

## Report

### Climbing the pyramid

10/05/2011

Luciana Stein



Marginal literature's made the masses highbrow  
 literaturaperiferica.blogger.com.br (2011) ©

#### Scope

The announcement of a TEDx event Rio's *Cidade de Deus* (City of God) slum is being celebrated by Brazilians as a significant cultural milestone. The second TED conference hosted by a low-income community – the first was in Kenya in 2009 – runs along the theme of "Our voice, empowered." It's a symptom of a powerful cultural movement underway in the country in which disenfranchised, lower income groups are gradually shifting from the periphery to the centre, both culturally and economically.

The booming TED events in the country could also be interpreted as a symptom of the pressing middle and upper class hunger for more innovative information. While on one side we find the emergence of a hitherto invisible class – the poor and the new middle class in Brazil (the C Class) - who want the attention, expression and education they deserve, more privileged classes are also scrambling to retain elite status, attentive to the culture of innovation that could boost their social currency as it's boosting that of Brazil on the global stage.

What this has created, argues Luciana Stein, is a peculiar situation in which both ends of the social spectrum are simultaneously expressing various elements of Maslow's classic hierarchy of needs. It's a further example of how, in many emerging markets, the flat social structure created by the internet is gradually replacing traditional social hierarchies.

----

Consumers formerly on the sidelines are bringing their narratives of disenfranchisement to the public eye, reframing them in a positive light and also seeking to enrich them. They are looking for educational and intellectual improvement (Being+), in addition to any new goods, services, and experiences that contribute to their advancement.

One of the central figures of this affirmation movement is a young man named Ferrez. A resident of a low income community in São Paulo, Ferrez is the author of five books loosely labelled as 'marginal literature', filled with the stories, dramas and joys of those living with little money in violent places.

Part of his life unfolds in a universe parallel to that inhabited by the Brazilian elites. Another part of his life, however, is in tune with the zeitgeist. Ferrez has strong links with the hip-hop movement and calls himself a 'literary terrorist'. His articles, renowned for their clear portrayals of Brazilian social inequality, are published in the *Folha de São Paulo*, Brazil's largest daily. Like the cultural institution Afro Reggae, Ferrez has empowered the

## Reports: Latest



### Ringing the changes: the Royal Wedding and Britishness

12/05/2011

Alex Gordon deconstructs the signifiers behind Wills and Kate's special day – and what they might mean for brands.



### Together: redefining community

21/04/2011

Ideas about community remain biased by romantic notions of a rural idyll. Henry Hemming asks us to reflect on the meaning of community in today's changing world.



### Hacking identity: authenticity and influence

14/04/2011

Hacker Josh Klein discusses privacy across digital and civic identities, how this differs from authenticity, and how Groupon is accelerating the inversion of the consumer-corporate pyramid.



### Bowling online: making e-tail more social

07/04/2011

Social shopping services recreate a sense of community between shoppers, restoring the high touch value of physical retail to the e-tail experience.



### Casual dining in India: an interview with Arvind Singhal

31/03/2011

Arvind Singhal elucidates the surge in India's casual dining segment, and the opportunities for growth for both local and international firms.



### Data futures: knowledge, discovery and prediction

10/03/2011

Data is everywhere: we know this. But what be done with it, beyond designing visualisations? Neil Perkin peers into the future of data analysis.



### Infinite Possibility, part two: the Virtuality anchor

09/03/2011

In the concluding part of his report, Joe Pine presents the four realms of the Virtual, and expands on the opportunities the Multiverse has to offer.



### Infinite Possibility: creating customer value on the digital frontier

08/03/2011

In the first of a two-part report Joe Pine introduces the 'Multiverse' as a comprehensive framework for customer experiences.

identity of the poor slum dweller. He's also created a fashion brand that makes use of global urban aesthetic of hip hop and skateboarding, localising the aesthetic with phrases like *Capão Redondo* (one of São Paulo's poorest communities).

### Beyond aspirations

However, the slum dwellers in Brazil and the new middle class want to express more than their aspirations and desires – they want transformation, and that's where opportunities are located.

According to data from the Getúlio Vargas Foundation's Center for Social Policies (CPS/FGV), the new middle class – who accounted for more than half of the population last year (1) - has a monthly household income between US\$704 and US\$3,034. These are the consumers driving the increase in e- and m-commerce.

Previously restricted by a lack of finances and their peripheral location, the C class is now accessing sophisticated information channels (such as TED) in addition to books, magazines and films. According to the Brazilian consultant Luiz Algarra, the increasing frequency with which this content is downloaded – and the diversity of content accessed – could well spark an aesthetic revolution.

Families belonging to the C class previously excluded from the main benefits of the consumer society have gained access through better wages and more abundant credit, brand name products, electronics and air travel. Now they also want more education.

**"In Brazil, where Portuguese e-books aren't yet widely available, sales of physical copies are booming."**

If elsewhere in the world people are starting to question the value of traditional educational establishments – seeking perhaps a more dynamic, TED-style solution, Brazil's C-class is happy to go to university. They currently account for 23% of the 6.5 million students (2). In Brazil, the possession of a college degree guarantees an average salary increase of about 171%. In addition to salary, however, higher education opens up new cultural horizons.

Literacy levels and attitudes to reading are improving. In late 2010, the radio program *Good Morning Brazil* reported on a recent survey into the dreams of Brazilian consumers. All classes wanted the obvious: a brand new car and electronic goods. But they also wanted to read more. Readership levels have grown 150% in the last ten years. (3)

In the rest of the world the discussion revolves around whether e-books will kill print, but in Brazil, where Portuguese e-books aren't yet widely available, sales of physical copies are booming. According to the [National Association of Libraries](#) (ANL), bookstores increased sales volume by 9.6% in 2010. Major chain Livraria Cultura is now one of the hottest meeting points for culturally-minded people in São Paulo. In addition, organisations like the [Virada Cultural](#), who promote a constant stream of cultural events, including concerts, theatre and exhibitions, are spreading fast. Launched in 2010, the event now has a presence in 30 cities across São Paulo state.

The consumption of cultural goods contributes to the [Brand Me](#) experience. In addition, cultural consumption, education and the resulting ascent up the socio-economic ladder provides autonomy and independence, two values highly sought by the lower classes.

### Educational pursuits for the upper classes

The upper classes are also involved in educational pursuits. Courses for intellectual improvement are flourishing, from the *Casa do Saber* (House of Knowledge) in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, to Estúdio Clio in Porto Alegre. Business courses specializing in innovation are proliferating and never before has the idea of 'newness' – whether in relation to products, services, or ideas – held such appeal. Labelling products as 'new' might be met with cynicism in the brand-weary Western world, but in Brazil, the gimmick still works.

The upper echelons have had access to digital media for longer than the rest of society and are now displaying the universal symptoms of information overload. Local magazine covers feed the anxiety of missing out by telling middle and upper class readers "You're done." This is compounded by pressure from a more qualified job market. The upper classes are realising that education – like the change around them – must be continuous.

### Insights and opportunities

Having a richer life and developing cultural interests is as important to Brazilians as their technical skills – regardless of social status.

What's interesting is that both ends of the social scale seem to be switching between several stages on Maslow's pyramid of needs, sometimes occupying more than one phase simultaneously. Some might be at the stage of 'safety and security'; they have one foot in the 'love and belonging' stage and the other in 'self esteem.' Their heads, however, are at the 'self-actualization' stage - the last in the pyramid.

As in other emerging societies, the domestic consumer market in Brazil will remain susceptible to products, services and experiences that fuel personal status for many years to come - but this status is increasingly being reflected in the improvement and purchase of intangible assets. Brands that provide elements for reaching consumers and allowing them to refine their identities and their lifestyles will flourish.

This stage of self actualization opens up new doors for brands that act as facilitators for personal improvement as part of Being+. Brands that are capable of teaching (in a lighthearted, fun way), brands that kindle new curiosities and are able to cultivate new interests in the consumers. Or that at the very least, for more pragmatic consumers, enable optimization and convenience. After all, consumers are no longer disoriented figures devoid of personal projects. On the contrary - these are [energetic](#) men and women who have plans. And it's up to brands to enable these to happen.

---

**Sources**

1. [Getúlio Vargas Foundation's Center for Social Policy](#)
2. [Band News](#), December 2010
3. [fipe.org.br](#)

**Further reading**

[g1.globo.com](#)  
[anl.org.br](#)  
[viradacultural.org](#)  
[casadosaber.com.br](#)

**Related on Canvas8**

Luciana Stein, 'Brazil's Go Faster market', 17 February 2011. Available [here](#)

Luciana Stein, 'Young, digital and divided: shifting demographics in Brazil', 11 November 2010. Available [here](#)

Meena Kadri, 'Looking beyond the Indian middle class', 12 February 2010. Available [here](#)

**Luciana Stein**

Luciana Stein is a Brazilian journalist based in São Paulo. She has written for *Valor Economico*, is a researcher for *Iconoculture.com* and has been contracted by many trend and market research companies to gauge the mood of Brazilian consumers.

[View full profile](#)

<b>Industry</b>	<a href="#">Art &amp; design</a> <a href="#">Demographics</a> <a href="#">Media &amp; entertainment</a> <a href="#">Social &amp; charity</a>
<b>Location</b>	<a href="#">Brazil</a>
<b>Keywords</b>	<a href="#">TED</a> <a href="#">Maslow</a> <a href="#">Brand Me</a> <a href="#">Being+</a> <a href="#">Middle Class</a> <a href="#">Slum</a> <a href="#">Education</a> <a href="#">Innovation</a> <a href="#">Social Capital</a>

---

[Terms & conditions](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Help](#) | [Who we are](#) | [What we do](#) | [Register](#) | [Contact us](#)

Canvas8 Ltd. © 2011

---