









Tradition is alive and live! The consumer experience in São João Festival, in Campina Grande City

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Abstract

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The aim of the current article is to describe the consumer experience at the traditional São João Festival, in Campina Grande City, Paraíba State, in 2022.

Method: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was adopted as method, in association with theoretical elements available at the Consumer Experience literature.

Results: The description highlighted four experiences as narratives comprising consumers' reactions to the event: "Meeting an old friend again", which is focused on affection to tradition; "Time to celebrate", which is based on the existing bohemia; "A northeastern feeling", which is centered on local culture affirmation; and "It is no longer done like it was before..." which expresses the critical tone facing traditions' mutation.

Contributions: The current study provides a sophisticated understanding about this experience, based on the Consumer Experience literature and on IPA application.

Relevance: Innovative practical impact on both the involved public and private organizations. Socio-historical relevance as register of cultural manifestation featured by great popular engagement. Approach adopted to produce unique psychological descriptions about how people enjoy this festival. It was possible to understand nostalgic, pleasurable and identity-forming mechanisms shaping the experience with the event, among others.

Social or managerial implications: Results make consumer experience innovation insights possible and are also a register of a high cultural-relevance event.

Keywords: São João, Campina Grande, consumer experience, phenomenology, tradition

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Resumo

A Tradição está viva e ao vivo! A experiência do consumidor na festa de São João em Campina Grande

Objetivo: descrever narrativas de experiência do consumidor na tradicional festa de São João em Campina Grande, em 2022.

Metodologia: descrição feita por meio da fenomenologia da *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA), apoiada nos fundamentos teóricos da experiência do consumidor.

Principais resultados: A descrição indicou quatro experiências compostas por reações dos consumidores ao evento: “O reencontro de uma grande amizade”, baseada no afeto pela tradição; “Uma época para festejar”, fundamentada na boemia da festa; “Profundamente nordestino”, que tem como núcleo a afirmação da identidade local; e “Não se faz mais como antigamente...”, a qual expressa o tom crítico às mudanças na tradição.

Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas: aplicação original da IPA em harmonia com a teoria da experiência do consumidor. Leitura teórica de um grande festival, com base em nuances novas, com destaque para a caracterização de um objeto com aspecto sócio-histórico peculiar.

Relevância/originalidade: impacto prático inovador nas organizações públicas e privadas envolvidas. Relevância sócio-histórica, por ser um registro de manifestação cultural, expressa por grande envolvimento popular. Abordagem que produz descrições psicológicas singulares acerca de como a festa é vivenciada. Foi possível entender os mecanismos nostálgicos, prazerosos e identitários que dão forma à experiência do evento, entre outros.

Implicações para a gestão, ou sociais: os resultados possibilitaram gerar *insights* de inovação relativos à experiência do consumidor, assim como o registro de um acontecimento popular de grande relevância cultural. Palavras-chave: São João. Campina Grande. Experiência do Consumidor. Fenomenologia. Tradição.

Palavras-chave: São João, Campina Grande, experiência do consumidor, fenomenologia, tradição.

Introduction

São João Festival is part of northeastern Brazil’s festive calendar. Celebrations in Campina Grande City (Paraíba State’s hinterlands) are part of the local culture and they used to take place in peoples’ homes, based on spontaneous actions taken by the population. However, the city began to organize a centralized, large-scale event in the mid-1980s (Lira, 2018), as shown in Figure 1. Nowadays, the festival takes place through an arrangement between public and private organizations, and it counts on popular cultural attractions made available to the public (Martins, 2022).

Figure 1*Parque do Povo [People's Park]**Source: Portal do Turismo Brasileiro [Brazilian Tourism Portal] (2022)*

The importance of this event is seen in its economic results. In 2022, after the interval caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the event generated almost R\$500 million in financial revenue, as well as one thousand direct jobs and five thousand indirect jobs, after 31 days of festivities. In addition, 80.7% of traders reported increased revenue in comparison to the one observed in the last edition, in 2019 (Diretoria de Ações de Proteção e Defesa do Consumidor [CODECOM], 2022).

The ones who consume this event are among the most important elements to help better understanding its success. It is so, because this event is supported by people who experience the tradition of São João Festival. They consume what is offered by the organizations involved in it, and it generates indirect economic outcomes, since the access to event is free. Therefore, in order to keep and/or expand this festival's success, it is essential to deeply understand its consumers.

Studies focused on investigating consumers' experience enable better understanding their reactions to event-related stimuli in a holistic manner, since they broadly take into consideration the context and several elements involved in it, namely: thought, emotion and behavior (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Firstly, this understanding type is seen as the initial stage of innovation, whether in organizations, in general, or in the assessed festival, since it generates information to help finding solutions for those who consume it. Secondly, it can be considered a strategic tool, since

it provides knowledge for decision-making about business (Keiningham, Aksoy, Bruce, Cadet, Clennell, Hodgkinson & Kearney, 2020).

In theory, São João Festival, in Campina Grande City, can be understood as leisure activity based on tradition. People consume an event organized for leisure purposes, i.e., they consume satisfying activities that happen in their free time (Parr & Lashua, 2004). This leisure takes place through their experience with the tradition of São João Festival, which is herein understood as a set of human elements dynamically shared, overtime; i.e., based on incremental changes and on defense against significant mischaracterizations (Beckstein, 2018).

Although São João Festival celebrations in this region change, overtime, there is still significant consistency in certain elements. At the beginning of its history, this festival was held in a simple manner, inside people's homes (Lira, 2018); later on, it started presenting a large infrastructure and counted on public-private partnerships (Martins, 2022). Despite these changes, elements, such as music, food and typical clothing can be observed in both aforementioned periods (Lira, 2018; Martins, 2022). Beckstein (2018) addressed configurations like this one: "if changes happen on the one hand, on the other hand, some elements capable of guaranteeing tradition preservation are maintained".

Despite its association with the cultural dynamics of tradition, this experience is an individual psychological phenomenon (Schmitt, 2011) that can be understood through phenomenological research strategies (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Investigating consumers' reactions to this event (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020) enables interpretations and associations to be made; consequently, appropriate conclusions can be reached, as suggested by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). This factor enables establishing the research question guiding the present study: how was consumers' experience with the tradition of São João Festival held in Campina Grande City, in 2022, from the phenomenological perspective?

The relevance of this study type for innovative actions is quite clear, since they are useful for agents in charge of the investigated event, such as public and private organizations. Understanding the experiences lived by consumers in this festival can generate insights on how to improve what is offered by these organizations to their consumers (Keiningham et al., 2020) and, consequently, to optimize economic gains. São João Festival is also a popular event of great

cultural relevance; therefore, assumingly, society would be interested in knowing more about its organization.

It is important addressing the academic relevance of this study type, given the gaps in publications available on this subject. Studies about consumers' experience have been showing significant interest in current topics related to technology (Bonetti, Pantano, Warnaby, & Quinn, 2019; Cavalcanti, 2022; Farah, Ramadan, & Harb, 2019; Punt'oni, 2021). On the other hand, among studies focused on addressing issues similar to the herein addressed ones, there are those that take tradition into consideration in their investigations, but that do not use phenomenology (Carrigan & Buckley, 2008; Holmqvist & Peñaloza, 2020; Viholainen, Kylkilahti, Autio, & Toppinen, 2020), as proposed in the current study. If one takes into account a broader field, namely: consumer behavior, some studies use phenomenology, although it was not possible identifying any study specifically using IPA, among them (Ansariapur, Sohrabi, & Khakbaz, 2020; Kreuzer, Cado, & Raies, 2020; Kuuru & Närvänen, 2019; Steinfield, Coleman, Tuncay Zayer, Ourahmoune & Hein, 2019; Stevens, Maclaran & Brown, 2019). It is also worth mentioning the lack of studies about São João Festival, in Campina Grande City, from the consumers' experience perspective. Some studies approach this subject from the local development, commodification and popular culture perspective (Brito, Santos & Gurgel, 2015; Leão, Perdigão, Franco & Ferreira, 2017; Lima, 2020).

The current study is in compliance with research about festivals capable of attracting large audiences due to their artistic attractions. Despite historical and sociocultural differences, studies about music festivals are similar to what was herein described. There are studies focused on investigating large festivals as experience producers (Ferdinand & Williams, 2013), such as sensory experiences (Torado, 2013; Farah, Ramadan, & Harb, 2019) and those encouraging identity and hedonic experiences (Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Rodríguez-Campo, Braña-Rey, Alén-González, & Fraiz-Brea, 2021). Despite their association with the aforementioned studies, none of them used the phenomenological method in the way it was herein applied. Thus, although their contributions point to related results (such as identifying 'identity' experiences), such findings were not explained in the specific terms and details provided by the herein adopted method. Therefore, results were organized, built in a systematic manner and presented a detail

level that has enhanced the idiographic nature of the study. Consequently, unique psychological descriptions about how the festival takes place, in terms of consumer experience, were generated.

The traditional São João Festival, in Campina Grande City

São João Festival, in Campina Grande City, is a popular event that has become a leisure and cultural event for the city, over time. Based on the ‘identity’ of Brazilian religious and syncretic celebrations, it started as community/church interaction event, through the worship of Catholic saints. It emerged as festival in the 1970s, after the inclusion of pagan festivities as social interaction form. In 1983, for political reasons, São João Festival in Campina Grande City was centralized in a large “shack” in the cultural center and turned into an organized celebration (Nóbrega, 2013).

Parque do Povo, which is one of the main symbols of São João Festival in Campina Grande City, started being built in 1986 (Lira, 2018). Since then, it has been used to hold this cultural festival, which is known for its striking features, such as square dancing and typical cuisine associated with corn-made dishes that, even in hybrid fusion with other formats, captivate tourists looking for a traditional celebration (Perdigão, 2014). *Parque do Povo* is the main stage for this public event. It covers an area of over 42 thousand square meters and comprises a huge pyramid, which is the only permanent covered area in it (Nóbrega, 2013), as shown in Figure 1.

This event, which is known as “the biggest São João Festival in the world” (Lucena Filho, 2003; Silva, Freitas Filho & Endres, 2013), brings the city together throughout June, through *forró* performances, regional artists and major national attractions. It also includes traditional square dancing competitions, stalls with games, typical food and drinks that, altogether, provide its visitors with a wide variety of opportunities for having fun (Menezes, 2012). However, it is important emphasizing that the festivities available in so many places are not just public. Entertainment venues far from *Parque do Povo* are private, paid parties that contribute to São João celebrations, as option among so many varieties available at the festival (Lira, 2018).

The 2022 edition of São João Festival was featured by 30 nights of festivities. It started on June 10 and ended on July 10 (São João, 2022). This large-scale event results from a public-private partnership between Campina Grande City and a company. Together, they work on implementing infrastructure, since neither of them would be able to cover the total cost of this festival, on their

own (Aragão, 2005). Ranking Brazil Institute awarded the event the title of largest June festival in the country, since it was the first event after the Covid-19 pandemic (G1, 2022).

Knowing the past: from the foundation to descriptions of consumers' experience

The consumer experience field was founded by Morris Holbrook and Elizabeth Hirschman, through a study about experiential consumption conducted in the 1980s (Kranzbühler et al., 2018; Lemon & Verhoef, 2017; Scussel et al., 2021). In addition to introducing the main elements of a given framework, the aforementioned authors presented a critique of traditional marketing and proposed an experience-based understanding type formed by elements, such as feelings, fantasies and pleasure (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

In the 1990s, studies conducted in this field received contributions from economics and marketing (Scussel et al., 2021). Among them, one finds the contribution from the study titled “Experience Economy”, according to which, consumers see offers based on experience as superior to other types, because the impact of their sensations would be more significant than that of their features and benefits (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). On the other hand, the Experiential Marketing proposes a marketing strategy based on mental modules (Schmitt, 2011).

In the 2000s, studies about experience helped better understanding different dynamics involving subjectivity and emotions. Carù and Cova (2003) addressed subjectivity from philosophical perspectives. Addis and Holbrook (2001), in their turn, have shown how the so-called rational behaviors can be understood through emotions. In the 2010s, the concept of co-creation has gained prominence (Scussel et al., 2021). Accordingly, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) highlighted that consumers are participatory individuals, since they create and transform value into experiences with organizations.

In that very same decade, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2013) reviewed the literature in this field and identified study groups organized into the following field: consumer experience, brand experience and consumption experience. Kranzbühler et al. (2017) carried out a systematic review based on the patterns and singularities of 115 studies and they highlighted 2 lines of thought, namely: organizational perspective, according to which, researchers focus on experience management; and consumer perspective, which focuses on understanding experiences from the perspective of those who live them.

The natural increase in the spectrum of theoretical and methodological possibilities is another effect of the large number of studies in this field, since it provides researchers with tools to describe experiences (Murphy et al., 2019; Nuttavuthisit, 2019; Ritch, 2020; Saatcioglu & Corus, 2019; Vespestad & Clancy, 2021; Zhu et al., 2022). A brief review of these idiographic studies enables seeing that some of them present limited scope, such as those aimed at understanding experiences through investigations focused on the body (Stevens et al., 2019), aesthetic elements (Alfakhri et al, 2017) and specific frameworks (Thanh & Kirova, 2018).

The current study also adopted an idiographic proposal influenced by studies, such as the one conducted by Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz (2013), who started from basic elements of experience (such as thoughts and emotions) to find increasingly abstract results. This process is similar to that carried out in the current study, as well as in the study by Thompson et al. (1990), who used hermeneutic interpretations to better understand meanings attributed by consumers, although their study differed, in some points, from the herein adopted hermeneutic proposal by Smith and Fieldsend (2021).

The aim of the current study was to describe narratives about consumers' experiences during São João Festival, in Campina Grande City, in 2022, as suggested in the literature in this field. Conceptualizing consumers' experience is a challenge, given the multiple definitions that underpin different approaches (Cavalcanti, 2022), such as those by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Pine and Gilmore (2011), and Schmitt (2011).

Faced with such heterogeneity, Scussel et al., (2021) and Becker and Jaakkola (2020) looked at different studies and proposed unified definitions to work as support point for the theoretical construction adopted in the herein conducted analysis.

According to Scussel et al. (2021), consumers' experience is an interactive process between them. Therefore, organizations' value propositions capable of generating emotional, cognitive and behavioral responses, whose final product has experiential value of mutual benefit, take place within a given social structure. Becker and Jaakkola (2020), in their turn, defined consumers' experience as non-deliberate and spontaneous responses/reactions arising from a given stimulus.

Both definitions present similar features, since there is always something (stimulus or interaction) leading to a consequence (responses and/or reactions). This combination is essential to both definitions and works as reference for the present research, just like the viewpoint,

according to which, the experience (which only takes place between consumers and the value proposition) can be expanded by the holistic concept of experience, by including indirect agents (Becker, 2018).

Views on the experience phenomenon-formation process are also heterogeneous (Aristotle, 1986; Cavalcanti, 2024; Dewey, 1958; Pinker, 1997). Among the defended views, there is the one by Steve Pinker, according to whom, experience derives from thought, based on a modular *modus operandi*, and it is formed by modules, such as thought, emotion and the senses (Pinker, 1997). This view is also defended in other studies, insofar as they explain experience functioning by subdividing it into modules, dimensions or functions (Bekker & Jakkola, 2020; Gentile et al., 2007; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Scussel et al., 2021; Schmitt, 2011; Pina & Dias, 2021).

Figure 2 shows the components used in the current research, based on analytical needs that have emerged from collected data, as well as their signs in the results, their definitions and the respective authors of their concepts:

Figure 2

Experiential Analysis Categories

Module	Sign	Definition	Authors
Thought	P	Mental activity based on convergent conclusive or divergent creative reasoning.	Schmitt (2011)
Feelings	E	It refers to feelings manifested as intense and defined emotional states in the form of emotions; or light and poorly defined in the form of mood	
Senses	S	It refers to the action of all five senses that perceive the world: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell	
Action	A	It concerns how individuals act in terms of actions related to body, lifestyle and interactions between people	
Relationship	R	It focuses on individuals' relationships with social and cultural contexts	
Fantasy	F	Multisensory image not directly related to previous experiences	Hirschman and Holbrook (1982)

Source: Schmitt (2011) and Hirschman and Holbrook (1982)

The aim of the current study is not only to address the theory of experience, but to empirically assess it. This process depends on understanding the role played by the meaning attributed by consumers to what they experience. When consumers live a given experience, they get in contact with stimuli that generate responses. These responses, in their turn, are interpreted and memorized by individuals (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Individuals asked about a given

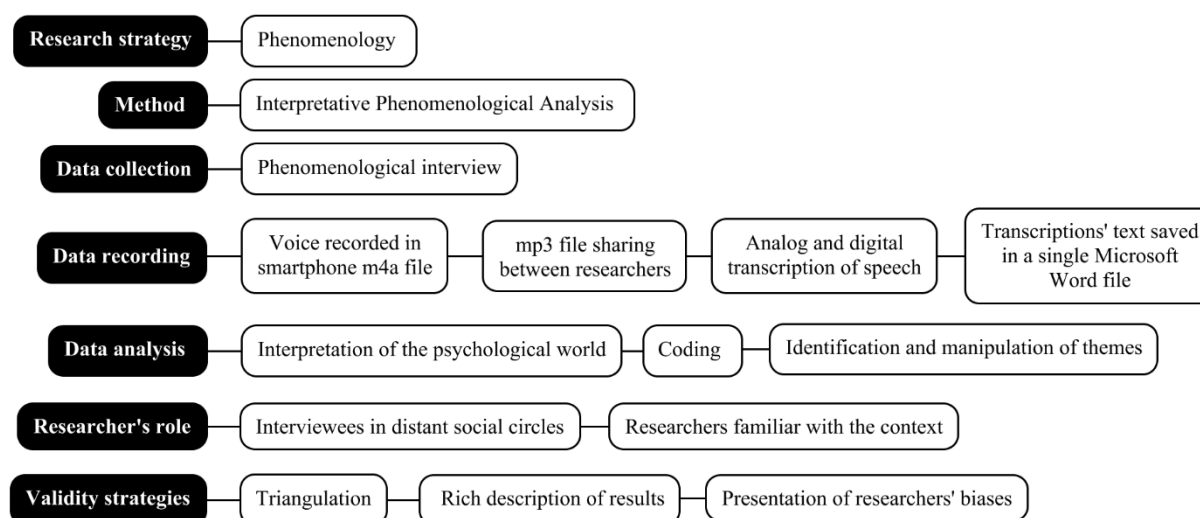
experience access the memory of it and try to make sense of what they experienced, through a first interpretative process. This process outcome lies on creating and sharing the speech about the experience as meaning, which will be interpreted, once again, by the interviewer, in order to form the double hermeneutic process (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021), which is part of the methodological process presented in the following section.

Method

The current study described the experience of São João Festival, in Campina Grande City, in 2022. A methodological scheme was developed for this very purpose, as shown in Figure 3. Phenomenology was herein used as research strategy. Creswell and Creswell (2021) highlighted phenomenology as appropriate method to investigate experiences; and experience can be acknowledged as an individual psychological response to a given stimulus (Schmitt, 2011), they made the option for using phenomenology, since it focuses on individuality and mental processes, rather than on groups or culture and, in the case of ethnography, on social relations (Goulding, 2005).

Figure 3

Method overview



Source: elaborated by the authors (2023)

Phenomenological studies adopt several approaches (Cope, 2005) like the herein adopted one, namely: interpretative or hermeneutic approach. This approach describes meanings given by human individuals to their experiences in the world (Heidegger, 1962); i.e., experiences crossed by social, natural, cultural, material, political and historical contexts, among others (Heelan, 2016).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was herein selected among the phenomenological methods available in the literature. It aims at thoroughly investigate how people give meaning to the world, based on double hermeneutics or double interpretation, which is an interpretation process adopted by researchers in light of interviewees' interpretations to what they have experienced. This qualitative and phenomenological method is based on the coding of speeches and on their grouping into topics, which can be related to each other and generate abstract experience-understanding categories. The authors emphasize that this method is not imperative in its details and that it can be adjusted to different research contexts (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

IPA is based on an 'interpretivist' view of research, which contrasts the foundations of natural sciences because it takes human activity as endowed with meaning built from subjective experiences in the world (Holstein et al., 2013; Schwandt, 2006, p.193-218). On the other hand, more than the possibility of describing meanings, this method provides the interpretation of psychological and experiential functioning, based on what is reported by individuals, and it includes considerations about body functioning, such as the dynamics of thoughts and emotions (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

Data collection was based on phenomenological interviews, i.e., on open and flexible interviews shaped from the phenomenology viewpoint, with emphasis on the first-person description of interviewees' experiences (Becker, 2018). This interview type focuses on respondents' psychological world, besides encouraging them to talk about their experiences as honestly and freely as possible, with minimal interruptions by the interviewer (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). People who attended São João Festival were selected for interviews, so that they could be heard about their view of what they experienced (rather than the researcher's view) through questions aimed at encouraging descriptions (rather than explanations) starting from the broadest to the most specific demands (Thompson et al., 1989).

In total, 8 interviews were conducted via Google Meet for 6 days, after the event. Interviewees mainly comprised people who attended *Parque do Povo* (which is one of the main

attractions in the festival), as well as other places where São João festivities took place, such as: *Vila Sítio São João* and *Clube Campestre*, between June 10 and July 10, 2022. It is worth emphasizing that IPA (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021) stands for flexible homogeneity and pragmatism as interviewees' selection criteria. Thus, people who attended the investigated event in the same year, and who were available to be interviewed in a timely manner, before they forgot what they had experienced, were selected. The number of interviewees in studies based on this method is often small; thus, studies can even be carried out with only 3 people (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Therefore, the present sample, which comprised 8 people, was viable and guaranteed a considerable amount of information necessary for the investigation.

Interviews were scripted to encourage responses about how the festival was experienced. They were based on open-ended questions organized according to participation flow in the festivities; i.e., from preparing the event to its return and repercussions. Minimal interruptions were made for clarification purposes, or as encouragement for interviewees to open up about a potentially data-rich subject, or to resume speaking after a pause.

Interviewees met the features reported in Figure 4, which shows the interviewees' codes, the date the interview was conducted, the places the reported experience refers to, as well as interviewees' sex, age and profession.

Figure 4

Interviewees' profile

Code	Date	Place	Sex	Age	Profession
R1	07/15 th /2024	Parque do Povo / Clube Campestre / Vila São João	Fem.	43	Service Manager
R2	07/18 th /2024	Parque do Povo	Masc.	43	Attorney
R3	07/19 th /2024	Parque do Povo / Clube Campestre / Vilinha	Fem.	52	Craftswoman
R4	07/17 th /2024	Parque do Povo	Fem.	40	Social Worker
R5	07/18 th /2024	Vila Sítio São João	Fem.	34	Dental surgeon
R6	07/17 th /2024	Parque do Povo / Vila São João	Fem.	40	Prison officer
R7	07/16 th /2024	Parque do Povo	Fem.	45	Higher education professor
R8	07/18 th /2024	Parque do Povo	Masc.	24	Medical student
R9	07/19 th /2024	Parque do Povo	Fem.	29	Materials engineer

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024)

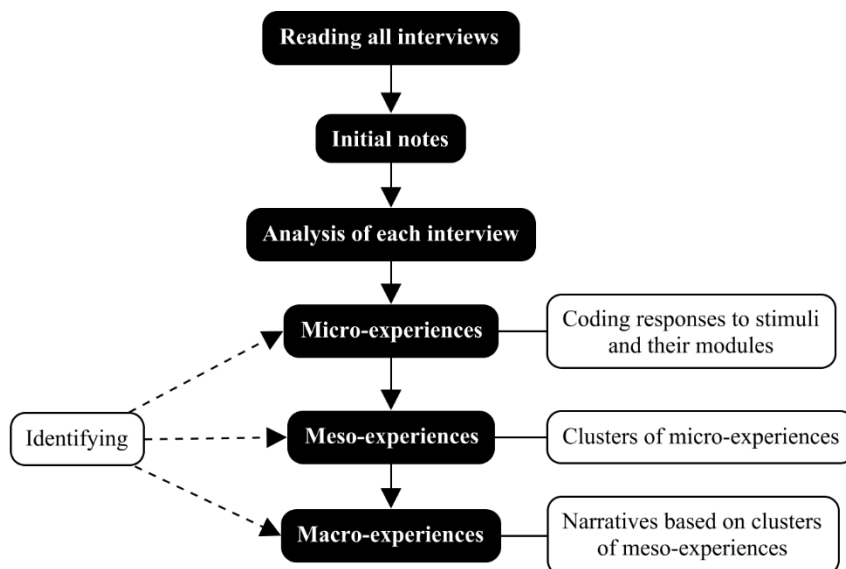
The interviews underwent careful data recording (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). All 8 interviews were recorded in Smartphone and stored in m4a audio format. Subsequently, they were converted to mp3 files and shared with all researchers in Google Drive cloud. They yielded 3 hours and 29 minutes of data, in total. The interviews were transcribed, compiled and organized into a single Microsoft Word document. The file was shared with all researchers in the cloud. If only interviewees' statements are taken into consideration, the text data comprised 25,672 words, in total. Data excerpts were transferred to Microsoft Excel for analysis purposes. A spreadsheet with 1,017 lines distributed across 6 columns was generated at the end of this process.

The aim of the data analysis proposed by IPA is to help researchers to learn about respondents' psychological world, through meanings built by them, while they lived the investigated experience. This learning process is not limited to reorganizing data into categories, but to interpreting them, so that they make sense to help better understanding the investigated phenomenon and to allow the previously mentioned double hermeneutics to take place. This method also points out that meanings should be related to concepts that, in their turn, help describing and understanding the investigated phenomenon in order to identify topics (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). This process is similar to the logic of coding and category construction research (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). IPA emphasizes that topics can undergo a new round of analysis to identify relationships and likely categories, and to generate abstract concepts about the investigated phenomenon (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

The analytical procedure was made operational as previously described (Figure 5). First, all interviews were read, and this process was followed by the first notes related to clear experiences described in the text, as suggested by Thompson et al. (1989) and Smith and Fieldsend (2021). Subsequently, the analysis of each interview was carried out by coding and identifying topics that, according to IPA, are categories built through interpreting the observed meanings.

Figure 5

Data Analysis Process



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2023)

The coding, categorization and interpretation processes had their own specificities. Based on the meanings given by interviewees to their experience, it was possible coding the micro-experiences, i.e., responses to stimuli, as suggested by Becker and Jaakkola (2020). Associated experiential modules were also identified. These micro-experiences underwent the process to identify patterns, singularities and relationships that helped building the topics and the most abstract concepts known as meso-experiences, which, in their turn, were organized as clusters of micro-experiences. The meso-experiences underwent another layer of analysis that enabled finding articulating concepts between categories. These concepts allowed building narratives that conveyed the panoramic meaning given to the analyzed data: macro-experiences.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2021), qualitative research should highlight the role played by researchers in the study in order to disclose their relationship with participants. Interviewees were part of social circles distant from most researchers who lived in Caruaru and Recife. These cities are located in a state close to Paraíba State, where São João Festival takes place. This proximity generates cultural similarities that allow researchers to understand experiences typical of this festivity.

Validity strategies were also used to improve data analysis accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Thus, the triangulation of researchers' perspectives was herein adopted; data analysis, including reviews, was performed by more than one researcher. In-depth results description was also carried out to provide realism and accuracy to the study's conclusions. Finally, likely research authors' biases and their relationship with participants were clarified in the topic about their own role.

Experience description

The flow of the analytical process that gave rise to the description of experiences reported in the current study will be herein depicted to help better understanding the results. The description of São João Festival experience, in Campina Grande, in 2022, will be presented through four narratives (macro-experiences) followed by their specificities. Below, one finds the speech of an interviewee who was asked about her relationship with São João Festival, in Campina Grande:

"So, I'm biased to talk about it, because it is really strong and quite present in me and it is part of my life. I need to go there every year. I need to be at São João Festival, in Campina Grande, because that place feels like refueling me and like reliving the past to live the present." (R1, F, 43 years old)

The first analysis stage aimed at identifying micro-experiences. One of the inferences in the excerpt above lied on an experience similar to others identified in the analyzed data. This experience could be described as the feeling of "realizing" longing. It was identified as emotion (E), because it suggests an emotional state.

This micro-experience, in its turn, was just one of the meso-experience components, and it pointed out experiences lived at the festival, which were closely related to consumers' past experiences. This process led to the following description:



The experience with the individual past, related to São João Festival, points out that consumers went through an experience that was awakened by relationships with past individual experiences, which were identified in manifestations, such as affection, longing (and the end of it), the feeling of being at home, of reliving youth, of passing on this treasure to young people and of comparisons between past and current structures.



After all meso-experiences were described, it was possible grouping them, once again, in order to identify the macro-experiences. Unlike the previous grouping, this study stage required support to identify what meso-experiences could be related to each other, given the high abstraction level and the large amount of information analyzed, until then. Therefore, some articulating concepts emerged and worked as connection between meso-experiences.

If one takes the macro-experience “Meeting an old friend again” as example, it is possible noticing the articulating concept ‘Familiarity’, which accounts for meso-experiences referring to past situations related to São João Festival, to association with consumers’ location and that of the event, to situations related to festival structure, as well as to those pointing to the games, dances and festive nature of the investigated event. All these factors highlight the perception that São João Festival is something that people have contact with, quite often, a fact that gives rise to the feeling of familiarity. Finally, this connector, together with others, enabled identifying the macro-experience described below, which is displayed with the icon symbolizing the narrative (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Summary of Macro-Experiences’ Formation

Macro-experience	Articulating concept	Meso-experiences related to...
 Meeting an old friend again	Traditional affection	Affection, games, food, bonfire, dancing, celebrating
	Preference for tradition	Individual past, identity, meeting people, celebrating
	Perpetuation of tradition	Structure, meeting people
	Familiarity with tradition	Individual past, games, location, dances, structure, celebrating
	Enchantment with tradition	Admiration, dances
	Missing tradition	Individual past, desire, food, bonfire, dances, structure, longing, meeting people
 Time to celebrate	Indulging in tradition	Ecstasy, dancing, meeting people, structure, family, celebrating
	Traditionally celebrating	Dances, structure, celebration
	Traditionally dancing	Ecstasy, dances, eroticism, celebration
	Being among friends	Ecstasy, meeting people, celebrating, being with friends
	Traditionally playing, drinking, talking and eating	Celebrating, eating, games, drinks, food
	Feeling northeastern	Location, identity
	Proud of traditional culture	Affection, admiration, location, identity
	Embracing traditional culture	Celebrating, location

Macro-experience	Articulating concept	Meso-experiences related to...
 A northeastern feeling	Enjoying traditional culture	Dances, comfort, affection, celebration, location
 It is no longer done like it was before	Analysis of the festival	Analysis, structure, strategy to celebrate
	Displeasure with the disfigurement of tradition	Analysis, criticism, structure, celebrating, discomfort, location, individual past
	Discomfort with national attractions	Analysis, criticism, structure, celebrating, discomfort, location
	Stress with contemporary behaviors	Analysis, criticism, festivity, discomfort, modernity, individual past
	Perceiving the commodification of tradition	Analysis, criticism, structure, discomfort, commodification, individual past
	Understanding economic segregation	Analysis, criticism, structure, discomfort, commodification, individual past
	Preference for tradition	Festivity, commodification
	Feeling the absence of tradition	Analysis, festivity, modernity, individual past

Source: elaborated by the authors (2023)

Meeting an old friend again

This macro-experience can be understood as meeting a great and old friend again; this friendship's parties comprise consumer and São João Festival. A good friendship is long lasting, just like tradition, and it allows the history of this relationship, as well as the elements forming it, which can be understood through dances and typical food types. There are also pleasant emotions in this relationship, such as affection and enchantment for the person making up the friendship, in addition to the feeling of familiarity in the presence of the other party, since they have coexisted for a long period-of-time. Lack of contact between parties in friendship generates the sense of longing, whereas the memory of the time spent together, in its turn, generates nostalgia. As part of this friendship, São João Festival is perpetuated in statements by the involved parties and in speeches about it. These parties are herein understood as tradition and consumers.

The meso-experiences, which will be explained from now on, provide an accurate view of the macro-experience. Consumers experience pleasant and striking mental states when they are in contact with traditional elements of São João Festival, namely: typical food, bonfire, dances, square dancing, the event's structure and the celebration itself. High- and low-intensity affection is the first sign of this process, whether due to the relationship between emotional elements of personal life and the festival's history, or to contact with stimuli by the festival itself, such as the

decoration in it. This feeling awakens another pleasantness type experienced through the sense of familiarity with the festivity, which has been held for many years and is mixed with aspects of personal stories, a fact that gives the experience the feeling of meeting an old friend again. Finally, pleasantness materializes in feelings of enchantment, since the event is seen as something unusual that generates admiration for the great spectacle provided by the festival, as well as pride for the vitality of tradition, in the present time.

Temporal or spatial distance from the festival leads to feelings of desire, mainly due to nostalgia, as well as to localized elements making up the event. On the other hand, there is great satisfaction in putting an end to this nostalgia when one visits the most recent editions of the festival. Tradition emerges as stage for nostalgia, where consumers relate the time of the festival to moments lived in the past, because tradition is not only historical, but also remarkable; experiencers behave as tradition perpetuators by setting their preference for the traditional aspect of the festival. It happens when they express their thoughts and emotions about the event, which is perpetuated through their interactions. Tradition perpetuators share their views on traditional elements with other consumers.

Some micro-experiences identified should be mentioned, namely: the joy of participating and the satisfaction of being, with family, enjoying (E) the traditional *forró* dancing (A). There are also memories of June festivals in *Parque do Povo* and in family homes, farms and spaces (P), in addition to evidence of nostalgia (E) related to childhood and adolescence memories, at grandparents' houses (P), which reflects the welcoming feeling of being home (E). The feeling of "breathing" São João Festival (F), when one sees the decorations and appreciates the bonfire (A), was also observed. The feeling of "realizing" the feeling of longing (E), in the transmission of cultural heritage, in the consumption of typical food and drinks (A), and in the enchantment (F) with square dancing performances (A); in addition to longing for the festival and its typical food (E).

Time to celebrate

This macro-experience shows a bohemian universe where consumers use tradition for their intense delight. Thus, data interpretation enables creating the image of a partygoer who finds the right elements to go into ecstasy at São João Festival. Consumers' focus lies on delighting in

dances, games, drinks, traditional food, in addition to the traditional nature assumed by these participants.

Meso-experiences enable deeply understanding this narrative. Consumers seek great delight, which is described as intense and pleasant emotion resulting from celebrating with traditional elements, such as *forró* dancing, with friends and family. These traditional elements are highlighted and make consumers seek out spaces, such as *Parque do Povo*, where these items can be found among the so-called *pé de serra* trios. Some interaction elements stood out, such as *forró* and square dancing and the eroticism surrounding them; games in the stalls and typical food are also highlights, in addition to drinks. None of these experiences would be possible without the interviewees who participated in the event and who generated great emotion, reunions with friends and conversations during and after the event about what they have experienced.

Micro-experiences emerge in reports about consumers who have the feeling of “being alive” at the festival, like when they get to *Parque do Povo* (E); when they report intense or deep emotion, which is oftentimes pleasant, like when they dance *forró* (A); in statements that they “loved” or even cried at the event (E); in personal acknowledgement as party person (P) who seeks fun in dancing just for the sake of it (A), in interacting with friends and artists (R), in drinking (A) and eating without wanting to stop; in socializing with the June tradition (R); in rediscovering the musicality of *forró* (S) and in watching the square dancing (A).

A northeastern feeling

Consumers come into deep contact with themselves in this macro-experience by relating themselves to northeastern elements forming their self and São João Festival tradition. It is important emphasizing that consumers understand that this tradition has historical aspects of the northeastern culture in its composition. The experience, in this case, lies on being and participating in the festival itself, since consumers live the aforementioned culture in the region. The perception of feeling northeastern is clear, as well as the admiration and appreciation for this culture, a fact that encourages fellowship with what is offered by it.

The herein described experiences provide further details about it. Consumers described the feeling of “being more northeastern” when they were amid this traditional event. This feeling is related to pride and appreciation of the northeastern culture, since it is followed by memories of

personal experiences lived during the event. When this pride was not mentioned, they reported to enjoy or to feel good at the time they were in contact with elements of traditional northeastern culture, such as *forró* dancing or shows with regional attractions. Finally, one can mention fellowship, which is based on northeastern elements observed in this festival.

Evidence of micro-experiences was observed when consumers showed pride and affection for Campina Grande City (E) in their appreciation for local artists (E); in their feeling of belonging (E); in people who declared to feel “more northeastern” (R) and to feel closer to their roots during São João Festival (E); by remembering, with pride and deep emotion (E) the identity of June festivals, the way they behave in them, the way they dress for them, the way they speak (A) and the atmosphere that makes one feel “the smell of São João Festival” (S).

It is no longer done like it was before...

The macro-experience described above does not resemble an enchantment, it rather puts consumers in a state similar to that of an elderly person observing the world around him/her, with displeasure and in a tone of alert, as if to say: “They no longer do things like they used to...”. Elderly individuals observe tradition with knowledge of the facts, since they have followed several of its manifestations and know its historical perspective. They analyze the experienced fact, get to conclusions and discover sensations. However, they remain displeased with tradition erosion, with changes in elements forming it and in the way it is organized. Nevertheless, they reaffirm their preference for tradition and miss the way it was in the past.

Meso-experiences provided further evidence of what was described above. Tradition was analyzed based on reflections on how to enjoy São João Festival or on relevant issues, such as economics. Therefore, consumers go to some critical conclusions about the return of São João Festival after the Covid-19 pandemic, by comparing it to memories of this festival in the past. Consumers noticed little emphasis on traditional attractions, such as *forró* dancing, as well as observed non-traditional elements like the visual ones. There was also criticism towards non-traditional attractions at São João Festival, such as *sertanejo* music (brazilian country music), since it generates strangeness in the public, as well as disapproval and irritation due to loss of this traditional event’s identity. Certain contemporary aspects drew attention when one talked about

this displeasure, namely: the excessive use of technologies, such as cell phones, digital platforms (Tiktok, among others), not to mention the mischaracterization of traditional dances.

The festival organization also drew criticism and bothered consumers. There is a strong marketing influence eroding tradition. The festival structure and its stalls favor trading, in comparison to what was observed in past events. Economic segregation was observed through changes in attractions and elitism in festival spaces. It differs from the perception that there should be communion among different groups during São João Festival. All these factors generate annoyance and criticism.

Consumers reinforced their preference for tradition and sought out services of this nature, even if it led to higher costs. Consumers made it clear that they feel the absence of tradition in different audiences, in the stalls, as well as in food and drinks.

Micro-experiences, in their turn, highlighted comparative analyses between the current model of the festival and the old traditional June festival (P), which generated sadness and repulsion (E), in addition to criticism towards the festival transformation into a more commercial than original event (A). There was discomfort with the ‘elitism’ of the festival (E), although consumers acknowledged it as the city’s economic engine (P). Finally, they missed the traditional São João Festival with more regional attractions (E), a fact that generated annoyance, discomfort and frustration (E), given the changes or lack of elements accounting for forming its traditional identity (P).

Results discussion

The previous section presented prevalently empirical knowledge about experiences with the June festival. This process generated a double hermeneutics of the adopted method based on consumers’ perspective and on researchers’ interpretation. This section will discuss the findings in light of the theory, with emphasis on changing tradition, nostalgia, pleasure, cultural identity, one’s relationship with festivals and on interviewees’ profiles. Likely contradictions highlighted by the current results will also be addressed.

Changing tradition

The analyzed data led to some reflections; firstly, on the very concept of tradition, which was defined in the introduction of the current article, based on Beckstein (2017), as set of human elements shared, over time. This very same definition is based on the idea that traditions change, although they preserve enough elements to remain recognizable.

This process enables seeing São João Festival, in Campina Grande City, as something genuinely traditional rather than merely invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012). Despite organizational interventions, consumers perpetuate elements like typical food types and aesthetic standards.

Collected data have evidenced this view in such a way that some interviewees described this São João Festival, in particular, as the same as in the past, based on the macro-experience “Meeting an old friend again”. On the other hand, others focused on changes accounting for mischaracterizing the festival, as seen in the macro-experience “It is no longer done like it was before...”.

Either way, such ambiguity is in compliance with Beckstein’s (2017) view of tradition, according to whom, tradition is not shared from the past to the present in its entirety. It changes, but significant elements persist through the work and influence of those who participate in tradition.

Nostalgia

The current findings have evidenced how interviewees experienced nostalgia, which is herein understood as past-related feeling that has a bittersweet feature, since it can awaken pleasant or uncomfortable sensations (Ryynänen & Heinonen, 2018).

The macro-experience, “Meeting an old friend again” has shown how interviewees recalled past festivities and related them to the festival, in the present, a fact that generated the human responses described above. This recall can be understood as nostalgia, which seems to make all sorts of reactions possible, since the absence of this relationship with the past would prevent individuals from perceiving tradition.

Nostalgia acts in a similar way in the macro-experience “It is no longer done like it was before ...” However, the bittersweet nature of nostalgia becomes more evident, since the

connection between past and present generates discomfort that, in its turn, leads to criticism. Therefore, the focus falls on the mischaracterization of tradition observed by consumers who expected to find what they had experienced in the past.

Pleasure

The analyzed data also pointed to what the literature calls hedonic experiences (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). According to the macro-experience “Time to celebrate”, some traditional elements, such as dances and typical food types, are used to generate pleasant sensations.

Therefore, São João Festival consumers perceive their experience as generating sensations of delight, based on their senses and on their own actions, a fact that makes this experience hedonic and fun.

Cultural identity

According to the literature, the concept of cultural identity is a contribution to consumers’ experience. Lam (2020) addressed how consumers’ contact with traditional Japanese culture elements triggered identity-centered experiences.

Similar occurrence can be seen in the macro-experience “A northeastern feeling”. Individuals who experienced this macro-experience interpreted the elements of São João Festival tradition as part of their own culture, in this case, the northeastern culture. They understand this phenomenon as something that makes them perceive themselves as northeasterners, and it is indicative of their cultural identity experience.

The current study is not objectively stating that São João Festival is exclusive to northeastern Brazil, but that, from interviewees’ perspective, it subjectively refers to what they see as northeastern culture.

Relationship with festivals

São João Festival, in Campina Grande City, is similar to music festivals, since one of its core features lies on musical artists’ performances – as evidenced in the macro-experience “Time to celebrate”.

However, it is worth emphasizing that São João Festival presents significant differences from other festivals dedicated to the same saint throughout Brazil, namely: its origin and its historical trajectory, as well as its cultural elements. Categories “A northeastern feeling” and “It is no longer done like it was before...” highlight this factor by pointing towards the northeastern culture and by comparing it to past festivals.

Similarities with other festivals enable the dialogue with the theory. A study about the Rock in Rio festival (Höpner, Almeida, & Brasil, 2022) presented some theoretical dimensions that led to inferences. The hedonic dimension identified in Rock in Rio festival points to pleasure based on the macro-experience “Time to celebrate”. There is a social dimension similar to sociocultural aspects of the macro-experience “A northeastern feeling”. The secondary dimension takes into consideration the excellence of the festival and reflections on the quality expected from it, and it highlights criticisms about what a quality São João Festival is, based on the macro-experience “It is no longer done like it was before...”

It is possible identifying further connections, based on the study by Fernandes and Krolikowska (2023), who presented a framework focused on festival design. The social environment presented in this framework appears in interviewees’ statements through their interactions with others, and between the others themselves. This factor can be seen in the macro-experience “Time to celebrate”, which shows intense social relationships, such as dancing to the sound of June festival music.

The digital environment was quite discrete in the analyzed data, with emphasis on consumers’ criticism of those who use cell phones at traditional festivals, as seen in the macro-experience “It is no longer done like it was before...”

About the subjects

Interviewees presented different profiles, as shown in Figure 4, in the Method section. They were men and women in the age group 24-52 years, who had different professions, at the time the current research was in progress.

Overall, men tended to be more critical and presented reports in compliance with the macro-experience “It is no longer done like it was before...”. Women, in their turn, reported their experiences with stronger emotional intensity, in compliance with the enchantment reported in the

macro-experience “Meeting an old friend again”. The other features did not show significant aspects.

Contradictions in the current findings

Some macro-experiences seem contradictory and deserve attention. The last one, “It is no longer done like it was before...”, points to criticism towards the ‘commodification’ of the event. On the other hand, the macro-experience “Time to celebrate” highlights the pleasure with commercial elements, such as drinks.

The current findings point to criticism and, at the same time, to delight towards the market elements. However, such a contradiction does not invalidate these findings. One might think that experiences are momentary (Gordon & Jindal-Snape, 2020) and not necessarily experienced at the same time. Therefore, the same individual can live different experiences, at different times, and change its mental state according to the circumstances. On the other hand, experiences can change depending on the person experiencing them. Therefore, based on the analyzed data, different experiences were lived by different people, a fact that nullifies the aforementioned contradiction.

In any case, likely contradictions do not invalidate fundamental factors; one way or another, the analyzed data confirmed that these experiences happened and can be understood in the herein presented ways.

Conclusion

In light of the foregoing, the following research question can be answered: how was consumers’ experience with the tradition of São João Festival held in Campina Grande City, in 2022, from the phenomenological perspective? The present study described this experience based on four narratives comprising different reactions of consumers who attended the investigate event, namely: “Meeting an old friend again”, “Time to celebrate”, “A northeastern feeling” and, finally, the macro experience “It is no longer done like it was before...”

From the practical viewpoint, knowledge about this object provides insights for agents in charge of organizing the investigated festival, such as municipal and market managers, to help improving what is offered to Campina Grande residents or to its tourists. In this case, macro-experiences can shine light on the experience types expected at the festival, so these agents can

plan attractions based on these demands. Based on the macro-experience “It is no longer done like it was before ...”, it is possible creating centers dedicated to recreate the old June festival events.

The current study has made a social contribution by registering a historical popular manifestation. It showed the mental picture of a cultural moment, which is useful for people’s self-knowledge. Furthermore, it is valid even for other academic fields, such as History, Sociology and Anthropology.

The current study contributes to the academia by providing an investigation about São João Festival from the consumers’ experience perspective, based on using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as phenomenology. There is a gap in studies about São João Festival when it comes to this approach. The gain from this process was expressed in the current findings, which pointed to experiences that were not described in previous studies about this festivity.

The dialogue with theory has shown convergence between the present study and the literature on large festivals, as shown in results’ justifications and discussion. Therefore, it was possible seeing that the experience with São João Festival resembles this investigation type. On the other hand, the herein described macro-experiences have shown differences resulting from the historical and sociocultural nature of the event itself or, from a different perspective, they have shown differences deriving from its own tradition. The macro-experience “A northeastern feeling”, in its turn, requires regional cultural elements experienced by interviewees in order to materialize itself. Therefore, some nuances in the present study are seen as something new for the theory in this research field.

It is also worth emphasizing the methodological contribution of the current study, namely: applying phenomenology and a specific method of the same nature (IPA), which are rarely used in studies about consumption. Furthermore, there is the uniqueness of the IPA structure (micro-, meso- and macro-experiences), as well as the use of the theory adopted by this research field: applying concepts like thought, emotion, among other concepts addressed by Schmitt’s (2000) experiential marketing.

One limitation of the current study lies on the very nature of the adopted qualitative method, which is featured by in-depth data analysis rather than by data amount. Thus, it was not possible extrapolating the current results, a fact that is herein understood as study limitation. Furthermore, the investigated subjects were not subjected to in-depth analysis, since the research focus lied on

their experiences, rather than on their actions. Finally, the current study aimed at investigating the northeastern manifestation of São João Festival, from consumers' perspective. This process did not allow collecting experiential information about this festival in other Brazilian regions.

Future studies should use quantitative methods to test the herein observed results and to enable the data extrapolation mentioned above. Similarly, other studies should further investigate both the subjects and São João Festival experience in other Brazilian regions.

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CRediT -Authorship Contribution Statement

Contribution	Cavalcanti, R. C. T	Lima, M. P. de	Marques, K. S.	Nascimento, J. C. A. do	Oliveira, A. M. de
Conceptualization	X	-	-	-	-
Methodology	X	-	-	-	-
Software	-	-	-	-	-
Validation	-	-	-	-	-
Formal analysis	X	X	X	X	X
Investigation	-	-	X	-	-
Resources	X	-	-	-	-
Data Curation	-	X	X	X	X
Writing - Original Draft	X	-	-	-	-
Writing - Review & Editing	X	X	X	X	X
Visualization	X	-	-	-	-
Supervision	X	-	-	-	-
Project administration	X	-	-	-	-
Funding acquisition	-	-	-	-	-

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