


# FEAR, DESPERATION, APATHY, AND RESILIENCE: HOW CAN BRAZIL PROVIDE INSIGHTS FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH IN TIMES OF TURBULENT EMOTIONS

*Medo, desespero, apatia e resiliência:  
como o Brasil pode oferecer insights para a pesquisa do consumidor  
em tempos de emoções turbulentas*

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## ABSTRACT

This think piece discusses how the contemporary context of polycrisis provokes negative emotions that could lead to more critical research in marketing in consumer studies in three themes: technology, backlash on diversity and debt. It also argues for paths for developing resilience in such scenarios by taking inspiration from Brazil, a country in which several people have already lived the end of the world as we know it.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** emotions, Brazil, LLMs, technofeudalism, backlash, resilience.

## RESUMO

Esta pensata reflete sobre como o contexto contemporâneo de policrise provoca emoções negativas que podem orientar pesquisas mais críticas em marketing e nos estudos de consumo em três eixos: tecnologia, reações contrárias à diversidade e endividamento. O texto também aponta caminhos para o desenvolvimento de resiliência nesses cenários, inspirando-se no caso do Brasil, um país em que muitas pessoas já viveram o fim do mundo tal como o conhecemos.

**KEYWORDS:** emoções, Brasil, LLMs, tecno-feudalismo, backlash, resiliência.

Every year, the director of the school in which I work starts the academic year by highlighting challenges that business schools have recently endured, which are arguably the challenges endured by other institutional actors, including Universities, Non-Governmental Organizations and companies at large. In her speech, she highlighted the crisis of the last 5 years: Covid, the war in Ukraine, the war in Gaza, the visibility and growth of the effects of climate change, and, obviously, the elephant in the room of academic research and education: Artificial Intelligence. While this tiny and personal essay will not explore such crises that constitute the contemporary era in depth, I will try to grasp the emotions that this polycrisis provokes and provide ideas to deal with it in academic research about consumption and markets.

I have to name the emotions: fear, apathy, desperation. As Sarah Ahmed (2020) argues, emotions orient actions; they direct which objects we will approach and from which objects we will distance ourselves. Most marketing and consumer research has historically, and still is, oriented to specific objects: perpetual growth (Kotler, 2024), responsabilization of consumers and firms to addressing social issues by better adjusting their individual behaviors (Aboelenien, Arsel, & Cho, 2021), and adaptation to technology, overlooking its downsides (Arsel, Zanette, & Da Rocha Melo, 2024). Such orientation derives from collective emotions that are, however, inconsistent with, and perhaps even inconceivable in, the context of polycrisis. It is in this sense that this brief essay proposes a queering (Pirani & Daskalopoulou, 2023), that is, a change of orientation, in marketing and consumer research, specifically the one produced in Brazil.

Brazil is a particularly interesting context for such reorientation because it is a place of contradictions, but of sad ones. Eliane Brum (2021), in her beautiful and powerful investigation of life in Altamira, describes how life exists amidst desperation. Indigenous peoples in Brazil have lived and keep on living the end of the world, their world, and the feelings and emotions of desperation keep on driving them into reinventing their world, into reinterpreting their cosmology (Fontenelle, 2024). This is not a sole characteristic of Indigenous peoples, but something that can also be seen in the lives of the many precarious workers in the country (Magalhães Lopes, 2023). Brazil is in many senses the country of the future, but not the future oriented to modern and Western notions of progress, but the future that a world in polycrisis drives us to (Magalhães-Lopes, Fontenelle, & Zanette, 2024).

It is under this sense that I draft a couple of ideas for future research in different themes, to both (1) inspire ideas for future research in the themes of fear, apathy, and desperation, and (2) to find resilience under polycrisis. I humbly propose these ideas because they are the ones in which my own research is centered, knowing that they are far from even approaching the broadness required for a research agenda or anything similar to it.

### **Fear, apathy and desperation**

The first theme refers to the elephant in the room, the new hype, the new wave, the new promise: large language models (Bender et al., 2021), or what is usually called artificial intelligence. There is just too much (already) written about it, its adoption, its possibilities, and even the ethical dilemmas that it provokes (Mollick, 2024; Narayanan & Kapoor, 2024). I will not approach the supposed promises of “progress” in these synthetic models, because despite the technofuturist fantasies, as Arsel (2025) puts it, around them, there is much fear, apathy, and desperation involved.

Bender and Hannah (2025) specifically make vividly explicit the invisible side of the precarious work that feeds such models, and that involves workers in contact with child pornography, violence, and all sorts of traumatic experiences for pennies. These are the workers who “ensure” the appropriateness of the responses given by such chatbots. The

political economy around these systems and the people who have power over them also cause in many individuals, myself included, a sense of fear and desperation: the new colonial thirst that is behind them (Hao, 2025), how tech barons are contributing to the increasing precarization and impoverishment of workers, leading to a new world order of technofeudalism (Varoufakis, 2023), how techbarons' greed for perpetual growth directly affected political crisis worldwide (Wynn-Williams, 2025), and eugenic and white supremacist ideas that are constitutive of this industry (Gebu & Torres, 2024). I believe these topics should be at the center of future research in technology, consumption, and markets, because they are redefining organized life in itself, and because such structures spill over into our consumption, marketing, and educational practices in pervasive ways.

The second theme refers to the different dynamics of backlash in several areas in which social progress has advanced in recent years. In the Western world, different companies considerably reduced Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts, including giants such as Gucci and Warner Bros, and American Eagle's campaign featuring Sidney Sweeney explicitly invokes eugenics by conflating the words "jeans" and "genes." Scholars interested in issues such as gender, race, marginalized cultures, and LGBTQIA+ have been investigating such issues (Drenten et al., 2023; Drenten, Harrison, & Pendarvis, 2023; Zakrzewska, 2025; Zanette & Scaraboto, 2023), investigating, for instance, how strategies of masculine and conservative dynamics play out and are reproduced online. In Brazil, studies such as Dallolio, Zanette, and Brito's (2025) and Rosenthal and Airoidi's (2024) show that Brazilian society is also infected with such discourses, increasing tendencies of consumerism in young people and legitimating gun usage.

In many stances, the growth of this type of grievance has also been caused by fear of certain groups who, though accused of privilege, also have been living economically precarious lives, and need to find a certain type of meaning and community (Klein, 2024). However, these dynamics bring fear and desperation for groups who have been historically marginalized, as efforts for intersectional (Rinallo et al. 2023) policies, strategies and even research seem to have been erased too quickly. Very recently, I even came up with a paper talking about cultural appropriation in a journal that is part of our field and that does not cite authors from racialized backgrounds, revealing that even what is supposed to be critical conceals the dismissal of such efforts.

The third theme, which I confess diverges from my sparse expertise, is related to debt and perpetual growth, rooted in a certain feeling of hope in a better future through consumption. Leandro and Botelho (2025), in their compelling piece about debt, show the spiralling down trajectory of indebted consumers. But beyond consumers' experience of living and struggling with debt, again, an investigation of how debt structures markets and consumption might bring a bleaker tone, if we consider David Graeber's (2014) argument that debt, not money, is at the origin of most social and historical transformations.

Graeber (2014) has argued that generalized debts are historically what lead to social unrest, unless general pardons are put in place. The exception seems to be the Roman Empire, where these pardons did not happen, being one of the causes of its demise – debtors ended up locked up in semi-slave conditions to their creditors, resulting in feuds. As the argument of Varoufakis (2023) goes, there is already a mechanism of wealth concentration – techbarons' roles in converting state-funded cheap money into real estate wealth – that is already contributing to social indebtedness. While bleak, this perspective is not at all far from certain phenomena, such as the parliamentary investigation of online gambling, which became widely publicized due to influencers' participation. Their participation, which was driven by growth-based frameworks of content management and increasing monetization of online content (Arsel et al. 2025), represents one of the ways in which emotions related to optimism about constant growth, debt and harm are interconnected.

## Finding a path to resilience

As I would situate myself in what could be classified as a critical scholar, I developed skills and frames of thinking that are more appropriate for revealing fear and desperation than for finding paths for resilience. Yet, this year I had the experience to serve as a jury member for the Dissertation of Adriana Arcuri, whose chapters were already presented in different conferences (Arcuri, Larsen, & Veludo-de-Ovileira, 2024; Arcuri, Veludo-de-Ovileira, & Larsen, 2025), in which she presented her work about the resilience, though she might not necessarily call it this way, of poor teenage girls, overloaded with care work, living in extremely patriarchal contexts. While Arcuri does not shy away from denouncing what causes the precarity of these girls, her focus is considerably on how they signify it, in how they make meaning in the care they give to others, and in community.

Arcuri's work follows a path of feminist work that finds resilience in vulnerability, community, and care (Mandalaki, 2025). As research in care work and the feminist ethics of care gain more relevance and interest in the neighboring field of Organizational Studies, markets and consumption studies could also use these ideas to understand how different forms of consumption are affected by and imbued with care. As Arcuri's works show, care, while situated and interpreted differently, is a form of resistance through resilience, of inhabiting a world in which individuals find solace, joy and meaning outside of insane productivity structures that technological life imposes. In some senses, Fracalanza, Campos & Suarez' (2024) work also shows that even amidst dynamics of platformed attention and monetization, community and valorization of care work can emerge. Going back to Eliane Brum's account of the river-dwellers in Altamira who lived and are living the polycrisis in their skin, bones, and means of surviving, it is through strengthening care and community that perhaps new modes of organizing markets will emerge.

At the same time, beyond critical research that reveals fear and desperation, Brazil, in its complexity, is a place, perhaps the place, for researching resistance and resilience. We have probably one of the most creative and thriving digital cultures in the world, and we live by disrupting the meanings of authority. This is ingrained in the spirit of carnival or in the insane production of internet memes that constitutes the spine of our digital culture (Zanette, Blikstein, & Visconti, 2019). Shamayleh and Arsel (2025) have recently shown that technology can still be imbued with affect, that, regardless of the capture of data and exploitation of affect imbued in digital platforms, small acts of love and care can emerge through creativity and embeddedness. The spontaneous, artistic, chaotic cultural movements that foster community, emotion and affective atmospheres are also important elements in creating resilience (Hoeger, Lobanova, & Lowrey, 2025).

Finally, a way for resilience comes again from Eliane Brum's call, which invites leaders to conceive another future based on a different cosmology for life. In a recent call for papers on Consumption, Markets, & Culture, Magalhães-Lopes, I, and Fontenelle (2024) call for works that explore these new cosmologies, forms of organizing, and possible futures through the decentralization of the West, of the hopeful, "nice", perhaps even sanitized emotions that have oriented past research in marketing. A direct quote from the call states: "Brazil then seems to resonate in synchronicity with the global neoliberal restructuring and its imperative for exploration in the Global North and expropriation in the Global South. This way, in this SI, we invite researchers to reconsider Zweig's proposition and look at Brazil as a place that has experienced the future. Not an idyllic one, though, but a future permeated by contradictions, failures, and even by the downfall of the world as we know it, something already experienced by the country's indigenous populations." Brazil has a lot to teach the world, for its contradictions, its past, its good, its bad, and its ugly. Maybe it is time for us to find in ourselves what we have been looking for.

## Concluding thoughts

I started this thinkpiece by talking about a polycrisis. We, as mere academics, a profession so devalued by backlashes, blurry for our students, and so affected by the elements of this crisis (war, disease, technology, debt, precarization), are perhaps not equipped to lead change. And yet, our work legitimizes public discourse, is used when political and corporate actors need credibility. Also, these future leaders pass through us, and they are learning forms of thinking, ways of analyzing, and ways of building their own solutions through the knowledge we pass to them as professors. We do have a role in thinking and conceiving the aftermath of such a polycrisis; we have a role in reflecting about the future that they, and we, are creating. We can reorient perspectives, including marketing and consumer perspectives (Magalhães-Lopes, Brondino-Pompeo, & Carvalho de Moraes, 2024). Hope in future is perhaps not the best emotion to orient us in this quest, but maybe, just maybe, hope in developing resilience is.

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