

The signification of jewelry in contemporary times: the perception of the consumer and the production of brand sense

A significação da joia na contemporaneidade: a percepção do consumidor e a produção de sentido das marcas

Clotilde Perez

PhD in Communication and Semiotics (PUC-SP) and Professor of Advertising and Semiotics (ECA-USP).

Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Comunicação e Artes, São Paulo (SP), Brasil.

Bruno Pompeu

PhD in Sciences of Communication (USP) and Professor of Advertising (ECA-USP and ESPM-SP).

Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Comunicação e Artes, São Paulo (SP), Brasil.

Introduction

Few product categories are so representative and expressive of the complex dynamics connected to the consumption phenomenon as jewelry. Even less manage to be, at the same time, so exemplary of all that involves, elicits, allows, provokes, and provides design. Speaking of jewelry in theoretical terms is walking through tortuous paths that touch on the production of meaning and the seek to satisfying needs, the human capacity to amalgamate meanings to things, and the employment of products for connecting with specific culturally constituted values. This is basically what this article is about, exploring as well the

<https://doi.org/10.46391/ALCEU.v21.ed44.2021.242>

ALCEU (Rio de Janeiro, online), V. 21, Nº 44, p.72-93, mai./ago. 2021

direct relation of these subjects with the challenges that contemporary advertising communication faces nowadays regarding its cultural function as a symbolic constructor, meaning producer, and articulator of aesthetic, behavioral, and ethical standards.

In a moment when the consumption of jewelry, i.e., of the products in a market category so symbolically expressive - since it handles objects that so emblematically match the material dimension of metal and stone with the plane of the symbolic, of luxury and dream - is in decline and a survey is conducted with the purpose of understanding the reasons for such and, most importantly, the potential ways out of this condition, the possibility of articulating the empirical and market knowledge with the theoretical and academic knowledge seems to us quite enriching. It is in this context that this article emerges, which seems to us to have relevant precisely due to the proposal of understanding the complex processes that result in consumption from a wide theoretical base that combines communication, marketing, and consumption with an empirical endeavor that goes through research with the consumer and the analysis of brand materials, as highlighted ahead.

Although studies on consumption motivations molded by culture, expressed in behaviors and identified by marketing procedures in different market segments are many and quite comprehensive (ARAUJO & TINOCO, 2015; MELO et al., 2016; PEREZ, 2020, for example), the present work is also justified for presenting a predominantly qualitative approach of interpretative nature that seeks to contribute simultaneously both with typically marketing thinking and academic reflection. The idea is to approximate the thinking that unfolds into market practices and methods stemming from understanding the contemporary consumer motivations to the more academic reflection of the communication field, committed to understanding the dynamics and social practices established and molded by consumption.

It is not a specific objective of this article to revisit the long - and interesting - history of jewelry and jewelry making. To those who want to get to know the subject, there are great Brazilian works to recommend (GOLA, 2008; DAYÉ et al., 2017; SOARES, 2001; SANTOS, 2001; MOL, 2009) that are dedicated to studying the general and regional histories of jewelry. There are also important international publications (EICHHORN-JOHANNSEN et al., 2013; TAIT, 2008; BLACK, 1998), all tackling the technical evolution of jewelry making, from the early days to nowadays, intertwined with the historical and cultural development of humanity.

What we are interested in highlighting, however, is that jewelry, as an advent of so-called modern design from the late 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, connects deeply with the consumption universe.

Approximately between 1850 and 1930, three generations of new professionals - some already nicknamed "designers" - dedicated their efforts to the immense task of conforming the structure and appearance of the artifacts for them to become attractive and efficient. Their target was no less than reconfiguring the world, with comfort and wellbeing for all (CARDOSO, 2012, p. 16).

The author refers to the more direct impacts of the industrial revolution on the house, the body, and people's daily lives through the large-scale manufacturing of the most varied products. Furniture, utensils, small devices, everything started to be produced by that emerging and promising industry. "Increasingly mechanized industries produce at scale, standardizing components, operating processes and assembly lines, studying times and methods, and, thus, conquering substantial production increases" (PIRATININGA, 1994, p. 8). And, in this context, jewelry - given that it is supported on the aesthetic dimension of materials, on the complexity and sophistication of the production processes, gaining meaning for being inserted in the dynamics of culture - seems to definitely meet with the world in which it had already demonstrated to exist so long before: a world sustained by the production-consumption logic, with products (goods or merchandise, as you wish, now conformed by design) serving as social demarcations, power demonstrations, sense and value vehicles, and, ultimately, as signs.

As all signs - bound, as Peirce (1993) had predicted, to expand and become even more complex -, jewelry goes through the modern era and arrives at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st loaded of apparently antagonistic meanings in its cultural significance process, yet absolutely consistent from the human-historical-social point of view. In other words: in a context closer to what would later come to be called consumer society, jewelry takes on meanings of differentiation, power, social demarcation, ostentation, and identity expression; at the same time in which, fulfilling loyalty to its more ancestral origin, it maintains its original meanings of permanence, transcendence, commitment, concreteness, and bond.

In a world that gives clear signs of suffering from values such as ephemerality, instantaneity, insecurity, superficiality, and profound moral crisis (BAUMAN, 2001 and 2008; LIPOVETSKY, 2004 and 2007; LYOTARD, 2010; GIDDENS, 1991; HAN, 2017), it seems interesting to imagine that jewelry could be the "perfect solution", the most attractive product from the symbolic viewpoint, being intensely sought by consumer citizens. However, this is not what happens. But why isn't it so? Why is the sector in crisis? Is there

<https://doi.org/10.46391/ALCEU.v21.ed44.2021.242>

ALCEU (Rio de Janeiro, online), V. 21, Nº 44, p.72-93, mai./ago. 2021

some kind of rejection? Do people no longer want to wear jewelry? Does youth not wear jewelry? These were some questions that led various entities in the sector (IBGM, Ajourio, Ajesp, and Ajomig, associations of jewelry makers from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Minas Gerais) to demand the "Significances" survey which now unfolds in this article.

No, it can't just be about an urban violence issue, given that cars, mobile phones, and other products knowingly targeted by thieves remain being consumed normally. Nor can one credit such a reduction in sales to an unfavorable economic context, since we are discussing a decline that antecedes the current crisis and, as is known, the lack of money was never an impediment for consumerist impulses. With the first more obvious hypotheses discarded, we move on to the survey's planning and execution, whose more conceptual results - about communication and consumption - and stemming reflections - about the current context - we share next.

Our objective with this work is to present a discussion about jewelry consumption in a theoretical interface with the studies on consumption and advertising communication, seeking to evince the centrality of these themes in understanding the typical dilemmas of contemporaneity. From the results of the already mentioned survey, we wish to demonstrate how consumption and communication - of jewelry in this case but with an evident similar effect on other areas and segments - intertwine nowadays as important instruments of construction, transformation, development, and acquisition of meaning.

1. Survey methodology

The investigative route started by the theoretical deepening of the historical and contemporary meanings of jewelry in our culture, specifically considering the Brazilian context. In this sense, as already indicated above, various Brazilian and foreign authors and works have brought prominent contributions. Also studied were the yearbooks and jewelry trend reports of the IBGM - Brazilian Institute of Gems and Metals (in partnership with Apex - the Brazilian Agency of Export and Investment Promotion), as well as the reports of Brazil Expression and *É do Rio!*. A publication of AjoRio - Association of the Jewelry Makers of Rio de Janeiro. Consulted as well as was the "National Survey of the Jewelry Consumer Market" report, with the contents of the survey carried out in 2005 by Ajesp in partnership with IBGM. All these reports composed the documental investigation and brought important contributions to the already started theoretical

reflection. It was from the scrutiny of this material, for example, that we arrived at the understanding of how the Brazilian jewelry market forms and structures itself.

The empirical research was robust, and the planning is basically divided into two fronts: (1) a public survey with in-depth interviews and discussion groups; and (2) a semiotic analysis of jewelry brands selected from the list of the brands most mentioned in the groups and interviews.

Hence, three discussion groups were conducted (COSTA, 2012) with consumers who were women of different age ranges and consumption profiles:

- Younger lovers (15 to 17 years old): girls who, despite their young age, demonstrate a taste for jewelry, consuming products of this segment. Even though this is a less frequent profile, the idea was precisely to understand what would have been the motivations and attractive values for this rare approximation;
- Older lovers (24 to 35 years old): women who, despite the already mentioned jewelry consumption decline trend, maintain this habit and this taste. The purpose was to identify what mechanisms would have worked in the maintenance of this type of bond, what values remain being desired;
- Older non-users (24 to 35 years old): women who, without "hating" jewelry (not "haters"), for some reason, stopped consuming such products (abandoners). Evidently, the objective, in this case, was to verify what would have made consumer bonds to break and, at the same time, what factors would have attracted their preference to other product categories.

Each group was composed of seven consumers selected from the recruitment of nine, thus ensuring the quality of the desired profile. The choice of women for carrying out the survey was based on their total predominance in the jewelry segment, both for purchasing and using, as per the IBGM (2005) National Jewelry Survey report, even though some growth in the purchasing and consumption by the male public has been observed. The script favored understanding the conception of jewelry and the different rituals for purchase, use, and possession in the distinct consumer profiles, permeated by direct stimulations and projective exercises, besides the task (pre-work) taken to the groups through photos presented and debated during the dynamics, with a focus on the use and possession (safekeeping) of the jewelry. The groups took place in August 2018 with a propitious environment and conditions.

Since the discussion groups ended up favoring women in a generally younger age range, we expanded the field to other consumer profiles through in-depth interviews (MEDINA, 1990; YASUDA & OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 79; MALHOTRA, 2012, p. 121; DUARTE, 2012; and BAUER & GASKELL, 2010, p. 64).

Three older women (45 to 70 years old) were interviewed with the objective of identifying possible differences in the meanings that jewelry has in their lives. Additionally, six other in-depth interviews were conducted with experienced salespeople from the sector - selected by convenience from the indication of institutions from the sector -, both from physical stores and those who sell jewelry in closed ateliers, given that these are quite distinct profiles of product exposure and commercialization. The goal of these interviews was to understand, from the production/commercialization perspective, what is the place of jewelry nowadays, and what are the main strengths and arguments for sale, as well as the fragilities and obstacles to commercialization. From these interviews, we also sought to discuss communicational aspects of stores, such as shop windows, merchandising, packaging, website, catalog, social networks, etc. The interviews took place in October and November of 2018.

Completing the planned and executed empirical effort, no longer drawing on the consumer as an information source (focus on reception) but now studying the market itself (focus on emission), we arrive at the semiotic analyses. Based on Peirce (1999) and Santaella (2004a and 2004b), we analyzed communicational materials of the brands - ads published in magazines, social network posts, and Internet pages provided by the institutions that enabled the study. Such materials allowed us to include in the analysis elements of the two brand dimensions available to the investigator's perspective: their expressiveness (logo, name, color...) and, at the same time, their offer (products, collections, stores...).

Thus, it is within these definitions and classifications [of the sign, proposed by Peirce] that one may seek the guiding principles for the analysis method of all the expression forms of the images and brands: name, color, sound, logotype, packaging..., in any medium in which they may show... (PEREZ, 2004, p. 151).

In general terms, the protocol route of analysis took place from three fundamental categories of Peirce's semiotic - firstness, secondness, and thirdness -, expressed, in this case, from the precepts of its speculative grammar, respectively, on the qualitative-iconic, singular-indicial, and conventional-symbolic planes. Therefore, it was possible to evaluate, under the same procedures, distinct materials such as those mentioned above. The brands chosen were H.Stern, Pandora, Swarovski, Tiffani, Vivara, Cartier, and Manoel

Bernardes, using as the selection criteria the fact that these were the most mentioned brands in the groups and in-depth interviews for the different consumer profiles.

The contemporary meanings of jewelry

The first and most important conclusion the survey arrived at is that there is no rejection of jewelry by the public. We consider this to be the most important of the findings because there was a premise suggested by the associations which called for the investigation that the main cause for the decline in sales for the segment would be a devaluation - rejection, uninterest - of the jewelry product itself.

But what was verified was that, contrary to what one could suppose or infer from common sense, jewelry remains an absolutely seducing product in its aesthetic aspects, attractive in its significance, and providential in its daily use, to the point that not even non-consumers of jewelry come to reject the product. Yes, they feel distanced from jewelry, especially the younger ones, yet they do not despise them - to the contrary, they demonstrate recognizing the value and the senses implicated in the use and possession of jewelry, but end up not knowing how nor when to use it.

In this sense, it is interesting to find, for example, that the consumer of this type of product ends up developing -from a combination of their own references as well as collective, social, and cultural ones - criteria that allow classifying certain pieces as jewelry or not. They are imprecise criteria in their rational constitution, difficult to explain through an organized verbal discourse, yet extremely clear in their function to separate what is and isn't jewelry, of delimiting through meanings what is within or outside this circle - which only evinces the symbolic relevance of this type of product and the strength of the meanings they acquire in contemporaneity.

Merchandise and things in general independently arouse the interest of various types of anthropology. (...) In the quality of objects of value, they occupy a central position in economic anthropology and, with equal importance, in the exchange or social anthropology in general, given they are the instrument of the act of representing. Analyzing things from the perspective of merchandise constitutes a starting point of great use for the interest in the material culture, renewed by the semiotic orientation (APPADURAI, 2008, p. 17).

The understanding that the consumption and circulation of objects, products, and brands are communicational practices has also been growing (PERNIOLA, 2005, p. 13). This understanding resonates with the studies by Appadurai (2008), Douglas & Isherwood (2009), and Miller (2013). And in the case of

jewelry, the communicative dimension is present in all production processes and even more so in the consumption rituals, as empiricism reinforced.

For more frequent consumers, jewelry works as a shield, protection. In a society characterized by the emptying of the institutions socially tasked with sanctioning the behaviors of individuals from clear and consensual normative references, judgment becomes a personal, commonplace, and feared practice. Each person feels free and encouraged to, stemming from their own convictions and particular way of seeing reality, judging (and almost always condemning) the behavior of others. And if the most efficient means to defend oneself against the judgment from others is not in the symbolic dimension of material culture and in consumption itself, where else could it be considering the transversality of consumption and the detraditionalization of institutions we have been undergoing lately (LIPOVETSKY, 2007, p. 50)? The words said by one of the group discussion participants are unequivocal when referring to the use of notably expensive jewelry: *"Yes, of course, I become immune. Who is capable of judging so much power?"*. It is in the use of a specific piece of jewelry that possibilities are found to avoid judgment, demonstrate power, and achieve a symbolic (self-) protection. "What is a product of meaning? It is one that gives you the sense of meaning to life" (PONDÉ, 2017, p. 52).

It is not new that expensive products that are desired by many and accessible to few achieve this elevated level of representation, delineating an unlikely and not always unison affinity between sociologists and anthropologists, with much having already been discussed about this role of consumption and of material culture in modern and contemporary societies. What was unexpected was that jewelry could reach such type of significance, superposing even products that are symbolically associated with social differentiation.

Mobile phones are products of extreme symbolic importance in the context of contemporary material consumption. Due to their communicational multifunctionality, omnipresence in everyday life, practically constant use almost always in direct contact with the body, and their high power to suggest an elevated status through the brand and the design, even possibly receiving customization applications both to the device itself and its system, they end up transforming into signs of the most valued. However, when confronted with jewelry, mobile phones end up being remitted by consumers to a semantic territory that is also marked by ephemerality and massification. More than that: mobile phones, like other technological

goods, represent at the same time various negative meanings such as imprisonment, excess of information, dependence, the annihilation of intimacy and privacy, etc.

However socially desired, important to the market, and symbolically expressive they may be, services and experiences also end up having their meanings relativized by consumers when confronted with jewelry products, especially when considering the younger consumer, who sees this type of consumption from the perspective of the person who receives and enjoys it, not that of who pays or hires. Yes, trips are ever more fruitful in providing striking and valued sensations; courses, tours, festivals, and several other possibilities of the experience market have been growing in this abstract and sensory dimension of consumption (LINDSTROM, 2007; MORAES, 2019). And they grow precisely for doing without materiality that wears, ends, or may be taken. On the contrary: residing at times on the expectation of before, at times in the memory of after, this type of consumption tends to idealization. The more chronologically distant from the product itself (product, show, trip), the better are the senses involved.

But what if the product category placed in comparison lacks semantic proximity with obsolescence or, to the contrary, has the power of raising the idea of perennity, eternity, of an extended time that transcends life? This is what ends up happening with jewelry because it gathers two important attributes for creating value and desire with the public: a socially relevant symbolic significance and little-expendable materiality, with less propensity to obsolescence. It seems important to stress that, when considering what was said above from the interpretation of what was discussed in the groups and interviews with the consumers, jewelry could reach an important symbolic level in this "world that, day by day, becomes a desert of meaning while it organizes more and more around a society of invisible commodities and its demanding and empowered consumers"(PONDÉ, 2017, p. 53).

Thinking about jewelry is also thinking of beauty (adornment, decoration); it is to recognize, in its use, an inevitable search for individual personal aesthetic improvement. The sparkle of gold, platinum, emerald, and diamond is a highly suggestive material aspect of this basic and indestructible meaning of jewelry: the capacity to embellish, seduce, and draw attention. And what we want, regardless of the cultural contour that is being considered, is beauty. In a society traversed by idealization (LIPOVETSKY, 2015), that ever more faces reality from its aesthetic dimension, how it looks - in detriment, as one knows, to the ethical dimension of the behaviors or the logical dimension, of world views -, beautifying products and procedures tend to occupy a high position in the imaginary list of desires.

<https://doi.org/10.46391/ALCEU.v21.ed44.2021.242>

ALCEU (Rio de Janeiro, online), V. 21, Nº 44, p.72-93, mai./ago. 2021

Hence, jewelry, makeup, clothing, shoes, and accessories on one side, plastic surgery, applications, cosmetics, medicines, and needles on the other side represent types of extremely attractive products (BAUMAN, 2008), as it was also possible to identify during the empiricism. Putting forward two of the most clearly polarizing of them - jewelry and plastic surgery -, what one sees is that both, each to its possibilities, express the unrelenting search for beauty. Yet, again in the comparison, jewelry ends up balancing itself on the semantic pondering that defines any consumption practice. It suggests perennity, enchants, brings the idea of rarity, dislocates the consumer to a superior exclusivity position, but is not definitive, does not cause physical pain, does not offer health risks, does not invade the body, does not generate side effects.

When thought about from an exchange ritual, very related to the acts of giving and receiving a gift, the symbolic potential of jewelry grows even more. From what one learns fundamentally with Mauss (2017, p. 183) and practically with McCracken (2003), it becomes evident how much the exchange ritual, in the jewelry universe, is powerful in its meaning transference capacity.

Often, the gift giver chooses a present because it has the properties of meaning that they wish to see transferred to the gift receiver. In fact, in many gift exchanges, it is intended that the receiver of the gift is also the receiver of symbolic properties that the gift contains (MCCRACKEN, 2003, p. 115).

What one extracts through the interpretation of the consumers' speech is surprising: in their view, a piece of jewelry that is given or received as a gift, for the high cost that it normally involves and everything it represents in the complex cultural dynamic of contemporaneity, arouses the meanings of effort, involvement, trust, and, especially, affection. This is an important conclusion because it is unthinkable without the undertaking of the survey, of the association between theoretical reflection and empirical practice. Let's see: it is precisely due to all its "flaws", all that could indicate is symbolic decline, that jewelry remains strong in its representation. It is by relinquishing functionality (of a mobile phone, for example), not being able to be idealized (as one does with a trip), and being less attractive and in-tune with the lenses and filters of digital photographs that shape us on social networks, that jewelry manages to represent, in the personal relationships it establishes and materializes, commitment and effort. In other words: it is in the understanding of its significance, unlikely and not at all obvious in the face of the cultural context in which we are inserted, that jewelry fulfills its role of binding, producing an effect of meaning, and generating significance.

Jewelry and consumption rituals

The application of a projective technique exercise carried out during the interview evinced how much associations with jewelry are positive, related to independence, beauty, sophistication, elegance, etc. For the younger consumers, jewels are associated with entering into the adult world, whereas it is the materialization of their fulfillment as women for the older participants. One may notice with some clarity how much jewelry consumption is quite ritualistic in both cases, well to the molds that the classical authors define (GENEPP, 2013; TURNER, 2013) and the approximations with consumption (TRINDADE & PEREZ, 2013; PEREZ, 2020). It is from its consumption - being gifted it, purchasing, possessing, using, etc. - that the consumer connects with the culturally constituted meanings she desires.

The ritual is an opportunity to state, evoke, mark, or revise the symbols and meanings agreed in the cultural order. In this measure, the ritual is a powerful and versatile tool for manipulating cultural meaning. Under the form of the classical "rite of passage", it is used to move an individual from a cultural category of person to another, and, hence, a set of symbolic properties may be abandoned, and another may be appropriated (MCCRACKEN, 2003, p. 114).

The main problem of social life is to fix meanings so that they remain stable for some time. Without conventional ways to select and fix agreed meanings, a minimum consensual basis is lacking for society. (...) Rituals are conventions that constitute visible public definitions. (...) Living without rituals is living without clear meanings. (...) Goods, under this perspective, are ritualistic accessories (DOUGLAS & ISHERWOOD, 2009, p. 112).

In this specific case investigated, the ritual of jewelry consumption imposes itself as necessary for the connection with the senses of the feminine. It may work as a symbolic means to access a cultural conception of "adult woman", entangled in meanings such as vanity and autonomy. In a context of generalized indetermination, it may also reinforce the meanings of being a woman. Here, the possibility opens for a large, deep, complex, polemic, and necessary discussion about the relationship between consumption and the new meanings of the feminine in contemporaneity. Not shying away from the challenge - new works exist for new problems -, we made a point to highlight this approximation of jewelry consumption with the ritualistic practices to reach another important point of the survey.

One cannot speak of consumption rituals nowadays without thinking at the same time about the shopping experience. It is certain that use and possession rituals - those most visible in this symbolic relation of people with products - take place more in an intimate, social, and daily sphere, far from the effective reach of brands or manufacturers. Yet one cannot ignore the importance that the purchasing process (search,

trying on, comparison, counseling) has on the construction of this ritual so necessary to this and many other markets.

In this sense, a full opening of the jewelry market to what one may call experience marketing or sensory marketing may be noticed. In the epigraph of the work by Lindstrom (2007), Benjamin Franklin evinces the strength of the sensitive experience: "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I shall understand".

The approach of sensory marketing consists of treating the client in symbiosis with the brand. The challenge is to penetrate the human mind on a deep level, using sensory strategies for the effect. A strategy is defined as sensory when it appeals to one or more senses of the human mind (RODRIGUES & HULTÉN, 2014, p. 114).

However, within the specific scope of the investigation from which this article stems, it was revealed that the jewelry consumption experience is not always good. The search ritual, for example, is quite impaired.

Coated of meanings quite different from the backstage manufacturing condition, the area intended for the public [in stores] is that in which the magic of consumption prevails. In it, wonders multiply, and a sovereign relationship between goods and people materializes. (...) The store converts into what we may call a "communicational space", in which products become consumer goods upon acquiring the human condition (ROCHA, FRID, & CORBO, 2016, p. 169).

As much as this is known, in the specific case of jewelry stores, not many potentialities of consumption environments are explored. Seeing that, in the overall view of people - include here makers, store owners, and salespeople - jewelry is a symbol of commitment, the characteristic practices of the process of searching for a product end up being prevented. The typical behaviors of "I'm just browsing", "I came to see the novelties", and "no commitment" are impossible.

This distancing is further accented with the fact that the shop windows often do not contribute to inviting the visit or to construct meaning. Exposing the pieces almost always restrictedly, in too-small spaces and supports, implicate the need for the approximation of the braver and more determined consumer. We say brave because, with this approximation, one takes the risk of the salesperson's immediate approach, who, in a recurring practice of commerce, ends up generating a sense of intimidation.

In the ritual dynamic, there is a certain predictable and "mandatory" sequentiality that the jewelry market seems to ignore or not take into account. Just as the engagement antecedes the marriage and fasting precedes the feast, the search is a means for the purchasing, and trying out is a condition for the effectuation

of consumption. So much so that, if there is not a favoring of this specific type of ritual - as the most diverse market sectors have been doing, from automobile dealers to beauty parlors -, the symbolic connection is deflated, and the rationality senses superpose, inevitably hampering or hindering, if not preventing, the final decision in favor of the jewel.

The function of publicity in jewelry consumption

Another highlighted result of the survey is the finding that jewelry is not enough as an attractive sign in contemporaneity. It is "all the best", as the consumers more enthusiastic with the segment say but is not self-sufficient in its production of meaning. And no product or good is. As anthropologists and consumption semioticians demonstrate, it is much in function of their contiguity that the senses produced by a certain object are constituted. It is in the combination of this thing with that other thing that the desired meanings are achieved. Especially in a world context in which individualism grows, however, with Brazil being an extremely relational country in which social practices are directed from and to others, the juxtaposition of products is a relevant strategy in this balance.

Yet, the jewelry market, in its typical advertising communication, seems to go in another direction. It is not rare - to the contrary, it is the rule - to find ads that, in the eagerness to highlight the aesthetic properties of the pieces, end up decontextualizing them. Infinite backgrounds and impersonalized models (with no expression or attitude, i.e., lifeless) are the maximum manifestations of this type of communication, which, as observed in the survey, more chase away and create semantic voids than seduce, enchant, invite, or attract. How many jewelry advertising pieces (in traditional media or social networks, whichever) are based on the aesthetic cliché of the nude body covered only with a necklace, a bracelet, or a ring?

While brands in other segments present their products in a contextualized way, with others inserted into a more suggestive scenography, with models in use situations, jewels insist on the idea of being presented alone, isolated, without context, in this museum aesthetic, therefore, withdrawn. The semiotic analysis of the campaigns of the already listed brands proves all this. Does the jewel appear highlighted, valuing its forms and beauty? Yes. But it does not semantically approach the consumer. It delights the eyes but does not suggest use, besides always being too self-referential. It is important to consider what Everardo Rocha and Cláudia Pereira say about one of the functions of advertising:

<https://doi.org/10.46391/ALCEU.v21.ed44.2021.242>

ALCEU (Rio de Janeiro, online), V. 21, Nº 44, p.72-93, mai./ago. 2021

Among the multiple narratives that construct the symbolic universe we live in, one of them may be taken as absolutely central in the modern-contemporary imagination. This is about the advertising narrative. (...) Advertising is the narrative of consumption; it teaches us to consume, confers meaning to goods, attributes them a symbolic value, helps us classify things and people, reproduces our values and beliefs (2013, p. 21).

Consumption, as a complex phenomenon guided on the gap that exists between individual existence and belonging to a collective, is carried out in symbolic terms in the daily dynamism. So much so that one of the most urgent functions of contemporary advertising is to give meaning to products and brands precisely in this complex and challenging reality. We may not even be aware of it, but we only buy a specific piece of clothing because we learn - with soap operas, friends, fashion shows, Instagram, people on the streets, and, still today, advertising - how, where, with what, and with whom to use it. The juxtaposition of a product with another, the desired attitude, the predicted gestures, the demanding context, the propitious occasion - all this is culturally constructed by dint of the mechanisms that constitute the cultural and market system in which we are all inserted, consumers and brands.

A possibility that may be quite promising for the jewelry market is to learn with the didacticism and mimetic effect that has been supporting fashion consumption for a long time. However much there may be an emphasis on the launch of a new brand bag or a new eyewear model, for example, the entire communication is contextualized, integrating product-concept-consumer. It is not about evincing aesthetic or symbolic attributes, reinforcing already inlaid meanings of the products in question. It is about demonstrating didactically and mimetically how that different bracelet or that bolder ring may be inserted in the consumer's daily life, attributing them (to the consumer) the positive senses that they so yearn for their life (PEREZ & POMPEU, 2020). Less prestigious retail websites or less vain product categories have already been experimenting with another aesthetic, giving new and important functions to advertising. Upon presenting their products in scenes that emulate the commonplace of everyday life, as if being caught in the act or unpretentious posts - and, please, don't confuse here with something that has been accustomed to being called *street style* -, they demonstrate how the products should be used. And it cannot be denied that the effect is positive. In a society that learns everything from contents that pass instantly through screens, this type of advertising fully fulfills its meaning of amalgamating the products with the senses.

Another finding that emerged from the semiotic analysis of the brand communications is that there is a conceptual confusion between seduction and mystery. They are not synonymous. In the search for valuing a given conception of sensuality, based on an alleged show-and-hide atmosphere, brands end up

going towards a too-hermetic communication, an empty concept, without associations of meaning. In fact, seduction, sensuality, and the association of consumption with sex are strategic paths consecrated in advertising. However, in this specific case of jewelry, the survey showed that one does not achieve this generation of meaning nor other desired values. The search for the idea of seduction slips on the trap of mystery. As abstract as it may come to be, there has to be a clear bond among the theme of a given product collection, the jewel being offered, and the consumer - which rarely happens.

Final considerations

Resuming the objective that led us to the survey presented herein, we noticed that an important learning was the finding of the inexistence of rejection to jewelry, the initial assumption. From this initial finding, we sought to deepen the meanings of jewelry to the consumers, and this revealed to be an extremely profitable path about consumption rituals, with privilege for the use ritual and the moments in which the jewelry was gifted, especially from the bias of who received the gift. The symbolic distancing from jewelry, present in younger consumers, were reasoned on jewelry's systematic self-referential advertising communication, presenting it decontextualized from use, as could be observed in the semiotic analyses of the jewelry brands, in which the centrality of the jewel object was enough, not creating meaningful narratives through usage experiences, for example. This was another result of the survey with a significant impact on the semiotic thinking about jewelry, with profitable possibilities of marketing in product and, especially, advertising actions.

Although it seems that the results presented above have relevance, as has already been said, due to their potential of practical application and theoretical reflection proposal, we do not minimize the limitations inherent to this survey. Throughout the text, we attempted to demonstrate how theoretical knowledge of consumption and advertising may contribute to understanding the complex processes through which consumption practices in contemporaneity take place, as well as to the occasional elaboration of strategies that may contribute to the development of the jewelry market. From an empirical survey of qualitative nature carried out with the consumer audience and with jewelry salespeople, also including a semiotic analysis of the materials from jewelry brands, we arrived at some interpretations that, based on a comprehensive anthropology theoretical referential, may be relevant to the field of communication and the

jewelry market at the same time. Nevertheless, next, we point out possibilities for continuing and complementing this study.

Other audience profiles, a greater representativity of other brand types, the more comprehensive the base material can be from where the analysis and interpretations stem, and from where one extracts the conclusions, more robust and valid the results tend to be. In our specific case, we had to deal with limitations of time, budget, and technical resources. However, within what was possible, we always sought the maximum exploitation of the methods and techniques used, maintaining at the same time, loyalty to the thoroughness that characterizes academic research and respect to the more contemporary methodological principles (CANEVACCI, 2013), with openness to the stupors that perchance showed.

And that, in this sense of supplying the limitations, other surveys may be conducted coming to broaden the understanding and deepening the contributions. For example, other semiotic analyses would be welcome - of other materials such as shop windows, catalogs, store ambiance, products. Research efforts of quantitative nature would also only come to add, providing numerical and statistical clarity to the dimension of what is surveyed here as a result.

The critical nature of the current context is recognized on several fronts, especially those that involve social, cultural, and economic aspects (POMPEU, 2016), directly impacting the market and offering new challenges to the academic environment. If, in the recent past, we already had a diverse consumer market in itself, nowadays, we have consumers at an unprecedented level of individualization (HAN, 2018, p. 115) that may take on the most varied forms, with equally unpredictable and diversified needs. In this sense, thinking about the jewelry consumer but with refraction to various other markets, it is fundamental to take into account that, in Brazil, we live with all consumer possibilities: with the traditional consumer who expresses the classical values, conservatives who are focused on the intimate pleasures and self-sufficiency. There is the consumer who values ostentation, who is guided by exaggeration, the exacerbation of the brand signs, who seeks in jewelry a means of demarcating elevated social status and richness, very centered on consumption, including of jewelry, for the view of others. And there is also the consumer more connected with contemporary values, in search of humanistic, ecological, and ethical values. And, to cope with this diversity, jewelry needs to express the values that people desire, break this idea that the material is limiting, bet on hybrid and youthful language, explore artisanal, mythical, and technological processes.

It is about grand, complex, diverse, and costly efforts, but which have at their heart the understanding of the consumer. A consumer who, unlike what arrogant gurus claim, does not seem to do without materiality. To the contrary: "the more humanity seeks to reach the conceptualization of the immaterial, the more important the specific form of its materialization is" (MILLER, 2013, p. 114). Hence the studies - such as this one - that interlace consumption, material culture, and communication become so relevant.

It has been long since the relationship between brands and individuals is no longer guided by the market principles that brought us to the current days. Nowadays, there seems to be a new symbolic negotiation between consumption promoting institutions and people seeking meaning in the things they buy. Han (2018, p. 12) tells us that "digital communication deconstructs distance in a generalized way. The deconstruction of spatial distance accompanies the erosion of mental distance". With these statements being almost undeniable, it becomes easy to understand the growth of expectations on the part of consumers and the increase of the challenges imposed on brands. Ever closer, one within reach of the other in a matter of a few seconds and fast touches, yet not always (almost never) agreeing on principles, objectives, and logic - after all, we are talking about people and companies -, friction, repulse, and incomprehension become easier. So the understanding, the adjusting, the affinity, and speaking the same language are so necessary nowadays for the success of any brand or company that wishes to prosper through consumption, reinforcing, even more, the place of advertising in this process.

Clotilde Perez

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3062-4087>

Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Comunicação e Artes, São Paulo (SP), Brasil.

PhD in Communication and Semiotics (PUC-SP)

E-mail: cloperez@terra.com.br

Bruno Pompeu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2829-5803>

Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Comunicação e Artes, São Paulo (SP), Brasil.

PhD in Sciences of Communication (ECA-USP)

E-mail: brupompeu@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.46391/ALCEU.v21.ed44.2021.242>

ALCEU (Rio de Janeiro, online), V. 21, Nº 44, p.72-93, mai./ago. 2021

Received on: April 18, 2020.

Approved on: August 31, 2020.

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Abstract

The relationship established in the field consumption is complex and increasingly challenging. As theories show (Sociology and Antropology), consumption involves in a ritualistic, market, conjunctive and relational logic, a symbolic dimension (of meanings), a material dimension (of products) and a human dimension (of consumers). This article derives from an investigative effort that embraces theory and empiricism, trying to understand the dilemmas and the challenges of the consumption of jewels in the present days. From the study carried out with a qualitative approach and interpretative theoretical paradigm, we propose here discussions and reflections about the development on the Brazilian jeweler market, the symbolic consumption in contemporaneity and the effective role of advertising communication in the dynamics of consumption.

Keywords: Jewelry. Senses of jewelry. Consumption. Material culture. Semiotics.

Resumo

São complexas e cada vez mais desafiadoras as relações estabelecidas no âmbito do consumo. Como demonstram as teorias (sociologia e antropologia), o consumo envolve em uma lógica ritualística, mercadológica, vinculativa e relacional uma dimensão simbólica (dos significados), uma dimensão material (dos produtos) e uma dimensão humana (dos consumidores). Este artigo deriva de um esforço investigativo que abarca teoria e empiria, procurando entender os dilemas e os desafios do consumo de joias nos dias atuais. A partir do estudo realizado, de abordagem qualitativa e paradigma teórico interpretativista, propomos aqui discussões e reflexões sobre o desenvolvimento do mercado joalheiro no Brasil, o consumo simbólico na contemporaneidade e o efetivo papel da comunicação publicitária nas dinâmicas do consumo.

Palavras-chave: Joia. Sentidos da joia. Consumo. Cultura material. Semiótica.

Resumen

Las relaciones establecidas en el contexto del consumo son complejas y cada vez más desafiantes. Como demuestran las teorías (sociología y antropología), el consumo implica, en una lógica ritualista, de marketing, vinculante y relacional, una dimensión simbólica (de significados), una dimensión material (de productos) y una dimensión humana (de los consumidores). Este artículo deriva de un esfuerzo de investigación que abarca la teoría y el empirismo, buscando comprender los dilemas y desafíos del consumo de joyas en la actualidad. Con base en el estudio realizado, con un enfoque cualitativo y un paradigma teórico interpretativo, proponemos aquí discusiones y reflexiones sobre el desarrollo del mercado de la joyería en Brasil, el consumo simbólico en los tiempos contemporáneos y el papel efectivo de las relaciones establecidas por la comunicación publicitaria en la dinámica del consumo.

Palabras clave: Joyería. Sentidos de la joya. Consumo. Cultura material. Semiótica.

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