

Digital Celebration in *Tourist Cybermarianism*: The Connectivity of the Sanctuary of Fátima (Fortaleza, CE) during the Pandemic

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the potential and limitations of digital connectivity in the devotion to Our Lady of Fátima in the celebrations held in her largest sanctuary, in Fortaleza (capital city of the Northeastern state of Ceará, Brazil). On the thirteenth of each month, the sanctuary usually gathers large numbers of devotees and visitors, with an extensive schedule of masses and novenas, and solemn processions on May 13 and October 13, which start at the Church of Carmo, in the center of the city. The study intends to observe the context of devotional changes in face of the COVID-19 pandemic, and seeks to highlight the strategies adopted by the Sanctuary in order to keep up with celebrations, guided by stricter sanitary protocols in the 2020 and 2021 editions. Methodological procedures comprise monitoring broadcasts and digital advertisement of these editions until March 2022, when sanitary protocols began to be relaxed. Field and digital observations (by means of YouTube channels broadcasts) point to maintaining a hybrid mode of spatial connectivity. To what extent does this show a trend of hybridization of faith, correlating face-to-face (sanctuary and neighboring communities) and remote (cyberspace) experience? Messages and comments left by devotees in the main Parish/Sanctuary's social media are also vital sources of research analysis. It was intended to explore the most pertinent dimensions in this new context of devotional connections; this may lead the way for comparative typologies with other equally popular and appealing sanctuaries.

Keywords

Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima, Digital Devotion, Celebrations, Cyberspace

1. Introduction

Religion is prominent for human relations within multi-faceted social organizations, from principles of collective conduct to more individualized spiritual practices. Faced with the pandemic of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, contact with religiosity has gained greater depth, seeing as, the virus has rapidly spread worldwide, causing various social problems and the death of millions of people, especially in developing or emerging countries such as Brazil (PAHO, 2020).

In this situation, the debates on stricter sanitary measures gained international momentum, and pointed to the need of quarantine, especially for the elderly and people with comorbidities, seen as risk groups, and social distancing of the population as a whole. Like the various economic and social sectors, the forms of religious cult, or multiple cultural practices, had to find ways to maintain proximity with its public, so as to keep with traditions and spiritual welcoming of the faithful and sympathizers.

Catholic organizations found a way to do so by means of digital communication, creating and intensifying the schedule of celebration broadcasts on radio, television and the Internet (De Oliveira et al., 2020). The house became a space for prayer and seclusion both during Lent and quarantine (Machado, 2020), thus religious feasts were broadcast live by their host parishes' television channels, among other activities organized online.

The present paper intends to analyze the Feast of Our Lady of Fátima hosted by the saint's shrine in Fortaleza (capital city of the Northeastern state of Ceará, Brazil), taking into account her devotional strength, realized by religious practices that have shifted, during the pandemic, from face to face to digital environments. The devotional space of Fátima becomes the focus of this research due to its representativeness in the face of what Santos (2008) calls *spatial diffusion of religion*.

The Fortaleza Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima is among the offshoots of devotion to Our Lady of Fátima throughout the world, which originates in Portugal, where she first appeared, and where her history and symbolism begins in the second decade of the twentieth century.

The spatialization of this symbolism is disseminated by the devotional beliefs such as miracles that, according to Santos (2008), present themselves diffusely, or, as considered here, within a space of hybrid and collaborative connection. In this sense, this paper's object of study—devotional *Cybermarianism* to Our Lady of Fátima and its potential for tourism—comprises the meanings dispersed and conjoined by means of the materialization of small and large-scale sanctuaries,

through iconographic and ritualistic shifts that differ from place to place.

In addition, pilgrimage and tourist flows strengthen the spatialization and the emergence of symbolic places, which, in their characterization, go beyond their physical boundaries. Among points of attraction and symbolic diffusion, Santos highlights the case of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima, in Portugal, viewed by many as the Altar of the world, extending its religious influence far beyond local and even national boundaries (2008, pp. 51-52), which fact proves its devotional reach.

The understanding of digital devotion, in the case of the aforementioned Sanctuary, allows us to see spatial-imaginative radiations unrestricted to a single place. Claval (2007) is instrumental in studying imagination by interpreting and collecting particular aspects, which are understood as practices not only inspired by traditional societies (face to face celebrations), but also inherent to the context of the pandemic (watching and experiencing the sacred from home). To what extent would a cybernetic Marianism or *Cybermarianism*, thus fusing both concepts into an instrumental neologism—point to the strengthening of devotion to Our Lady of Fátima during such paradoxical times (of health crisis and telematic opportunities)?

The networked message communicates a condition of experiencing faith by means of online channels. Listening to the remote demand, not leaving home demand partial restraint on those who seek some comfort in religion. Staying home is an exercise of performatively and meaningfully imagining a religious connection by television, cell phone and computer screens. The scenario of virtual devotion fosters some type of (direct and future) presence. In religious tourism, to what extent may this be said to promote *cyber tourism*?

Thus, based on a qualitative and exploratory research, the methodological steps are guided by literature that tackles cyberculture, digital media and online rituals, as well as the phenomena of devotional irradiation, the mirror shrines and their specific dynamics. In this sense, discussion starts from the understanding of place as a privileged experiential space, which helps in acknowledging the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima as a locus of irradiation of Marianism in Fortaleza.

The primary objective of the present study is to observe devotional changes promoted by access restriction to the Fortaleza Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima during the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022, reflected in the growth of the use of digital media as an alternative. Secondly, it also intends to: 1) integrate the Marian devotional perspective to local cyberculture tendencies, and 2) analyze such an integration drawing theoretically on cultural geography and urban tourism, with a view to show the collaboration links between remote and face-to-face religious irradiation practices.

We understand irradiation from the perspective of spatial and religious communication. The presence of media in religious spaces is not exactly a novelty, but its massive use has been imposing itself as a privileged maintenance strategy for religious activities and practices in permanent integration with sacred values

and images. Subsequently, the methodological steps point to analysis of interactions among researchers, taking documentary and empirical bases into account, in tune with the pandemic context (2020-2021), as well as the beginning of sanitary relaxation in early 2022.

By observing celebrations and interactions in the Sanctuary's social media, communication failures were noticeable in the form of complaints and questions, often due to the unavailability of complete data (e.g. days and times of celebrations, and broadcast platforms). Participation was also observable through requests and thanks on behalf of different causes, which had already been seen in testimonies and/or masses that express devotees' blessing requests and thanksgivings.

In this sense, the present study has adopted the perspective of understanding irradiation from social media, and how media and/or the public are adjusting to each other. It is understood that the study here developed is not putting an end to, but opening up possibilities of research approaches that take a close look at religious phenomena and their tourist dynamics.

2. From the Sacralized Place to the Sanctuary's Spatial Connectivity

Geographical categories such as a *place* and their dimensions in scales and networks are strategic in this research model as a tourist interface. In place—especially when sacralized by faith—we capture devotional perspectives, diversities of knowledge, collective desires and aspirations. A geography specific to the transcendental subject converges to such a place; in other words, the way of being in varied geographical situations, which try to understand the mundane relations with differentiated or special *placeness* (Marandola Jr., 2014). A geography sensitive to collective movement must incorporate such diversity into its analytical dimensions in order to attain a study of universal knowledge. This demand must also consider all societies and their diversity, in different degrees and representations. Furthermore, a spatial experience is born from human experience of the places and the emotions that it arouses (Claval, 2010: p. 55). The knowledge produced in human practices allows people to create spatial meanings and orientations, which become indispensable elements for individuals to engender knowledge of the place.

Without a precise scale, memory of place is fluid, embodied in the search for a person-earth relationship. The place is worldly and dynamic in temporality, but its meaning tends to contain something eternal, timeless. Marandola Jr. (2014) points to such a place in the understanding of recent changes, mainly due to the pandemic, or before that, to tensions between economic powers. After all, people in constant flow take with them circumstances that are sometimes *placed* in space.

Marandola Jr. (2014) wrote that the circumstances of being-in-the-world and their ways of inhabiting without reifying or objectifying suggest an ontological

discussion (being and thinking) of place. It is *placeness* that goes beyond a general being with immediate answers, setting the thought in the great topological expanses. Marandola Jr. interprets place in Tuan's work (2012) beyond the feeling of belonging, critically adding that, prior to the undertaking on place, there must be a debate on the dimensions of world experience, and proposing that an important ontological question—subject and object—be overcome. It is necessary to interweave modes of being space, place and entities (any given thing), offering interrelated understandings that do not boil down to purely Cartesian extensiveness (subject-object).

To this end, Massey (2000) shows place through political tensions and desires that reverberate a discussion focused on domestic and international contacts. Basically, we must say, with Milton Santos, that the world changes, and places change, too; for Santos, place is actually defined as functionalization of the world: the world is empirically perceived as place (Santos, 2005: p. 158). The geographical and tourist space encompasses place dynamics, whether material or ideological, always (re)created by significant experiences of daily practices.

Still, in this case, daily life would not elaborate abstract systems of stable routines with time or age demarcation. Critical of linear time, Merleau-Ponty (1999) speaks of a network of successive intentionality of ecstasies, which is never completely constituted. For Merleau-Ponty, temporality is plural time or time in time. It is exactly in place that the mandatory theater of actions gains the realm of freedom. It is in place that the multiplicity of actions and struggles enveloped in multifaceted interest in social life is found.

Globalization has narrowed the gap between elites, displaced essential relationships between producers and consumers, broken many ties between work and family life, obscured lineages between temporary locations and imaginary national ties. This notion is also guided by the philosophy of Deleuze & Guattari (1997), who consider that the world today is rhizomatic, endowed with a schizophrenia that more than ever demands uprooted reflection from thinkers. In this rhizome of social correlations, hardened by the pandemics, crises, and worldly hopelessness, the sacredness of places finds fuel and conditions for expansion. We also add that a new kind of approach may help us understand the senses of culture through the experiences imagined, lived and *placed* in the transcendence in religious manifestations in sanctuaries.

2.1. The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima as a Radial Model

From the perspective of the imaginary, to think about the links between a shrine of international scope (the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima, in Portugal) and its *mirror* shrines (the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima, in Fortaleza) makes us reflect on its projections, its reach, the number of visitors, whether concentrated in a certain period or constant throughout the year, as well as on the growing alternatives of its *kaleidoscopic* cyber access. The way it communicates with the community is also relevant: from its communication with believers to the way in

which it is represented on television, print media or news websites.

Cavalcante (2011) divides the geographical dynamics mediated by the Fortaleza Sanctuary of Our Lady in into *vertical*, *horizontal* and *relational* dynamics. Vertical dynamics comprises house-spiritual realm relations, in which the sanctuary is metaphorically taken as the House of the Mother of God, that is, it is a relation between the faithful and the spiritual realm. Horizontal dynamics comprises house-world relations, as the Sanctuary's institutional relations, i.e. between its officials and the world, identified by the relations between the house and the neighborhood, as well as other scales. And finally, the relational dynamics home↔street↔spiritual realm is seen in celebration moments and in the different levels of presence and interaction they allow.

The Sanctuary of Fátima, located in its namesake neighborhood, also stands out in numbers. With some fluctuation, according to data obtained by Cavalcante (2011), May 13 celebrations amass approximately 120,000 faithful and visitors. A 2013 survey in regional news websites—*GI*, *O Povo* and *Diário do Nordeste*—shows these numbers to have reached 150,000 faithful (Torres, 2013). Up until 2019, these numbers were likely associated with favorable weekdays and special events, such as the Cova da Iria apparition's 100 years Jubilee. In 2020, social distancing regulation and the closing of religious centers have caused May 13 face-to-face events to be canceled; in 2021, they returned with limited capacity. Online broadcasts, which have taken place before, were intensified.

From the perspective of devotional studies, seen as a point of intercession between human beings and the Christian divinity, Mary is associated with multiple demands and presents herself in different phenomena. In this plan, she receives a number of appellations starting in *Lady*, *Virgin* or *Mother*. Both her titles and iconography may stem from life events, ritual dogmas and/or places in which her apparitions have taken place (Machado, 2020; Marino, 1996). In light of such appellations, Mary will appear as protector and welcoming of her children, as a harbor in moments of anguish and conflict, still bearing the image of resignation and courage. The Marian devotional model is therefore presented in multiple forms and has been reinforced by televised and telematic representations, and also on social media.

From the dynamics and strategies of displacement, Machado (2020) has taken rituals and celebrations of Our Lady of Lourdes as devotional Marian tourist-therapeutic models, taken the International Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, in France, as reference—which sanctuary radiates onto mirror shrines in the cities of Chaval (Ceará) and Lagoa do Piauí (Piauí)—, given its geographical and cultural celebration characteristics, its spatial organization and connection to other Marian forms of health care. According to De Oliveira (2014), the methodological paths of the study of representations permeate the analysis of radiation, fluidity, densification and participation in the celebrations. Radiation, diffusion and devotional turistification studies demand the systematic analysis of the existing communication network. In this sense, it is valid to consider the scope of the manifestations, the means they use, the flows that arise from them and the

direct or indirect influence exerted by reference shrines.

2.2. Cybercultural Communication in the Acceleration of Devotional Access

In order to understand the breadth and expressiveness of cyberculture as a modern social and cultural process, we must first consider it as a new human relationship with knowledge. It is a culture of every form of human production mediated by the great interactive potential of cyberspace.

To better understand this process and its pertinent concepts, we draw upon Lévy (2000), Trivinho (2001, 2007) and Lemos (2010). Lévy (2000) understands cyberspace as a space of communication opened by the worldwide interconnection of computers, considering it humankind's main communication medium after the process of general digitalization of information. In parallel, the so-called *cyberculture* represents a set of (material and intellectual) techniques, practices, attitudes, modes of thought and values that develop alongside the growth of cyberspace (Lévy, 2000: p. 17). Within the scope of cyberculture, cyberspace directed to "complementary" purposes capable of assuming the rule of social and territorial processes has guided postmodern reality. It remains to be seen whether this heralded technical advance will be accessible to most human groups, how quickly and at what price.

Trivinho (2007) interprets cyberculture as a material, symbolic and imaginary configuration of the late post-industrial era, corresponding to the international predominance of the digital matrix of technology, whether in work, leisure and free time (Trivinho, 2007: p. 66). Trivinho, therefore, allows us to more clearly see how religious involvement radiation as a human activity that is also involved with the cybercultural configuration of modernity.

Despite digital and virtual practices not as yet predominating over *placed*, face-to-face activities, religious radiation has become progressively stronger in Brazil in recent decades, first with radio and television, and progressively with the broadcast of religious events on cyberspace media. To understand this context, Trivinho (2001) presumes the existence of an inextricable relationship between communication, culture and speed. In relation to this triad, we also rescue the concept of *cybercultural dromocracy*.

For Trivinho (2001), *dromocracy* (or power of speed) is an exponential, cyberculture-specific logic, which may be seen as a technological *sociodromocracy*, in its most defined and radiated form due to its nature, its world dynamics and its ensuing social consequences (Trivinho, 2001: p. 23).

Cybercultural dromocracy encompasses, with reflected precision, the current global stage of late capitalism. Integrating network communication, instantaneity and digital culture, it translates, in other terms, as the most advanced stretch of real-time media civilization (Trivinho, 2001: p. 21).

However, unlike cyberculture, dromocracy is not something new in history. As Trivinho states, dromocracy fostered the development of ancient cities, sports, burgos, pre-capitalist commercial activities and industrial facilities, and many

other historical processes (Trivinho, 2001: p. 24). With the support of cyberspace, cyberculture as a more recent process fosters virtual the possibility of collective cognitive evolution, systems and subsystems of agency and formation of subjectivities and the generation and hypertextual transmission of knowledge (Trivinho, 2001: p. 62).

Unlike other communication-related activities, the act of watching/broadcasting religious celebrations online involves more than interaction between people and geographically distant places. The spiritual and symbolic dimension that involves ritual places, such as Christian churches and temples, allows them to promote a connection between earth and the spiritual realm.

Thus, we consider that watching the digital broadcast of religious celebrations transfers somewhat this connection power to several other places. By access to television, radio, computer or cell phone, as well as to appropriate conditions for watching these celebrations, the place where the ceremony is being remotely watched shares the aforementioned connection power with the place where the ceremony is being broadcast, thus multiplying the communicative capacity due to a reach that surpasses the local sphere.

Cybercultural communication, in these terms, was very relevant for devotional irradiation and for religious tourism during the pandemic. If tourism had previously been closely linked with audiovisual resources in order to advertise destinations, today this relationship is intensifying.

Regarding this relationship, Baumann et al. (2017) discusses how projected and perceived images create different connections with tourists. The projected image represents an attraction, as visitors see it, whereas the perceived image is how the individual perceives the image that was projected. The connection between earth and the spiritual realm, in cybercultural communication, transforms the perceived image of the sanctuary and its devotional experience.

Religious tourism from 2020 onwards is marked by new modes of devotional practice, rites and identities. Digital means began to enable a new way of experiencing connection with the divine. Thus, the experiential nature of religious tourism takes on new nuances, transforming the possibilities of religious places, which become more intangible than tangible with the support of virtual spaces.

It is also important to consider the distinction that Lemos (2010) establishes between *mass-function* and *post-mass-function media*.

By *mass-function media* we understand a centralized flow of information, with editorial control centered on the sender pole, held by large competing enterprises financed by advertising. Post-mass-function media work from telematic networks in which anyone may produce information, thus “liberating” the sender pole, as enterprises and economic conglomerates need not be present. Post-mass-function media do not compete for advertising financing, and they are not centered on the specific territory, but are virtually around the globe. The product is customizable and, most of the time, insists on two-way (all-all) communicational flows, as opposed to the unidirectional (one-all) flow of mass-function media (Lemos, 2010: p. 157).

It should be added that post-mass media are more than merely informative (something more characteristic of mass media), they use bidirectional (all-all) communicational processes, unlike the unidirectional (one-all) flow of mass-function media (Lemos, 2010: p. 158). Given these structuring characteristics of cyberculture and this distinction, we may assess the forms of use and devotional irradiation of the Fortaleza Sanctuary of Fátima, with emphasis on the pandemic period previously mentioned. In this case, we see not only routine practices that fulfill church-centered demands. Let us consider the very construction of digital devotion, enhanced by cyberculture—something that was evident when local and digital observations for the preparation of this study, on the second Sunday of Lent (March 13, 2022), were coming to a close. All 8 masses broadcast on the Sanctuary's YouTube channel, during Sunday celebrations, were crowded, while, six days later (March 18), the 7 a.m. mass reached 8500 views. The following section details the methodological steps undertaken.

3. Access to Hybrid Fields (Face-to-Face-Virtual): Materials and Methods

In order to achieve our proposed objectives, this research was developed from a qualitative, exploratory analysis and subject to subsequent reviews. The first stage, as we have seen, sought to develop the theoretical framework by means of a review of literature comprising books, papers, theses and dissertations that cover the themes related to the consolidation of the Marian place of Our Lady of Fátima, as well as its digital religious celebration practices during COVID-19 (Sars-CoV-2) pandemic.

Our central object of analysis combines, therefore, Our Lady of Fátima commemoration and the proposed, tourism-focus virtual access to Marian devotion, called *cybermarianism*. Before the pandemic, the largest celebrations were held between May 05 and 13, when the Sanctuary welcomed devotees with masses, the novenary and the procession. With the pandemic, new strategies were adopted, in order to keep with ceremonies and broadcast other events, taking social isolation into account while ensuring permanent communication with devotees, including donations by bank transfer. Mass broadcasts routinely inform the Sanctuary's relevant data for bank transfers.

In the second stage, we sought to analyze the celebrations and practices in the Fortaleza Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima during May 2021, when infection rates were still high in Brazil. This second stage was developed as *netnography*, which is based on the search and selection of data and information found on the Internet (Braga, 2007). Broadcasts and publications in the Sanctuary's social media were monitored; the irradiation of celebrations in both digital and face-to-face environments by other sanctuaries and parishes in the states Ceará was also followed.

The main social media analyzed were the Sanctuary's Instagram profile and YouTube channel. Monitoring online broadcasts allowed to verify and analyze

devotees' messages and comments in the Sanctuary's main communication networks, thus allowing for assessment of the possibilities and shortcomings of this new way of celebrating.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Results

Digital tracking enabled us to understand different Marian reception strategies and their unfolding in terms of visitation and forms of ecclesial service to devotees. Despite the marks of an unexpected situation, we sought to understand how celebrations took place from a virtual perspective: What remained? How does the Sanctuary respond to the demands of its public?

In terms of celebrations, specifically on May 13, masses were celebrated in accordance with their previous face-to-face schedule, which corresponded to their online broadcast (*Diário do Nordeste*, 2020). The connectivity represented by the events inside and outside the temple in the Sanctuary of Fátima already provided the basis for this growing trend of cyberculture in the May and October masses and solemn processions, as *Trivinho (2001)* points out. **Figure 1** below shows this celebratory context, however, despite the advances in broadcasting, the Sanctuary's surroundings have not yet established a relation with telematic channels. Broadcasts were and still are very focused inside the temple. The church was decorated with flower arrangements, the Marian rosary was prayed, and, during the last celebration of the day, the coronation of the Saint was maintained, which moment may be said to be the most anticipated by the public.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the Archdiocese of Fortaleza was also adapting to state decrees and to the demands of the devotees, such as the possibility of a communion drive-thru in some of the city's churches.

The Sanctuary's social media with the highest number of participants and views on May 13 was its YouTube channel, which reached 55,511 views (**Table 1**). The Sanctuary's channel is named *Igreja de Fátima (@IgrejadeFátima13)*; it was created on August 2020. As of May 9, 2022, there were more than 47,900 subscribers and more than 4 million views—which is the sum of the views of all videos ever posted.

During mass live broadcasts on YouTube, the live chat box was used for collecting requests and blessings (**Figure 2**); viewers also used it to state the place from where they were watching. As may be seen, at the time of observation there were 1427 people watching simultaneously, and the live chat was filled with expressions of feelings, requests or, in other words, the *placement* of their experiences, in reference to what *Marandola Jr. (2014)* tells us. In a way, the organizers of the celebrations tried to set a digital religious space, where devotees could practice their rites of faith. This is because the religious tourist wants a unique proximity to the divine, being the religious celebration the ideal space-time for such an experience (*Parellada, 2009*). In this sense, some of the live chat box messages call attention:

“Prayer for the unemployed.” (Devotee 1)

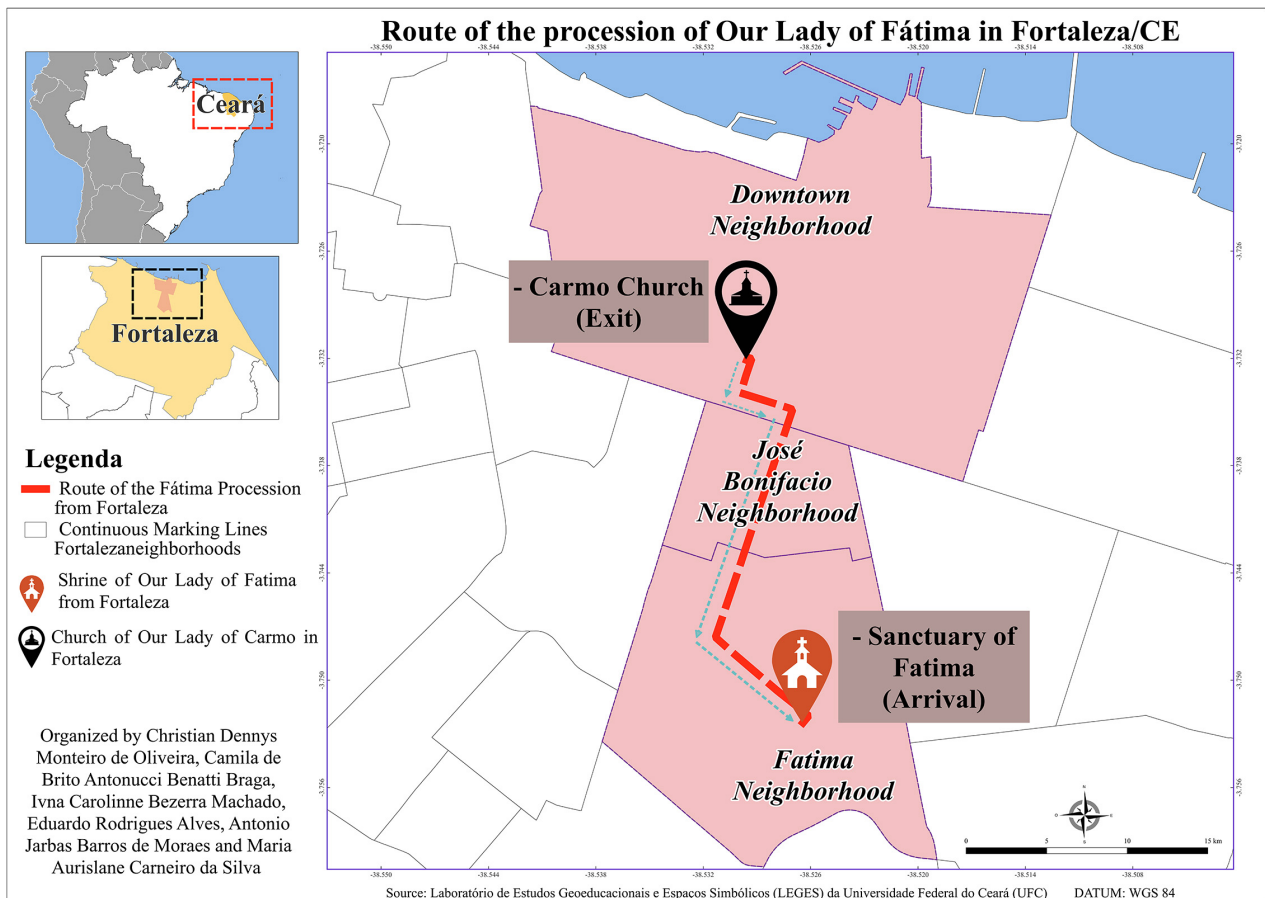


Figure 1. Location of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima and solemn procession route. Source: the authors, based on authors’ archives (2022).

Table 1. Number of views of broadcasts on the Sanctuary’s YouTube channel.

May 13th live stream	Number of views	Link
5a.m. Mass	2157	https://youtu.be/uN1_ eflf0g
6:30a.m. Mass	2688	https://youtu.be/GS1JBj4awXc
7:30a.m. Mass	2465	https://youtu.be/x0G0SKSoY6U
9a.m. Mass	2528	https://youtu.be/v08WGOx6afs
10:30a.m. Mass	4037	https://youtu.be/PZCwOSShzMw
12 noon Mass	6617	https://youtu.be/TB-Ejh1I59M
2p.m. Mass	3613	https://youtu.be/PB_6VS0JSag
3:30p.m. Mass	5053	https://youtu.be/d_P.M.AZT5CShE
5p.m. Mass	10,645	https://youtu.be/nTKESByHw6M
6:30p.m. Mass	7178	https://youtu.be/9dKmAft1Pgo
Procession of Our Lady of Fátima	8530	https://youtu.be/IKuQiG_pqHU
Total views	55,511	

Source: the authors (2022).

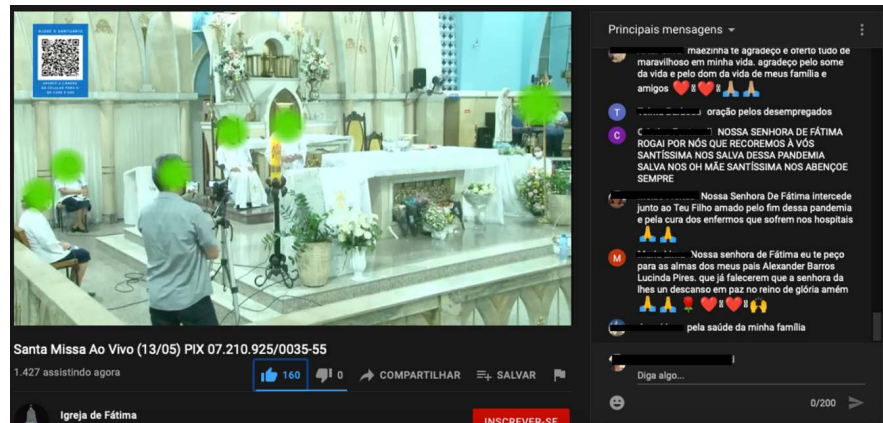


Figure 2. 5p.m. mass live broadcast. Source: Authors' archives (2022).

“Our Lady of Fátima, pray for us who turn to you; Most Holy Mother, save us from this pandemic, save us Oh Most Holy Mother, bless us always.” (Devotee 2).

“Our Lady of Fátima, plead for us with your beloved son for the end of this pandemic and for the healing of the sick who suffer in hospitals.” (Devotee 3).

The above messages are linked to the current pandemic. The first asks on behalf of the unemployed, seeing as the pandemic has considerably aggravate unemployment, as many people lost their jobs or needed to close their business. The following messages call for the end of the pandemic and the cure of the infected. It is important to remember that the broadcast platform, due to the presence of this live chat tool, takes on the role of post-mass-function media, although viewer interaction was limited to this type of manifestation. We also add that this connectivity creates a flow of messages and emojis that symbolically expresses devotees' emotions.

On the other hand, it was observed that the Sanctuary's staff assisting the celebration often did not establish real-time interaction strategies with Internet users. This situation contradictorily approximates the broadcast/celebration model to the mass-function communication model. However, moments such as the Procession of Our Lady, transmitted live on May 13, 2021 (**Table 1**) should be highlighted; during this event, which moved through some streets of Fortaleza, communication was more directed to cybernauts, in order to bring those watching from home closer to the religious ritualistic moment.

With over 1 billion active users, Instagram is currently one of the most important and widespread information and communication networks. Instagram is growing more and more in terms of users and resources, offering different possibilities for both personal and commercial profiles, as well as profiles by institutions and content creators (Ferrari & Gândara, 2015). It should be remembered that, even though irradiation centers—Fátima for Santos (2006) and Lourdes for Machado (2020), among other studies—are related to other shrines around the world, it is necessary to consider the digital devotion that transcends the materiality of space for monumental communication in cyberspace.

The main Marian shrines of the world already offer some digital services, such

as making requests, lighting candles, watching masses, or, as in the case of the Sanctuary of Lourdes, requests for water from the grotto. Many devotees use these services to feel closer to the divine, showing different modes religious experience.

However, Instagram has reached a unique dimension today, becoming one of the main means of communication between institutions, their supporters, and, as mentioned earlier, it is the main information and communication channel used by tourists in the world. Even before the pandemic, in 2017, Instagram was one of the main media for advertising the Marian Jubilees celebrated by the Sanctuary of Aparecida and the Portugal Sanctuary of Fátima (Braga, 2017).

As of May 9, 2022 the Fortaleza Sanctuary of Fátima counts 37,400 followers on its Instagram profile (*@igrejafatima*); up to that date, there were 166 posts, both photos and videos; the oldest post is dates June 15, 2016.

In May 2021, periodic observations and analysis were carried out in the communication channels of the sanctuary, especially in the celebratory period from May 05 to 13. There was only one Instagram post on the topic, informing about the beginning of the novenary—one of the shrine's main religious practices.

However, it was observed that the post lacked more detailed information such as broadcast platform, dates and times. This led the profile's followers to express their doubts on the comments section. If social media are places of communication that have become essential to clear doubts and provide information, followers will look for quick and clear communication.

However, the profile's administrators' answers were found to be short, vague and not enlightening. As an example, one follower asked where she could watch the broadcast of the novenary, and the reply was: "the information is in the caption". However, the post and its caption provided no such information. This demonstrates, therefore, that the profile's administrators make limited use of the network and its possibilities, establishing a not very close relation to its audience and the faithful. Thus, it is necessary to draw attention to the relevance of continuous improvement of the modes of use of these communicability spaces, as they have become the main means of information, relations and dialogue in society during the pandemic.

However, after these questions and doubts were posed on the Sanctuary's Instagram profile during the festive period, it was observed that, in the following months (June and July), the profile was remodeled. Images began to display standardized visual identity, with models, shapes, typefaces and colors. In addition, it was noted that the novenary post cited above was deleted, which leads us to assume that the administrators possibly identified some of its gaps. Likewise, all 2021 posts prior to June 07 were deleted or archived. So, as of July 06, 2020, the first post in the profile is dated July 07, 2021. This is believed to follow from a revision and reassessment of posts and the use of the Instagram profile, in an attempt to adjust and improve communication.

Signs of Hybrid Resumption of Visitations in 2022

Two years after the beginning of the restrictive measures, with the adoption of

more or less rigorous codes to restrict the number of visitors during periods of quarantine, the Sanctuary has yielded to the extra-official trend of relaxing occupancy limitations. It was possible to follow the dynamics of the morning masses (7a.m. to 12 noon) on March 13, 2022, as most of the faithful do: in the vicinities of the church (see **Figure 3**). However, the eight masses and some intermediate moments of the novenas were still broadcast online.

The permanent basis of access to the broadcast channels is not as complete as in tourist-religious complexes such as the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Aparecida or Canção Nova (in the countryside of the state of São Paulo), partly because the neighborhood of Fátima, where the Fortaleza Sanctuary is located, maintains strong interaction with the Metropolitan dynamics, which, as we have discussed, forges a *placeness* of specific functions at the time of the celebrations, but not in a spatial and tourist configuration autonomously managed by the Catholic Church. This combination of Metropolitan popular religiosity and permanent cyber projection of cults points to possible challenges for the renewal of religious tourism—especially when a major health issue, propelling alternative devotional behaviors, increases the demand for Marian intercession on behalf of the faithful, beyond the best contemporary technical and scientific conditions. Tourist Cybermarianism needs to be observed as a contextualized response, therefore, in shrines such as that of Fátima and many others expanding in Brazilian geography. However, there is an issue that may no longer be ignored regarding the hybrid dynamics of real and virtual placeness: how to methodologically tackle the presence of the Sacred on the screens of faith cyberspaces?

The analyses developed in this study led to significant research considerations. With the central objective of analyzing the commemorative celebrations of Our Lady of Fátima in the month of May, 2021, specifically in the Fortaleza Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima, it was possible to identify the celebration strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, when social isolation became crucial to inhibit the spread of the disease.

The Fortaleza Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima kept the May 05 to 13 celebrations, especially by digital means. Thus, the novenary, the masses and the procession were transmitted live, with YouTube as the main broadcast platform. According to the analyses carried out, on May 13, 10 masses took place between 5a.m. and 6:30p.m. After the last mass, the festivities were closed with the procession of Our Lady of Fátima.

It is also understood that this model of irradiation supported by social media is an increasingly current reality, not only due to state decrees of social distancing, but also to the popularization of lives and all sorts of broadcasts during the pandemic. The increasing use of social media demands that religious institutions increasingly incorporate post-mass communication strategies in order to contribute to the irradiation of their beliefs.

5. Conclusion

The Sanctuary has sought to broaden communication with devotees using other



Figure 3. Surroundings of the Sanctuary on March 13, 2022. Source: Authors' archives (2022).

media besides Instagram and YouTube, as was the case with the official Facebook page, *Boa Nova Rádio Web* and *TV Diário*. However, broadcasts were made on YouTube, where, in the virtual scenario, most devotees were present. Instagram and Facebook were used by the Sanctuary as a means of promoting information and advertise the event, whereas devotees intended to clear doubts about the celebration, which, as it was possible to observe, has limited return.

Boa Nova Rádio Web and *TV Diário*, in turn, sought to broadcast the May 13 celebration highlights.

It is important to note that a few members of the congregation were able to attend masses, as they were celebrated with 25% occupancy. They were allowed in by order of arrival. However, a large number of people who could not enter remained outside the Sanctuary, which posed a sanitary risk in the current scenario and conflicted with biosafety regulations, especially in light of what broadcasts and in-person observation indicated to us at the March 13 Sunday masses in 2022. A much larger crowd waited in line on the sides of the Church to attend the 9a.m., 10:30a.m. and 12 noon masses.

Therefore, it was possible to realize that both the Fortaleza Sanctuary of Fátima and other parishes and religious organizations in the country have been looking for ways and strategies to maintain their devotional practices during the pandemic. This is important both for the maintenance of faith and religious rituals, and as an alternative revenue source.

This discussion opens the door for future studies, such as analyzing other Marian festivities and comparing them with the festivities to be held next year, when the majority of the population is likely to have been vaccinated against COVID-19.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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