

CULTURAL FAIRS IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL: CREATING A CULTURAL MANAGEMENT APP

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ABSTRACT

Rio de Janeiro's cultural fairs have a direct impact on the creative and economic value of the city. This research explores the receptiveness of network creation to bring their historical evolution and economic impact to the digital era. We investigated 5, among 160 fairs, the informal market workers, and the consumers' point of view, highlighting a need for digital support, aiming to spread digitally these traditions while fostering innovation and economic growth. The study followed an exploratory sequential character and combines qualitative and quantitative characteristics. The study explored how digital technology reshapes social dynamics in spaces like Rio's cultural fairs. Despite traditional cultural values, there's a demand for digital integration on both publics of interest. Online platforms can enhance fair experiences, offering convenience and wider access to products. Both consumers and vendors see potential in digitalization for fair engagement and commerce, bridging the gap between physical and digital environments.

Key words: creative economy, culture, network creation, cultural fairs, consumption

Introduction

Fairs are collaborative spaces usually organized in high-traffic public areas. Their main feature is the commercial exchange of goods and services, but they are inherently intertwined with the realms of culture and leisure, exploiting their economic and creative potential. This work aims to analyze the cultural fairs in the city of Rio de Janeiro from the perspective of the creative economy.

In Rio de Janeiro, there are 160 registered street fairs with the city hall. With 120 years of history, they were regulated by Law 997 of 1904 by then-mayor Pereira Passos, who was responsible for the

urban reform of the city of Rio de Janeiro, carried out in the style of the Parisian reform executed by Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann in the 19th century. However, Brazilian fairs, in general, trace back to a Portuguese fair model brought to the American continent by merchants alongside colonists. Therefore, in the case of Rio de Janeiro – the focus of this research – the French city model mentioned earlier overlaps the colonial Portuguese model.

Just as there is no significant and representative data regarding fairs in Brazil, the same can be said about the broader sphere of informal work. The last census on informal work conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) dates back to 2003, but despite being outdated, it provides a sense of the size of the population working on the streets as vendors or market stallholders.

In Rio de Janeiro, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 669,937 people were employed in the informal sector of the economy out of a population of 14,392,106 at that time. Of these, 319,763 people were in the areas of Manufacturing and Extractive Industries, Commerce and Repair, and Accommodation and Food Services¹, and 73,065 people worked either exclusively in public spaces or in combination with other work locations. In October 2003 alone, 465 million reais were generated by Rio's informal sector as a whole. A 2022 survey by SEBRAE (Brazilian Service of Support for Micro and Small Enterprises) indicated a population of 8.5 million artisans in the country, generating 50 billion reais per year, around 3% of the country's GDP.

These data help to size the population that makes up Brazil's informal market, even without being able to directly infer the number of market vendors. This entire population includes various economic actors from creative classes who seek a place to sell their products and services at fairs and in public spaces.

Today, they do not have the necessary support to enhance their activities in a digitalized world. Many strive to bring innovations to a sector that has remained practically stagnant over time, reminiscent of medieval and modern European fairs.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Fairs, the city, and Creative Economy

The theoretical frameworks in the construction of this research and data analysis were centered on the themes of fairs, markets, and their relationships with cities, creative cities, creative economy, creative class, smart cities, information architecture, communication and information technologies, and user experience. Pirenne (1989) argues that merchants were the actors responsible for the commercial and urban renaissance post-Middle Ages. Cachinho (2014) complements this assertion by reinforcing the centrality of the commercial sphere in cities, without generalizing cause and effect as Pirenne did, but maintaining the relevance that regardless of the city's origin, trade would soon be structured to meet urban needs. Araújo (2011), in a comparative study between Portugal and Brazil, concluded that the fairs in Brazilian cities emerged with Portuguese colonization, and these fairs date back, at the same time, to the fairs and markets of Portuguese cities.

In the realm of the city, Pesavento (2007) addresses the issues of urban sociability, emphasizing the role of its actors in everyday life in expressing local cultures to build a common social sense. In the same logic, Ribeiro (2018) points to cities as an urban and cultural phenomenon evidenced in the way understanding of identities and human relations is summed up, especially in history and anthropology, expressed in the study area of memory. Pesavento (2007) delineates three spheres of the city – material, social, and sensitive – and similarly, Ribeiro (2018) delineates two spheres of the city – the city that really exists (material) and the city present in social imagination.

In both cases, cities are presented as promoters of social relations and cultural expressions very

¹ Manufacturing (Production of: Textiles; Clothing and Accessories; Leather and Leather Goods; Travel Items and Footwear; Wood Products; Furniture and Various Industries; Food and Beverages; Publishing, Printing, and Reproduction of Recordings; Production of Chemical Products; Plastic and Rubber Articles; Non-Metallic Mineral Products; Metallurgy, Metal Products, Recycling, Production of Electronics and Transportation Equipment) and Extractive (minerals), Commerce and Repair (Commerce and Repair of: Personal and Household Items; Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles; Retail of Fuels) and Accommodation Services (excluding real estate activities, rentals) and Food Services (Food vendors and other food services).

centered on their residents, who create this cultural sense of space. These relationships between city and culture are aligned with the studies of creative economy by Florida (2012), Vivant (2012), and Reis (2022). The first conceptualizes the idea of the creative sector of the economy and centralizes its analysis on the creative class, promoters of the city through creativity, which is multifaceted and multidimensional, surpassing stereotypes of technological innovation or new business models. Additionally, it is directly associated with freedom and fluency of thoughts, involving social habits and behaviors. Unlike the old logic of a division between work and private life, the creative way of living permeates work, communities, and individualities, reflecting norms and values that strengthen its central role in today's society and economy. In line with the concepts of city as sociability presented by Pesavento (2007) and Ribeiro (2018), Vivant (2012) centralizes the artist in their analysis of the Creative Class, establishing them even as an archetype of the new creative and precarious middle classes, which closely resembles the market vendor as an artisan, who produces cultural artifacts through their subjectivity and sells them at the fair, without certainty of public reception, subject to income variations throughout the year, and without much social assistance protection as they are not formal workers.

In approaching the creative economy to the Brazilian context, Reis (2022) asserts that the major difficulties for the greater success of the creative economy and creative classes in emerging economies are issues related to governance, low digital literacy of the population, and competition with global trade. Some of these issues go against the ideal of smart cities, aspired by the City of Rio de Janeiro, including the promotion of events by the government such as Rio Innovation Week, an annual event.

Leite (2012) centralizes the mapping and dissemination of the immense opportunities within the current urban territory as success factors for the smart management of cities, both in Urban Revitalization of central regions and in Productive Regeneration of underutilized areas, which is in line with the proposal of this research. The author also points to the importance of democratizing access to territorial information to promote participatory communities for optimal urban living.

In this sense, recourse was made to information architecture and user experience design, according to Garret (2011), for the structuring of a platform capable of organizing and promoting a better urban experience, with market vendors at the center as members of the informal creative class with significant impact on the everyday experience of cities.

Methodology

This research had an exploratory sequential character and combined qualitative and quantitative characteristics. It was conducted in the South Zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Previously, a qualitative on-site investigation was conducted with the market vendors. Currently, we validated the information originally obtained from the vendors with the consumers through quantitative surveying. Cultural fairs were investigated in order to map them and interview vendors who exhibit at these events, in order to understand them for the ideation of a product (Gil, 2017: 26). The qualitative approach in data collection was chosen in the first phase because, according to Goldenberg (2004, p.53), it ensures a detailed description of the problem studied considering the individuals involved in its entirety. And, in the second phase, the quantitative approach was chosen to deepen the results of the qualitative research through generalization (Gil, 2017: 56)

To achieve the proposed objectives, the following methodological trajectory was followed: literature review; definition of the researched universe; on-site investigation of fairs to identify Cultural Fairs within the scope and theory; in-depth interviews; identification, treatment, and analysis of collected data; structuring of the platform; validation of the platform with consumers at two of the fairs included through surveying; treatment and analysis of collected data; restructuring of the platform.

In this research, the individuals prioritized throughout the interviews were the market vendors. These individuals are both at the top of the credibility hierarchy and at the bottom regarding the theme (Goldenberg, 2004: 85). This is because when it comes to the city fairs, no one is better suited to discuss this topic than the vendors and consumers themselves. On the other hand, these same vendors

and consumers do not have expertise in relevant subjects for the research such as information and communication technologies (ICTs), smart cities, and digital consumption, having little ability to conceptualize network creation.

For the treatment of the data collected during field visits and interviews, content analyses were conducted, both on the field notes authored by the researcher - which materialized in the form of fichas of the fairs - and on the interviews resulting from the field visits, duly transcribed. Content analysis, according to Silva and Fossá (2015: 3), consists of a methodological resource in constant development to analyze diverse contents, centered on the search for categories or themes that aid in the understanding of what lies behind the discourses.

According to Silva and Fossá (2015), the process of Content Analysis was used in this research according to the following steps: i) reading of the collected material; ii) coding to formulate analysis categories; iii) cutting the material into registration units; iv) elaboration of thematically distinct and mutually exclusive categories in the registration units; v) grouping registration units into common categories; vi) progressive grouping of initial, intermediate, and final categories; and vii) inferences and interpretations supported by the theoretical framework. Thus, the registration units of this work were categorized into fourteen intermediate categories and four final categories, the latter being Sociality, Work, Knowledge, and Fair.

For the treatment of data collected in the survey with consumers, the following standard data analysis process will be followed: (a) establishment of categories; (b) coding; (c) tabulation; (d) statistical analysis of data; (e) evaluation of generalizations obtained from the data; (f) inference of causal relationships; (g) interpretation of data (Gil, 2017: 118).

To achieve these objectives, a geographical delimitation of the study object was made in the city of Rio de Janeiro, focusing only on the fairs in the South Zone of the municipality. Additionally, a temporal delimitation was proposed in the interviews from 2019 to 2021, starting from the situation in the fairs up to the moments before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the interviews focus on the activities of the market vendors at the events, as well as their reality during the pandemic and its effects on their personal lives, and a comparison of how the fairs were before the pandemic compared to the moment of data collection.

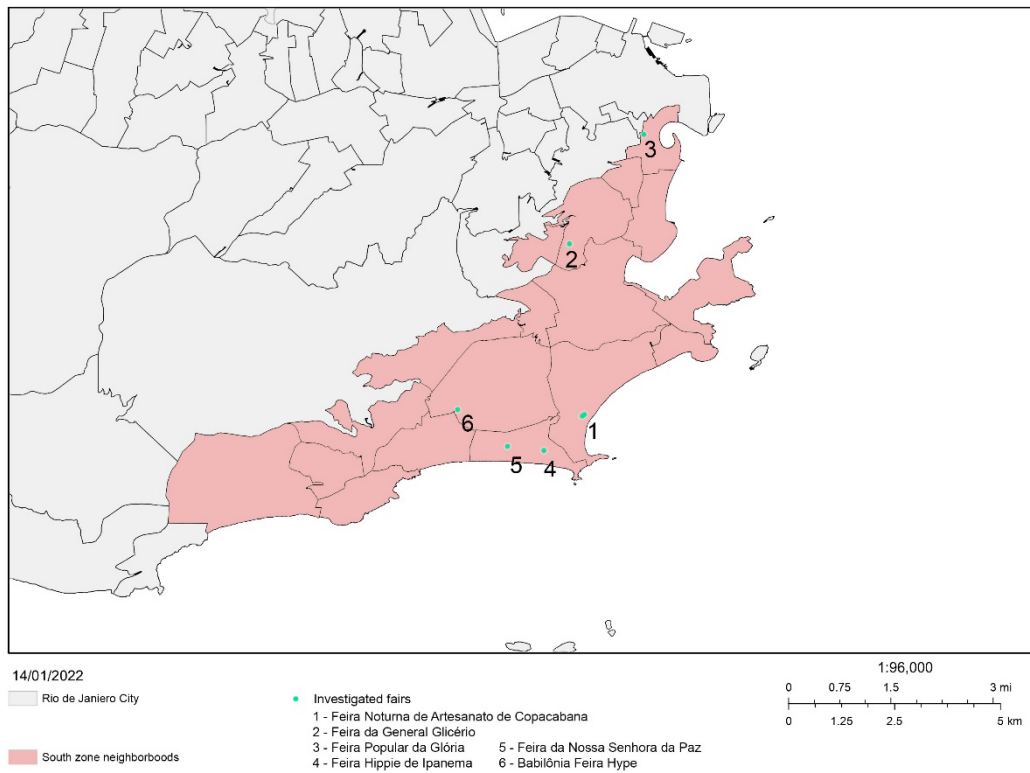
Afterward, a quantitative survey was conducted with the fair consumers through the application of a predefined, structured, and closed questionnaire in face-to-face interviews that would be conducted at different times over at least four weekends – Saturday and Sunday – with a 15-day interval at the General Glicério and Glória fairs, both located in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The research instrument was developed with the elaboration of the questionnaire questions, which can be found in the appendix of this work.

During the execution of this phase of the study, however, a change in the data collection approach was necessary due to the adverse weather conditions observed in March 2024 - when the data collection took place. The intense precipitation, typical of this period, made it impossible to conduct face-to-face surveys in full. Faced with this scenario, in order to ensure the representativeness of the sample and guarantee the attainment of a significant confidence interval, it was decided to extend the questionnaire application to the virtual environment, through a snowball sampling approach. In this process, the questionnaire was distributed through the WhatsApp messaging application, with the criterion of exclusion being the participation only of respondents who declared to frequent the fairs evaluated in the field in the Rio de Janeiro region (Glória and Laranjeiras).

Conclusions and Results: Structuring and Relevance of the Application

This research has already resulted in a data collection of 7 pages about 6 cultural fairs in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro and 82 pages of transcriptions of in-depth interviews with 5 vendors from cultural fairs in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro (figure 1).

Figure 1: Rio de Janeiro's South Zone with location of investigated fairs.



Source: Prepared by the author.

These data were correlated with the dimensions of fairs proposed by Mariana Busso (2010), Araújo (2011), Ribeiro (2018), the dimensions of cities proposed by Pesavento (2007), the dimensions of the creative class by Florida (2012), and the dimensions of the creative economy by Reis (2022), as well as smart city dimensions by Leite (2012). Subsequently, a platform was proposed for organizing information and accessing information with the objectives of enhancing and professionalizing the cultural fairs of Rio de Janeiro and generating data to provide strategies for smart cities, according to Garret (2011). This platform proposal will be validated through a survey with consumers at two fairs included in the field investigation during the second semester of 2024, and a final adjusted version of the platform will be proposed.

Focusing the analysis of the interviews on the presence of technology in the daily lives of the vendors, it was noticed that all interviewees were present on social networks, with Instagram and Facebook standing out as channels for promoting their work, regardless of the interviewee's level of technological fluency. In some instances, the personal and professional spheres merge on these platforms. A pain point raised was the energy and dedication required for content production, and another was the need to follow algorithm protocols to achieve good results. Throughout the interviews, one vendor recounted a past successful case, that of a marketplace at the Hippy Fair in Ipanema that generated many sales for him; he mentioned missing this online space that brought nationwide visibility to his work. However, the digital space ceased to exist, and he was unable to recreate it individually.

During the interviews, various pain points of the vendors were raised, and many of them could be addressed through forums for conversation and decision-making, resource mobilization, and increased visibility of Rio de Janeiro's cultural fairs. And based on Garret (2011), we proposed the structure of the platform (figure 2).

Figure 2 – Platform elaboration process.

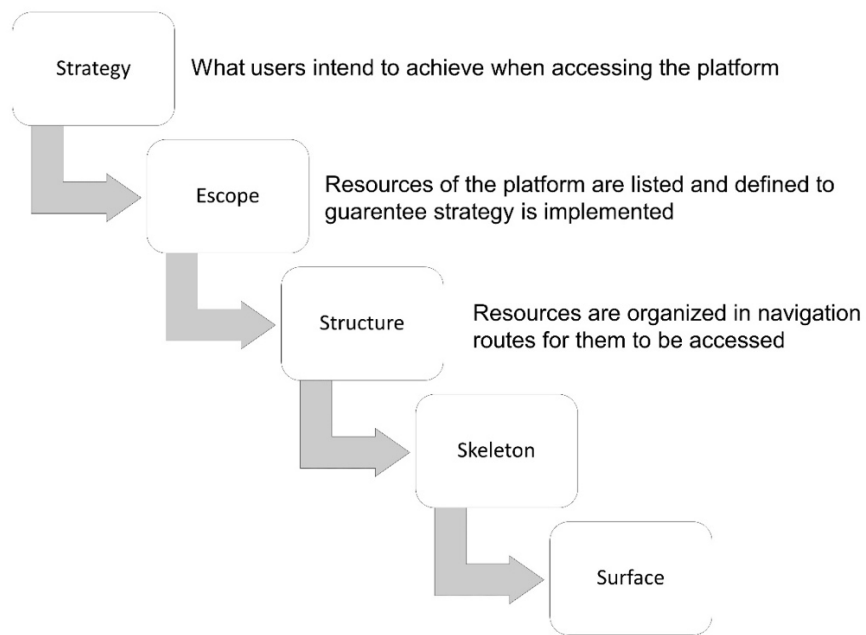
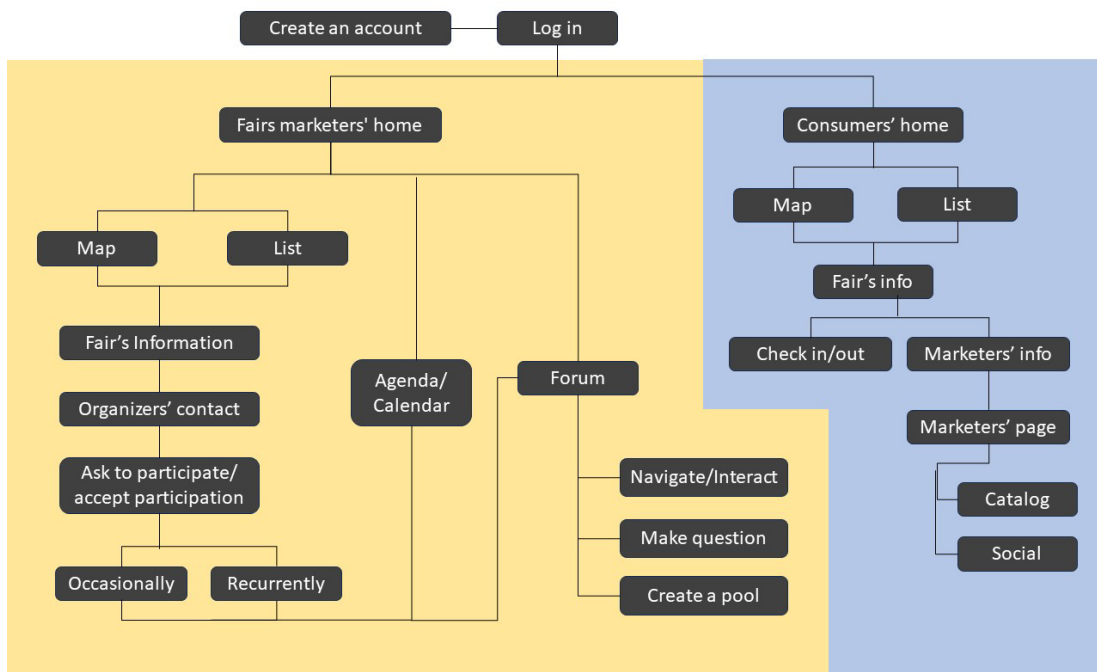


Figure constructed by the author based on page 22 in The Elements of User Experience de James Garret

Source: Prepared by the author.

With that, the main strategy for the platform would be to bring visibility to the vendors and their products and facilitate access to information, both for the vendors and for the consumers. In scope, we consider the following as essential: the map with the location of the fairs, dates and times, contacts of the organizers, registration lists for vendors, conversation spaces, vendor profiles, vendor products, a purchasing space, and the vendors' social media. The structure was divided between the vendor space and the consumer space, as proposed below in figure 3.

Figure 3 – Platform Information Architecture



Source: Prepared by the author.

With the definition of the platform, the questionnaire was administered over 4 weekends between March and April 2024, on the dates 23/03, 24/03, 30/03, 31/03, 07/04, 13/04, 14/04, and 20/04. Additionally, responses were collected online, using snowball sampling, resulting in a total of 399 valid responses, with 339 in-person respondents and 63 online respondents. It was not possible to precisely determine the size of the fair's consumer universe, so we extrapolated to a population of 80,000 people, the capacity of the Maracanã football stadium, for reference. With this extrapolation and the achieved sample, we can guarantee a 95% confidence interval with a 5% margin of error. The demographic breakdown of the sample can be seen in the table below.

Chart 1 – Demographic chart of the respondents

Gender	Number of respondents	Age	Number of respondents	Region	Number of respondents
Male	197	18-24 years	18	South Zone	356
		25-29 years	69	North Zone	9
		30-34 years	131	West Zone	11
		35-39 years	70	Downtown	15
Female	202	40-44 years	10	Baixada Fluminense	3
		45-49 years	35	Niterói	3
		50-54 years	20	São Paulo	1
		55 years or more	46	Scotland	1

Source: Prepared by the author.

The authors Pesavento (2007) and Ribeiro (2018) discuss the physical and symbolic spheres of the city, where complex social relations unfold, and in the current context, we must also consider a digital sphere of the city. The way we, as social beings, interact with space has changed significantly with the advancement of technology, the development of smartphones, and access to fast mobile internet. This fact has directly impacted the social relations experienced in the material and physical sphere of the city. People search for geolocation before arriving at the fair to view Instagram Stories from the fair's location. If before we asked for directions and relied on street signs; now we use GPS. If before we asked for recommendations for products, markets, and fairs; today we search online. And this digital sphere of space is already a reality at fairs: people search for the address on the online map, get directions with GPS, take business cards from vendors to find their Instagram, and more. Therefore, it was not surprising when it was concluded that, on average, 87% of respondents would like the application that organizes fair information, and 2 out of 3 respondents would like to receive products from the fair at home (64.8% at the General Glicério Fair and 65.46% at the Glória Fair).

When inferring the meaning of fairs and the cultural importance of the events in question, it is understood that the connection with the community and pleasure are the main feelings aroused in consumers, and the sensation of economy is the last feeling aroused. Additionally, quality and variety, respectively, are the most valued characteristics at the fair.

The cultural environment of fairs is complex to replicate on a platform, so the first hypothesis would be that the more affinity with the cultural environment of the fair, the greater the rejection of the platform. However, the result was the exact opposite, as people who value the cultural environment of the fair the most are the most likely to buy their products online, indicating that even those who attend the fair for its cultural characteristic see potential for using the application.

Another positive aspect of the platform would be the possibility of increasing the audience, since 83% of respondents who said they have stopped going to fairs because they wouldn't know what they would find there would be interested in the application.

This digital acceptance also appeared in the in-depth interviews with the vendors. One example of a similar digital platform to the one proposed in this research was the previously mentioned website of the Hippy Fair in Ipanema, which served as a marketplace for the vendors.

So he created a website for the Ipanema Fair there. It was pretty cool, it was a very good experience. [...] Like the case of this guy who made the website for the Ipanema Fair, it was a very positive experience. [...] He went there. He visited the entire fair, talked to the artisans about his work. I think he also did a selection for the work. Cataloged some people and it worked. I even sold with a good, reasonable result. Sold to other states. I found it very practical. [...] For them to buy our products through the website, then I sold to São Paulo, to Pernambuco, to Minas Gerais. I found it very cool because it was just me leaving my house, going to the post office, and putting it there. The person already paid the shipping. It was through PagSeguro, right, so we received it safely. The person paid securely. So it was a very cool experience. So much so that I even tried to look for online sales. But I'm not a person. Since it was something for college, then he didn't update the website anymore and the site kind of went offline, we asked to do... (E5)

When trying to reproduce online sales on his own, the artisan from the Ipanema Hippy Fair faced difficulties.

It's what I told you. There's a platform, like an Instagram site, and when I joined it, they were like 'oh, you're going to sell a lot', man, after two years... Man, if I tell you that on that site I sold three pieces, it was a lot. It's absurd, I paid a fortune because I paid in advance for a good signature of the service. And well...(E5)

Finally, those who go to the fair every day and those who never go are the main ones interested in receiving the products at home, followed by those who rarely go to the fair. This indicates that, for the most frequent attendees, the app would be a convenience and practicality benefit, and for the less frequent ones, an opportunity to consume products that they wouldn't go to the fair to get themselves.

It would therefore be interesting to include a platform for marketing products in the app, without generating too much competition between channels and enabling the marketers' products to have a wider reach, even on a national scale, as explained by a marketer who started exhibiting her products at the Feira da Glória because of the digital existence of this physical space:

I thought about going to the fair because I sold on Instagram and then I realized that my audience revolved around Feira da Glória. So I decided to do this fair. And, because I live in Niterói, people asked for accessories and the shipping was always very expensive. Delivery was expensive. So I thought: “I need to go to Rio because it's a point of sale in Rio. That's why I thought of Feira da Glória. How did I get there? It was because of that, because of the girls themselves. My friends used to tell me. [...] Yes, and I've always known a lot of people from Rio too. So I always sold a lot and I also knew people in person, so a friend who bought would introduce me to another friend. So I already had a large network of women who liked my work. When I came to Rio everything improved absurdly (E4)

We can therefore conclude that, in a reality of encounters and intersections between the physical world and the digital world, a platform that organizes and facilitates access to information on Rio's cultural fairs would be well received by both the fair-going public and the consumer public.

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Appendices

Script for in depth interviews with market informal workers

This interview lasts approximately 45 minutes. No individual responses from the vendors will be disclosed. The research results will only be used for diagnostic purposes and academic articles with aggregated information. The researchers guarantee the confidentiality of any information provided by the vendors, including the use of pseudonyms. This research is conducted in partnership with the Laboratory of Creative Cities at ESPM Rio and aims to profile the Rio de Janeiro vendor, understand their needs, and identify variables for the development of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their professional activities.

1. First, a basic introduction: How old are you? What is your educational background? How long have you been exhibiting at fairs?
2. Do you live around the fair area?
3. Do you produce your own products? How do you price them?
4. Is your dedication to this fair full-time, or do you have other jobs at other fairs or in other areas?
5. Have you always worked as a vendor, or was it something that became part of your life at some point? What motivated you to exhibit at fairs in general and at this fair?

6. Do you see differences between the city's fairs? What is your perception of other fairs?
7. Regarding this fair, is there an annual calendar organization with festivities? Does anything change throughout the year? What in the fair is always the same and what is always changing?
8. In this fair, is there any fee to exhibit here? Is there any organization or organizer? Does the municipality participate? Is there any accountability to the municipality? How does this work?
9. Is there any municipal platform that helps or organizes these fair issues? How do you contact the municipality?
10. Do you have any internal communication network for the fair? Something like WhatsApp or a closed Facebook group? Do you have any public communication or interaction with the public such as a website, a public Facebook page, or an Instagram page? How do these networks help you?
11. Regarding your relationship with other vendors, do you maintain a good exchange relationship? Exchange of information... favors... contacts...
12. With local businesses, residents of the area, or the municipality, have you ever had any conflicts or disagreements?
13. As an exhibitor, do you use these interaction networks with the public? If so, how do you feel about engagement? Do you think it is ideal or sufficient? What could improve?
14. Do you have any way to control your relationship with the customer? Like return rates, feedback, loyalty to improve the customer experience?
15. What do you feel is missing in the fair to improve your business?
16. And finally, how was the pandemic situation for you as a vendor? Was it difficult? And how was or is it returning to fairs?

Questionnaire for quantitative validation with consumers

1. What gender do you identify with?

Female

Male

Prefer not to answer

Other:

2. How old are you? (Select age range)

Under 18 years old

18-24 years old

25-29 years old

30-34 years old

35-39 years old

40-44 years old

45-49 years old

50-54 years old

55 years or older

3. Where do you live?

South Zone (Glória, Catete, Botafogo, Copacabana, Flamengo etc.)

North Zone (Madureira, Méier, Tijuca, Anchieta, Marechal Hermes, Oswaldo Cruz etc.)

West Zone (Praça Seca, Vila Militar, Jacarepágua, Bangu, Realengo, Campo Grande etc.)

Downtown (Lapa, Santo Cristo, Gamboa, Saúde, Santa Tereza etc.)

Baixada Fluminense (Mesquita, Nilópolis, São João de Meriti, Nova Iguaçu etc.)

Other:

4. How often do you go to fairs?

Once a day

Once a week

Once a month

Rarely

Never been before, this is my first time at a fair

5. What motivates you to go to fairs? (You can select more than one)

Buy groceries to take home (vegetables, fruits, meats, spices, etc.)

Buy non-food items such as gifts, decorations, household items (rugs, cushions, pots etc.)

Eat directly at the fair (pastries, hamburgers, pizzas, etc.)

Participate in cultural events (samba circles, chorinho, live music etc.)

Stroll and entertainment

Other:

6. Which fairs do you usually attend?

Feira da Glória (Glória)

Feira da General Glicério (Laranjeiras)

Feira da Praça XV (Downtown)

Feira do Lavradio (Downtown)

Feira Hype (Lagoa)

Other:

7. What do you value most at fairs from the options below? Check 1 or 2 options

Quality of products

Affordable prices

Variety of products

Cultural atmosphere

Local and/or artisanal suppliers

8. What does the fair make you feel from the options below? Check 1 or 2 options

Curiosity

Pleasure

Nostalgia

Sense of economy

Connection with the community

9. Is there any product that you don't buy in the market/store because you prefer to buy only at

the fair?

Yes

No

10. Have you ever been unable to go to a fair for any of these reasons? (You can select more than one)

Lack of time

Laziness/lack of motivation

The fair location was difficult to reach

Did not know what would be available there

Other reason

Never missed a fair

11. Do you use any of the apps below? (You can select more than one)

Facebook

Instagram

WhatsApp

TikTok

Twitter (X)

12. How much time, approximately, do you spend on the internet per day?

Less than 1 hour

1 to 2 hours

2 to 4 hours

4 hours or more

13. Do you usually shop online?

Yes

No

14. Would you buy the same product from the fair if you found it online?

Yes

No

15. Would you like an app that gathers all fair information in one place? (Location, directions, hours, exhibitors, what each exhibitor sells?)

Yes

No

16. Would you like to see and buy products from fairs and have them delivered to your home?

Yes

No

