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ARTICLE

Avatar of the self: Governing meta-body elaborated based on embodiments of consumption

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of the current study is to investigate how consumer performativity is enacted through embodiment transformation, based on the theoretical elaboration of the body in three dimensions, namely: resistance, utopia and desire.

Theoretical framework – Based on previous literature, the study proposes a theoretical framework when embodiment transformations – i.e., politics, pleasures, and affects – overlap through consumer performativity, evoking Foucauldian concepts to understand the *dispositif* sustained in a consumption *ethos*.

Design/methodology/approach – The study was conducted by investigating the cosplay practice based on the use of an ethnographic Foucauldian genealogy.

Findings – The results evidenced three consumption embodiments based on *dispositifs* circumscribed amidst pairs of body dimensions: redemption, related to politics; reward, regarding pleasure; and rapport, about affection.

Practical & social implications of research – Presumably, these representations are evidence of an attempt to improve the body that represents the best way to experience this consumption *ethos*, which is herein called the "avatar of the self": a governing meta-body used to mediate consumption experiences through performativities.

Originality/value – Avatar of the self is an interpretation of the theoretical generalization of phenomena of consumption embodiment through performativities.

Keywords – Cosplay, consumption embodiment, performativity, ethnography, Foucauldian genealogy.

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1 Introduction

Different performances by consumers can and often do incorporate the position they take in the social fabric in which they live, in other words, their performativities (Carrington & Ozanne, 2022; Seregina & Weijo, 2017). On the one hand, consumers can incorporate roles to be played and dramaturgical resources into their identities through market performance (Hein & O'Donohoe, 2014; Seregina, 2020). On the other hand, elaborating performativity requires consumers to act as subjects, since their practices place them in front of – either for or against – the institutionalized power structures that govern their market relations (Bode & Kjeldgaard, 2017; Visconti, 2016).

By exploring the production of the consumer performativity phenomenon, the present study is in line with Thompson and Üstüner's (2015) thoughts on how performances are intended to help consumers better understand their own identities, while supporting the elaboration of consumer subjectivity beyond relationships and towards market ideologies. However, consumer performativity both institutionalizes the reproduction of power relations and undermines market ideologies by evidencing dominant representations of consumerism (Harju & Huovinen, 2015; Seregina, 2020).

Thus, the difference between performance and performativity becomes even more evident in the ontic position taken by those who practice them. From this perspective, consumers express and manifest alterity to pre-existing norms that constantly govern their lives whenever they exercise social positions (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Consumer performativity attests to how the construction of the body results from speech acts rather than concrete embodied practices (Dion & Arnould, 2016).

Embodiment reflects a process in which consumers exercise an ontological process over themselves to experience values through consumption practices (Murphy, 2022). It can be understood as an effort made by consumers based on their relationship with others when they give new meaning to experiences by combining their own knowledge with that which is socially predetermined. In particular, such reframing can and is exercised through how consumers adjust and adapt their bodies (Harju & Huovinen, 2015; Schöps et al., 2020).

Thus, embodiment is an exercise of resistance when subjects' bodies elaborate both on social positions and on themselves (Harju & Huovinen, 2015). When consumers assume these positions, they exercise linguistic and non-linguistic practices to deal with the institutionalized and institutionalizing discourses driving them and the marketplace itself. Consequently, consumer performativity – even without intention or interest – promotes the marketing and social discourses it is related to (Bode & Kjeldgaard, 2017; Visconti, 2016).

Broadly speaking, performativity is a conscious effort by consumers to shape their bodies and navigate multiple discourses (Min & Peñaloza, 2019). It is aligned with Foucault's (2006a) understanding of how bodies are disciplined products that are continuously shaped by discourses, which in turn are able to institutionalize pleasant ways of living. Ultimately, the body is a space to be continuously elaborated and dealt with throughout one's existence. Body adaptation is a strategy used to obtain a more livable and perhaps idealizable space that satisfies the desires of the individual and, at the same time, the moralities arranged in the social fabric that, in turn, determine the roles to be played by the individual's body.

By understanding the body as a space, it is possible to interpret how consumers make adaptations in their own bodies to make them more pleasant spaces to live in (Roux, 2014; Roux & Belk, 2019). Moreover, consumers' bodies both operate possibilities to maintain the imaginary and are constrained by semiotic systems of other rationalities (Kozinets et al., 2017). Therefore, when consumers' performativity assimilates objects consumed as part, or an extension, of their own bodies, they end up incorporating the very subjectivity of other people's desires, which they assimilate in everyday consumption practices (Carrington & Ozanne, 2022).

This factor can be linked to Foucault's (2006a) idea of the body as a space of desire that is both multiple and continuously managed in the social context one lives in. The body is an ontological condition that leads different social agents to establish relationships with other bodies through power relations and the elaboration of subjectivity. How we seek to understand our desires permeates the pleasures experienced through our bodies. Avoiding or seeking to experience desires is a way of dealing with the discourses inherent in the power relations that govern us (Foucault, 1971).

From this perspective, Belk et al. (2003) believe that Foucault's proposal on desire is valid for understanding how consumer desire functions as a moral dilemma in which we govern ourselves to live

ethically. Thus, consumers' bodies assemble their desires (Kozinets et al., 2017), since consumption practices can destabilize or support market forms of governance (Rokka & Canniford, 2016), as well as function as ideal spaces (Roux & Belk, 2019) or performativities that go beyond consumption itself (Rokka & Canniford, 2016; Seregina, 2020).

In this sense, the present study is consistent with Seregina and Weijo (2017), who presented cosplay as an interactional consumer performativity experienced through body transformations. Moreover, it is reminiscent of Arnould et al. (2020) suggestion on how the cosplay phenomenon is typically investigated by consumer culture theory (CCT).

Cosplay is the practice of using costumes and interpreting characters, on the basis of which consumers engage in exercises capable of adapting the existing structures (performed characters and media objects) to subjective desires (their bodies) at the time of interacting with other individuals who are interested in the phenomenon and in multiple performances presented by them (Gn, 2011; Seregina, 2020). Consequently, cosplay illustrates how interrelationships between consumers operate in multiple possibilities and consumption contexts (Joubert & Coffin, 2020; Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022).

The argument developed so far allows us to access Foucauldian concepts of the body (Rokka & Canniford, 2016; Yngfalk, 2016) to investigate cosplay, a CCT phenomenon (Arnould et al., 2020. Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022) characterized as consumer performativity (El Jurdi et al., 2022; Seregina & Weijo, 2017). From this theoretical perspective, it seems appropriate to investigate forms of governance that are sustained through consumer performativity. Therefore, the aim of the current research was to investigate **how cosplayers perform consumer performativity through embodiment transformation.**

To achieve this aim, the present study assumes that consumers' body transformations are an instrument of power driven by the *dispositifs* governing their performativity. According to this assumption, consumer performativity elaborates representations of the self that mutually satisfy the rationality of multiple forms of governance, which in turn lead to market and cultural embodiment transformations. Thus, a theoretical framework (see Figure 1 below) is

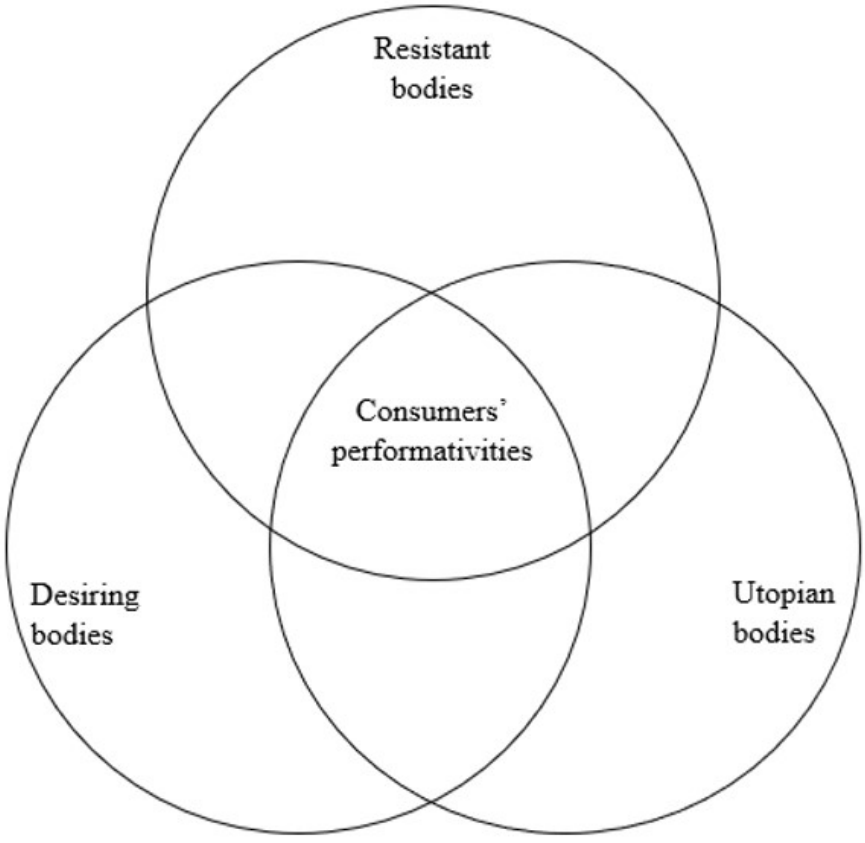

Figure 1. Theoretical framework
Source: Elaborated by the authors

proposed to point out both the foundation and the contribution of the study. This theoretical framework is based on the assumption that consumer performativity is enacted through embodiment transformation via resistance, desire and utopia.

Based on the theoretical framework, the study identifies *dispositifs* sustained by cosplayers' performativity in a process we call "avatar of the self" that emerges from the research results. This process reveals that multiple embodiment transformations experienced through consumer performativity are intrinsically related, as they are ontological elaborations of heterogeneous members of the same consumption *ethos*. Thus, although the concept of "avatar of the self" derives from an analysis of a specific phenomenon investigated by CCT – i.e. cosplay – it can be generalized as a meta-body that governs the ontological performances – e.g. performativity – exercised by consumers when they transform themselves – and their bodies – in order to enhance their consumer experiences.

The remainder of this article is divided into four substantive sections. The theoretical foundation is divided into two parts: in the first, the proposed theoretical framework is explored, by discussing how the consumer's body can destabilize and stabilize market relations (Min & Peñaloza, 2019) to evoke the concepts of resistant (Harju & Huovinen, 2015), utopian (Roux & Belk, 2019) and desiring bodies (Kozinets et al., 2017); next, discussions about cosplay were analyzed to emphasize the possibilities of investigating performativity through multiple performances enacted through individuals' bodies (Carrington & Ozanne, 2022; Seregina & Weijo, 2017). In line with the epistemological foundation, the methodological procedures section indicates the validity and relevance of carrying out an ethnographic Foucauldian genealogy in consumer research (Denegri-Knott & Tadajewski, 2017; Souza-Leão et al., 2022), detailing the stages and process of data collection and analysis. The results are then presented and discussed through the elicited categories and empirical examples from the research *corpora*. Finally, the interpretation of the results allows the elaboration of the research conclusions, in which theoretical and practical contributions are proposed.

2 Theoretical foundations

Consumers' performativity is an engagement process that leads them to spontaneously and consciously discover, learn and reflect on an ideal performance for themselves and each other, taking into account the context in which they consume (Bode & Kjeldgaard, 2017; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). From this perspective, some performances that are capable of transforming consumers' bodies can also shape their performativity (El Jurdi et al., 2022; Seregina, 2020).

Previous studies have provided interesting explanations for the relationship between performances and performativity (Hein & O'Donohoe, 2014; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015), between performance and the transformation of consumers' bodies (Schöps et al., 2020), and even for the elaboration of a given body to fit in socially (El Jurdi et al., 2022; Seregina, 2020). Although these studies are quite enlightening, they appear to focus on the performativity of performing individuals.

However, consumer performativity goes beyond this, since productive positions extrapolate consumption practices as marketing resistance behaviors (Cluley & Brown, 2015). According to Thompson and Üstüner (2015), consumer performativity does not belong to the individual or the context in which it is exercised. In fact, it is an exercise that no marketing agent can possess. Therefore, the elaboration of performativity requires that consumers assume themselves as subjects: their practices position them before – for or against – the institutionalized power structures that govern their market relations – as a form of resistance.

If performativity is a form of resistance, consumer performativity likely transforms both the body of the practitioner and the body of others who are part of the same *ethos*, i.e. the social body. Thus, consumer performativity is the embodiment of both market and cultural *logos*. Moreover, our understanding of the transformations brought about by consumer performativity evokes the proposition of body dimensions associated with Foucauldian concepts that operate through different forms: first, as resistant bodies; next, as utopian bodies; and, finally, as desiring bodies.

Thus, a theoretical framework (see Figure 1) is proposed here, according to which consumer performativity occurs at the intersection of these theoretical concepts.

We present two sections of literature to substantiate the arguments presented here. First, the proximity between theoretical concepts is addressed based on consumer performativity, which functions as a market and cultural embodiment process. Subsequently, the cosplay phenomenon is described as consumer performativity capable of producing embodiment transformations.

2.1 Consumer performativity: The process of market and cultural embodiment

Thompson and Üstüner (2015) present performativity as resignification exercised by consumers who repeat rituals, ideologies or discourses in their bodies, or even speech that questions their concept of themselves. Consumer performativity refers to an ontological process in which individuals live and re-signify contextual values in order to represent themselves. In this process, the body is both a political space (it can be the means for consumers to normalize or legitimize themselves as subjects) and an epistemological space, since it is continuously referred to when knowledge about subjects is produced or elaborated through speech acts themselves (Harju & Huovinen, 2015; Schöps et al., 2020).

Both concepts expose the limits of the performativity lens that illustrates consumers as market actors; this is because the way they take possession of and deal with their own bodies reveals their subjectivities, resistance exercises, and, in a broader sense, how individuals deal with different behaviors governing the society they are part of (Joy et al., 2015; O'Leary & Murphy, 2019). The resistance exercise in this scenario enables individuals to comply – or not – with institutionalized dominations that aim to govern the market by maximizing the usefulness of goods, boycotting hegemonic brands and products, affirming the sovereignty of consumer choice, among others (Denegri-Knott et al., 2018; Thompson, 2017).

One form of resistance that consumers exercise is the process of embodiment experienced through their performativities (Harju & Huovinen, 2015). The embodiment process can be defined as the experience of the body as it is lived. Embodiment is an ontological exercise in which consumers incorporate the knowledge of others into themselves in order to have consumption experiences that represent their own values (Murphy, 2022). Consequently, it is common for consumers to resist, adapt and modify their relationship with their bodies and sociocultural values in order to achieve certain statuses or social roles in the context in which they live (Viotto et al., 2021).

Another perspective on the exercise of resistance occurs when consumers transform their bodies into multiple "*topias*" to satisfy their desires; consequently, they are valued in the social context in which they live (Roux, 2014; Roux & Belk, 2019). Consumers create spaces to live their utopian existence through consumption practices that are capable of changing their bodies (Hong & Vicdan, 2016; Rokka & Canniford, 2016).

At this point, it is worth assessing how, according to Foucault (2006a), the body is a finite place – i.e., a *topia* – that ontologically imprisons individuals since it cannot be left behind. However, despite limiting individuals, bodies underlie the imagination, since they constantly adjust to the will and morals on which individual lives are based.

The body is the means for transformations that are never fully known – i.e., blind spots – by subjects themselves, but which continuously compares itself to its own idealized versions destined for beauty or death. According to this process, individuals can fall in love with their social role (and possible privileges) played by their bodies within the context in which they live (Foucault, 2006a).

Consequently, when consumers' bodies play a given social role through the exercise of their performativity (El Jurdi et al., 2022; Seregina, 2020), they tend to engage in self-resignification practices within limited market scenarios – within adequacy to dominant cultural rituals, norms and customs (Visconti, 2016). Consumers' performativity can re-signify market asymmetries that they believe to be orthodox or invalid for their reality. From this perspective, it is not feasible to form a set of transgressive performances focused on adapting consumers' bodies to the new realities they represent (Schöps et al., 2020; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015).

According to Zanette and Brito (2019), knowledge of one's own body results from its affective profile. The body can transcend the forms of governance that guide or regulate it by producing ways of living that satisfy multiple desires deriving from relationships that individuals both experience and are attached to (Bokek-Cohen, 2016; Yngfalk, 2016).

The multiplicity of desires available through consumption practices converge in assemblages that embody beings but disembody their desires. Consequently, from a Foucauldian perspective, improving one's body is the ontological condition that stratifies both the power of one's desires and the limitation of submitting to the social regiment that guides them (Roux & Belk, 2019; Thompson, 2019).

Although the works of Foucault avoid evoking the concept of desire, this theme is recurrent in his works. According to Belk et al. (2003), the Foucauldian perspective on desire serves to understand how consumer desire is an ethical problem. For the authors, acts of consumption are

usually moderate when our desires are refined so that we become ethical people.

Furthermore, Foucault (1971) identifies desire as our will to know ourselves; to understand what pleasures we can experience through our bodies. On the path to knowing ourselves, it is necessary to examine and overcome desires that represent discourses inherent in the power relations that regulate the context in which we live – e.g. the limitations and aesthetics of our bodies, the prohibitions that surround our emotional relationships, ideal behaviors, etc. Consequently, desiring bodies represent how subjects incorporate broader power relations into themselves.

The embodiment of desire through consumption practices points to how different elements of market assembly can be combined to enable consumers to differentiate themselves from their peers (Carrington & Ozanne, 2022). Thus, enhancing bodies through consumption is a way of both challenging structural barriers (Thompson, 2019) and connecting the individual psyche to the social context and institutions that govern consumers within networks (Kozinets et al., 2017). Furthermore, this process exposes the materiality of consumers' bodies as an ontology that includes entities at different levels (personal, collective and institutionalized) and, at the same time, the objects consumed (Schöps et al., 2020).

2.2 Cosplay: Participatory consumer performativity

Cosplay is a dynamic and complex process that sees the cosplayer as an interactional media body. The body plays a key role in the process of performing fantasies; this is because body reflexivity induces and encourages cosplayers to better develop their physical form in order to adapt it to that of the character to be played (Gn, 2011; Seregina & Weijo, 2017).

The definition of cosplay is based on interactivity between consumers who use costumes to play fictional characters and/or to experience pop culture universes (Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022; Seregina & Weijo, 2017). This phenomenon functions as an arrangement of skills and feelings that add to memorable experiences, which in turn can intensify fans' relationships and their participation in fandoms (Mello et al., 2021; Gn, 2011).

Cosplayers embody and materialize the media objects they consume, but they also manifest different identities, articulate relationships and share social networks with other fans. According to Seregina (2020), cosplay is an emblematic phenomenon because it enables consumers to exercise a certain freedom in relation to market structures.

On the one hand, cosplayers' subjective experiences and performative practices, whether with fictional characters or with the community they are part of, are arranged in the public manifestations of their relationship with media objects and with their peers (Joubert & Coffin, 2020; Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022). On the other hand, different performances, such as relationships with a given character or fictional universe, fantasy production, interpretation, reliability, posture among peers, makeup, treatment of videos and photos, memory when dressing up, among others, are based on the goal of cosplay to be recognized based on the *ethos* that fans are part of (Arnould et al., 2020; Seregina & Weijo, 2017).

Both sides highlight how cosplay gives its practitioners a position in the socio-cultural context in which they act in a participatory manner (Lamerichs, 2013); thus, it functions as a performative exercise according to which they mutually transform their own bodies and the social body in which they live (Seregina, 2020). Furthermore, cosplay reiterates the likelihood of consumers to embody transformations of the context in which they are embedded through their performance (El Jurdi et al., 2022).

Thus, whenever cosplayers engage in an active bodily learning process, they act as performers who continuously want to have fun in commercial playgrounds or in consumption fantasies (Carrington & Ozanne, 2022). Accordingly, Thompson and Üstüner (2015) have emphasized that although these performances are fantasies, they are ultimately assembled in positions taken by consumers in the broader social context in which they live.

Performance assemblage is a performative exercise (Schöps et al., 2020), according to which consumers play social roles in power relations they experience through and beyond their consumption practices (Hein & O'Donohoe, 2014; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). By assembling multiple performances, performativity extrapolates identity representations, a fact that makes it capable of reflecting or subverting pressing ideologies, and material, social and technological conditions to which their practitioners relate through consumption (El Jurdi et al., 2022; Seregina, 2020).

3 Methodological procedures

Foucauldian genealogy was adopted as a way of interpreting data obtained through an ethnographic approach in a method that we call ethnographic Foucauldian genealogy (EFG). This adoption reflects a methodological perspective that has been adopted by marketing studies that combine techniques for collecting ethnographic data with the analysis and interpretation of results in light of theoretical concepts proposed by Michel Foucault (Denegri-Knott & Tadajewski, 2017; Souza-Leão et al., 2022).

EFG uses ethnographic approaches as a fieldwork perspective – i.e. data collection and *corpora* organization – and a research planning stage. In addition, the Foucauldian genealogical methodology works as an analytical stage for the elaboration of research results. Although these stages comprise autonomous methods, we implemented both of them as a single method because they take into account the context in which the investigated phenomenon takes place.

Thus, the first of the following subsections points out the validity of virtual ethnography as a data source and its quality criteria. The second presents Foucauldian genealogy as an interpretive path and elucidates its analytical stages adopted in the present study.

3.1 Virtual ethnography and research data collection

Ethnographic approaches adopted by consumer research describe consumption as a cultural practice capable of evidencing the behavior of those who have embodied a certain *ethos* and its cultural context (Cristofari & Guitton, 2017; Kozinets et al., 2018). Researchers can then act as interpreters of cultural phenomena by proposing theoretical and epistemic concepts of the investigated consumption practices (Woermann, 2018).

From this perspective, virtual ethnography was adopted here as a stage in the construction of the research *corpora*. According to Hine (2008), virtual ethnography is a comprehensive methodology according to which researchers are sensitive to the *ethos* investigated through digital platforms and to details about the use of such common technologies in contemporary cultures, how they are embedded, embodied and part of everyday life.

Therefore, multiple and complementary ethnographic approaches were adopted to deepen the researchers' relationship with the investigated *ethos*, namely: **netnography**, which was used to observe online interactions that were both socially and historically situated in a specific time and place (Kozinets et al., 2018; Schembri & Latimer, 2016); **ethnographic interviews**, which were used to obtain in-depth answers related to the *ethos* under study (Cristofari & Guitton, 2017; Kozinets, 2002); **ethnomethodology**, which enables a better understanding of the daily consumer practices of a particular *ethos* (Jacobsen & Hansen, 2021; Moura et al., 2023); and **autoethnography**, which was used as a way to conduct experiments and analyze sensitivities to transformations observed in the researcher's routine to become a member of the *ethos* under study (Kapoor et al., 2020; Minowa et al., 2012).

Table 1 presents the details of the data collection process to build the present research *corpora*. It is worth emphasizing that the data analysis took over eighteen months due to the amount of data gathered in the aforementioned research *corpora*. This effort enabled the study to meet the quality criteria proposed for handling ethnographic data in consumer research.

According to Kozinets (2020), "rigor" in fieldwork is essential to make data "resonant" and "credible" to the investigated *ethos*. Nevertheless, the contributions must be "consistent" with both the research question and the analytical effort of the study, as well as make the researchers' "instruction" and "reflexivity" explicit in order to reach the theoretical "background" provided by the study's contributions.

Additionally, it is worth clarifying that the virtual platforms adopted to carry out the research were chosen during the cultural *entreé* stage for marketing studies (Kozinets, 2002; Minowa et al., 2012; Moura et al., 2023; Schembri & Latimer, 2016). In this stage, one of the researchers entered the investigated consumer *ethos* – i.e., becoming a cosplayer, participating in online and offline events – and mapped out which virtual environments would be more accessible to interact with other cosplayers. In this sense, both social networks – i.e. Instagram and Facebook – and information and communication technologies – i.e. Skype, Mail, WhatsApp – were used as platforms to collect data from the different *corpora* that make up the research.

Finally, the guidelines of Leban et al. (2021) were followed not to directly display the content made available on social networks. Although the research data (e.g., photos, texts) are available in the public domain, the lack of explicit authorization to use them could lead to questions about whether the research has followed

Table 1
Virtual ethnographic data collection

Ethnographic approaches	Data collection details	Data corpora details
Netnography	The four largest cosplay communities with interactions in English were selected for the research: "Cosplay," "Cosplay Help and Service," "Cosplay Extremists" and "Cosplay of a Certain Age." All four were launched between 2007 and 2017, with a minimum of 5,000 and a maximum of 50,000 members.	In total, 18,727 topics and 120,494 comments were taken into consideration and analyzed. Given the large amount of data, we selected some emblematic examples that can help us understand the nature of these netnographic interactions (Supplementary Data 1 - Appendix A_Netnography 6).
Ethnographic interviews	We found cosplayers from different countries who attended pop culture events in 2019 and posted photos on their Instagram accounts. Those with public profiles were sent a message inviting them to participate in a virtual interview, which could take place on their preferred communication platform (e.g., Skype, WhatsApp, Instagram or Mail). The protocol is available in Appendix B (see Supplementary Data 1 - Appendix B_ Interviews).	A total of 84 interviews with cosplayers from 27 countries were carried out between December 2019 and December 2021 and were transcribed into 364 pages. In order to protect the identity of some respondents, we selected 15 interviews (Supplementary Data 1- Appendix B_ Interviews 16).
Virtual ethnomethodology	Cosplayers' open-access Instagram profiles were monitored for their production of synchronous and asynchronous content. All profiles published content in three different languages (e.g., English, Portuguese and Spanish). Two types of content were taken into consideration. Synchronous posts – i.e., InstaStories – available to followers were captured using screen recording software. Asynchronous posts – i.e., InstaFeed – were archived at the end of every month between December 2019 and December 2021.	A total of 71 cosplayers from 18 countries were monitored, resulting in 2,435 InstaStories and 9,992 InstaFeed files. Given the large amount of data, we selected some emblematic examples that can help us understand the nature of these virtual ethnomethodological interactions (see Supplementary Data 1- Appendix C_ Etnomethodology 5).
Autoethnography	Monthly diaries covering the period between 2019 and 2022 were prepared in text documents. In addition, spontaneous interactions about cosplay were transcribed and archived. These interactions came from both social networks – i.e., Facebook, Instagram – and information and communication technologies – i.e., WhatsApp – after the researcher published his cosplay performances. In addition, photos and videos published on social networks about cosplay were also archived.	The diaries consisted of 23 pages and 328 archived videos or photos. In addition, 36 publications on social networks were taken into consideration; third parties made 306 comments. Given the large amount of data, we selected some emblematic examples that can help us understand the nature of these autoethnographic interactions (see Supplementary Data 1- Appendix D_ Autoethnography 23)

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

the ethical principles of research carried out with data derived from the Internet. Thus, despite the valid data to be analyzed, the examples presented in the "Results" section were adapted in order to protect the participants' identity, whether by translating texts originally written in other languages into English or, mainly, by using image editing software – i.e., Toonme – to caricature people's faces.

3.2 Foucauldian genealogy and analytical procedure

The Foucauldian methodology has long been associated with research characterized as critical marketing. This association stems from how the Foucauldian genealogy can clarify the ambiguities inherent in discursive productions and forms of governance established through consumption practices (Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Thompson, 2017).

Genealogy makes it possible to understand how power relations emerge from the institutionalization of specific knowledge in a relationship involving multiple affections (Foucault, 2006b). Accordingly, what can be said – i.e., what is sayable – is closely related to what is only visible – i.e., behaviors, institutions. Thus, in Foucault's perspective, the "sayable" practices are called discursive, while the "visible" ones are qualified as non-discursive (Kendall & Wickham, 1999; Tadajewski, 2011).

The uniqueness between discursive and non-discursive practices is fundamental to understanding the objectives of Foucault's methodological approaches (Paltrinieri, 2012). From the Foucauldian perspective, power relations are sustained through the institution of certain knowledge. However, the dissemination of knowledge results from its presence in the power relations that govern society (Deleuze, 1988).

Consequently, Foucauldian genealogy establishes the contingency between specific marketing thoughts and presents perspectives capable of transforming marketing knowledge production (Brownlie et al., 2009). It is a methodological analysis that functions as a critical reflection on how cultural practices, such as consumption, tend to maintain the hegemonic status of certain social groups (Thompson, 2017) and allows us to explain the horizontal links between consumer discourses and ideologies (Denegri-Knott et al., 2018). No wonder that recent consumer research studies focusing on such links have operationalized the Foucauldian genealogy through data obtained through ethnographic approaches (Denegri-Knott & Tadajewski, 2017; Souza-Leão et al., 2022).

Accordingly, the genealogical analysis must start from discursive formations, since discursive practices are closely related to the conducts that account for the substantiation of different forms of governance. These conducts follow power operators that are capable of guaranteeing ways of governing. However, power operators work together in networks to indicate how forms of governance converge as power diagrams driven by complex *dispositifs* (Foucault, 2006b). In order to clarify each of these analytical categories, we elaborated Table 2 with their definition and criteria.

Thus, as Souza-Leão et al. (2022) explain, the adoption of the Foucauldian genealogy for marketing research should start with defining discursive formations. The aforementioned authors indicate that consumer interactions observed in ethnographic data allow for the mapping and analysis of discursive formations and, after rounds of refinement and analytical categories, the definition of power diagrams. Thus, in order to elucidate the analytical process, Figure 2 was drawn to indicate the stages of the analytical procedures from a Foucauldian genealogy.

4 Avatar of the self: Proposal for a new concept based on data analysis

Considering that cosplay can be defined as a performativity, it inherently leads to the elaboration of consumers' bodies as spaces of resistance and utopia, and as agencies of their desires. However, since it is mainly a participatory phenomenon, its continuous relationship with the self and with others reveals how cosplayers' bodies are heterogeneous elements belonging to the same group, which is guided by multiple forms of governance capable of conditioning their performativity.

Based on the analytical procedures described here (see Figure 2), it was possible to identify three *dispositifs* that govern the performativity of the consumption *ethos* under study. These three *dispositifs* – i.e., redemption, reward, and rapport –respectively represent three embodiment transformations – i.e., politics, pleasures, and affects – which overlap the partialities of the intersections between the theoretical concepts presented in the current theoretical research framework (see Figure 1). These embodiment transformations, altogether, set an interpretation that summarizes the theoretical contribution of the study, by proposing the concept of **avatar of the self** (see Figure 3).

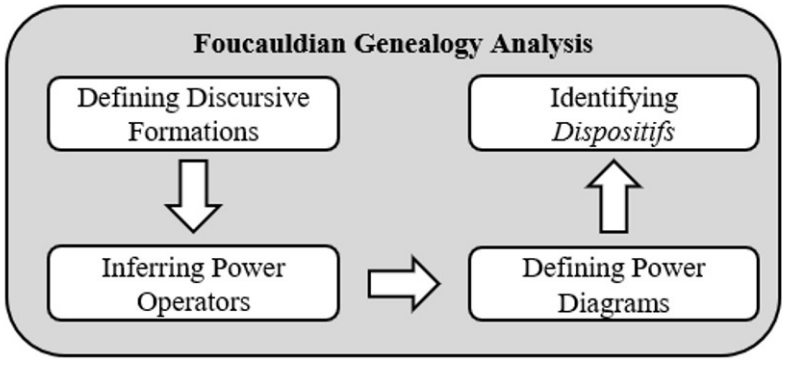

Figure 2. Analytical process
Source: Prepared by the authors based on Souza-Leão et al. (2022)

Table 2
Foucauldian genealogical categories

Discursive Formations				
Correspond to broad bodies of knowledge derived from discourse regularities, indicating the concatenation of elements that support discursive practices, considering the social context and the epistemic conditions that allow the production, maintenance, and dissemination of knowledge. They can be identified through three criteria:				
Statements	Enunciative Functions	Rules of Formation		
Basic units of discourse, indicating its regularities; unveil concrete themes, temporally and spatially located, through the signs of language (e.g., texts).	Since discourses are practices, they evidence the purposes and actions of the statements, and also how they relate to each other.	Define the bases of discursive formations based on the convergence of regularities of the statements and their enunciative functions.		
Power Operators				
Represent the mechanisms that manifest exercises of power. They are inferred through discursive formations, on the basis of the discursive practices they evidence and the non-discursive practices inherent to them. They are observed through five criteria:				
Differentiation Systems	Type of Objectives	Instrumental Modalities	Forms of Institutionalization	Degrees of Rationalization
Allow for the identification of singularities in the incidence of the same form of governance among different individuals and social contexts (e.g., linguistic or cultural differences, legal systems, and economic conditions).	Indicate the motivation for action by one agency over another, supporting or questioning the maintenance of social positions (e.g., privileges or status, professional practice, capital accumulation).	Point out how to operationalize the forms of governance, elucidating the instruments (e.g., word effects, surveillance systems, rules of control, material devices) through which it is possible to exercise power.	Explain the origin of the established power relations (e.g., social contexts, cultural values, legal and political rules).	Attest to the intensity of the effectiveness of the instruments of power (e.g., economic results, cultural and/or social movements, ideological legitimacy).
Power Diagrams				
Elucidate the combination of discursive and non-discursive practices that establish instruments and institutions related to the forms of governance. They represent how power vectors work as productive forces. Consequently, they also indicate the conditions for exercises of resistance.				
Dispositifs				
Concern instances of power established in the social fabric, based on bodies of knowledge. They are inferred through the mutuality – i.e., power operators and discursive formations – between autonomous power diagrams.				

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Foucault (2002, 2006b).

To live the avatar of the self, consumers experience performativities of embodiment transformations – i.e., politics, pleasures, and affects – that are autonomous but share ontic conditions. The embodiment of politics elucidates how the transformations elaborated in the consumers' performativity allow them to redeem themselves as a version that is representative of their ideals and respected in their *ethos*. Alternatively, the embodiment of pleasures indicates that the transformations arising from consumers' performativity lead them to experience the most beautiful and admired version of themselves in the cultural context in which they live. Finally, the embodiment of affects reveals how the transformations made possible through the consumers' performativity function as a way of interpreting versions of themselves that attract the attention of others and strengthen ties with the members of the communities in which they operate.

Presumably, the embodiment transformations are evidence of a continuous process according to which consumers do not stop trying to improve their bodies, positions, recognition and relationships in order to establish the best version of their avatar of the self to live their *ethos*. Thus, the avatar of the self results from an arrangement of performativity shared by consumers who use their bodies to manifest themselves. In addition, the avatar of the self enables the production of a body

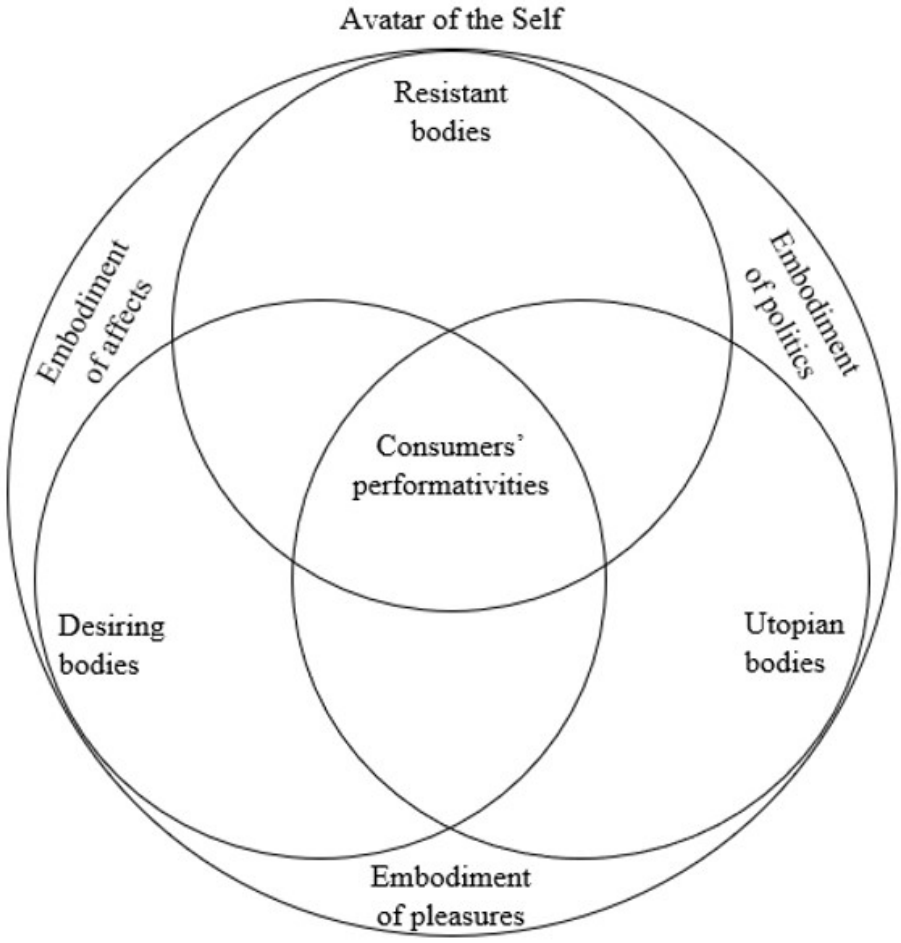

Figure 3. Avatar of the self diagram
Source: Elaborated by the authors

capable of following the flows of desire, experiencing a utopian space (even if only momentarily), and exercising resistance to transform the context it is part of.

Interactional consumption embodiments that govern consumer performativity enable the elaboration and maintenance of the avatar of the self, since heterogeneous members influence each other to enhance their self-transformation process. The avatar of the self demonstrates consumers' commitment to their performativity through embodiments that use their bodies as a means to experience and transform multiple forms of governance; this process transforms the avatar of the self into a governing meta-body.

Thus, it is valid to indicate how the avatar of the self emerges from the concatenation of the three identified *dispositifs* – i.e., redemption, reward, and rapport. Three power diagrams support these *dispositifs*, elucidating the power relations observed between cosplayers, represented by four power operators. Five discursive formations are based on such relations (see Figure 4).

The results in Figure 4 represent the analytical categories described in the following subsections. As can be seen, the relationships between them are not linear, but overlapping. The Redemption *dispositif* comes from the Community and Representativeness power diagrams. Both are related to the power operator Support, through which Community is related to the discursive formations Self-reliance and Empathy; Representativeness is also related to the power operator Affirmation and only to the Empathy discursive formation. The Reward *dispositif* is linked, on the one hand, to the power diagram Representativeness and the power operator Affirmation, deriving from the discursive formation Respect, and, on the other hand, to the power diagram Surprise and the power operator Reliability, which also derive from the

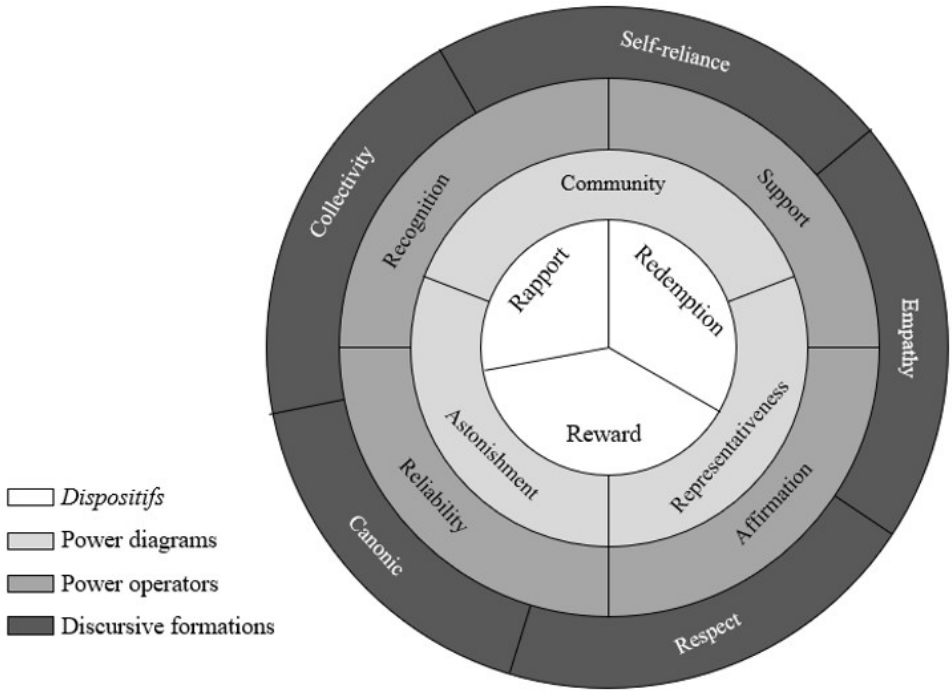

Figure 4. Analytical map
Source: Elaborated by the authors

discursive formation Respect, in addition to Canon. Finally, the Rapport *dispositif* is linked to the Community and Surprise power diagrams. Both are related to the power operator Recognition, through which they derive from the discursive formation Collectivity; in the same way, Community also comes from the discursive formation Self-reliance; Surprise, in turn, is also related to the power operator Reliability, through which it derives from the discursive formations Collectivity and Canon.

Thus, the three subsections were elaborated to define, interpret, detail, and contextualize these *dispositifs*. These subsections first present a concise definition to establish an interpretation based on previous CCT literature. Next, the analytical categories are presented and conceptualized in the context of the phenomenon under study and illustrated with examples from the research *corpora*. Finally, the examples provide clues for specific interpretative results that support the theoretical reflections and the study contributions.

4.1 Cosplayer redemption: embodiment of politics

The Redemption *dispositif* governs performativity, according to which bodies are resistances and utopias. It does so by elaborating the **politics embodied** by consumers as a commitment to transform themselves and as the context in which they live. On the one hand, through their non-discursive practices, cosplayers serve the regiments of emancipation, brotherhood and "coming-out" with cosplay as an arrangement of extraordinary experiences. On the other hand, their discursive practices are evidence of cosplay as a transformative, fraternal and non-inhibitory phenomenon.

It reflects Harju and Huovinen's (2015) understanding of the resistant body lived through consumption practices. It is a continuous elaboration that enables consumers to understand themselves and the world they live in, either by sustaining or destabilizing pre-existing and constant norms. Similarly, according to Roux (2014), in addition to playing a fundamental role in self-knowledge processes, consumers' bodies undergo a continuous elaboration process based on the cultural inscriptions that influence their social behavior. This ability for elaboration depicts the body as a utopian space in which an individual constantly tries to improve himself/herself, but never fully achieves the intended embodiment.

Redemption is the *dispositif* that drives cosplayers into behaviors aimed at improving their civic and

participatory positions through their performativity. According to this form of governance, power relations set the conditions for cosplayers to elaborate and manifest their own identities, whether through representation through the interpretation of certain media texts and characters among fans, or through the body self-confidence that cosplay enables them to experience.

No wonder Redemption is present in two power diagrams. The first indicates how the cosplay **Community** directs the behavior of its practitioners, who seek to make their performances valid for themselves and their peers. The other power diagram is associated with **Representativeness**, since some cosplayers believe that their performances allow for dialogue on civic and social issues associated with the characters they play.

Both diagrams have in common the **Support** power operator, which shows how cosplayers' behaviors and attitudes are based on the warmth they receive from other members of the consumption *ethos* in which they operate. Specifically, the Representativeness diagram is also associated with the **Affirmation** power operator when cosplayers see that their performances and the characters they play are closely associated with political positions beyond the ludic factor of cosplay.

Similarly, the two power operators presented share a discursive formation: **Empathy**. This is the understanding that the cosplay phenomenon reflects multiple ways of helping different people who are interested in the media objects represented or in the practice itself. Additionally, the Support power operator is also analogous to another discursive formation: **Self-reliance**. This discourse represents the body confidence that cosplayers gain by dressing up and experiencing characters that inspire them.

Consequently, cosplayers' redemption is the embodiment of politics. It is a form of governance used by consumers to elaborate a performativity capable of giving them a social position and establishing an ideal space for them to live out their will. It is a subjective exercise on the basis of which cosplayers' bodies are elaborated as a proposed resistance to subvert the context in which they live (social, routine) and to produce a utopian version of them.

Therefore, cosplay is the sum of the meanings attributed to the performed media object and to the practitioners who interpret it. It is a resistance exercised to produce a version that combines "representation" and "body self-confidence" in an ideal way of life for cosplayers. Three aspects of the resistance and utopia achieved by cosplayers in their performativity embody politics, namely: racial issues, LGBTQIA+ affirmations and the fight against shyness.

The Instagram post published by a black Brazilian cosplayer on June 2, 2020 (see Figure 5) illustrates the first of the aforementioned aspects.

More than resonating with the BlackLivesMatter movement (which was spreading worldwide at the time – from May to July 2020), this cosplayer presents his version of a character – i.e. Black Panther – that has a significant impact on pop culture due to his fight for racial equality. His cosplay presents itself as a resistance body seeking to question the role of black people in society as targets of violence. However, it is also a utopian body used to connect his speech to a massive media discourse derived from a movie of paramount importance in the entertainment industry, and to give him a position to ensure a society where racism is not passed on to future generations.

In addition, the political embodiment experienced in cosplayers' redemption leads to resistance and utopia when they take into consideration the previous norms that establish what is acceptable or not in gender-switched characters – i.e. cross-play. A good example from this point of view can be found in Facebook's "Cosplay Help and Service," from December 5, 2021 (see Figure 6).

All three of the cosplayers involved in the highlighted conversation are concerned about how to adapt their bodies for cosplay purposes. The one who posted the doubt resists the very desire to express the version of the cosplay body she is interested in and she tries to conform to the community consensus. The second cosplayer, who identifies as gender fluid, resists the existence of consensus and argues that there are advantages to subverting (e.g., self-identification) and disadvantages to normalizing cosplay itself – i.e., drawing attention to the genitals. The third cosplayer, who identifies as assigned female but as male at birth (AMAB), agrees with the previous answer.

The third aspect substantiating the redemption *dispositif* points to political embodiment to improve participatory skills and positions. The excerpt from an interview conducted with an Indonesian cosplayer, who describes the characters she intends, or likes, to play the most, is used here to illustrate the aforementioned aspect (see Figure 7).

Based on her response, it was possible to see that cosplay is an exercise in overcoming shyness to deal with other people's impressions of her body by allowing her

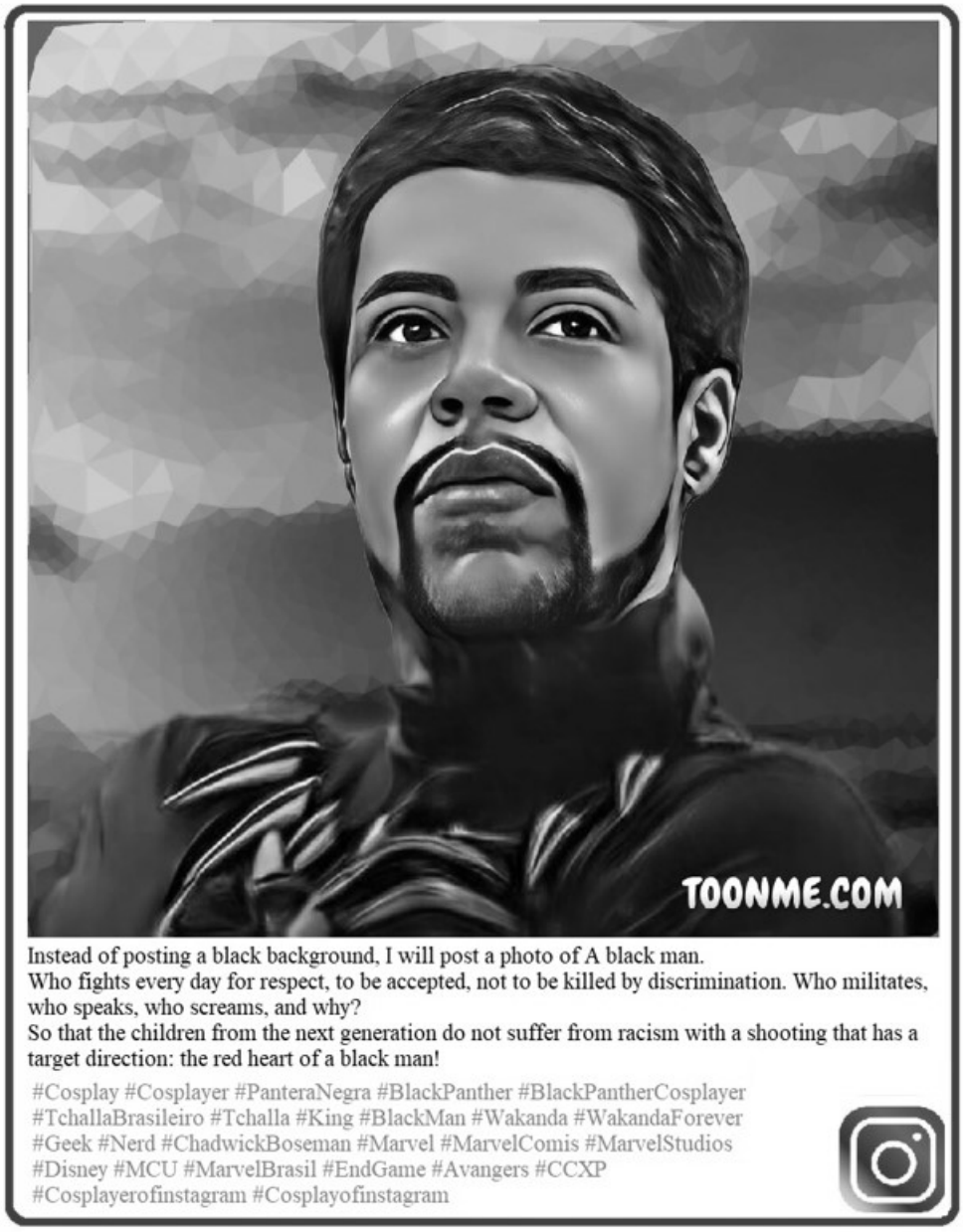

Figure 5. Example of a racial issue from the redemption *dispositif*
Source: Translated and adapted by the authors from data *corpora* with the Toonme app

to feel more comfortable about her looks. It is resistance and utopia at the same time when cosplay allows her to deal with bodily and social inhibitions through the interpretation of admired characters (e.g., strong, physically uninhibited women).

All three of the above examples are in line with Seregina and Weijo (2017), according to whom cosplay is a consumer performativity used to embody and materialize consumed media objects, since it enables exercises of resistance through the manifestation of different identities. In a broader sense, cosplay reveals how consumption works to transform consumers' bodies into multiple "*topias*" to simultaneously satisfy their will and the values of their *ethos*. It is a way of elaborating the space in which consumers want to live, since their bodies are used as diaries capable of accumulating utopian experiences related to consumption (Roux, 2014; Roux & Belk, 2019).

Therefore, the elaboration of consumers' performativity through resistant and utopian bodies enables them to embody politics. Their performativity is, in fact, the positions through which they comply

Figure 6. Example of LGBTQIA+ affirmation based on the redemption *dispositif*
Source: Adapted by the authors from data *corpora*

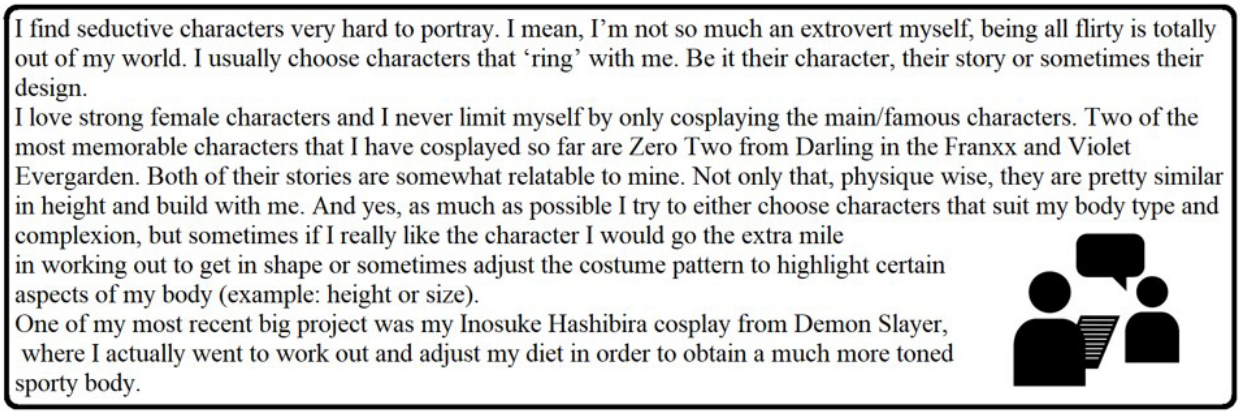

Figure 7. Example of the fight against shyness based on the redemption *dispositif*
Source: Adapted by the authors from data *corpora*

with or question institutionalized discourses that govern them. This is done in order to transform, elaborate and experience their contexts and bodies in idealized spaces.

4.2 Cosplayers' reward: embodiment of pleasure

The Reward *dispositif* establishes the consumer's body as an idealized space and producer of desires, while the recognition of cosplayers by different marketing agents who interact with their performativity is the **embodiment of pleasure**. These experiences align with power networks that represent a meritocracy and a tribe among cosplayers. Both of these power networks are permeated by recognition, as they address how cosplay is potentially providential for its practitioners. Moreover, meritocracy is based on effort, as cosplay is well-known to be detail-oriented. Finally, tribes also function by sharing cosplayers' speech on how cosplay is a collective phenomenon.

Thus, the reward *dispositif* depicts Roux and Belk's (Roux and Belk, 2019) proposition about how the utopian body functions as a space filled with unique events and desired consumer relationships. Such fulfillment conforms to the discursive order by which consumers conduct pleasures, as they produce knowledge about themselves and about those they relate to when dealing with bodily limits such as inoperable will or withering morality.

Such a proposal is in line with Kozinets et al. (2017) understanding of how consumers continuously pursue desiring bodies in order to couple them with other bodies, since the conduct of pleasure itself results from high levels of socialization. Living pleasure requires that the individualization of bodies is regulated by multiple desires and moralities that govern them; individuals act as productive beings for themselves, for their relationships and for institutionalized social functions.

Cosplayers' **reward** is a *dispositif* that governs them, allowing them to have their expertise and effort recognized by others. It is possible to see a rewarded governmentality in several experiences that cosplayers have, such as requests for photos and interactions with strangers, invitations from other cosplayers to form thematic groups, praise from producers for the cosplay they perform, requests to produce the cosplay of others and contracts to perform at events or promote brands through cosplay.

Nevertheless, the Reward *dispositif* can be seen in two power diagrams. The first is **Representativeness**, which in this form of governance is exclusively associated with the power operator **Affirmation** – both analytical categories and their relationship are conceptualized in the previous subsection. The **Astonishment** power diagram represents cosplayers' continuous effort to surprise their peers and followers with their performances, striving to be admired by others. To do so, they reflect the existence of the **Reliability** power operator, which attests to the quality and validity of the cosplay, as well as the relevance and talent of the cosplayer.

Both power operators – i.e., Affirmation and Reliability – are analogous to the **Respect** discourse, as cosplayers seek to be admired for their positions in the consumer *ethos* or for their cosplaying skills. On the one hand, Affirmation is exclusively associated with the discursive formation of Respect in this power diagram. On the other hand, Reliability has the uniqueness of the **Canonical** discourse, which represents the care cosplayers take in preparing their bodies to be as faithful as possible to the content of the media object they are performing.

Thus, the possibility that cosplay simultaneously produces utopian and desiring bodies helps to better understand that cosplayers' reward enables the embodiment of pleasure. Cosplay arranges the desires and will of multiple phenomenon actors: cosplayers themselves, fans in general, producers of cultural objects, entertainment and technology brands, mainly in two streams: business partnerships and fandom achievements.

A post published by an Argentinian cosplayer on December 19, 2020, is an example of a business partnership stream (see Figure 8). According to her social media post, she is grateful for the opportunity to work as a brand ambassador through cosplay in her country.

Her performativity is both a utopia among cosplayers and an assemblage of the desires of multiple agents involved in their performed/experienced/shared cosplay. According to several cosplayers, it would be a dream to get job opportunities or business partnerships through their cosplay. Accordingly, when brands trust cosplayers to publicize the launch of their products in another country, it couples heterogeneous desires. In addition, followers on social networks are graced with an unprecedented cosplay to celebrate the partnership with, and discounts from, the announced brand. Finally, she highlights the participation of friends who strive to improve their cosplay as skilled professionals.

A passage from the auto-ethnographic diary depicts the fandom achievements stream. It refers to an

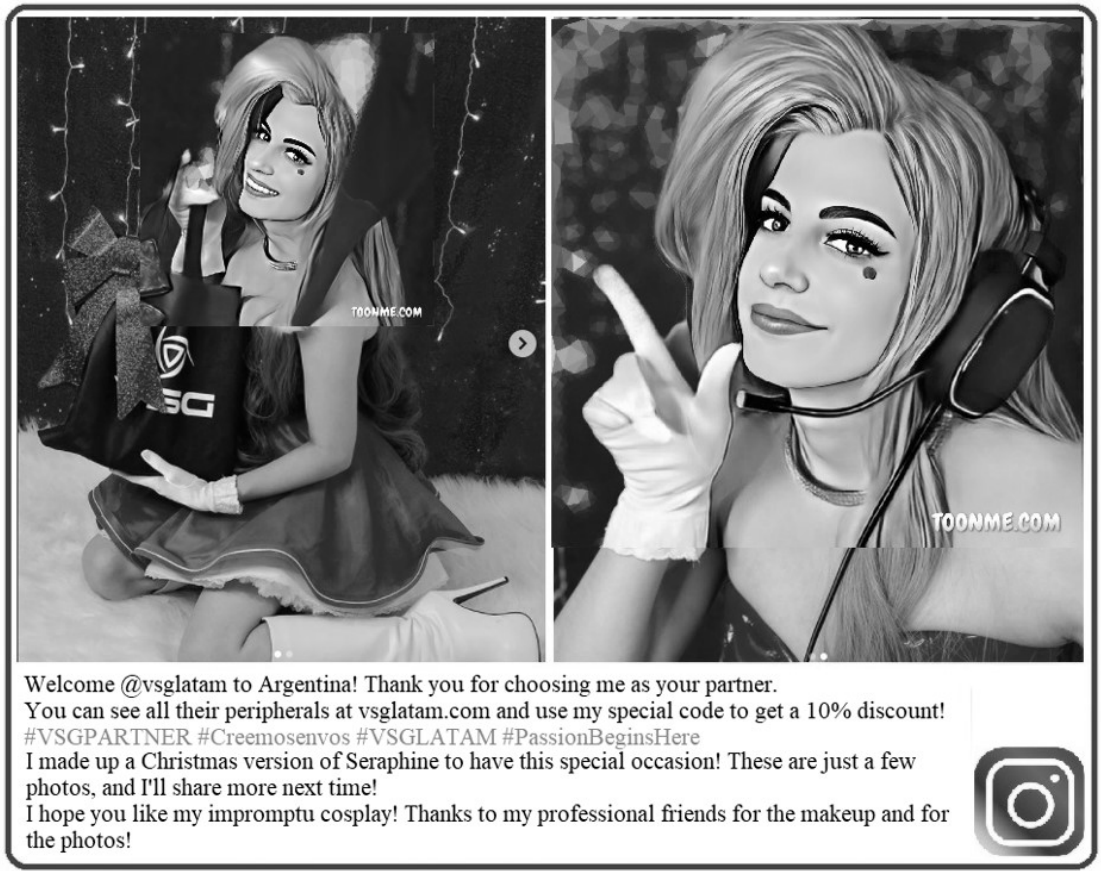

Figure 8. Example of a business partnership based on the reward *dispositif*
Source: Translated and adapted by the authors from data *corpora* with the Toonme app

event-related experience when the cosplayer joined a group and met the cast of the series she was interpreting (see Figure 9).

The shared experience of cosplayers, in the account highlighted here, makes it possible to infer the desires of those involved in the process of becoming a cosplayer and allows them to live the utopia of being recognized by the managers of the media object they are performing. By doing it together, cosplayers draw more attention to their bodies and, at the same time, they incorporate the desires of the multiple agents they are involved with at the time they cosplay in their performativity.

Both of the above examples represent how consumers create spaces to live the existence they perceive as ideal by modifying their bodies. Therefore, consumers can live utopias through ongoing interest and actions that allow them to experience voluntary, temporary, stochastic or extraordinary experiences (Hong & Vicdan, 2016; Rokka & Canniford, 2016). Such experiences go beyond the inherent holistic organization or unifying structure that brings together consumers' desires. Moreover, they function as rhizomatic relations that bring together desires and socialization practices in a context capable of enhancing the assemblage of material or virtual spheres (Kozinets et al., 2017; Thompson, 2019).

Thus, the consumers' performativity allows them to live utopian and desiring bodies, since it sustains the relationships between heterogeneous members of the consumption *ethos*. Moreover, it shows how consumers organize themselves in a rhizomatic manner to embody their pleasures. This *dispositif* leads consumers to embody the pleasures of those with whom they interact within their performativity.

4.3 Cosplayers' rapport: Embodiment of affection

The Rapport *dispositif* regulates performativities designed to give continuity to consumers' emotions when their resistant and desiring bodies are capable of **embodying the affection** they nourish through consumption-based

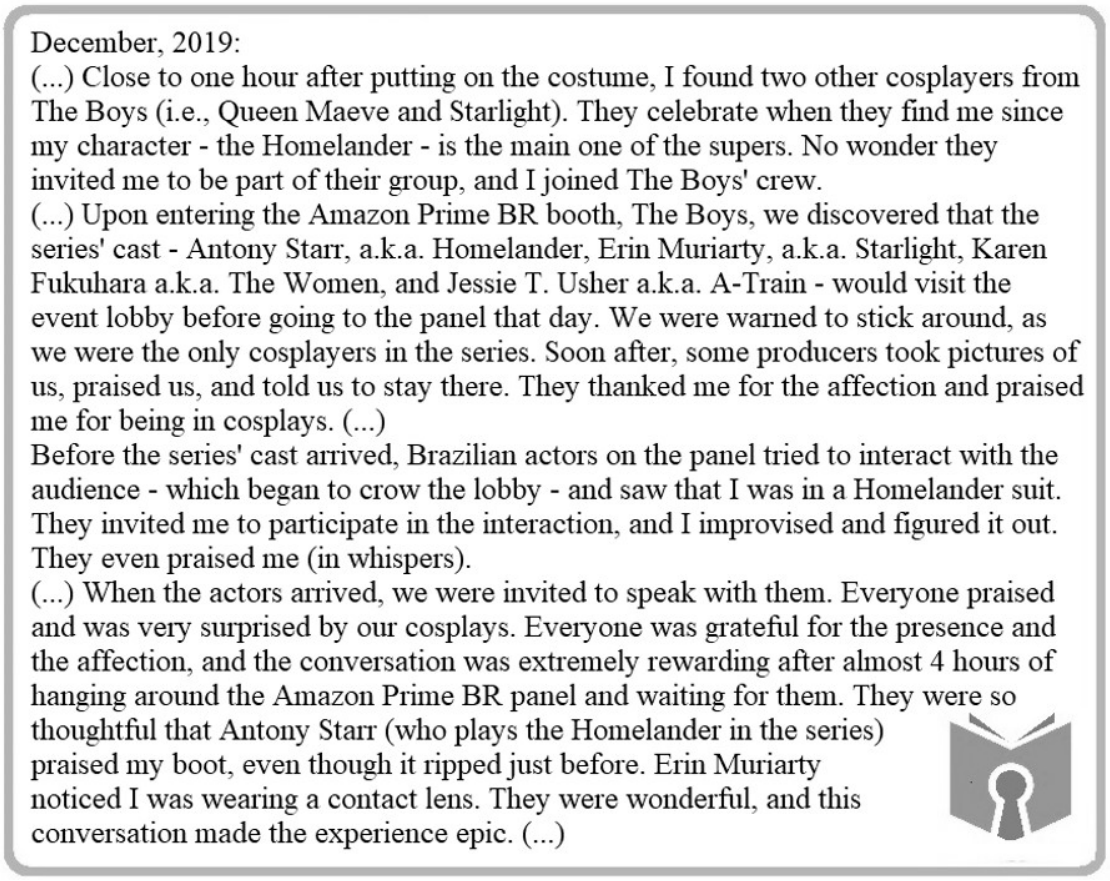
December, 2019:
(...) Close to one hour after putting on the costume, I found two other cosplayers from The Boys (i.e., Queen Maeve and Starlight). They celebrate when they find me since my character - the Homelander - is the main one of the supers. No wonder they invited me to be part of their group, and I joined The Boys' crew.
(...) Upon entering the Amazon Prime BR booth, The Boys, we discovered that the series' cast - Antony Starr, a.k.a. Homelander, Erin Muriarty, a.k.a. Starlight, Karen Fukuhara a.k.a. The Women, and Jessie T. Usher a.k.a. A-Train - would visit the event lobby before going to the panel that day. We were warned to stick around, as we were the only cosplayers in the series. Soon after, some producers took pictures of us, praised us, and told us to stay there. They thanked me for the affection and praised me for being in cosplays. (...)
Before the series' cast arrived, Brazilian actors on the panel tried to interact with the audience - which began to crow the lobby - and saw that I was in a Homelander suit. They invited me to participate in the interaction, and I improvised and figured it out. They even praised me (in whispers).
(...) When the actors arrived, we were invited to speak with them. Everyone praised and was very surprised by our cosplays. Everyone was grateful for the presence and the affection, and the conversation was extremely rewarding after almost 4 hours of hanging around the Amazon Prime BR panel and waiting for them. They were so thoughtful that Antony Starr (who plays the Homelander in the series) praised my boot, even though it ripped just before. Erin Muriarty noticed I was wearing a contact lens. They were wonderful, and this conversation made the experience epic. (...)

Figure 9. Example of fandom achievement based on the reward *dispositif*
Source: Translated and adapted by the authors from data *corpora*

relationships. The power relations that support this form of governance include attachment to interpreted media objects and relationships among members of the cosplay community. As such, they demonstrate collectiveness, friendship and sharing behaviors that support discourses about cosplay as an inclusive, intimate and fulfilling phenomenon, respectively.

This is in line with Visconti's (2016) understanding of how resistant bodies represent a self-extension function, when he addressed consumer vulnerabilities through performativity. The idea of immaterial and material, internal and external aspects of body use is diffused in the amplitude of positions based on emotions. Thus, it is valid to rethink performativity as a continuous elaboration of the self when bodies recognize collectivities in constant change, multiple assemblages characterized by the ability to incorporate permutations and transformations, when individuals relate emotionally to the subjectivity of others.

However, according to Schroeder and Zwick (2004), bodies reconfigure consumers' desires but limit their fate. In an attempt to maintain relationships and satisfy their emotions, subjects conform to the forms of governance guiding society. Adapting our bodies to forms of governance is a way of meeting and expanding the desiring capacity of heterogeneous members of the same arrangement, such as those who transform themselves.

Thus, the **Rapport** *dispositif* represents the form of governance according to which cosplayers attribute their participation in relationships with other cosplayers and with the cosplay community to their relationship with peers. Thus, the cosplay community plays the fundamental role of encouraging and helping its members to improve their bodies through their performativity.

Like the other *dispositifs*, Rapport is also present in two power diagrams: **Community** and **Astonishment** – both analytical categories are conceptualized in the previous subsection. These two power diagrams are united by the power operator called **Recognition**, which indicates the importance cosplayers attach to being recognized by their peers in mutual support and even inspiration to intensify their performances. In addition, the Astonishment diagram is also supported in this form of government

by the **Reliability** power operator – i.e., both analytical categories are conceptualized in the previous subsection.

Specifically, Reliability is associated with the **Collectivity** discourse, since it is common for intimate relationships to develop between the same fans and stakeholders of a cosplay or media object. Complementarily, Recognition is analogous to two discursive formations: Collectivity and **Self-reliance**. The first – i.e. Collectivity – represents the understanding that everyone is part of a broader phenomenon when their bodies are one of the many elements that make up the interactional experiences associated with cosplay. The other discursive formation – i.e. Self-reliance – shows how the intimacy created between different members of the consumer *ethos* is a great incentive for cosplayers to decide to disinhibit shame about their bodies.

Therefore, cosplay enables its practitioners to adapt multiple desires and resistances by adjusting their bodies. Thus, it enables us to see that the rapport *dispositif* governing cosplayers embodies affection. More specifically, when cosplayers remodel their bodies, by taking into account the relationship between peers, they aim to establish narratives and, by taking positions, to transform the interests of their *ethos*. Thus, these transformations based on cosplayers' emotions and relationships focus on two streams, namely: living their fan attachment to media texts and inter-fandom convergence.

The living fan attachment aspect was identified in a post published in the Facebook group "Cosplayers of a Certain Age" on November 26, 2021 (see Figure 10).

The cosplayer refers to the many positive feelings she has experienced through cosplay by posting several

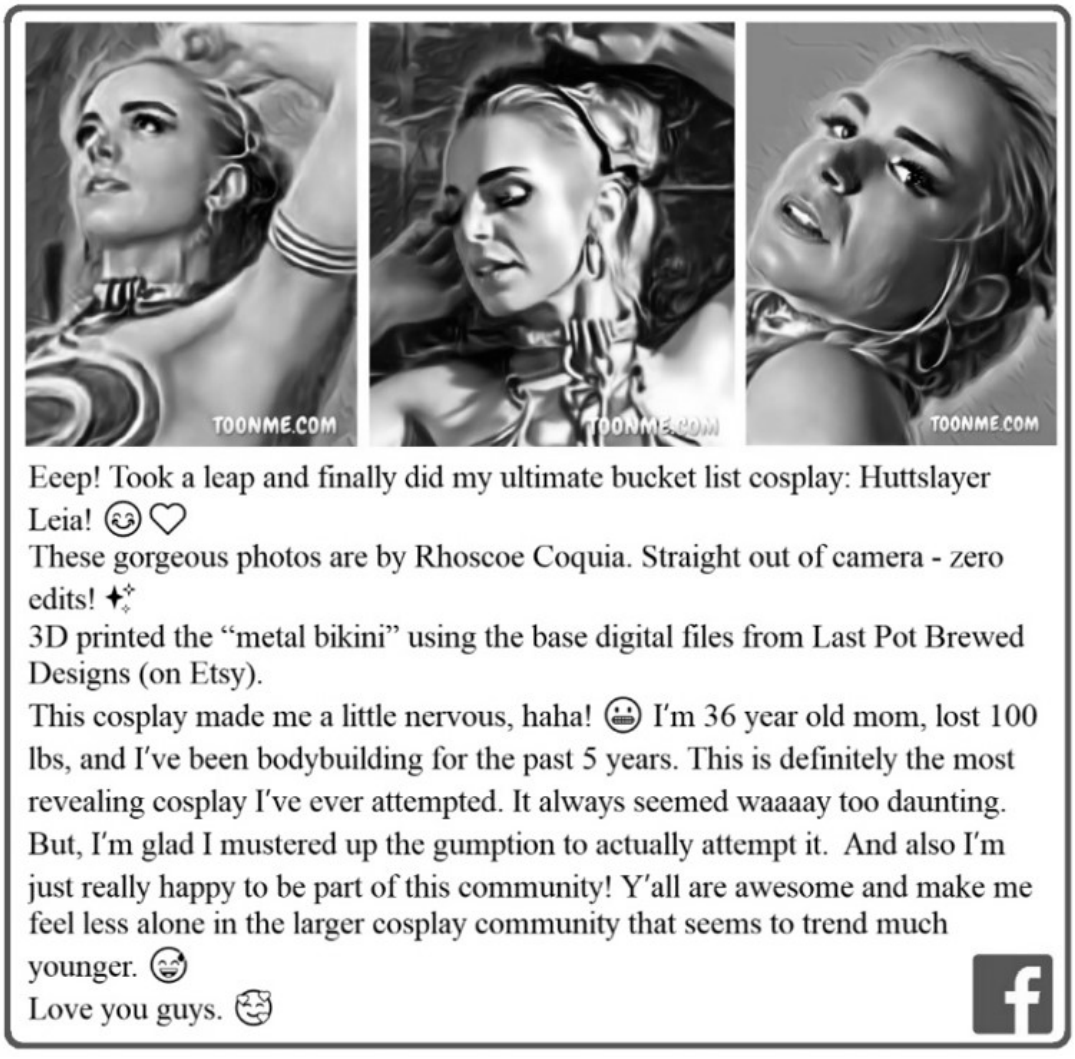

Figure 10. Example of a fan relationship lived based on the rapport *dispositif*
Source: Adapted by the authors from data *corpora* with the Toonme app

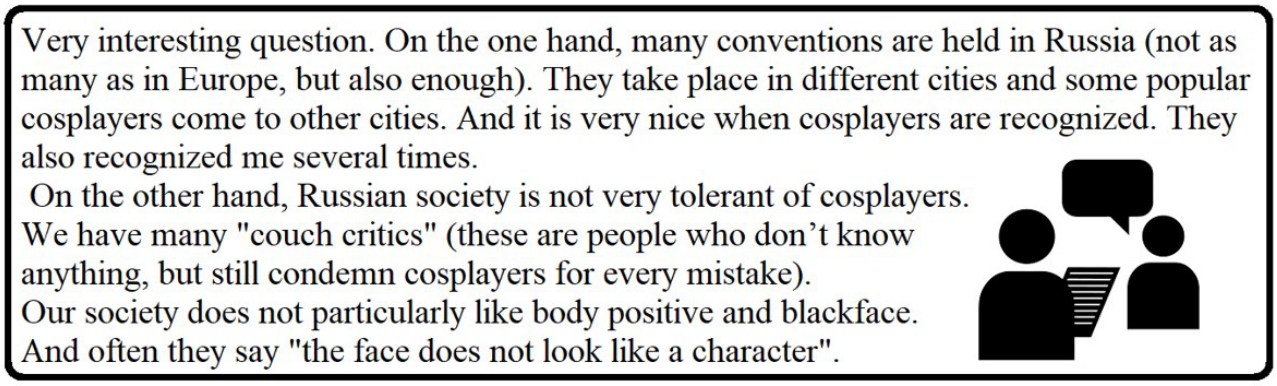

Figure 11. Example of inter-fandom convergence based on the rapport *dispositif*
Source: Adapted by the authors from data *corpora* with the Toonme app

photos of a performance that she considers emblematic. She has long desired to play an iconic character in pop culture (Princess Leia, from Star Wars). She exercised continuous resistance to achieve this experience; she adapted her body to lose weight, given the shame of sharing this cosplay, which is so body revealing. It was her own effort to transform her body in order to satisfy her desires and to feel comfortable sharing this revealing version of herself with a community made up of heterogeneous members who are so welcoming of her performance as a cosplayer.

Another example of inter-fandom convergence shows how the rapport *dispositif* functions as the embodiment of affection. This is a Russian cosplayer's response on how she feels about cosplaying in her country (see Figure 11).

Her speech emphasizes the congregation of local cosplayers who recognize each other and the collective nature of the phenomenon. Accordingly, she highlights the importance of encouraging sociability among cosplayers. This understanding is reinforced by the fact that they have to deal with a society that is not tolerant of cosplay. Therefore, recognition among cosplayers is embodied in the rapport *dispositif*, which brings them together and governs them.

The aforementioned examples reflect how consumers can shape their conception of themselves and their bodies through the threats that arise from the effects of iterability and citationality in the social context in which they live. In order to do so, they engage in resistance behaviors and discourses that reproduce market norms and enable them to improve their relationship and act to transform the pressing sociocultural logic (Seregina, 2020; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Furthermore, the consumption relationship enables consumers to understand their bodies and to take positions in the context in which they live. However, these positions tend to represent the desires of others, a fact that individuals assemble through their social relationships (Carrington & Ozanne, 2022; Schöps et al., 2020).

Resistant and desiring bodies materialize the embodiment of affection within a rhizomatic process, according to which consumers' performativity arranges social positions based on their emotional attachment to their consumption practices and relationships. These positions are in motion; they process both the body and corporeality through the reification of norms subject to the strong influence of moral values and through the subversion of ideologies that question social structures in a broader way than those of experienced relationships. Thus, consumers' bodies are both an ontological limit to their own desires and a possibility to enact dispersed resistances that are often associated with the individual's way of life.

5 Concluding remarks

Based on the research results and our theoretical interpretation of them, we conclude that consumer performativity, when enacted through embodiment transformation, sustains intrinsic multiple forms of governance – i.e., *dispositifs* – through what we call the avatar of the self. The identified *dispositifs* – i.e., redemption, rapport, and reward – elucidate how the avatar of the self synthesizes the efforts of consumers who should and must develop ways of managing their bodies in order to be the example that institutionalizes the performances of others. Thus, the following subsections were elaborated

to elucidate the theoretical and practical contributions of the study, as well as the research limitations and agenda.

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

The transformations embodied by cosplayers through their performativity reveal complementary and unique modes of self-governance. This process produces the so-called "avatar of the self," which is a meta-body circumscribed in power *dispositifs* capable of mediating consumption experiences based on consumer performativity. This concept is the main contribution of the current study since, although it was elaborated based on the cosplay experience, it is a potential theoretical generalization of consumption embodiment phenomena experienced through performativity.

The rest of the avatar of the self is continuously and collectively produced by multiple marketing agents and functions as a parameter for the heterogeneous members of a consumer *ethos* to intensify their relationship with others. It can be understood as a governing meta-body in which consumers embody knowledge of what they consume in order to experience and induce the possibilities of redemption, rapport, and reward that govern their performativity.

Thus, this theoretical contribution can be seen as an extension of the discussion of how consumers resort to digital media to increasingly assume the role of co-producers and induce the forms of governance – i.e., *dispositifs* – that lead to their consumption practices (Hill & McDonagh, 2020; Winter, 2023). The proposed discussion about the avatar of the self clarifies that members of a consumer *ethos* are interested in embodying product knowledge and social values in their performativity.

In this sense, the study makes a practical contribution by indicating how each marketing agent interacting in this environment tends to produce knowledge that feeds back the possibility for consumers to experience the avatar of the self. The possibility of experiencing the governing meta-body leads them to continuously incorporate the values of others – the knowledge inherent in the three *dispositifs* which govern them – making their performativity adjustable and desirable for consumers who interact with this *ethos*.

The redemption *dispositif* presents the possible hodgepodge in which consumers empower their bodies as a resistance (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015) and utopian spaces (Roux & Belk, 2019) through consumer relations. The rapport *dispositif* allows us to observe the concatenation between consumers' possibilities to transform their bodies, either as an example of resistance (Zanette & Brito, 2019) or desire (Yngfalk, 2016). However, the reward *dispositif* indicates consumers' ubiquitous interest in shaping their bodies as desirable (Kozinets et al., 2017) and utopian (Rokka & Canniford, 2016). Thus, each *dispositif* combines two theoretical concepts, showing how it is possible, valid, and relevant to sew autonomous concepts that are epistemologically close to deepen the discussion and interpretation of the phenomenon under study.

5.2 Limitations and future research directions

The limitation of the current study lies in the specific scope of consumer performativity, namely the cosplay phenomenon. However, it is worth highlighting that a virtual ethnography was conducted in a worldwide effort to collect data and conduct this research. Moreover, the integration of material and virtual performativity is in line with Thompson's (2019) understanding that consumer studies need to consider the fluidity between these two environments.

Nevertheless, the study is an empirical investigation focused on one theoretical perspective: the Foucauldian. Consequently, on the one hand, it seems opportune to expand through an essay with deeper arguments on how the avatar of the self and its three *dispositifs* – redemption, rapport, and reward – reflect the aforementioned author's proposition, since each one of these concepts indicates how consumers' agency over their bodies works to elaborate and maintain their performativity – an ontological exercise identified through consumers' experiences.

On the other hand, despite the fact that the Foucauldian concepts establish an autonomous and valid interpretation, the combination with other epistemologically aligned high social theories – i.e., Butler and Deleuze and Guattari – can expand and refine our proposition about resistant, utopian, and desiring bodies. These theories have been pointed out to expand the interpretation and knowledge aegis of the culturalist approaches to consumer research (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Holt, 2017).

In terms of additional possibilities for future research, it would be fruitful to study cosplayers in other contexts (e.g., the sharing of cosplayers' bodies to be consumed on specific platforms, with fetishized content), or even the sharing of counter-conducts according to

which cosplayers regulate their peers and the cosplay phenomenon itself. Broadening this scope towards a theoretical generalization of the concept of avatar of the self, other types of consumer performativity (e.g., drag queens, social media influencers) could be investigated through a Foucauldian genealogy in order to better understand the production of subjects, ethics and truths through such consumption practices.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Appendix A_Netnography
Appendix B_ Interviews
Appendix C_Etnomethodology
Appendix D_Autoethnography
Supplementary material to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/QJ56M5

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