

## **Funk and McDonald's: symbolic disputes and value negotiation in the advertising campaign "Novinhos Cheddar"<sup>1</sup>**

### **Funk e McDonald's: disputas simbólicas e negociações de valor na campanha publicitária "Novinhos Cheddar"**

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**Abstract:** *The paper discusses negotiations of value related to the appropriation of a Brazilian funk song by the fast food brand MacDonal'd's in its campaign entitled #Novinhos Cheddar. Through the analysis of comments posted on the video page "The #NovinhosCheddar are at MacDonal'd's. Again!" on YouTube, we problematize the relation among consumption, identity (personal and brand related) and value disputes in digital culture, understanding that these three spheres operate together. We conclude that a major part of the audience has demonstrated their approval of the campaign, emphasizing that the strategy of approaching popular / peripheral cultural expressions can be profitable. However, we highlight that this approach does not take place without tensions, since several elements that reinforce the connection between funk and the periphery were summarily erased in the multinational's campaign.*

**Keywords:** *funk; peripheral musical genres; communication and consumption; identity; YouTube.*

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**Resumo:** *O artigo investiga negociações de valor relacionadas à apropriação de uma música do gênero musical funk pela marca de fast food McDonald's em sua campanha intitulada #Novinhos Cheddar. Através de análise de comentários postados na página do vídeo "Os #NovinhosCheddar estão no McDonald's. De novo!" no YouTube, problematizamos relações entre consumo, identidade (pessoal e de marca) e disputas de valor na cultura digital, entendendo que essas três esferas operam de forma conjunta. Concluímos que grande parte do público demonstrou ter aprovado a campanha, ressaltando que a estratégia de aproximação com expressões culturais populares/periféricas pode ser profícua. Entretanto, destacamos que essa aproximação não se dá de forma isenta, uma vez que diversos elementos que reforçam a conexão entre funk e periferia foram sumariamente apagados na campanha da multinacional.*

**Palavras-chave:** *funk; gêneros musicais periféricos; comunicação e consumo; identidade; YouTube.*

## Introduction

In October, 2015, one of the most known brands in the world, McDonald's, posted a video on YouTube advertising their new products – sandwiches and French fries with layers of cheddar cheese. This video was a part of an advertisement campaign that had as target the young Brazilian audience and had a peculiarity: presented a remixed funk song as soundtrack for the campaign. More specifically, they used as the main motive a parody of the song “As novinhas tão sensacional”, composed by MC Romântico and DJ Bambam, first released in 2013 and relaunched in early 2014 in a “lighter” version, without all the curse words and other words that could be censored from the original lyrics.

With the parody, McDonald's used the song's popularity, which official videoclip (MC ROMÂNTICO, 2014) had, in April 2017, more than 29 million views on a video platform, and transformed the erotic lyrics of the song, classified as “funk putaria<sup>4</sup> – uncensored funk”, in an ode to the pleasure given by the consumption of fast food. A double appropriation, considering the “prohibited” version (responsible for the initial success at funk parties) and the “official” version (without curse words) of the song. Due to its popularity, the brand decided to make a new version of the song for the campaign, between the months of August and September, 2016. With some alterations in the lyrics and the melody, the campaign #NovinhosCheddar from 2016 (OS #NOVINHOS-CHEDDAR..., 2016) had an audience 10 times bigger than the first version and the most expressive amount of views among all the videos available at McDonald's Brazil on their channel.

Even though it is a brand with a wide audience, including people with lower income, the appropriation of funk in the advertisement campaign seemed to be a potentially risky bet. In 2013, the brand Mercedes-Benz used the song “Passinho do Volante”, whose videoclip was one of the most seen by the Brazilian audience that year, to promote the release of the car Mercedes-Benz Classe A. Shared exclusively on YouTube,

4 The so-called “funk putaria” is a subgenre of funk that is characterized by lyrics that approach sensual themes, often in an explicit manner.

the video presented only the chorus of the funk – without alteration – as soundtrack of the video. The initiative sparked controversy and was published by media sources specialized in marketing (TUR-LAO, 2013) and in the car sector due to the “unusual” association between a brand related to the luxury goods market and the music genre. Although the lyrics did not have curse words or double meaning expressions (unlike “As novinha tão sensacional”), the use of the song had a high rate of rejection, which led to the deletion of the video of the brand’s channel.

While it is considered a “peripheral”<sup>5</sup> music genre, funk still carries social stigmas associated to ideas of low culture, violence, vulgarity (HERSCHMANN, 2000; FACINA, 2010; LOPES, 2010), among others. However, according to Evangelista Cunha (2014), artists and cultural producers related to funk are intensely appropriating the social media to share their songs through increasingly sophisticated videoclips, which has contributed for the popularity of the genre and, at the same time, for the increase of criticism and the increase of haters.

Having this context, our objective is to understand in what way the link between Mc Donald’s campaign Novinhos Cheddar and funk on social media come to be, in which the relation between consumption and identity becomes even more visible through different elements and environments that enable the expression of identities. In a moment in which identities of brands and subjects spark intense debate in contemporaneity, the object of study of this article seem to be particularly interesting to understand the diversity of social and cultural processes overlapped in the appropriation of peripheral music genres.

Therefore, the proposal of this study, with exploratory purposes, is to identify symbolic disputes involved in the relation between funk and advertisement. We argue that this equation is marked by the dialectic tension that involve, among other aspects, negotiations of meaning through a “sanitation” of the genre, making it more “palatable” to

5 When attributing the term “peripheral” to the Brazilian funk, we argue that the genre is configured as an important mediator for issues related to discussions about periphery, such as social inequality and territorial exclusions, argument developed in previous works (PEREIRA DE SÁ e EVANGELISTA CUNHA, 2014; EVANGELISTA CUNHA, 2014).

certain audiences. As the example of Mercedes-Benz shows us, the reference to popular levels of the population, still associated with an eternal “struggle for survival” in environments surrounded by “material deficiency” (BARROS e ROCHA, 2007, p. 2) that would impede the consumption beyond subsistence, is far from unanimous. Beyond the differences between the car brand and McDonald’s, we argue that the fast food chain used a series of strategies to neutralize possible criticism and reinforce the bonds with the fans of the brand.

In order to do that, we will make a brief historical background on funk so as to contextualize the object of research to, then, discuss about the relationships between consumption and identity, with special highlight to this process in the digital culture. Finally, we will present an analysis of the comments from the audience related specifically to the song of the 2016’s #NovinhosCheddar campaign. The sample was selected from the video shared at McDonald’s channel on YouTube.

### **A brief timeline of Brazilian funk**

Successful in parties and radios at Rio de Janeiro in the 70’s with American songs and lyrics, funk began to flirt with a Brazilian version in the next decade (ESSINGER, 2005). According to Vianna (1987), despite the crescent popularization in Rio de Janeiro, with parties filled with thousands of youngsters every weekend, the genre was still portrayed by the media as something “new” at the time.

By the 90’s, funk already was a synonym of Brazilian funk throughout the country. Artists linked to the genre dragged crowds with lyrics in Portuguese that portrayed issues related to the daily lives in the favelas and peripheral neighborhoods of the city. Throughout the decade, funk representation in the media intensified, being strongly associated with violence (HERSCHMANN, 2000).

However, the speech of the same media grounded the basis for moments of glamorizing the genre, which also opened space in the cultural sections of big mainstream media of the country (HERSCHMANN, 2000).

Nowadays, funk simultaneously coexists with stigmas associated to violence - funk parties are still prohibited on many carioca communities, for example – and with a moment of rise in the media and the contemporary<sup>6</sup> cultural scenario, circulating in spaces different from their original places, such as middle-class nightclubs, fitness centers, Globo's telenovelas (PEREIRA DE SÁ, 2007) and advertisements of global companies, the focus of this article.

In this sense, we highlight that, despite the success of some artists and the international projection of funk, the structure of production and advertisement, especially for new artists, is still far from standard if we compare to new artists of other musical genres. Given the lack of space on the “mainstream” media, YouTube became an even more central element on the strategy of release of artists and producers. Throughout the years, the popularization of the platform followed a movement of diversification of genre in subgenres such as funk pop<sup>7</sup> and funk ostentação<sup>8</sup>, with artists from different genres releasing hits on the video portal. That was the case of MC Romântico and “As novinhas tão sensacional”, song that was eventually appropriated by McDonald's.

Such appropriation, as we previously discussed, generated a series of comments amongst consumers, many of which brought clear conflicts and symbolic-discursive aggressions related to funk, the identity of the brand and, consciously or unconsciously, to their own identities, linked to the sphere of consumption.

6 Even though many of these narratives are still characterized by judgements of value that create a prejudiced view, we believe they can produce “gaps” through which difference can emerge (HERSCHMANN, 2000).

7 Resulting from the approximation between funk and pop music, the term funk pop refers to a subgenre known for the lyrics that distance themselves from the politically incorrect and for the sound that mix elements of pop with the beat of the drums, which began to dominate funk songs produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

8 Subgenre categorized by the exaltation of consumption of luxury items, the funk ostentação was popularized at Baixada Santista (SP) in the 2010's and influenced other music genres, such as sertanejo – some artists began to present themselves as representatives of “sertanejo ostentação”.

## Consumption and identity on digital media

We understand, along with other authors, that, in the context of the arrival of the Modernity, related to the demise of “fixed” social references such as the church and the school (HALL, 2000), consumption started to constitute a central category in the definition of identity of the contemporary subjects (BARBOSA and CAMPBELL, 2007; FEATHERSTONE, 1997). In this sense, it is an important tool to “enable the significance and the identity that modern human beings aspire” (CAMPBELL, 2007, p. 63), helping individuals to “discover who they are” and, in this sense, combating “their sense of ontological insecurity” (CAMPBELL, 2007, p. 64), even if, according to Giddens (1991), the “mandatory” aspect of daily choices can lead to anxiety crises.

Also according to Campbell, this process of “discovery” or constitution of identity processes enabled by the consumption are in permanent reconstruction and resignification. Even the place of consumption in the contemporary social fabric contributes for the construction of “flexible” identities – after all, it is about an engendered instance in a complex system of cultural meanings of unstable value<sup>9</sup>.

Profoundly marked by self-reflectivity (GIDDENS, 1991), the process of continuous elaboration of identity through consumption becomes even more noticeable with the development of information and communication technologies, particularly from spaces geared towards expression and sociability, such as social networks, in which the identity construction that the social actors seek to make of themselves becomes visible or even accessible (POLIVANOV, 2012).

Platforms such as social media websites are, thus, profitable spaces for this type of manifestation, once they offer subjects the opportunity of choosing to make some content related to the image they wish to build of themselves as visible or invisible (POLIVANOV, 2012), showing their affiliation or rejection to certain consumption products - either tangible

9 It is important to highlight, however, that we agree with Barbosa and Campbell (2007, p. 24) in the argument that such phenomenon do not represent the “end of social”; factors such as citizenship, religious affiliation, tradition and individual performance remain having an important role in the “demarcation of frontiers among groups” and in the “construction of identities”.

or intangible goods, such as services or even ideas. Even though YouTube is not necessarily a social network website structured for this end (RECUERO, 2009), we consider the speeches of the social actors in the comments as discursive messages that can be directly linked to the ways these subjects present themselves to others in this space. In addition to that, the platform presents functionalities that make visible the channels followed by individual profiles, appropriation that evidences the construction of a social network and that we will not explore in this article.

Therefore, in a scenario in which consumption goods, overall mediatic goods, are, often, more active than the “traditional” identity markers, elements such as musical preference, television preferences or even food preferences become relevant affiliation instruments to the way in which individuals in these spaces wish to present themselves to others that belong in these networks. And it is important to highlight that this process works not only for individuals, but also for brands. In our opinion, when taking as inspiration a song of the so-called “funk putaria” to create the ad campaign showing the new flavors of sandwich and French fries, McDonald’s is clear to give the intention of reinforcing a hedonistic view of consumption, according to which the same should be a source of pleasure and realization.<sup>10</sup> According to Rocha (2009), the hedonistic aspect, common in the advertisement discourse, relates to the infinite consumption of goods to a perennial sense of happiness, which, for the author, configures as a superficial framing of the phenomenon.

In a release about the launch of the first campaign, on October, 2015, the marketing vice-president of the brand in Brazil, Roberto Gnypek, says that “cheddar is our product icon of flavor, pleasure and indulgence that connects directly with funk, which is fun, entertainment and boundless pleasure” (“OS NOVINHOS ESTÃO DE PARABÉNS”, 2015). When reflecting about the choice of the brand for a funk with erotic content, whose subgenre “putaria”, with many swear words, is

10 They also do this aiming at a specific audience, the youngsters, who already are linked to the sphere of entertainment and fun, as the studies of Pereira and Polivanov (2012) show.



successful at parties and on the internet, it is possible to think about a double association in relation to the “boundless pleasure” proposed by the food franchise.

In this sense, we highlight the relevance of the publicity while a classifying system related to consumption through which sharing and the social classification of products and services as “necessities” come about, with certain values link to them (ROCHA, 2009). One can think, through this logic, that the expressive potency brought by digital media<sup>11</sup> brings even wider instruments for the sharing of this cultural system – even for their problematization.

If we consider the timeline of stigmatization of funk in Brazil, the choice of genre for an advertisement campaign, overall with a song with politically incorrect content, would be unlikely some years ago. Even though the purpose of this article is not to dissect the multiple social and economic processes that inspired this change, we believe that the plurality of videos of funk becoming hits on YouTube recently (such as “As novinhas tão sensacional”) can have a relevant role to legitimate the creation of the campaign, as well as other appropriations in advertisement pieces.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the popular practices in the “cultural system” (BURGUESS and GREEN, 2009) established in the platform gain relevance in the set of current social practices that contribute so that the values around certain consumption goods are re-signified throughout time.

When using the goods to turn visible “a set of fluid processes to classify people and events” (DOUGLAS and ISHERWOOD, 2009, p. 36), consumption also acts as a cultural marker, building a shared universe of values and practices. However, as the limits that Hall (2000) points for the more “flexible” identity constructions in the contemporaneity, the

11 About the potency of digital media, it is important to emphasize the inequality of access and forms of use of these spaces, in which the social actors dispute places of visibility and authority (RECUERO, 2009), among others.

12 Even though this strategy not always is exempted from intense conflict, such as what happened in the Mercedes-Benz campaign we previously mentioned.

construction of consumption while cultural marker is also crossed by issues related to social class, ethnic background and gender.

In this direction, Barbosa and Campbell highlight the existence of a hierarchization of goods that turns the consumption of certain products and services more licit and desirable than others. According to the authors, although this classification is contextual, "there are crystalized cultural meanings about certain social goods and practices that transcend some contexts" (BARBOSA e CAMPBELL, 2007, p. 39). In the case of funk, the bond between the poor and black peripheral population remain as a stigma (EVANGELISTA CUNHA, 2014) that activate mechanisms of distinction (BOURDIEU, 1979) according to which the genre becomes inferior, such as those who consume it.

Even though McDonald's advertisement piece can be considered a successful example due to its popularity, this crossing between products of different spheres of consumption brings reflections that contribute for the reconfiguration of symbolic disputes associated to prejudice and hierarchizations that still remain in Brazil. It is about thinking to what extent the legitimacy offered by McDonald's campaign can be seen as a "discursive trick" (ENNE, 2004, p. 113) that "sanitizes" funk and, consequently, allows the expression of discourses that defend the music. As we will see next, this process of appropriation of funk by the brand is not exempted from conflict, but, contrary to what frequently occurs in pages with popular videos of funk, there are few registers of rejection to the jingle of the campaign.

### **Symbolic-discursive disputes on Novinhos Cheddar**

Created by the agency DPZ&T, the campaign Novinhos Cheddar had as objective to present two new versions of the sandwich Cheddar McMelt (fixed item on the brand's menu): Grand Cheddar McMelt and Super Cheddar Bacon, in addition to the McFries Cheddar Bacon. After being commercialized temporarily between October and December 2015, the items returned to the menu on August and September 2016, also temporarily. With advertisement videos, jingle, printed material and digital

pieces for the brand channels in social media websites, the project used as main element a parody of the song “As novinha tão sensacional”, success of MC Romântico released in 2014, to highlight the “new” flavors<sup>13</sup> and the “extreme amount” of cheddar on the recipes.

The song “As novinhas tão sensacional” appeared in late 2013 at DJ Bambam’s studio at Vaz Lobo, Rio de Janeiro. Recorded with lyrics improvised in 10 minutes by MC Romântico, the song mixes the traditional sound of funk in the 21st century with the “beat” of reggaeton in a subgenre of funk that has been called “rasterinha”. In an interview of the Thump channel of Vice magazine (ROMANI, 2015), Romântico said that the song was almost an immediate hit on DJ Bambam’s channel on social media websites, and right after that, it was a hit at funk parties. The lyrics are filled with swear words and words that are considered vulgar: “As novinha tão sensacional / Descendo com a xota prendendo no pau / Subindo com a xota prendendo no pau / Rebola com a xota prendendo no pau / Isso aqui tá gostoso, tá sensacional”. With the success, came the invitations to perform in radios and a softer version of the song, but, even so, it is filled with strong erotization: “As novinha tão sensacional / Descendo gostosa, prendendo legal / Subindo gostosa, prendendo legal / Rebola gostosa, prendendo legal / Isso aqui tá gostoso, tá sensacional”.

On McDonald’s version for the campaign, the lyrics are altered to mention the brand’s products, but the structure of one only verse and the sound remained similar: “Os novinhos tão de parabéns / Os novinhos tão de parabéns / É o dobro de cheddar / Acabou de voltar / É cheddar mais bacon, pode lembrar / Batata com cheddar você vai pirar / Derretendo de novo / É só comemorar”. The jingle is sung by a singer whose young voice exaggerates the carioca accent, making even more clear the connection with MC Romântico’s song. Following other recent ads related to the brand, the video campaign presents a simple

13 The popularization of the term “novinha” in funk can be compared with the use of the word in the genre brega from Recife, according to Soares: “The ‘novinha’ is the echo of a nymph, a young, seductive girl, sexually voracious and able to invite the man for a night of sex” (SOARES, 2010, p. 57).

narrative, focusing on the ingredients and in the preparation of the sandwiches and the French fries.

The popularity of the ad of the campaign Novinhos Cheddar, shown during the months of October and December 2015, already proved the success of this endeavor: until May 2016, the video had over 607,000 views on YouTube. With the return of the campaign on August 2016, it was possible to find that the commercial, and probably, the products announced were popular with the audience. Until April 2017, the video called "The #NovinhosCheddar are on McDonald's. Again!" Had over 6.7 million views at McDonald's Brazil official page on YouTube, far superior number compared to the views of other videos posted on the same channel. At the time that we analyzed, between September 2016 and April 2017, the advertisement campaign received 978 comments and expressive numbers of approval: there were 15,398 "likes" and only 4,053 "dislikes" registered on the page. The approval of the use of the song in the campaign is even more evident with the post of a video with 1 minute and 40 seconds of duration with the "extended version" of the song<sup>14</sup> by the user jhonatan jh only after two days of the release of the campaign of the brand's channel on YouTube. Later, the 1min40s video was deleted.

In a qualitative exploratory analysis, we selected 40 comments amongst the those comments classified by YouTube system as the most relevant on the 10 first pages of comments about the campaign in the official channel of McDonald's on the platform. The speeches explicitly mention the jingle and the sample includes answers to these comments<sup>15</sup>.

A first analysis about the comments posted on the page of the video reveals that most of the audience who chose to manifest themselves on

14 With 1min49s, the "extended version" presents only a repetition of the jingle. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yH9TNQG-AwM>. Accessed in: May 2017.

15 Answers to other comments within the universe sporadically analyzed contained mentions to the song. However, our objective was to maintain the focus on discussions around the centrality of the song in the campaign.

the comment section approved the use of the funk in the campaign: sentences as “I can’t take this song out of my head” and “catchy ad”,

Images 1, 2 and 3 – Positive comments on McDonalds campaign jingle.



Source: YouTube.

Mainstream songs are marked, among other aspects, by being considered commercial, clearly geared towards market sales (FRITH, 2004), and because it has the ability of being— to a certain extent — easily reproducible in terms of melody, “fixating” in the memory (even more if we think about genres such as funk or pop). The positive comments clearly point to those characteristics, that are, more specifically, traits associated to jingles used on advertisement that has as objective to call attention of the clients and “fixating” the message on their memory (ALLAN, 2006). In this sense, such comments seem to indicate that the strategy adopted by the brand has worked.

According to the example shown on Image 4, the relationship about parody funk and the advertisement campaign was recognized – positively, negatively or ironically - by a good part of the audience: at the official page of the videoclip of “As novinhas tão sensacional” and in

one of the pages with the original version, deleted by YouTube<sup>16</sup> (probably due to inappropriate content), there were several comments that indicated visits from people who were interested in the song through the jingle.

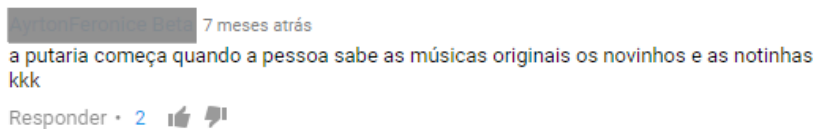
Image 4 – Comment registered in the official page of the videoclip “As novinhas tão sensacional”.



Source: YouTube.

Another issue that deserves to be raised was the fact that the comments on the ad explicitly mention the “uncensored” version of the song, as Image 5 illustrates:

Image 5 – Comment mentions funk which inspired the campaign.



Source: YouTube.

As other parodies associated to the genre (EVANGELISTA CUNHA, 2014), the campaign can be framed in what Felinto (2007) considered as spoof culture, parody or imitation of a video. Popular amongst cultural practices consolidated on YouTube, this type of video, that usually parodies other productions available on the video platform itself, has been largely used by marketing on other medias in a way of establishing a multiplatform connection and getting the attention of the younger

16 The video was available at the link [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_AMvxIR\\_Sf8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AMvxIR_Sf8). On April, 2017, date of the last access of the URL, YouTube indicated that this was deleted.

audience. Therefore, the spoof format can be understood as a type of language linked to a “remix culture” (LESSIG, 2008), which comes from a certain content in order to create another content, potentializing, in this case, appropriations of funk for marketing purposes.<sup>17</sup>

However, when the object of parody is a music genre marked by stigmas, such appropriation gains new nuances. In the case of funk, there is a conflict between the consumption of the genre and the rejection to it, once, according to what Hutcheon (2000) reminds us, it is necessary to recognize the original text in order to understand the ironic dimension of the parody. Thus, the song, which is considered by some as “degrading” on the original videoclip of “As novinhas tão sensacional” – whose first pages of “most relevant comments” present many criticism, unlike McDonald’s ad - become, to a great part of the audience that approved the campaign #NovinhosCheddar, something “catchy” and valued.

Image 6 - Comments valuing ad’s jingle.



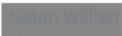
Source: YouTube.





However, as the next comments composing our research corpus show, there must have limits for this meaning negotiation in relation to

17 Other studies point towards the relation between spoof and advertisement can be linked to movements such as culture jamming “a set of techniques of intervention that alter and subvert commercial symbols imposed by marketing of big companies through advertisement” (OLIVEIRA and PESSOA, 2014, p. 5)

funk. According to opinions that could be considered as anti-fans<sup>18</sup>, the appropriation of the genre by McDonald's is seen negatively. According to this point of view, the positive repercussion of the ad would be an acknowledgement that funk would be a "threat" to Brazilian society, approach that shows a series of prejudices associated to the history of the genre. There are, however, only 2 among 40 comments that show this posture and that, in one of them, presented in Image 7, the choice of the brand was promptly defended in discourses that legitimate funk as a genre ("Funk is musical expression. Accept it and move on") or, at least, agree with the brand's choice ("I also hate funk, but this song is cool").

Images 7 and 8 – Comments criticizing the use of funk in an advertisement campaign.

 7 meses atrás  
 Meu Deus até no comercial tem Funk, onde o mundo vai parar?  
 Responder • 8    
 Ocultar respostas ^

  8 meses atrás  
 Eu sempre pergunto quando o Super Cheddar Bacon volta! Eu sonhei com esse dia. A única coisa que tirou minha fome foi esse funk.  
 Responder •  

Source: YouTube.

In addition to the responses defending the song in these same comments, there are "random" comments criticizing explicitly negative comments, such as Image 9. There would be, therefore, possible indication of the existence of other discourses that do not appear on the corpus of this study. Another important issue is that, due to limitations of the adopted methodology, it is not possible to know if these individuals are admirers of the genre or the brand and its products.<sup>19</sup> However, we can

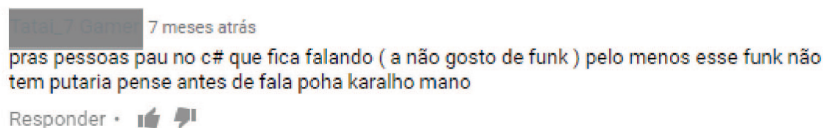
18 According to Gray (2003), the anti-fan takes his time hating something from the moment he/she sees it as a "threat". In the case of anti-fans of funk that comment on the web, there is a perception of the genre and all the universe that surrounds it as a threat to other genres, especially to rock.

19 It is also not possible to know whether these defenders are not people hired by McDonald's themselves to defend the brand.



infer that they show some type of sympathy for the choice of funk as a soundtrack for the ad.

Image 9 – User defending the use of funk in the Novinhos Cheddar ad.



Source: YouTube.

These expressions, either supporting or rejecting the use of the song, can be understood as discursive performances of the subjects, that aim to explicit their affiliations to certain values, music genres (in this case, funk) and brands (McDonald's). They work as identity markers, according to what we previously discussed, and send us the notion of “emotional communities” (FREIRE FILHO, 2013). It is possible to take the defense of the ad Novinhos Cheddar as a possible manifestation of the relation of proximity between the brand and part of its consumers capable of neutralizing eventual criticism to the adaptation of a funk “putaria” to the soundtrack. According to Freire Filho, the grammar of emotions of a certain society is shaped “by social hierarchy and by daily relations of power” (FREIRE FILHO, 2013, p. 4). Strongly influenced by the media, such readings, that vary according to the socioeconomic conditions, status, age and gender, shape emotional communities ruled by feelings such as love, hate or anger.

In this sense, it is important to highlight the effort made by brands and organizations for the construction of an emotional capital (JENKINS, 2010) from different strategies in digital platforms. In a scenario in which multiple possibilities of interaction with consumers are available in the market, brands seek to promote a consolidation of a kind of agent “to which interests a more personal and direct involvement with what is intangible to the brand in question” (CASTRO, 2012, p. 136). Therefore, it is about endeavors that aim at the development of

affectionate relationships with the objective of turning clients into fans. These fans frequently gather in communities of the brand, where it is possible to affiliate to a certain lifestyle that “enriches exchange experiences with similar partners and with the company itself” (ALMEIDA, et al., 2011, p. 370). With around 73 million likes on their official Facebook page in October 2017, we can say that McDonald's gathers an extensive community of fans (although, we highlight, it wouldn't be possible to affirm that all the individuals that like the page are, effectively, fans of the company).

Beyond the admiration to the brand, however, we resume our argument around the “sanitization” of funk in the multinational company parody. When performing an attempt to erase certain characteristics that reinforce the connection of the song with the original communities of funk, the brand avoids the attraction of an extensive community of anti-fans of the genre, whose criticisms often show, explicitly, the hate also to ideas about peripheral communities represented there. That way, although it maintains the reference to the original funk, the commercial presents: a) a sound closer to pop; b) modified lyrics; c) replacement of the black bodies of the “novinhos” (singer and dancers) that appear on the videoclip of the song to focus exclusively on the preparation of the foods promoted.

About the first argument, there is, in McDonald's ad, a sound weakening of a funk trademark: the strong beat, or “batidão” (ESSINGER, 2005), with potent bass. In contrast, there is the inclusion of melodic sounds produced by synthesizers or keyboards and the use of tuned vocals, possibly auto-tuned, elements frequently linked to a sound aesthetics from pop (FRITH, 2004), even though it is difficult to delimitate it. About the lyrics, as we've mentioned, there are considerable changes. Even though it maintains the informal tone from funk (“As novinhas tão sensacional”/“Os novinhos tão de parabéns”), the agreement error is suppressed. While the lyrics of the first version of #NovinhosCheddar, broadcasted in 2015, made more direct references to the sexiness of the original song, with terms such as “pegando geral” and “derretendo

gostoso, é fenomenal”<sup>20</sup>, the 2016 campaign promotes a bigger neutralization of the message. We can argue that, in the last case, the main and maybe the only explicit bond between the original song and the jingle, to what is referred to this hermeneutical field, is the mention of novinhas(os): in the first case, young and seductive girls; in the second, the new flavors of hamburger and fries. Such mention is not repeated in the imagetic field, since the ad suppresses the individuals and the urban peripheral scene from the original videoclip in favor of an aseptic environment with the products framed by neutral colors in the background.

From the analyzed material, we defend that these changes are an important part of the acceptance of the campaign. Even though it maintains association with the original funk so that the audience understands it is a parody, the video eliminates elements related to the stigmas around funk - therefore, the distinctive processes associated to its consumption or rejection.

Considering the role of advertisement in the social process of meaning articulations, the visibility granted by the campaign could represent an opportunity to discuss remaining preconceptions linked to funk. As we could see in the comments analyzed, there were some debate, but such collocations could be considered, overall, as a “collateral effect” of the reference to the genre. According to McDonald’s approach, funk consumption is desirable according to some parameters, such as the use of parodic resources and the “sanitization”, legitimating choices that maintain distinction mechanisms related to the process of stigmatization of the genre.

Such strategies also seem to be intimately linked to positive comments on the campaign’s page, that belong to an identity expression - both from the brand and the consumers - that is more socially accepted. I. e., from the moment they “clean” stigmatized marks of funk from the ad, the social actors feel more comfortable to express their affiliation to the ad. After all, it is in the sphere of consumption that we build (and rebuild)

20 Complete lyrics: “Dobro de cheddar pegando geral / É cheddar mais bacon ficou genial / Batata com cheddar não tem nada igual / Derretendo gostoso, fenomenal”.

our identities continuously and it is through the goods, ideas and products “organized” in the field of advertisement that we affiliate ourselves to certain values.

### **Final considerations**

Throughout this study, we sought to highlight some elements that problematize the appropriation of a peripheral musical genre as funk in the advertisement campaign #NovinhosCheddar. We were particularly interested in the reflection about the crossings regarding the consumption of foods and musical genres in the social media environment, where the relationship between consumption and identity becomes even more evident in front of the possibilities of identity self-construction in these spaces. From the moment identity constructions are based by consumption and that platforms such as YouTube makes consumption even more visible through many tools (number of views, “likes” and comments, for example), the classification list around it becomes even more subject to debate and symbolic disputes involving “common” brands and subjects.

We also observed that the object of research brings reflections about the use of peripheral musical genres as elements of sound branding, resource through which the brands philosophy is translated acoustically (GUERRA, 2013). In the case of McDonald's, a brand highly consumed by the young audience, the resource of parody, linked to a Song that is already known and related to fun, seem to be used to reinforce the emotional connection of consumers with the brand itself and their values.

However, as we sought to highlight, it is an appropriation that: 1) does not eliminate conflicts related to symbolic disputes between different social actors in contact through social platforms; And 2) it is done in a way of erasing certain relevant markers from the funk universe, such as black youngsters, the use of colloquial language and favelas, for example, “sanitizing” it. The debates arising from the use of a song whose original content is considered “inappropriate” and that is related to a history of marginalization in an advertisement campaign evidence, thus, the central role of consumption as an unstable element through

which values can be re-signified. It is about a complex system that, such as identities in contemporaneity, acts among potencies of imaginary and social limitations. These limitations have frontiers that are problematized, even if unintentionally, by campaigns as #NovinhosCheddar.

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