLB	It contemplates the speeches of Brazilians about their interest in other sports leagues from MLB consumption. Such reports indicate an interest in other American leagues - e.g., NFL, NBA, and NHL - and baseball leagues from other countries - i.e., Japan and Mexico.
Stolen Base Acculturation	
Consumption of the MLB allows its Brazilian fans to advance between U.S. and Brazil values since they combine aspects of their local culture with those of the foreign culture based on the sports league broadcasts and interactions with their peers.	
[Code 05] Brazilian fans ask questions about the MLB	It represents Brazilians' continuing interest in understanding MLB rules and their sport. In the observed messages, fans present questions that can be answered by ESPN Brasil channels and its team or by other members of the fandom.
[Code 06] Brazilian fans teach about MLB	It indicates the care taken by Brazilians to help others interested in the MLB understand to popularize the league in the country. In these messages, it is possible to verify the effort of some fans to divulge particularities that make the sports league exciting and attractive.
[Code 07] Brazilian fans extol fellow athletes in the MLB	It concerns the recognition of Brazilians in the participation of athletes of their nationality in the MLB. The fans' messages range from congratulating their fellow compatriots to assuming support for their teams.
Bunt Acculturation	
MLB consumption encourages part of its Brazilian fans to advance to debate or criticize U.S. values, highlighting how the singularities of this foreign cultures it is present in the content transmitted in the league games.	
[Code 08] Brazilian fans echo anti-racism guidelines via MLB	Indicates the repercussion among Brazilians of US racial guidelines to which they have access when they consume MLB. In the comments, fans highlight negative and positive impressions about the insertion of racial-ethnic discussion between athletes and clubs in the league.
[Code 09] Brazilian fans discuss geopolitics via MLB	It represents the opinions of Brazilians about the participation of athletes of various nationalities in the MLB, as well as international games and the US-Canada relationship. In the messages, fans give their opinion about the singularities of the countries that host the league games and the presence of athletes of different nationalities.
[Code 10] Brazilian fans opine on policies associated with the MLB	It concerns the perception of Brazilians about political movements and public policies that impact or are included in MLB broadcasts. In these messages, fans opine about US elections, health policies that paralyzed the games, and the relationship between athletes and politicians.

Table 1. Codes and categories
Source: elaborated by the authors from analytical procedures.

As seen in Table 1, the ten codes were named to present the practices identified during Brazilian fans' virtual interactions with MLB broadcast and their peers. The categories had their names associated with plays that were emblematic of baseball. These plays are considered steps towards achieving Runs Batted In (RBI), which allow a team's offensive performance in occupying their opponents' territory to be observed. Thus, the following three subsections were prepared to highlight the categories and its codes. Additionally, the ethos consumption context of each code is detailed, with examples – i.e., in Brazilian Portuguese – taken from the research corpus to illustrate the signs of the referred codes.

5.1. Base Hit Acculturation

Base Hit Acculturation is a process in which Brazilian MLB fans demonstrate their effort to establish a familiarity with U.S. cultural values to understand the sports league itself. It was named based on the Base Hit play when the hitter succeeds in reaching the first base and starts an offensive campaign. Reflects how Brazilian MLB fans can integrate aspects of foreign culture into their daily lives, prioritizing the consumption of transmissions. In this opportunity, they may or may not neglect aspects of the local culture to incorporate the singularities of the foreign culture.

Among the codes that make up such cultural assimilation, the first one – i.e., **Brazilian fans change their routine for the MLB** [Code 01] – indicates how part of the analyzed fandom reports the adaptations they make to follow the league's broadcasts in Brazil. This code represents a fan effort to watch the most significant number of the 162 games that each team plays during the regular season, but also their schedules that follow the US time zone, which can start in the afternoon – i.e., East Coast – or at dawn – i.e., West Coast – and extend, on average, for more than 3 hours. To illustrate this code, we highlight messages of two fans published on October 15, 2022, about the record of entries they saw in that night's broadcast (see Fig 1):

The game between the Seattle Marines and Houston Astros in the 2022 playoff matched the record for innings – i.e., 18. In the first message, the fan shares an old message from him – i.e., from 2018 – when he watched a game as long as. In the other message, the second fan shares the message sent by the ESPN Brasil commentator – i.e., Antony Curti – about it being one of the most enduring matches in the history of the MLB playoffs.

Complementarily, it is possible to observe cultural assimilation when **Brazilian fans support MLB teams** [Code 02], highlighting cultural aspects that make them support specific teams in the league. In this opportunity, fans list their history with the teams, athletes, and the host cities of the franchises they support. Figure 2 shows a tweet sent in June 2019 that exemplifies this code.

In the highlighted message, a fan tags the narrator and commentator of the Brazilian broadcast so that his relationship with the Boston Red Sox is passed on to the rest of the audience. In his report, he indicates his continued commitment to accompanying the franchise in the region where he previously lived in the US.

The following inference that makes up the cultural assimilation indicates that **Brazilian fans travel to consume the MLB** [Code 03], referring to messages from part of the fandom that use the hashtag to inform of past experiences, during broadcasts, or future desires in which they can watch league games in person by traveling abroad. Figure 3 presents an example published in April 2019 that illustrates such code.

In the highlighted message in Figure 3, a Brazilian MLB fan indicates that he was conditioning his trip to the U.S. with his girlfriend to be able to accompany the New York Yankees team in loco.

Figure 1. Code 01 examples
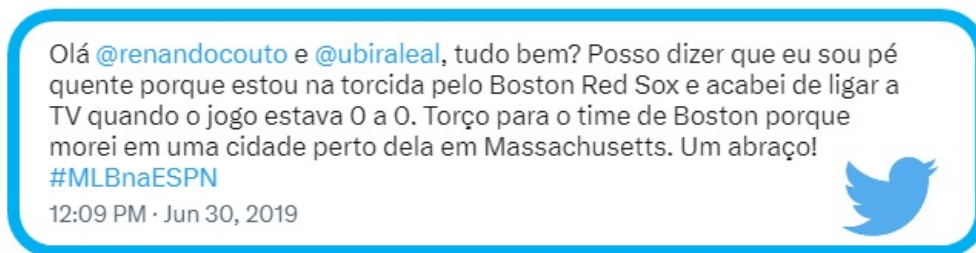Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

Figure 2. Code 02 example
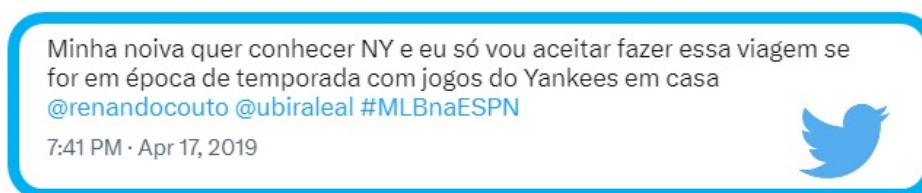Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

Figure 3. Code 03 example
Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

Finally, when **Brazilian fans look for other international leagues from the MLB** [Code 04], they indicate cultural assimilation through a continuous interest in knowing foreign sports broadcasts that are complementary to what they already experience with the main baseball league in the world. In this regard, they discuss other U.S. sports leagues also broadcast on ESPN Brasil channels. However, they also express an interest in consuming broadcasts of baseball leagues from other countries that form important players in the MLB – i.e., Mexico and Japan.
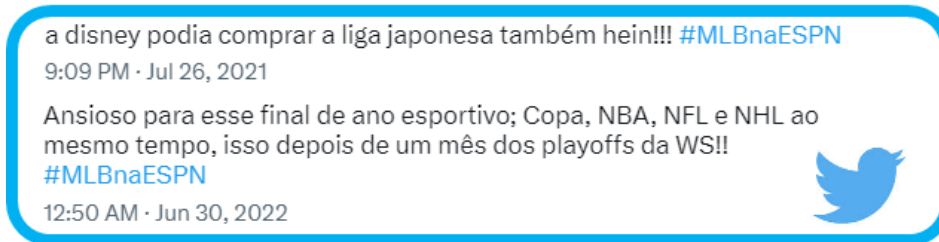
Figure 4. Code 04 example
Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

In the first message – published in July 2021 – a fan considers that the Disney group – i.e., owner of the ESPN group – could expand baseball broadcasts in Brazil through the Japanese league. In the second, another fan reports that at the end of the 2022 World Series, he will focus on other broadcasts of American sports leagues – i.e., NFL, NBA, NHL – and a global event – i.e., FIFA World Cup.

5.2. Stolen Base Acculturation

The second arrangement of identified codes points to a **Stolen Base Acculturation**. It was named as an analogy to the play in which the runner who had already won bases previously takes advantage of his teammate's play to advance to the next destination, getting closer to scoring. Thus, it reflects the attempts by part of the Brazilian fandom to naturalize or familiarize aspects of the foreign culture displayed in the sports league – e.g., rules and history – to their peers. Additionally, they highlight how members of the local culture – i.e., Brazilians – can understand or are a representative part of the foreign culture they consume.

The first code in this category deals with how **Brazilian fans ask questions about the MLB** [Code 05] since the rules are not intuitive and the contents that help to understand them are not always accessible. This code indicates how common it is for MLB fans in Brazil to resort to broadcasts to understand aspects of the league and the foreign culture of which it is a part. Simultaneously, the concern of local broadcasters to meet such demands. An example that illustrates the code is shown in Figure 4, when a fan tries to solve doubts about the sport modality during the broadcast on August 11, 2019.
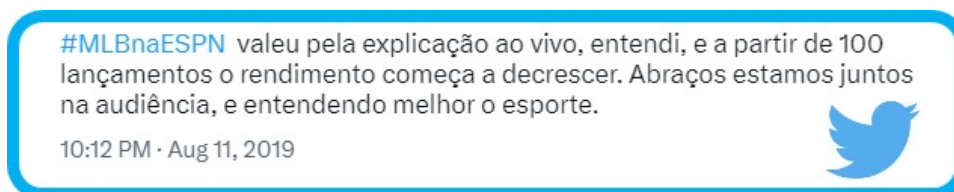

Figure 5. Code 05 example
Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

In the message shown in Figure 5, the fan thanks the ESPN Brasil channels team for explaining how baseball works. In his tweet, he takes the opportunity to reiterate the ongoing commitment between fandom and Brazilian MLB broadcasts while consuming what he considers the best of sports.

In a complementary way, it is possible to observe that **Brazilian fans teach about MLB** [Code 06]. It is a movement in which fandom participants are interested in explaining to their peers, presenting trivia and curiosities about the sport and the league on social networks, or proposing

discussions with the ESPN channel team to make the consumption of foreign sport more didactic for their Brazilian counterparts. Another tweet from 2019 exemplifies this code:

In the message addressed to the main MLB commentator in Brazil – i.e., Ubiratan Leal –, the fan identifies himself as the person quoted in the broadcast, which has been teaching Brazilian American football fans the rules of baseball for two decades. However, he indicates that most onlookers still find baseball boring despite his continued efforts. He ends his message by asking for a message of affection for his hometown.
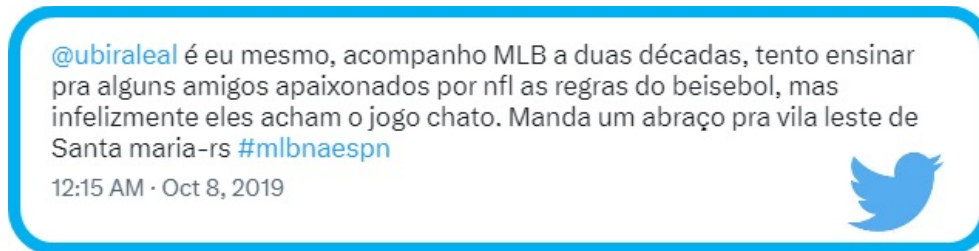

Figure 6. Code 06 example
Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

Additionally, it is possible to observe that **Brazilian fans exalt fellow athletes in the MLB** [Code 07]. In the messages that make up this code, fans consider that the presence and success of Brazilian athletes in the MLB is a source of pride and familiarity to promote the consumption of the league in the country. The example in Figure 7 was published on July 17, 2018, during that year's all-star event, when Yan Gomes had a prominent role in the match.

According to the tweet in Figure 7, Yan Gomes became the first Brazilian athlete to play in one of the star games celebrating the performance of the best players from the main sports leagues in the U.S. – i.e., MLB, NBA, NFL, NHL, and MLS. In addition to the message, the fan presents a print of the moment when the Brazilian athlete participated in the match of the MLB stars.

Figure 7. Code 07 example
Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

5.3. Bunt Acculturation

The last category observed through code arrangements reflects the existence of a Bunt Acculturation. Points to the play in which the hitter chooses to make a sacrifice to encourage his teammates to advance on the bases to facilitate the scoring process. Our research is associated with how fans understand that they need to discuss issues that may be controversial in the U.S. sports leagues, but that will help their peers get to know MLB better and intensify their relationship with it. Thus, it indicates how Brazilian league fans problematize unique aspects of the foreign culture with whom they have contact through the transmissions they consume. Such problematizations derive from their reflections on how the culture in which the MLB is inserted presents singularities to which they are not accustomed and, possibly, disagree or discredit. However, it is worth explaining that these discussions do not defend or postulate the existence of aspects of the local culture that would be superior to the sports league they consume.

One of the codes associated with cultural marginalization is the one that indicates how **Brazilian fans echo anti-racism guidelines via the MLB** [Code 08]. This code portrays the appropriation of a foreign political discussion based on the league's consumption since when they consume MLB broadcasts, many of its Brazilian fans question and comment on messages stamped around the games about the anti-racism protests that have become even more emblematic after the death of the American George Floyd in May 2020. In this context, Figure 8 deals with a message from July 23 of the same year, when a fan commented on the importance of the league's attitudes on this theme.

In addition to including a print that highlights patches on athletes' uniforms that highlight the fight for change against racism in the U.S. and the Black Lives Matter movement itself, the fan praises the importance of the support given by the league to this cause (see Fig. 8).

Similarly, **Brazilian fans comment on geopolitics via MLB** [Code 09] since measures taken in this sphere reverberate in the general context of the league. This code derives from the evidence of how baseball represents a popular sport in Latin and Asian countries. It goes beyond the cultural scope of the countries that host its games – i.e., the U.S. and Canada. Therefore, it is common for Brazilian fans to be interested in the performance and history of athletes from other countries. Consequently, they take a stand on the political situation of some countries – i.e., Cuba and Venezuela – to deal with the performance or motivation of such athletes. We highlight two messages sent at different times – i.e., 2020 and 2021 – in which Brazilian MLB fans opine about cultural and political singularities in Cuba.

In the first message, a fan asks Ubiratan Leal – i.e., a commentator for ESPN Brasil channels – about the political influence of the communist regime on Cuban athletes who play in the MLB. Already in the second message, published in 2021, a fan criticizes the late dictator of Cuba – i.e., Fidel Castro – after the day's broadcast explains the history of the diaspora of Cuban athletes who had to flee the island as children. In this message, the fan takes the opportunity to criticize the position he considers left-wing – i.e., socialist – exercised by some members of the MLB broadcast in Brazil.

Figure 8. Code 08 example
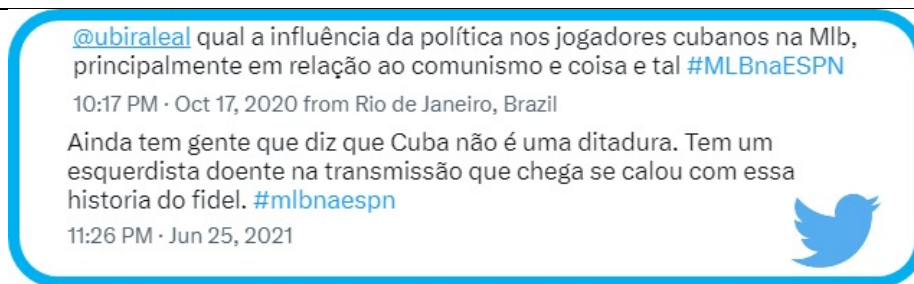Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

Figure 9. Code 09 examples
Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

Finally, the last code identified during the analysis reports that **Brazilian fans opine about politics based on the MLB** [Code 10]. It is about the opinions and debates in which athletes or the content of MLB broadcasts in Brazil lead part of their fandom to initiate political discussions. Such discussions can be about the U.S. and Canadian context or even associating them with the Brazilian political situation. In the tweet sent in October 2019, a fan makes the association between the then presidents of Brazil and the U.S. and their political alignment.
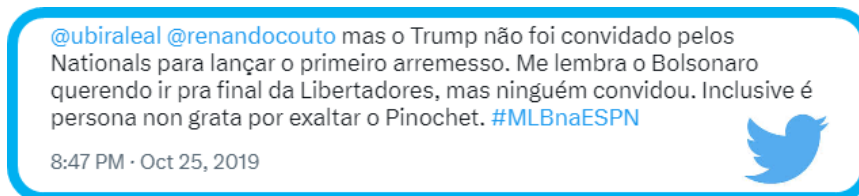

Figure 10. Code 10 example
Source: adjusted by the authors from Twitter.

In the highlighted message in Figure 10, the fan replicates the information about one of the MLB baseball teams not inviting the then-president of the U.S. to kick off an important match that year. In his tweet, he takes the opportunity to indicate how common it is for controversial presidents not to be invited to participate in sporting events. To exemplify, he mentions the alleged lack of invitation for the then Brazilian president to participate in an important sporting event – i.e., the match of the COMEBOL Libertadores final held in Brazil that year – since he had exalted a Chilean dictator – i.e., Pinochet.

6. RESULTS REFLECTIONS

The three forms of consumption acculturation identified in the research results indicate different receptions and appropriations of foreign cultural signs in the same consumption ethos. It is a Cultural RBI, when the Brazilian MLB fans interact about the sports league broadcasts, expanding and helping to establish a consumer acculturation associated with three streams.

Base Hit Acculturation reveals the predisposition of some fans to incorporate foreign culture to the detriment of local culture. It is the first step to becoming familiar with U.S. values when they use their peers' interactions to better understand the sports league and the fandom.

It is a specific type of cultural assimilation via consumption that occurs mainly due to consumers' growing interest in co-producing their consumption experiences through massively mediated products and in a context enhanced by globalization (Kizgin et al., 2020; Li & Shao, 2023). According to de Souza-Leão and Moura (2021), cultural assimilation is enhanced by using social networks to interact, seek, and consume foreign media products that are initially distant from the local culture.

Stolen Base Acculturation points to the Brazilian MLB fans' effort to adapt new cultural signs to the context they belong to. It is a process that derives from the understanding that U.S. values can be combined with the fandom's interest in expanding interactions with their peers, possibly increasing the collective intelligence about MLB among Brazilians.

Thus, the second category represents a specific cultural integration based on consumption, discussed as a mutual result of globalization and glocalization movements, when product managers and consumers negotiate an adaptation of foreign products to the local context, combining aspects of both cultures involved instead of hierarchizing them (Cleveland et al., 2016; Miocevic & Zdravkovic, 2020). Demangeot et al. (2013) point out the existence of different multicultural structures that allow cultural integration. On the one hand, consumers are interested in receiving a mixture of aspects of autonomous cultures. On the other hand, managers exercise marketplace strategies that meet the demands of their target audience for aspects and elements of more than one culture.

Finally, Bunt Acculturation reveals the criticizes of some foreign cultural aspects but does not dissent or discredit the media product. It is a process based on the effort by some Brazilian fans not to avoid discussing controversial topics that, if not explained, could scare those unfamiliar with the U.S. sports league. In this sense, they recognize that these are sensitive topics but highlight how MLB treats them in the way that seems most correct to them, indicating that some foreign values of the country's culture may be uncomfortable for Brazilian consumers.

Consequently, the third category seems to exemplify the marginalization through consumption, which derives from a consumer movement that discredits the existence of cultural singularities in the mass products they consume (Cleveland & Bartsch, 2019; Luedicker, 2011). Nevertheless, Das et al. (2022) explain that cultural marginalization can be justified either by the lack of interest of consumers in both cultures - i.e., local and foreign - with whom they have contact through massively commodified products, or by positioning and criticism of the singularities of the new culture that they are getting to know without endorsing their home culture.

When combinate, the three categories make up the Cultural RBI process, where fans' virtual interactions allow them to lead multiple forms of consumption acculturation. Two features help explain why multiple forms of acculturation co-exist among Brazilian MLB fans.

On the one hand, fandoms are an independent and autonomous cultural grouping that predisposes to contact with other cultural signs and may or may not submit to it, as well as access or highlight the local cultural context (Moura et al., 2023). On the other hand, the observed consumption acculturation is established by the prosumption practices of the fans themselves when they re-signify the cultural and entertainment aspects that interest them (Cruz et al., 2021).

Thus, the forms of consumption acculturation observed are cultural positions elaborated by the consumers themselves. As a cultural positioning, it reflects political positions that can be interpreted as manifestations of identity projects associated with their consumption practices (Iqani, 2023; Sandlin & Callahan, 2009).

The identity projects carried out through consumption are one of the main themes discussed by the culturalist approach of consumer research (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Belk et al., 2013), and when elaborated and associated with cultural contexts, it indicates how interaction in communities allows the demarcation of alterities and singularities that represent broader cultural identities (Moisander et al., 2008). Such cultural identities are based on Hall (1980)'s proposal about how dealing with multiple cultures leads individuals to encode and decode signs of the cultures with which they have contact.

This proposal is visited by Kozinets (2001) to characterize the ethos of consumption composed with fans when they appropriate the content of media and cultural products to produce, distribute and circulate their cultural codes, no longer limited to the marketing relationships that initially brought them together. Complementing this understanding, Souza-Leão et al. (2020)

understand that interactions between fans typically go beyond the reinterpretation of cultural codes - i.e., decoding -dealing with recording and producing new signs that give continuity and merging multiple cultural signs associated with the cultural products consumed.

7. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results' description and reflections allow us to consider that the virtual interactions of Brazilian MLB fans produce multiple forms of acculturation that allude to manifestations of cultural identities - e.g., Assimilation, Integration, and Marginalization. We consider that each of these forms is part of a more significant process: the cultural RBI, since the Brazilian MLB fans put effort into popularizing the U.S. values inherent to the sports league they consume. It is a process that exemplifies the prosumption ability of fans to reframe – i.e., encode, decode, and recodify – signs and values of different cultures indicate how the processes of consumer acculturation do not necessarily have to diminish the local culture to the detriment of the foreign one and vice versa.

As discussed, the consumer acculturation inherent in fan interactions prioritizes the propagation of experiences and relationships between fandom members and the cultural products they consume. In this perspective, fans combine and highlight forms of acculturation that interest them, characterizing the ethos of consumption in which they gather as a pluricultural social space. However, when dealing with multiple cultures and taking a stand in front of their signs, they manifest identity projects that, despite alluding to their consumption practices, are wider than this.

However, it is worth mentioning that the results and reflections presented in this study are associated with virtual interactions of fans who consume a massively mediated foreign sports league. This highlight elucidates the limitation of the study in focusing on a sport - i.e., baseball - which is little known by large market segments of sports consumption, such as Brazil. Consequently, it points to the possibility of a research agenda that seeks to explore the expansion of consumption of massively mediated sports leagues associated with foreign cultures associated with processes of consumer acculturation. Among the possibilities, it is possible to highlight investigations focusing on other sports leagues in the U.S. – i.e., NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLS - and their consumption among emerging markets – e.g., Brazil, China, and India.

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