

For an understanding of the material world: a biography of the brand 'Apple'

GEORGIANA LUNA BATINGA¹MARCELO DE REZENDE PINTO¹LUDMILA DE VASCONCELOS MACHADO GUIMARÃES²¹ PONTIFÍCIA UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA DE MINAS GERAIS (PUC MINAS) / DEPARTAMENTO DE ADMINISTRAÇÃO, BELO HORIZONTE – MG, BRAZIL² CENTRO FEDERAL DE EDUCAÇÃO TECNOLÓGICA DE MINAS GERAIS (CEFET-MG) / DEPARTAMENTO DE ADMINISTRAÇÃO, BELO HORIZONTE – MG, BRAZIL

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to reflect on how objects can be characterized as predicates of culture, considering that objects are fundamental nonhuman actors in the experiences of everyday life, connecting humans through their functions and symbolism. This discussion, still incipient in the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), deserves attention from researchers since following the life of these objects means to understand their effects on individual and collective subjectivity. The theoretical assumption that supports the reflection presented in this article is the influence that the material world exerts on human life, as objects are determinant in daily life. Objects- tangible or intangible, such as material goods, brands, animals- have the capacity to act socially, are endowed with the power of induction and action, a property that does not belong only to humans (LAW, 2001). They also have a social life that can be built from their various uses and contexts, thus accumulating a cultural biography. This study adopts a qualitative-interpretative approach, and the methodology consists of writing the biography of the brand 'Apple' and pointing out its agency. The discussion is based on the discursive analysis of the brand's advertising pieces, through the theoretical approach of the Semiolinguistic Theory (ST) by French linguist Patrick Charaudeau.

Keywords: Material culture. Consumption. Materiality. Objects. Biography of things.

Por uma compreensão do mundo material: uma biografia da marca Apple

Resumo

Este estudo reflete sobre como as coisas ou os objetos¹, enquanto atores não humanos fundamentais nas experiências de consumo da vida cotidiana, que conectam os humanos mediante suas funções e simbolismos, podem ser caracterizados enquanto predicados da cultura. Essa discussão, ainda incipiente na *consumer culture theory* (CCT), merece a atenção dos pesquisadores do campo, pois acompanhar a vida desses objetos significa, em grande parte, entender seus efeitos na subjetividade individual e coletiva. O pressuposto teórico que sustenta a reflexão proposta neste artigo é a influência que o mundo material exerce na vida dos humanos, ou seja, como coisas ou objetos são determinantes na vida diária. As coisas – tangíveis ou intangíveis, tais como bens materiais, objetos, marcas, animais – têm uma capacidade de agir socialmente, são dotadas de poder de indução e de ação, uma propriedade que não pertence apenas aos humanos (LAW, 2001). Elas também têm uma vida social, que pode ser construída a partir de seus diversos usos e contextos, acumulando, desse modo, uma biografia cultural. Para a condução deste estudo, adotou-se uma perspectiva qualitativa-interpretativa e o caminho metodológico escolhido considera, ao final, escrever a biografia da marca Apple e apontar sua agência, apoiando-se na análise discursiva das peças publicitárias da marca, por meio da teoria da semiolinguística (TS), abordagem proposta pelo linguista francês Patrick Charaudeau.

Palavras-chave: Cultura material. Consumo. Materialidade. Coisas. Biografia das coisas.

Por una comprensión del mundo material: Una biografía de la marca Apple

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio se centra en reflexionar sobre cómo las cosas o los objetos, como actores no humanos fundamentales en las experiencias de consumo de la vida cotidiana que conectan a los humanos mediante sus funciones y simbolismos, pueden caracterizarse como predicados de la cultura. Esta discusión, aún incipiente en la *Consumer Culture Theory* (CCT), merece atención de los investigadores del campo, pues, acompañar la vida de esos objetos es, en gran parte, entender sus efectos en la subjetividad individual y colectiva. El presupuesto teórico que sostiene la reflexión propuesta en este artículo es la influencia que el mundo material ejerce en la vida de los humanos, o sea, cómo las cosas u objetos son determinantes en la vida diaria. Las cosas –tangibles o intangibles, tales como bienes materiales, objetos, marcas, animales– poseen una capacidad de actuar socialmente, están dotadas de poder de inducción y de acción, una propiedad que no pertenece sólo a los humanos (LAW, 2001). Ellas también poseen una vida social que puede construirse a partir de sus diversos usos y contextos, acumulando, así, una biografía cultural. Para la conducción de este estudio se adoptó una perspectiva cualitativa-interpretativa y el camino metodológico escogido que considera, al final, escribir la biografía de la marca Apple e indicar su agencia, se apoya en el análisis discursivo de las piezas publicitarias de la marca, a través del abordaje teórico-metodológico de la Teoría de la Semiología (TS), del lingüista francés Patrick Charaudeau.

Palabras clave: Cultura material. Consumo. Materialidad. Cosas. Biografía de las cosas.

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¹ The terms "things" and "objects" are used in this article in conceptually similar way.

INTRODUCTION

One way to contemplate and understand humanity is to direct attention to the fundamental materiality present in each life (MILLER, 2013). This statement makes sense because it is not only obvious that things or objects fulfil practical functions that are indispensable to daily life, but also because they serve symbolic functions overlapping with their structural conditions. Similarly, objects are always present in social or economic contexts, rituals, collections, museum collections, and daily life. "Not only does this condition assure them of the power to become visible, but it also stabilizes certain sociocultural categories, demarcating borders between them, regarded as specific forms of individual and collective subjectivity" (GONÇALVES, 2007, p. 7).

One lives surrounded by a large and varied number of things or material objects that significantly circulate through social life, and they present themselves as an extensive, diversified "web of objects bearing their social and symbolic relevance, as well as their subjective repercussions on each other, which ends up going unnoticed because of proximity, the familiarity aspect, and the obvious character they assume" (GONÇALVES, 2007, p. 14). "All of them are replete with senses, meanings, and resignification by those who attribute values and symbolisms to them, which are the fruits of the inter-subjective and interactive experiences of individuals, among themselves, and with the rest of the world" (DOHMANN, 2010, p. 71-72).

Because objects circulate through social life, it is essential to monitor and describe them, observing their movements and changes in the various social and symbolic contexts, e.g., mercantile exchange, ceremonial exchanges, or institutional and discursive spaces such as collections, museums, and so-called cultural heritage. Monitoring the life of objects through their displacement between these contexts means, to a great extent, to understand the very dynamics of social and cultural life, its conflicts, ambiguities, and paradoxes, as well as its effects on individual and collective subjectivity.

Objects may also assume the function of triggering memories of either people or places, since they connect people with each other and the world (GONÇALVES, 2007, p. 15). In this way, it may be said that "there is a soul in things, referring to subjective landscapes where the subjects—[re]situated by objects—are found through the memorial aspects that things entail as an expression of the materiality of the culture of a certain social group" (DOHMANN, 2010, p. 72). Based on the arguments put forward by the thinkers to whom he alludes, Miller (2013) builds support for what he called the *humanity of things*, in which he concludes that objects are not important because they are evident, but for the opposite reason. Their importance lies in their ability to be either invisible or unmentioned. The less one is aware of them, the more they can determine expectations, by subtly establishing their agency over humans.

The belief that objects have a social life, as put forward by Appadurai (2010), strengthens the understanding that it is possible to attribute a biography to them. When assuming this condition, the researcher's position may shift from the consumer to the article consumed. Moreover, the complexity of this issue may be verified, which, in principle, is aimed at selling the advertised product, but also includes the goal of disseminating values and ideals. Although this debate is addressed in studies related to material and consumption culture (BELK, 1988; MCCRACKEN, 2003; MILLER, 2007) and more direct approaches to *consumer culture theory* (CCT), (CURASI, PRICE and ARNOULD, 2004; BORGERSON, 2005; EPP and PRICE, 2009; BADJE, 2013; JENKINS, MOLESWORTH and SCULLION, 2014) to quote some, there is still a gap to be found, which is considered by this study. Accordingly, this study aims to present the biography of a brand based on the analysis of its advertising campaigns over a certain period of time.

As the object of study, the Apple brand was chosen: an intangible, immaterial article, which creates connections and materializes in human life through its products. The analysis of its life trajectory leads to its agency capacity, as, when exchanging subjectivities—with people and other goods—one of its main features is that it [re]defines the concept of technology, introduces new consumption and *design* patterns, and ends up modifying the relationship between people and technological objects. The most common and frequent path in studies dealing with this question necessarily originates from human actors and arrives at the understanding of things; however, the proposal envisaged here is to originate from things and observe them in motion in an attempt to understand humanity.

Methodologically, this study also contributes to the field of CCT by employing the discursive analysis of brand advertisements, through the theoretical-methodological approach of semiolinguistic theory (ST) by Patrick Charaudeau. As explained by

Cardoso, Hanashiro and Barros (2016), the local and foreign studies that adopt the perspective of text/image discursive semiotics are developing. ST is a part of an interactive/communication-based discourse analysis (DA), according to which language contains several dimensions, including implicit and explicit ones, and maintains a close relationship with the psychosocial context in which it is carried out. Hence, it is possible to work not only with the visible semiologic configuration, but also “with the knowledge that is added by the subjects during the production and interpretation processes of this act” (CHARAUDEAU, 1996).

CONSUMPTION, CONSUMPTION CULTURE, AND MATERIAL CULTURE

First, it is necessary to consider the strong link between consumption, consumption culture, and material culture, theoretical constructs found in the extensive set of research themes comprising CCT. By engaging in dialogue with subjects such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, media and discourse, critical studies, and gender studies, CCT fosters the expansion of the intellectual horizons of the field, which is essentially multidisciplinary. Finally, it leads to a profusion of interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise. In this sense, it may be concluded that CCT has “enlightened the contextual, symbolic, and experiential aspects encompassing all consumption stages of a good, whether it is tangible or intangible, including interpretative, critical, emancipatory, and transformative perspectives” (JOY and LI, 2012, p. 143-144). It has become the wide lens that legitimizes marketing researchers. Moreover, CCT has allowed for the possibility of using multiple lenses to examine consumption and consumer behavior, thus generating multiple structures of understanding (JOY and LI, 2012).

Among these, material culture stands out. It focuses on the construction and possible interpretations of the relationships between goods (objects or things) and people, with all their complexities and variations. This converges with anthropological theories defending the intense interaction of these goods (MILLER, 2007). Objects are fundamental to defining identity, and in some cases, they are the very extent of this identity (BELK, 1988, 1989; TIAN and BELK, 2005). Although these constructions are complex, and often replete with ambivalence, the act of looking at articles begins with Sherry’s seminal article entitled “*Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective*” (1983), and Belk’s (1988) similarly influential “*Possessions and the Extended Self*” (JOY and LI, 2012). By adopting Kopytoff’s theory of singularization (1986), Epp and Price (2009) present the agency of the furniture objects in a house throughout the development of a family’s individual and collective identity.

On the other hand, Jenkins, Molesworth, and Scullion (2014) discuss the ambiguities and disorder expressed in the social life of objects circulating through interpersonal loans, and they adopt in their study the theoretical contribution of social life and the biography of things. Badje (2013) proposes a theoretical discussion between CCT and the actor-network theory (ANT), pointing out the ways in which they overlap, but also differ in this immense web of complexity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity of the materiality and social life of things. That is, “material culture studies function through the specificity of material objects so that ultimately, a deeper understanding of the specificity of a humanity inseparable from its materiality can be developed” (MILLER, 2007, p. 47). In Belk (1988), the relationship between goods (objects) and consumers (humans) was found through the concept of extended *self*. According to the author, the connection established between the consumer and the article is so strong that it becomes an extension of the self, reflecting its own identity. Here, articles are not limited to tangible goods. They may also be represented by people, brands, services, places, and other intangible elements. The intense relationships between objects and people may reach a stage of sacrality, or divinity.

The concept of trademark worship was explored by Belk and Tumbat (2005), who investigated the cultural aspects of the Apple brand and its founder, Steve Jobs, adopted by some brand consumers, identified as brand evangelists in their study. This absolute loyalty to the brand makes it something sacred, even damaging other brands (BELK, WALLENDORF and SHERRY, 1989). Hence, consumption may be viewed as an aspect of materialism that reduces humanity and shifts its focus to the object; however, it has been noted that it is precisely the object-focused approach that enriches the sense of humanity, since it can no longer be separated from its intrinsic materiality (MILLER, 2007).

TO UNDERSTAND THE MATERIAL WORLD

By focusing on understanding the material world, the intense and vital presence of objects inundating people's daily lives is contemplated: things or objects are regarded as non-human actors essential to the everyday consumption experiences, connecting humans through their functions and symbolisms, thereby characterizing them as true culture predicates. By defending this point of view, Appadurai (2010) takes a stance against the theoretical current that considers either the material world or the world of things as inanimate, inert, and mute, gaining life and movement only through humans. According to the author, while pursuing the things in themselves, their meanings can be found inscribed in their forms, uses, and trajectories. Kopytoff (2010) puts forward the idea that it is possible to understand the dynamics of the material world through the construction of its biographies. His approach focuses on observing and monitoring the circulation of objects in contemporary societies. According to him, by monitoring the very object and its trajectory in a specific social context, one can identify a crucial question upon which to build its biographic approach.

Humans can make choices that have an eminently political character. It is in this sense that Appadurai (2010) argues that things, like people, have a social life. There is an indissociable relationship between the material world and human beings, in the sense that when objects are watched closely, an effect is produced that can elucidate the human and social contexts of their existence. This turns them into powerful sources of information, as the analyses by Appadurai (2010), Kopytoff (2010), and Gell (2010) point out. The understanding of the material world, through the development of biographies, must be focused on fostering a reflection on the multiple tasks of meanings attributed to things and human experiences and how they are projected throughout the course of social and daily lives.

Moreover, by monitoring their trajectories, lives, and biographies, the concept of agency, as introduced by Latour (2005), is found. According to this concept, things or non-humans—tangible or intangible, such as material articles, objects, images, brands, animals—are no longer artifacts and can act socially. Agency deals with fostering actions in everyday situations that may cause transformations (LAW, 2001; LATOUR, 2005). The concept of agency is conceived by Latour (2005) as the capacity of action that may affect or influence others to carry out a new action. From this viewpoint, an object is not only understood as something gifted with soul and life, but also as being able to alter, mediate, or subsidize actions. Furthermore, non-humans are no longer intermediaries; they take the place of mediators. Just like humans, they can affect choices and possibilities in other actors, whether human or non-human.

METHODOLOGICAL PATH

This article is characterized as a qualitative exploratory study aligned to an interpretative approach (VERGARA and CALDAS, 2005; MORGAN, 2007). The data collection strategy adopted was document research, which enables "the observation of the process of maturation or evolution of individuals, groups, concepts, knowledge, behaviors, mentalities, practices, etc." (CELLARD, 2008, p. 295). These documents are used as sources of information, cues and clarification that explain certain questions and serve as proof for others, as per the researcher's interests (FIGUEIREDO, 2007). These documents were collected in a virtual or cyberspace environment through consultation with specialized websites. "There have been increasingly reliable databases offering information, as well as web pages specialized in specific themes, research centers, and blogs" (SANTOS, 2009, p. 137-138, our translation). All these websites are valuable sources of information for research, enabling faster access to documents, along with the dissemination and availability of scientific publications.

The corpus of this study consists of document data on the history of Apple Inc. and its advertising material in print media. Given the immense collection of images accumulated over its forty years of history, a set of criteria was established to select the ads to be analyzed. Thus, to address the aim of this article — to describe the biography of the brand in question—we selected the most representative ads in relation to its meanings and [im]materialities in the period between the 1970s and 2007. This selection enabled a temporal comparison of the characteristics of the discourse and the manifestations of the brand from the launch of its first product until the debut of the iPhone. To analyze the advertising images in question, this study was methodologically based on the ST by Patrick Charaudeau, an interactive/communications-based branch of DA, according to which language comprises several dimensions. The prefix *semio* stems from *semiosis*, which means that the construction of meaning occurs through the form/meaning in the different semiological systems, and the *linguistics*

term is linked to language. Its epistemological premise is that "language maintains a close link with the context in which it is carried out and in which a sender and receiver participate. As they are different, several interpretations are attributed" (CÔRREA-ROSADO, 2014, p. 3).

ST is closely connected to this study, as it puts the discourse in a context linking language to social phenomena, such as action and influence. A proposal of considerable potential to analyze social discourses such as politics, media, advertising, and literature is outlined. It is based on the fact that language maintains a close relationship with the psychosocial context in which it is carried out, considering "the act of language as the product of a context in which a sender and receiver participate, resulting in a dual dimension: the implicit and the explicit dimensions" (CÔRREA-ROSADO, 2014, p. 3); hence, one may assess the visible semiological setting represented in the image, as well as the knowledge triggered by the subjects during the production and interpretation processes of this act.

According to Charaudeau (2005), the signal exists in the discourse only. Hence, according to ST, the language act provides semiological tags that function as carriers of "systematized meaning instructions;" they form a semantic core and receive information from the communication situation so that the signal may effectively "mean" (CÔRREA-ROSADO, 2014, p. 2). The construction of meaning is carried out through a form/meaning relationship that may occur in different semiological systems, resulting from the discursive operations of subjective entities (CHARAUDEAU, 1996). At least four theoretical assumptions inspire and guide the author's AD: i) the relationship between situational and linguistic plans; ii) the way it integrates the macro and microsocial plans into its model; iii) the importance attributed to social interactions; and iv) the particular way in which the author conceives the intentionality of the subjects involved in language acts (CHARAUDEAU, 2005).

To achieve what was proposed in this study, ST was used to provide support for the analysis of discursive strategies in the promotion of their image through advertising, to understand the linguistic choices and related discursive effects, and finally, to understand the articulation between the verbal and iconic form to construct the meanings of the object analyzed. To arrive at an adequate understanding of the trajectory of the brand through the analysis of its advertising, a section must be devoted to describing the history of the brand: its creation, founders, and cultural context of each time, etc.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF APPLE

Apple was chosen as the source of this study corpus for being an emblematic brand, with notorious sales success, and for being synonymous with innovation, creativity, design, and originality. Also, the brand is constantly present in the media, TV shows, documentaries, films, studies, dissertations, and theses, especially in the fields of technology, marketing, communication, and advertising. The history of Apple began when two college students, Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs, pursued their dream of developing smaller, more accessible personal computers. In 1976, they founded the Apple Computer Company in the garage of Jobs' parents. The Apple I personal computer was the first product to be released. However, only a year later, the company achieved notoriety and managed to overcome their direct competitor, Microsoft, with the release of Apple II (KAHNEY, 2008; GALLO, 2010, 2013).

The Apple II was known as the first computer to have a CPU made of plastic with colored graphic design. Three years later, the failure of the release of the Apple III and the complicated failure of the Lisa computer, named after Jobs' daughter, culminated in his departure from the company after a disagreement with the CEO at the time. Not even the thunderous release of the Macintosh in 1984 was able to contain the crisis that had been sparked in the company (KAHNEY, 2008). In 1991, Apple resumed sales with the launch of the Power Book, a portable computer that achieved success in sales and reconquered its audience. Despite this and all the actions taken, in 1995, the company was still in crisis because of legal problems involving Microsoft and Windows 95, which might have been considered a carbon copy of the Mac graphical interface. Later, Apple underwent a massive change with the return of Steve Jobs to the company in 1996 (KAHNEY, 2008; GALLO, 2010, 2013).

After the period of crises experienced by the company, a wave of product releases, including the iMac, the iPod, the iPhone, and iTunes, along with the iTunes Store, a virtual store with millions of songs available for purchase online, grabbed the attention of the media and thousands of consumers, contributing to the popularization of the brand (KAHNEY, 2008). Since the end of

2011 and following the death of Steve Jobs, Apple has been facing the challenge of showing that it can maintain its capacity of innovating and revolutionizing the market, thus influencing society. The company's history, marked by highs and lows ever since its founding, turned it into a profitable brand, with significant sales success (KAHNEY, 2008; GALLO, 2010, 2013).

THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE APPLE BRAND BASED ON A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ITS ADVERTISING

The advertising images used in this study are regarded as fragments of the Apple brand biography that tell its history, evolution, and transformation, highlighting its agency. Figure 1 shows the first advertisement for the Apple II computer, published in the late 1970s. The image on the left shows a man using the computer at the kitchen table, while a woman is washing the dishes in the background. This typically domestic image calls for the deconstruction of the hegemonic discourse that was typical of that generation, which stated that domestic computers were inaccessible to the common man. The models that previously filled the space of a room, such as supercomputers, are replaced by the personal computer (PC), or domestic use computers. Apple was a pioneer, and it was responsible for creating the first PC, the Apple I, in 1976. From that moment on, the brand ushered in a new era of PCs, when computers became accessible to anyone, anywhere; they were small enough to fit in the home and intuitive enough to be used by anyone. The discursive strategy indicates how the announcement creates a dialogue between the macro and microsocial plans, foreseen in Charaudeau's ST (1996), by intentionally addressing the discussion and trying to alter it.

On the right of the ad, there is a lengthy text description of the product. The descriptive text genre predominates in the structure of the ad, since the sender extensively highlights the qualities and physical features of the product. In addition, it humanizes the machine and brings it closer to the consumer, while defending the title of the page, located on the right, that *"the household computer is ready to work, play, and grow with you."* It states that the computer is complete and ready to use; this information made sense, as the first version of the Apple I was only a motherboard whose parts had to be acquired to assemble it. By saying *grow with you*, the brand establishes a clear connection with the consumer, indicating proximity and partnership; moreover, it presents itself as an extension of its own *self* (BELK, 1988). As new technologies are incorporated, the brand expands its potential, taking the user with it.

Figure 1

First announcement of Apple II



Source: Hayashi (2011).

In the early 1980s, Apple launched an advertising campaign with the slogan, “What kind of man owns his own computer?” As shown in Figure 2, the campaign uses genius characters who made history with their incredible inventions and/or contributions to mankind, such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Henry Ford, and Thomas Edison. The brand draws a creative comparison between the remarkable legacies left by these men in their remote generations, and the common contemporary man. The sentences associated with each of these characters are committed to the idea that it is possible to do more and better, provided that you have an Apple.

A semiological resource put forward by Patrick Charaudeau was found in the set of ads. His message cannot be understood only in the visible semiological setting, represented in the images and texts, but it is also necessary to access “the knowledge that is triggered by the subjects during the production and interpretation processes of this act.” To understand the message that the sender wishes to send, the stories of these characters must be acknowledged. They come from the social context in which the communications situation is located so that the signal represented therein may effectively mean, that is, be interpreted, recognized, and make sense to those who read. The sentences recall the achievements of these iconic characters: “Jefferson had one of the best minds of 1776, but today you can make better decisions with an Apple”; “Ford spent the better part of 1903 tackling the same details you will handle in minutes with an Apple”; and “Edison had over 1,800 patents in his name, but you can be just as inventive with an Apple”.

Figure 2
Apple II Advertisements



Source: Hayashi (2011).

In 1984, Apple launched the *"Think Different"* campaign for the launch of the Macintosh, as shown in Figure 3. Considered the most popular Apple ad, it was inspired by the novel 1984 by George Orwell (KAHNEY, 2008). With print advertisements, outdoor media (*billboards*, wall paintings, bus ceilings and posters), and a one-minute video aired on television, the campaign used personalities known for their political, economic, and artistic achievements, such as Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Pablo Picasso, Maria Callas, Thomas Edison, Miles Davis, Jim Henson, Ted Turner, John Lennon, Yoko Ono, Frank Sinatra, and Muhammad Ali, among others.

Figure 3

Think Different Campaign



Source: Coutinho (2011).

The theme of the video aired on broadcast television celebrated the *"misfits,"* the ones who do not fit into the norms or standards; those who dare to challenge things differently, *"because they are the ones who are crazy enough to think they can change the world."* Both the print media and video maintain the same discursive tone by accentuating the features of those characters who dared to *"think different,"* so *"they made a difference."* To think different would mean to see things differently, not to follow rules, not to fit the status quo. People who adopt this attitude, according to Apple, can change and boost the world to move ahead.

The differentiating factor of this campaign is that the company breaks away from the explicit, framed, and objective discourse. By doing this, it highlights the strength of the brand when it does not need to use more than one language to try to persuade the consumer through the physical and functional attributes of the product. By taking up all the screen with the image of the character and using its small logo as a mere detail of the advertisement, the brand assumes a new, implicit, subtle, and intersubjective discourse, highlighting its immaterial, abstract characteristics.

There is no direct or indirect reference to the Macintosh product, either in the form of text, or image. This is a rhetorical discourse composed of only a black and white image, mostly with a closed angle, and a title, represented by the slogan that has a provocative, reflexive proposal: *"Think Different,"* suggesting to the reader to associate the image with the text and brand logo. It is found that the brand was based on a discourse based on immateriality, supported by the interdiscursive resources to send its message by evoking the achievements and life paths of those characters.

The discursive game between the implicit and the explicit dimensions are clearly seen in this campaign, which was conducted by a persuasive pitch that carries at least three implicit narratives in itself: i) the characters' walks of life, acknowledging them as personalities who *"made a difference"* through their achievements, reproduced in different scales and contexts; ii) the narrative of the brand that is associated with the same values as the characters and invites their readers to do the same, *"think*

different;” and (iii) the third narrative drawn up by the reader-consumer, who recognizes the characters’ history, associates them with the brand, and feels compelled to share the same values. The images of the personalities were able to (re)invent and reinforce what is being said in the text—*Think different*—and they take the form of a narrative to trigger emotions, to effectively persuade.

In 1998, two years after the return of Steve Jobs to the company, Apple launched the “*iThink, therefore iMac*”, alluding to the famous sentence of the French philosopher René Descartes, “*I think, therefore I am.*” The campaign releases another version of the Macintosh, now named with the iMac abbreviation, a computer without floppy disks (CD only), with USB entries (it was the first computer to offer this), innovative *design*, and several color options, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Images of the iMac launch campaign



Source: Grabham (2018).

By changing the iMac configuration, the brand introduces a new concept of the PC to the market: colored computers, without a floppy disk drive, but with USB and CD drives. It was the beginning of the age of flash drives and the end of floppy disks. This changed the way data and transfer of users’ data was carried out, which strengthens the brand agency power. Some of the main campaign advertisement tag lines are: *i) Chic. Not Geek* (chic but not nerdy), which explains the sender’s intention to reach a new audience other than the “*geeks,*” that is, the technology aficionados. By emphasizing that it is “*chic*” and investing in design and colors, Apple aims to reach an audience that values style and beauty; *ii) Sorry, no beige*, which indicates the particular way the campaign author conceives the intentionality of the subjects involved in the language acts by erasing the predominant discourse that used to highlight the potential and features of the product. Furthermore, this is an attempt to build a new discourse attributing a symbolic capital to the iMac, making it stand out compared to the others.

Again, there are no references to the iMac as a personal computer: an iMac is an iMac. Also, the prefix “*i*” to the Mac abbreviation was used by the brand for the first time, and was later added to other products (e.g., the iPod, iPhone, and iPad). This is an idea of Jobs, as seen in the video *Steve Jobs Introduces the Original iMac*, a recording of the campaign launch that took place at the Apple Special Event in 1998 (COMPUTER HISTORY MUSEUM, 2016). The meaning originally assigned to the letter “*i*” was that it was an abbreviation of “*internet*” in order to tell users that it was a machine designed for navigating the web in a simple and fast way; however, it would also mean “*individual,*” “*instruct,*” “*inform,*” and “*inspire.*”

The apparent “*unpretentious*” decision of Apple adding the “*i*” to the names of all its products creates the opportunity to observe language in action and the effects produced by its use. Implicitly, the “*i*” prefix may also be understood as the English first person singular pronoun, “*I.*” This evokes the idea of Belk’s extended *self* (1988), almost pointing out to a hybridism between the product and the consumer. Even though this option is not featured in the formal discourse, it is

the result of an imaginary discursive created from the exchange occurring between sender and receiver, as disseminated in the ST approach.

The first iPod was launched in 2001, with the following discourse: *“With iPod, Apple has invented a whole new category of digital music player that lets you put your entire music collection in your pocket and listen to it wherever you go. Listening to music will never be the same again.”* This product stood out because it did not require the use of physical media and used digital music purchased on the iTunes store. The agency power of the brand is noticed again. This was marked by a campaign integrating a series of communication actions. They were black-colored silhouettes, representing boys and girls of different ages and styles, suggesting they belonged to several urban tribes, printed against live and cheerful colors, as shown by the images in Figure 5. All silhouettes have the iPod in hand, connected to earplugs, and they present movements suggesting a dance, since they are listening to music. In all pieces, the product appears in the color white, gaining prominence. In the ad footnotes there was a small text, which said: *“Welcome to the digital music revolution. 10,000 sounds in your pocket. Works with Mac or PC. More than a million sold.”* The campaign videos use the same format, with the difference of displaying the characters in movement, dancing to the sound of several musical rhythms.

The discursive strategy that takes a central role in this campaign is the persuasive appeal: a colorful visual, with a playful, jovial, relaxed, and innovative tone, which tries to induce its readers/consumers to identify with this *“new lifestyle”* inaugurated by the digital music revolution. Having an iPod meant to be in fashion and connected. The climate of innovation and novelty, which was the purpose of the new product created by the brand, stands out. It represented a revolution in the concept of the players at that time. Again, the brand did not accentuate the product features to highlight the experience it can provide — it used the [im]materiality discourse.

Figure 5

iPod launch campaign images



Source: Hayashi (2011).

Apple launched the first iPhone with the slogan *“We will reinvent the telephone”* (Figure 6). Steve Jobs officially released the product at the 2007 MacWorld, with a 68-minute speech based on rhetoric. He repeated the campaign slogan several times: *“Today, Apple is going to reinvent the phone, and here it is;”* *“So we have reinvented the telephone;”* and *“Today, Apple has reinvented the telephone,”* to mark the strength and positioning of the brand to negotiate subjectivities and affect everyone around them. This is a transcription of the first 3 minutes and 11 seconds of his speech:

[...] every once in a while, a revolutionary product comes along that *changes everything*. Apple has been very fortunate. It has been able to introduce a few of these into the world. In 1984, we introduced the Macintosh, it did not just change Apple. *It changed the whole computer industry*. In 2001, we introduced the first iPod, and it did not just change the way we all listen to music, *it changed the*

entire music industry. Well, today we are introducing three revolutionary products of this class. The first one is a *widescreen iPod* with touch controls. The second is a revolutionary mobile phone, and the third is a breakthrough Internet communications device. So, three things: a widescreen iPod with touch controls; a revolutionary mobile phone; and a breakthrough Internet communications device. An iPod, a phone... are you getting it? These are not three separate devices, this is one device, and we are calling it iPhone. *Today, Apple is going to reinvent the phone, and here it is.*

The “reinvention” of the phone actually occurred. That is, the relationship between individuals and their devices changed considerably from then on, which highlights the brand agency with humans.

Figure 6

The first iPhone



Source: Freire (2014).

FINAL REMARKS

While it is not clear from the motivations that led to it, this study aimed to present a biography of the Apple brand through the analysis of its advertising campaigns, describing its circulation and transformations throughout a representative period of time, as well as its effects on the lives of humans and non-humans. To achieve this, we referred to the ideas of Miller (2007), who believed that the best way to understand humanity is to focus on the fundamental intrinsic materiality found in everyone’s lives; the ideas of Appadurai (2010) and Kopytoff (2010), who believed that one must focus on the objects and understand and comprehend them as social life owners; and finally, Latour (2005), who expanded this idea and goes a little further, granting things the ability to act, affect, and influence the world around them.

Through their advertising discourse, the brands take the role of significant instances capable of providing a product with a symbolic, non-measurable, and priority value in relation to the commodity exchange value. To build the imaginary world and propose a universe with an organized meaning, brands employ seduction and persuasion mechanisms through rhetorical and semiotic constructs composed of rational elements and emotional constructs. Thus, the advertising studies serve as true sources that enable access to their history, since they reciprocally reflect values and social and cultural ideals built from social interactions. Moreover, they make it possible to see them as receivers and value producers in everyday consumption experiences, through their functions and symbolism, in their relationship with people and other objects. Advertising images have the ability to narrate brand historicity so that the functional features of their objects will only be proven through their use. This statement is verified by analyzing them and realizing that they reveal the brand’s values, along with its sense of connection, status, style, innovation, design, and creativity.

By writing its biography, based on the analysis of six representative brand ads, relevant details of the company's history were found, such as the strategies used to create an emotional connection with their consumers, their transformations, and their stances. For example, it was found that Apple went through a transition in the way it communicated regarding its products, shifting its stance. It went from a predominantly material, objective, explicit, and textual persuasion discourse, in which its main interest was the sale of its products, to an immaterial, subjective, implicit discourse focused on the abstract features of the product. Finally, the company took a new stance: to sell *an idea, a concept, a new lifestyle*. While Apple emphasized the information and functionalities of its products between the 1970s and 1990s, it started to highlight immaterial features, such as in the iMac and iPod ads from 2000 onwards. In these ads, the brand values were transmitted through rhetorical, lexical, and visual constructs based on emotions and experiences, founded in emotional dimensions. The Apple brand identity, today acknowledged as singular, was built on elements that individualized it, turning it into something admired and desired, and even sacred in some cases, finally, converting their users into evangelists (BELK and TUMBAT, 2005).

It is through trade and its circulation that objects acquire human attributes, and this is perceived in Apple when its cultural insertion is observed. That is, as long as objects increasingly share a social life, they increase their presence in everyday scenes. Their value is strengthened by the judgment of their users. Thus, two issues must be emphasized. Firstly, the brand highlights its agency with non-humans when it [re]configures the technology and communication markets, directing them to new concepts and values, such as design, marketing, simplicity, ergonomics, aesthetics, ease of use — incorporated into the PC market (KAHNEY, 2008). On the other hand, the brand highlights its agency with humans when it alters the relationship between people and technology, connecting them, making it indispensable to the contemporary way of life, and fostering individuals' inter-subjective and interactive experiences with each other and the rest of the world.

By promoting the consumption of its products, Apple creates intense connections between people and these objects, expressed in this inseparable materiality, present at different times and social contexts. Consequently, cultural, aesthetic, and technological conventions of the different contexts experienced by the brand stand out (MILLER, 2007). Throughout its social history, the brand has reinforced habits, practices, and methods of identification that mold and build; it provides experiences and breaks with conventions. With the Apple I, Apple broke barriers and made it accessible for anyone to have a computer; the iMac marked the end of floppy disks and introduced color and design to computers; the iPod revolutionized the music industry, and the iPhone changed the mobile phone industry. For future studies, we suggest exploring contemporary questions regarding the brand and its agency in consumers' lives and the technology market, among other dimensions. Moreover, it would be interesting to explore the symbolic, hedonistic, and experiential aspects of the brand product consumption: What does it mean to consume an Apple product? What message does one wish to send when they consume Apple products? What does Apple promise? What does it fulfill?

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Georgiana Luna Batinga

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1807-9824>

PhD in Business Administration, Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais (PUC-Minas), Belo Horizonte – MG, Brazil.
E-mail: georgiana.luna@gmail.com

Marcelo de Rezende Pinto

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3251-2460>

Doctor in Business Administration, Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG); Permanent Professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais (PUC-Minas), in the Graduate Program in Business Administration, Belo Horizonte – MG, Brazil. E-mail: marcrez@pucminas.br

Ludmila de Vasconcelos Machado Guimarães

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5741-0279>

PhD in Business Administration, Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG); Professor at the Federal Center for Technological Education of Minas Gerais (CEFET-MG), in the Graduate Program of Business Administration, Belo Horizonte – MG, Brazil. E-mail: ludmila@cefetmg.br