DIFFERENT WAYS OF SAYING GOODBYE: OUTLINING THREE TYPES OF ABANDONMENT OF A PRODUCT CATEGORY

Maribel Suarez and Marie Agnes Chauvel

ABSTRACT

Little attention has been directed to investigating abandonment that refers to the deliberate choice of giving up something previously consumed. In this chapter, we look into meanings that motivate the abandonment of a product category and also the meanings abandonment gives rise to. The research used a qualitative methodology to collect and analyze data obtained from in-depth interviews with 16 Brazilian consumers who gave up automobile ownership. This category was chosen due to its intense symbolic dimension. In the literature, abandonment is described as the act of giving up something previously consumed, thus presupposing that a deliberate choice was made (Hogg, 1998; Hogg, Banister, & Stephenson, 2009). The interviews, however, suggest that, rather than being a discrete event, an action or decision that is circumscribed by a given moment, abandonment is in fact a process. The analysis also outlines three types of abandonment: contingent, positional and
ideological. Contingent abandonment occurs when the individual, despite sharing the meanings with other consumers of the category, is forced to abandon consumption. Positional abandonment is driven mainly by the rejection of symbolic associations that consumption provides. Finally, ideological abandonment presents a collective perspective where the individual believes that society as a whole should abandon or reassess that consumption. Results offer potential insights for both governments and nongovernmental organizations involved in de-marketing efforts aimed at inappropriate consumption and companies interested in reversing the shrinking of their markets.

**Keywords:** Anticonsumption; abandonment; automobile; research paper; antichoice; nonchoice

**INTRODUCTION**

Creation of meaning via consumption involves approach and avoidance aspects of consumer behaviors and attitudes, but many of scholars and practitioners’ efforts have been devoted to approach orientation (Lee, Fernandez, & Hyman, 2009). In the context of the recent interest in anticonsumption, various studies have focused on more extreme and thus more “visible” manifestations of avoidance such as, for example, actions involving boycotts or aversion to companies and brands (Close & Zinkhan, 2009; Cromie & Ewing, 2009; Hoffman & Müller, 2009; Sandikci & Ekici, 2009; Yuksel & Mryteza, 2009). However, until now very little attention has been directed to investigating abandonment that refers to the deliberate choice of giving up something previously consumed. (Hogg, Banister, & Stephenson, 2009).

Since choice, nonchoice and antichoice (Hogg, 1998) are inextricably linked, the investigation of the meanings linked to abandonment enriches the theoretical reflection on consumption and offers potential insights, for both governments and nongovernmental organizations involved in de-marketing efforts aimed at inappropriate consumption and companies interested in reversing the shrinking of their markets.

In this chapter, we look into meanings that motivate the abandonment of a product category and those it gives rise to. The research used a qualitative methodology to collect and analyze data obtained from in-depth interviews with 16 Brazilian consumers who gave up automobile ownership.
This category was chosen due to its intense symbolic dimension, with previous studies evidencing its relation with self-concept (Belk, 2004; Grubb & Hupp, 1968), capacity to engender lifestyle and social class stereotypes (Belk, Bahn, & Mayer, 1982; Dalli & Gistri, 2006), and tangibilize ideologies (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Hirschman, 2003; Luedicke, 2006; Luedicke & Giesler, 2008).

In Brazil, the car is a category that is capable of demarcating social identity and status. It constitutes a “dream of consumption” that is present in all social classes (Stefano, 2010), associated with meanings such as masculinity, independence, achievement and wealth. Historically, the product’s high price has restricted its consumption to the wealthiest. In recent years, however, its price has gradually declined, although it still remains inaccessible to most people — in 2012, for example, the cheapest models cost around US$ 12 thousand.

ANTICONSUMPTION AND ABANDONMENT

Anticonsumption studies have a broad scope, ranging from investigations into the reasons why individuals simply fail to consume to their motives for actively questioning the consumption ideology or resisting certain products, brands, and companies (Lee & Fernandez, 2006).

The classifications of passive and active behaviors found in studies of the theme serve to establish differences within so-called negative choices (nonchoice x antichoice) and also their visibility in the marketplace (rejection x resistance). According to Hogg (1998), nonchoice constitutes a more passive type of behavior and is related to products and services that were simply not bought, either because they were not within the consumer’s means or due to financial factors, availability or accessibility. Antichoice, on the other hand, concerns offers that were actively not chosen because they are seen to be inconsistent or incompatible with a consumer’s other choices or preferences (Hogg, 1998).

Hogg et al. (2009) also propose a distinction between resistance and rejection. Although the former is related to active behaviors in the marketplace (e.g., boycotting, ethical consumption, and voluntary simplicity), rejection, in contrast, involves products not purchased; services not accessed; and brands not chosen, constituting, according to the authors, “rather more passive behaviors” (Hogg et al., 2009, p. 156).
Defined as the action of giving up something previously consumed, abandonment presupposes the existence of a deliberate choice (Hogg, 1998). It is thus different from nonchoice (a passive behavior) and can be included in what Hogg (1998) defines as antichoice. Hogg (1998) affirms that abandonment, avoidance, and aversion represent different degrees of antichoice, although they overlap to some extent. For Hogg et al. (2009), aversion is the act of physically and emotionally disentangling oneself from something. This is the clearest expression of disgust, involving more definitive decisions of nonconsumption. Avoidance, on the other hand, refers to the act of keeping oneself apart and is more related to the wish to minimize consumption choices that may have undesirable symbolic or cultural associations. According to these authors, aversion (expressed as disgust, loathing or repulsion) may generate avoidance and abandonment behaviors. The former tends to precede or appear together with expressions of avoidance and abandonment.

Kleine and Kleine’s (2000) suggest that individuals manage facets of their self-concept by discarding certain aspects of their identity as their self-concept evolves. In this process, the abandonment of products and categories may serve as an indicator of new identities and social conditions. Other authors also relate disposition and abandonment behaviors to social transition, that is, changes in the lifecycle or status of individuals (Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Hogg et al., 2009; Roster, 2001; Young, 1991).

The anticonsumption literature also includes studies that discuss the motivations and logics that govern resistance and rejection behaviors. Iyer and Muncy (2009) distinguish four types of anticonsumers depending on the object of anticonsumption (general x specific) and the purpose of anticonsumption (societal x personal): simplifiers, global impact consumers, market activists, and antiloyal consumers. In their study of aversion to specific brands, Lee, Motion, & Conroy (2009) also articulate personal and societal dimensions to create a framework that contains three different types of brand avoidance: experiential, identity (personal motivations), and moral (societal motivation).

Various studies of resistance to consumption discuss identity formation as something central to this behavior (Black, 2009; Cherrier, 2007, 2009; Dobscha, 1998). Cherrier (2009) analyzes the discourse of two important anticonsumption movements — voluntary simplicity and culture jamming — and evidences how, based on these resistance behaviors, consumers articulate two types of possible identities: a “hero identity,” whose construction is based on the quest to transform society, and “project identity” that questions positional consumption and proposes creative consumption,
in which individuals no longer buy, use, and discard products to correspond to the expectations of others.

Studies such as those undertaken by Hogg (1998) and Banister and Hogg (2003), Hogg et al. (2009) seek to map the dynamics that produce differentiation through antichoice. The authors develop a series of studies in the context of the clothing and fashion industry (Banister & Hogg, 2001, 2004; Hogg & Banister, 2001, 2006), where they investigate how consumers create and interpret meanings regarding the negative aspects of their “egos,” involving consumption-based stereotypes, and how products and brands are rejected in this segment.

Hogg and Banister (2001) affirm that in order to maintain a positive self-image – or at least a normative self-standard – consumers avoid risks, rejecting products, brands, or suppliers that are associated with undesirable or negative stereotypes or reference groups. Hogg et al. (2009) remind us that marketing professionals can create meanings for their products through commercials featuring typical users. Consumers can identify with them if they are aligned with their positive self-concepts or, on the contrary, generate avoidance if associated with their “undesired-ego” or dissociative groups.

Hogg et al. (2009) present two opposite motivational drivers of anticonsumption and consumption. On the one hand, the desired reaction to protect self-esteem and avoid humiliation in the self-concept (in anticonsumption as distinction: abandonment, aversion, or avoidance behavior) and, on the other, the desired reaction to maintain or improve self-esteem in the self-concept (in consumption, as approach).

METHODOLOGY

The present research used a qualitative methodology for data collection and analysis. One-on-one semistructured in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 former car owners (12 men, 4 women). The interview scripts included projective exercise due to their ability to capture consumers’ emotions, desires, and motivations and the not always conscious meanings and relations with products and brands (Rook, 2006).

We contacted informants referred by friends and then expanded our informant pool via snowball sampling. New interviewees were selected using the theoretical sampling procedure that consists of data collection prompted by concepts developed during the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Each interviewee is selected in order to discover variations
in the concepts developed and increase the density of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions. According to the above authors, the aim of theoretical sampling is to “maximize the opportunities for comparing facts, incidents and events to determine how the category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 196). Interviewees’ names were changed in order to guarantee their privacy.

Interviews lasted between 60 and 240 minutes and were taped and transcribed (around 450 pages of text). The content of the interviews was analyzed with the support of the Atlas ti program following the dynamics proposed by Rubin and Rubin (2005). This analysis sought to find, refine, and develop concepts, themes, and events that could be codified and interrelated in order to construct theoretical proposals.

Each interview was read at least three times (many sections were reviewed on other occasions). In accordance with Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) indications for data preparation and codification, the first step was to undertake the so-called “free-floating” reading in which, besides apprehending general and particularly important aspects, the aim was — through the use of codes — to distinguish the large blocks of themes and objectives listed in the interview script. The second reading demanded a more dense exercise involving the systematic tasks of creating labels for the various units or blocks of texts that had already been highlighted.

Some of these codes were suggested by the literature, others were created during interaction with the interviews, thus enabling different types of abandonment to be distinguished.

FINDINGS

In the literature, abandonment is described as the act of giving up something previously consumed, thus presupposing that a deliberate choice was made (Hogg, 1998; Hogg et al., 2009). The interviews, however, suggest that, rather than being a discrete event, an action or decision that is circumscribed by a given moment, abandonment is in fact a process.

The accounts of former automobile owners revealed that various informants kept the same vehicle for long periods of time (in some cases years), even without using it, before selling it. Samantha (59, university professor), for example, remembers that she has never had an involvement with a category, though she took nearly two years to sell her car after giving up driving “for good.” She explains that she “couldn’t be bothered to place ads to
sell it” and therefore had to pay R$50 (US$25) a month to the porter to switch on the engine from time to time to prevent it from deteriorating. After the sale, Samantha nowadays celebrates not only the economic gains but also the fact that she has got rid of the chores associated with consumption:

I think it makes sense financially [not having a car] and I have removed some stress in my life: not having to take the car to the garage for repairs, not having to do the official vehicle fitness test. (Samantha, 59, university professor)

Standing idle in the street or garage, without an effective functionality, the car ended up contradicting the prevailing social view that it is an indispensable product, thus signaling the possibility of life without a car. The promise of autonomy and mobility expressed in the product’s advertising is erased little by little by a practice that shows that life is possible without it. Whether consciously perceived by the consumer or not, this period characterizes a kind of divestment ritual (McCracken, 1988), which allows the meanings that motivated the purchase to be “cooled” and legitimizes the decision to sell.

**Types of Abandonment**

The interviews suggest three distinct types of abandonment: (1) contingent, (2) positional, and (3) ideological. Their delimitation is based on the articulation of factors that explain not only the decision per se but also the negotiation and communication of meanings it gives rise to. Thus, the research considered four main dimensions: (1) tensions that motivate abandonment, (2) repertoire of meanings related to the consumption of the category, (3) repertoire of meanings related to the abandonment of the category, and finally (4) the social negotiation of these meanings.

**Contingent**

In this kind of abandonment, the consumer is forced to leave the category due to a conflict between objectives or practical and material limitations. Although they value the functional and/or symbolic benefits that the product confers, matters related to money, health, access to the product, space, family pressure, may lead the consumer to abandon it. The case of Jorge shall be used to illustrate this type of abandonment.
Passionate About Cars, Like All Brazilians

Jorge is a 26-year-old systems analyst who left Salvador a year ago to work in Rio de Janeiro, the second largest city of Brazil. His fiancée accompanied him in this move, but he left his car behind in his home town. Jorge admits that he is passionate about cars: “I love cars, I’m fanatical about automobile racing.” The young man says he has an affectionate relationship with his cars, even going so far as to give his first car — bought with money earned in his first job — a name. Jorge still takes part in an online community of car owners that he never abandoned even after selling his car, a decision he justifies in the following way:

First of all because I moved to a city that had better public transport than Salvador. A car is also very expensive to run. There, for example, I didn’t pay rent and here I have to. So I transferred the cost of my car to my home. Here I have the subway, its closer to my work, access is quicker and cheaper than having to pay for insurance, gasoline, without forgetting the cost of depreciation itself. There is also the matter of garages: as I work in the center of town its more complicated to have a car and have to rent a garage on a monthly basis. On top of all that, my apartment block doesn’t have a garage. (Jorge, 26, systems analyst)

The above account suggests that the sale of the automobile seems to “tangibilize” various gains for Jorge. The new job, the move to a bigger city with “access” to quality public transport, and the new house and his wedding. In this context, momentarily not having a car acquires the meanings of these changes and achievements. Although satisfied with the solution, Jorge does not identify himself with the abandonment of the category, as he loves cars. During the interview, when asked to create a campaign to encourage the nonconsumption of cars, he lamented: “You know, it’s difficult to communicate something you don’t really believe in yourself.” He then proposes the following message:

I would use two images: one is a guy with a car and an empty piggybank. The other is a guy without a car but his piggybank is full of coins. As a slogan: Better to be a relaxed pedestrian than a heavily indebted and stressed out driver. (Jorge, 26, systems analyst)

The appeal of financial rationality evidencing that the consumer should seek “financial tranquility” suggests that the origin of the nonconsumption of the car lies in this conflict and, in the final analysis, signals the limitation of the main character’s financial resources, rather than a rejection of the car ideal per se. Thus, the ad that suggests the abandonment of the car also reaffirms the car as a symbol of status, achievement, and financial “tranquility.” In this way, Jorge seems to share the positive meanings related to the consumption of cars with other consumers.
This interviewee also describes his abandonment as provisional and situational and comments that, in the future, when he has children, he intends to restructure his lifestyle, buying a bigger apartment, with a garage, to include this product in his consumption profile.

The stories of other people interviewed for this research appear to show that, though recognizing the benefits of the initiative, those who perform contingent abandonment suffer as a result of their losses, especially the emotional and social ones. They thus experience feelings akin to mourning.

Yolanda (75, retired teacher), Norberto (73, retired engineer), and Mary (59, physiotherapist), for example, speak of health constraints and family pressure as the main reason for selling their cars. Although they used the product very little, the three interviewees associated the abandonment of the category with the loss of status related to youth and an autonomous and independent existence.

Questioned about whether her abandonment decision could serve as an example for other consumers, Yolanda (75, retired teacher) made a point of affirming that her decision to sell constituted a recognition that her life had changed:

> It’s not right to want to go on driving, a little old granny, without seeing, without hearing, with my neck hurting (...). So I also come to terms with certain things. (Yolanda, 75, retired teacher)

Yolanda reports various physical limitations tangibilized by the abandonment of the category. The words “I come to terms” suggest nostalgia, a certain sadness and resignation, a kind of mourning that evidences an abandonment that was not desired by the consumer but, on the contrary, was imposed by her age. Another section of the interview confirms the contingent nature of this abandonment, revealing a potential consumer, who is resigned to the fact that she was deprived of her consumption:

> Saying what I would like is not going to resolve anything. I am happy that one day, for 38 years, I was able to have a car, and use it for good things. That time has passed, I made good use of it. (...). I am very grateful to God for this opportunity I had. It was a very useful, very valuable good. (Yolanda, 75, retired teacher)

Mary (59, physiotherapist) kept her car parked in front of the main entrance to her apartment building for a year practically without using it. She comments that she kept it “out of habit” and explained why she ended up deciding to sell it: “I gradually realized that the car was simply falling apart. I felt so bad about it! But it took me such a long time to make a decision because I had always had a car.”
Mary’s account reminds us of the loss of a beloved one. Even though they engender suffering, deaths caused by degenerative illnesses in many cases represent a relief — for both the sick person and the family. Mary’s words seem to be imbued with this feeling, with the car’s deterioration consoling her in her abandonment of it, adding: “If I buy another car, I’ll have the same problem, so that’s the end of it! Now I don’t have a car.”

Here we have a situation in which abandonment is not generated by low involvement with the category but, on the contrary, by the affective ties that the consumer has with this product.

For Nancy (33, economist), the sale of her car is tied to her separation. The interviewee said that, in the division of marital assets with her ex-husband, she “forewent” the car because he was the one who used it on a daily basis. The abandonment of the category, in her case, helps to signal her new status. She comments that today she counts on the support of friends who have become “more available” and who invite her along when they go out together. As well as being a “tool” in the young person’s resocialization who is now once again single, the “lift” her friends give her is described by Nancy as a proof of their affection and care. However, she sees this as a temporary situation because the losses outweigh the benefits. Like Jorge, Nancy intends to resume this consumption before long, evidencing that she shares a repertoire of positive meanings regarding the product with other consumers of the category: “For me a car means comfort. As well as the freedom to go anywhere and travel whenever you want to.”

POSITIONAL ABANDONMENT

This is motivated by the demarcation of a symbolic distance in relation to consumers of the category. Thus, the decision expresses a difference and generates a sense of distinct identity for individuals. The case of Leonardo will be used to illustrate this type of abandonment:

Leonardo, Happy Without a Car…

In 2008, Leonardo (27, administrator) was able to celebrate two personal achievements: obtaining a master’s degree and passing a public competition. Many would expect that a good salary and job stability would be
good enough reasons for this young man (single, no children) to change his old car with its 110 thousand mileage. Instead he simply preferred to sell the car. Leonardo recognizes that he is different from most people: “I have a tendency to question things a lot. I’m critical about everything. Many peoples think I disagree just for the sake of it.”

Leonardo comes from a family that changed cars fairly regularly but did not have a “passion for the product.” He was also influenced by the circumstances surrounding the purchase of his first car. Leonardo worked for five months in London, managing to save $3,000. On his return to Brazil, he decided to buy a car with the money he had saved. He went to a foreign exchange bureau, changed all the dollars and took the money to the car dealer:

I said to myself at that time that something was wrong. “I’m giving away all my money!”. I worked for five months without spending anything. So I said “Christ! All my money's gone!” (Leonardo, 27, administrator)

This account shows that payment in actual notes made Leonardo more aware of the purchase effort and the costs involved in buying a car. This experience broadened the young man’s perception regarding the elements that constitute a cost/benefit trade-off.

At no time did I think that: ok, now I am making money I’ll change my car. I thought, this car has a cost X, it will cost me, like, four thousand dollars just for fuel. If I buy another car, the cost per year will increase and that makes no sense! The only benefit it will bring me, which is transportation, won’t compensate for this deficit. (Leonardo, 27, administrator)

During the course of his interview, Leonardo does not consider the symbolic benefits that a car could confer on its owner, and explains his perception of this product:

I don’t hate cars, it’s just a matter of choice. It’s rational. Because if you have a car and don’t use it, but think that it provides you with some kind of benefit, you’re not thinking straight. It’s just not rational. (Leonardo, 27, administrator)

Not needing the status that a car confers puts Leonardo in a differentiated position: of someone who controls and dominates his consumption rather than being dominated by it. The abandonment of the automobile seems to contribute to a sense of identity that is differentiated from the majority, based, above all, on rationality and, in his own words, “taking more conscious decisions.” Leonardo thus uses the discourse suggested by “project identity,” as described by Cherrier (2009), who questions
positional consumption and considers that material goods create a sense of identity for individuals.

Thus, concomitantly, the abandonment of the automobile helps him to construct the desired ego announced right at the beginning of the interview: someone who is critical, systematic, and whose behavior is different from that of the majority. Hogg and Banister (2001) affirm that to maintain a positive self-image — or at least a normative self-standard — consumers avoid risks, rejecting products, brands, or suppliers that are associated with undesired stereotypes. In this case, the abandonment of the automobile also reinforces a positive self-concept (rational) based on a critical stance toward the product’s usual meanings: if a car confers status, representing most people’s dream of consumption, then Leonardo expresses his differentiated place in the world through abandonment.

When asked whether his behavior should be followed by society as a whole, he affirmed that he was not concerned about ecological issues and that he could only be taken as an example due to the rationality and conscious nature of his decision. “Because I don’t support the idea of not having car. I am happy without a car and communicate this happiness to other people.” As a “simplifier,” in accordance with Iyer and Muncy’s (2009) definition, Leonardo considers that it is a personal decision, pertaining to the category at issue and not an ideological one.

In positional abandonment, individuals no longer share the positive meanings that once led them to purchase the product with the category’s consumers. Roberto (59, university professor) is another interviewee who questions the meanings usually associated with the car, related to economic welfare and the optimization of time. When describing someone who decides to sell their car, he comments:

He is a lucky person not to need a car. He has a very urban life and is an independent person. He has no financial problems. He is simply fleeing from the torture of having a car in this country which is expensive and difficult, with the traffic, stress and traffic jams. (...) I think it’s a “luxury” (fantastic) not to have to face all these hassles just to have a car”. (Roberto, 59, university professor)

This discourse is in contrast with the advertising campaigns the industry usually creates and is different from the one expressed by Jorge (an example of contingent abandonment). Robert describes — always from an individual perspective — his negative experience with the car (impolite drivers, traffic jams, and stress) and, thus, distances himself from the meanings of “freedom,” “autonomy,” “safety,” and “tranquility.” usually associated with the product. The abandonment of the car is not related to financial
difficulties but to an opportunity to exercise choice, and is thus understood as a “luxury.”

**IDEOLOGICAL ABANDONMENT**

It is different from other types on account of its collective perspective. Consumers believe that society (and not just themselves individually) should abandon or rethink that consumption. The case of Eurico (biologist, 34) will be used to illustrate this type of abandonment.

**Eurico: Helps Improve Society’s Quality of Life**

Eurico is 34 years old and, as a biologist, works as a consultant in a non-governmental organization that encourages recycling. He also collaborates with an organization whose aim is to promote alternative means of transport based on human propulsion (bicycles, roller-skates, skates, etc). For Eurico, the aim of abandoning the automobile is to improve the urban space.

In his interview he associates the car with individualism, with private space and isolation, to the detriment of the collective space. His decision to abandon the category, however, is not based on his own individual considerations — on the advantages and disadvantages for him as a consumer -, but on its impact on society at large. As a solution for the problems generated by motorized transport, Eurico advocates the use of the bicycle. More than a sustainable means of transport, the bicycle represents a philosophy of social interaction and intervention, which puts him on a par with the “global impact consumer” defined by Iyer and Muney (2009):

My everyday choices are in tune with my opinion that the bicycle is more appropriate from a socio-environmental point of view. It is thus part of a coherent point of view. I do selective waste collection, economize water, ride a bike. It’s part of a series of things we are trying to do to help improve society’s quality of life, which begins with our own quality of life.

During his interview, Eurico gradually deconstructs the positive meanings usually associated with the car, transferring them to the bicycle. This young man makes a point of highlighting the individual gains: “maintenance cost savings” or “I feel less safe driving, I have been mugged more times driving my car” or “when you go by bike you seldom arrive late
because you are not held up in traffic.” Finally, he emphasizes the health benefits, showing that he does not share the repertoire of meanings adopted by the category’s consumers.

More than celebrating the gains he obtained by abandoning the automobile in the personal sphere, this young person communicates these advantages in a wide-ranging and collective way in conferences or through the internet: “I speak with everyone, journalists on TV programs, the media, even with friends, with my wife, my relatives, the subject often comes up.”

When asked to create a campaign to encourage the abandonment of the category, Eurico resorts to images he has already used to divulge the “Bicicletada,” a bicycle tour during the rush hour. Riding around the city’s jammed-up streets, the initiative’s aim is to demonstrate the bicycle’s mobility and the advantages of this choice based on the contrast with all those motionless cars:

A would show a river that gradually turns into a flow of bicycles. A line of bicycles would be more or less like water. A river of bicycles running in the middle of traffic jam. A river that finds its way and meanders between stones, never stopping. Always flowing!

The “sale” of the idea of nonconsumption is based on the benefits it brings: the end of traffic jams, the flowing traffic, compared to the water of a river that meanders between stones (cars) and continues along its course. His discourse is well grounded and shows that it belongs to a person who proposes to be the spokesperson for a cause.

In the case of Eurico, the philosophy of a more sustainable form of consumption, tangibilized by the abandonment of the automobile, also helps to construct a differentiated and positive identity. Cherrier (2009) describes the “hero identity” as a way of acting that requires dedication and commitment to redefine and restructure daily life, articulating new meanings for consumption. Eurico adopts this role, sparing no efforts to communicate his ideas, whether through formal means or through the meanings generated by his own behavior. Indeed, he prides himself on already having convinced “various people to adopt the bicycle as a means of transport.”

Another example of ideological abandonment is Cristiano (65, cyclo-activist). The interviewee lost one of his legs 31 years ago and after going through a long recovery process currently takes part in Iron Biker competitions where he was won various prizes. Cristiano is a benchmark in the physiotherapy and physical education worlds, as well as being an idol among bicycle fans. At the time of the interview he had 2400 “friends” in an online community, most of whom were fans he conquered through his conferences and social work.
Cristiano describes himself as a cyclo-activist engaged in the cause of traffic education and the use of the bicycle as an alternative means of transport. The interviewee makes a point of giving his opinion in relation to this means of transport: the problem is not the car but the way our society uses it. When asked what constitutes conscious use he highlights, for example, that it should never be used for small trips or by only one person going about his daily affairs.

In Cristiano’s case, the car seems to play a fundamental role in the construction of his identity and self-esteem: not due to its consumption, but due precisely to its absence in his daily life. A disabled person driving a car already constitutes the greatest sign of autonomy and triumph over adversity, but Cristiano goes even further by questioning this consumption and using a bicycle to get around: “It’s very interesting, no-one can imagine a guy without a leg pedaling his bike. Would you be able to imagine this? It’s outside society’s mental framework.”

The campaign in favor of the conscious use of the car is, in Cristiano’s case, also a campaign in favor of the bicycle and the social inclusion of the elderly and physically handicapped. His behavior exhibits characteristics of the hero-identity described by Cherrier (2009). Cristiano takes part in events like the World Car-Free Day because he believes that this event helps to develop people’s awareness: “one can’t be the alienated and lazy person who only goes to places by car”. He also gives talks on the theme of mobility and is a guest on TV programs that discuss the issue of the car in big cities. By being outside “society’s mental framework” he has found a new place for himself in it. He is no longer excluded because he is “handicapped” or “old,” but is someone who, based on his questioning of the greatest symbol of contemporary mobility (the car), has become an example capable of forming a different identity as well as stimulating discussions on the theme.

**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The present research broadens our knowledge of abandonment, showing that it is a process rather than a decision or an action circumscribed by a given moment. This research identifies three types of abandonment: contingent, positional, and ideological. This understanding enables a comprehension to be achieved that goes beyond antichoice and allows us to situate it among other kinds of anticonsumption. Thus, the present research
evidences that abandonment can have characteristics of inertia or procrastination (abandoning use without effectively taking this decision); nonchoice, when the product is no longer within the consumer’s means (contingent abandonment); rejection (positional abandonment); and, finally, resistance (ideological abandonment). Abandonment can be associated with feelings of loss and grief, as an experience of loss of status. However, in other cases, it can operate affirmative differentiation, helping individuals to constitute positive identities and signal important changes in their lives.

In abandonment, the individual foregoes the functionality related to the product. The symbolic associations, however, continue to be used, created and manipulated even after this happens. When they speak of the benefits and advantages of abandonment, consumers appropriate, recreate and “take advantage” of the meanings of the discarded category.

From the perspective of governments and nongovernmental organizations, the present study may contribute to de-marketing efforts related to inappropriate consumptions and products that are harmful to health. According to Kozinets and Handelman (2004), the activist discourse, in the cases studied by them, borders on the “quasi-religious” speech that seeks to transform the behavior of the “mistaken” and “unenlightened” mass of consumers. The present research suggests alternative avenues: instead of undertaking an effort to make all individuals share a collective awareness (transforming all abandonment into the ideological kind), managers involved in this challenge can reinforce other logics that already exist, providing examples of practices and symbolic representations aligned with the other types of abandonment (contingent or positional). As suggested by Black and Cherrier (2010), more than engaging the consumer in a cause, a way of achieving a change in behavior may lie in the creation of an aura that is positive and aligned with the individual’s identity.

From the perspective of firms, an understanding of the various types of abandonment makes it possible to apply the antidotes that are most appropriate to each case. In the case of contingent abandonment, the motivation for desertion may reside in concrete problems: lack of money, space, time, comfort; negative impacts on health, the consumer’s welfare, etc. The solution for these problems is related to the development of new technologies and product concepts capable of minimizing these problems. Responding to contingent abandonment requires the engagement of corporate areas such as research and development, R&D, procurement, costs and marketing, with actions related to adjusting and expanding the portfolio of offerings, in order to cater to segments that are no longer attracted by the solution currently offered by the company.
In positional abandonment, the obstacles reside in the product’s symbolic aspects. The category represents meanings that are obsolete or in conflict with consumers’ values. Another possibility is that the offering has been “embraced” by dissociative groups that are rejected by the target audience. The solution thus lies mainly in a coordinated effort by marketing and communication sectors, leading the process of renewing the category or brand’s associations and the creation of connections with positive groups (to the detriment of segments that are not desired by the company).

Ideological abandonment, on the other hand, demands the company’s engagement in broader societal discussions and requires decisions by the board of administration and the discussion of strategic aspects, such as the organization’s values and mission (which may conflict with those of society); the review of technologies and the provision of more sustainable offerings. This task may require the action of not only the marketing and corporate communication areas but also the legal, R&D, and production areas.

It is fundamental to take heed of ideological abandonment even in cases where it represents a small fraction of deserters from the company’s offerings. As the present research shows, consumers who practice ideological abandonment become an active pole for the production of symbolic content that may be adopted by future contingent or positional deserters and legitimize wholesale abandonment.

REFERENCES


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