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CIGARETTE ABANDONMENT AND RITUALS: UNDERSTANDING SMOKING CESSATION SYMBOLISM

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ABSTRACT

Giving up smoking benefits smokers' health and increasing the smoking cessation rate can save many lives. Several advances have been made in understand the impact of pharmacotherapies and media campaigns on smoking cessation, however, most of these studies concentrate on the physical or cognitive aspects. In consumption studies, very little attention has been focused on investigating abandonment and, more specifically, its symbolic dimension. The present study aims to investigate meanings that motivate and arise from the abandonment of cigarettes. To do this, it uses rituals as a conceptual vehicle to understand the experience of smoking and giving up cigarettes. This study used a qualitative methodology to collect and analyze the data generated by one-on-one semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 Brazilian ex-smokers. The analysis suggests that rather than being a discrete event, an action or decision that is circumscribed by a given moment, abandonment is in fact a process. Results suggests that ex-smokers undertake a wide range of actions that serve as rituals capable of individually and socially creating and negotiating meanings of order, transformation and community, where abandonment the abandonment of cigarettes can be offered as a connection, gift, sacrifice that make relations special and even magical.

Keywords: cigarettes, abandonment, consumption ritual

RESUMO

Abandonar o consumo do cigarro traz benefícios para a saúde dos fumantes e pode salvar vidas. Boa parte dos estudos recentes sobre o tema se concentram nos aspectos físicos da dependência do cigarro e no efeito de medicamentos ou na dimensão cognitiva, relacionada ao impacto das campanhas antitabagistas.Nos estudos de consumo, pouco se investigou sobre o abandono, sobretudo, sua dimensão simbólica. O presente trabalho busca investigar significados que motivam e surgem a partir do abandono do cigarro. Para isso, utiliza-se dos rituais como arcabouço conceitual para entender a experiência de fumar e abandonar o cigarro. Esse estudo utiliza-se de metodologia qualitativa de pesquisa para coletar e analisar dados gerados a partir de entrevistas individuais em profundidade, com 15 ex-fumantes brasileiros. A análise sugere que ex-fumantes realizam diversas ações que servem como rituais capazes criar e negociar tanto individual quanto socialmentel os significados de ordem, comunidade e transformação.

Palavras-chave: cigarro, abandono, consumo ritual

According to the World Health Organization, tobacco kills nearly six million people a year and thus accounts for one in 10 adult deaths (WHO, 2012). Giving up smoking benefits smokers' health and increasing the smoking cessation rate can save many lives. Despite important developments in tobacco control, the consumption of tobacco products is increasing globally (WHO, 2012) and US national data for the 1991-2010 period shows no consistent upward trend in the population cessation rate during this two-decade period (ZHU ET AL, 2012).

In consumption studies, very little attention has been focused on investigating abandonment and, more specifically, its symbolic dimension. The present study aims to investigate meanings that motivate and arise from the abandonment of cigarettes. To do this, it uses rituals as a conceptual vehicle to understand the experience of smoking and giving up cigarettes.

Ritual framework has contributed towards an understanding of the symbolic dimension of consumption (ROOK, 1985) and the movement of cultural meaning carried out by consumer goods (MCCRACKEN, 1986). The initial assumption that the experience of smoking and giving up cigarettes can be framed as ritual behavior draws on Belk's (1989) affirmation that individuals also create and manipulate the meanings contained in products through anti-consumption. Thus, in addition to its substantive importance, related to the challenge

of encouraging smoking cessation, the present study can contribute to a conceptual reflection about the symbolic dimension of anti-consumption, more specifically the case of abandonment. This study used a qualitative methodology to collect and analyze the data generated by one-on-one semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 Brazilian ex-smokers.

RITUALS

Over the past 20 years, ritual framework has been used in diverse contexts in consumer behavior research, serving as an analytical framework for the interpretation of public and collective actions such as Thanksgiving Day (WALLENDORF and ARNOULD, 1991), Christmas (MCKECHINIE and TYNAN, 2006), Halloween (BELK, 1990) and Ramadan (SANDIKCI AND OMERAKI, 2007), in addition to group and family activities such as family heirlooms (CURASI, PRICE and ARNOULD, 1998); sales meetings at home (GAINER and FISCHER, 1991), debutante out balls (ESCALAS, 1993), consumption of art (GAINER, 1995), funeral rituals (BONSU, 2001) and also private rituals such as grooming rituals (ROOK and LEVY, 1983; ROOK, 1985) and shopping experiences (JOHNSTONE and CONROY, 2005). It has also contributed towards an understanding of student drinking behavior (JARVINEM, 2003; TREISE, WOLBURG and OTNES 1999; WOLBURG and TREISE 2004; TUCKER, 2006).

Ritual is a type of expressive and symbolic activity (ROOK 1985), that encompasses a wide swath of human behavior. According to Rook (1985, p. 85), rituals are constituted of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Rituals are different from habits because they are performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity. The author describes four tangible components: artifacts, script, performance roles, and audience.

McCracken (1986) proposes a definition of rituals grounded in social and cultural aspects. The author considers that ritual "is a kind of social action devoted to the manipulation of cultural meaning for the purpose of collective and individual categorization" (MCCRACKEN, 1986, p. 78). According to the author, rituals affirm, evoke, signal or review the social order's constituent symbols and meanings, serving as tools for their manipulation. McCracken (1986) also highlights four ways of transferring the meanings of goods to individuals: rituals of exchange, possession, arrangement and discarding.

A third view, also anchored in sociology, is suggested by the work of Belk et al. (1989). The authors define ritual as "rules of conduct that indicate how an individual should behave in the presence of a sacred object" (BELK et al., 1989, p. 7). According to

the authors, the quality of being sacred is not related solely to the religious or mystical, but also to what is seen to be more meaningful, powerful and extraordinary than identity/existence itself. Sacred occurrences can be ecstatic and self-transcendent. According to Belk et al. (1989), many contemporary experiences of consumption involve feelings of reverence, fear and profound respect. Examples can be found in areas related to sports, celebrities, national parks, works of art, cars, museums and collections. The sacred is thus defined in contrast to the profane. The latter is precisely what is most ordinary and lacks the ability to lead to ecstasy, self-transcendence or the extraordinary.

In the investigation of rituals, Driver (1991) proposes a reflection on its functions or three "social gifts" that rituals can provide: 1) creation and maintenance of order; 2) community: rituals unite people through emotion; 3) transformation: accomplish "instantaneous" symbolic changes.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design to explore meanings that motivate and arise from the abandonment of cigarettes. The research interviewed a total of 15 ex-smokers who had abandoned consumption during the previous five years. For data collection it was decided to use the widely employed qualitative in-depth interview method (GASKELL, 2002), considered to be one of the most important in the qualitative arsenal (MCCRACKEN, 1988). In addition to more public, conscious and communicable aspects, the interviews sought to capture unconscious aspects related to attitudes and motivations. Thus, in addition to questions aimed at discovering justifications and deeper motivations, one of the resources used by the research was to include projective exercises during the course of the interview. According to Rook (2006), projective techniques are particularly important in research into the emotions, desires and motivations of consumers and the meanings attached to and relations established with products and brands. The interviews also included some questions that reconstituted interviewees' life stories in terms of their relation with the category under study (BERTAUX, 1997). Thus, before beginning to talk about abandonment, interviewees were encouraged to recall their first memories of cigarettes, when they began consumption, as well as their consumption routines and attempts to abandon the product.

The selection of interviewees followed the theoretical sampling procedure, which consists of data collection induced by concepts developed during the research process (STRAUSS and CORBIN, 1998). Each new interviewee was chosen according to the possibility he or she represented of discovering variations in the concepts developed and to make them denser in terms of their properties and dimensions. According to the authors,

the aim of theoretical sampling is to "maximize opportunities for comparing facts, incidents or occurrences in order to determine how a category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions" (STRAUSS and CORBIN, 1998, p. 196). The interviewees were between 29 and 63 years old. All belonged to urban middle classes and had good levels of education. 13 of the 15 people interviewed about cigarette abandonment were college graduates and only two were high-school graduates. In order to maintain the interviewees' privacy all names were changed.

Gaskell and Bauer (2002) highlight that "a good distribution of a few interviews or texts over a wide spectrum of strata take priority over the absolute number of interviews or texts in the corpus (GASKELL and BAUER, 2002, p. 485). In other words, the number of interviews should be sufficient to evidence the diversity of behavior and ensure the consistency of the concepts developed during the research process. So-called theoretical saturation, which justifies the end of the search for new interviewees, occurs when a certain repetition and convergence is detected in the accounts obtained (LINCOLN and GUBA, 1985; GASKELL and BAUER, 2002; STRAUSS and CORBIN, 1998).

All fifteen interviews were recorded totaling approximately sixteen hours of audio material which was subsequently transcribed. The analysis was performed with the support of the Atlas ti (version 6) program and followed the procedure proposed by Rubin and Rubin (2005). Based on the interviews, the research sought to find, refine and develop concepts, themes and events which could be codified and inter-related for the construction of the present study.

FINDINGS

The interviews permitted the mapping of a wide range of actions related to abandonment that serve as rituals capable of individually and socially creating and negotiating meanings of order, community and transformation.

ORDER

Various interviewees recounted that their reason for abandoning cigarettes was a wish to distance themselves from the stigma they experienced as smokers. From a social perspective, within the dualist view that characterizes modern thought regarding consumers (SLATER 2002), the abandonment of cigarettes provides a sense of order by constituting a victory of the "heroic" consumer (rational and sovereign in the definition and meeting of

his needs) over the "dupe" consumer (the irrational slave of desires, a conformist, an idiot seduced by advertising).

Abandonment is presented in the interviews as a declaration of self-control, independence and autonomy on the consumer's part.

The people I tell I've stopped smoking say: "Congratulations", as if it were a great personal triumph. No-one really has the slightest notion of what it's like for a person who smoked like me quit smoking. (...) It's as if I´d been through a war.(Amanda, 36, psychologist)

I freed myself, my daily life is much better. I don't need to leave a party because I don't have cigarettes, before going out I don't have to ask everyone to stop at a gas station to buy cigarettes. I am freer now, nowadays I'm an easier person to get along with. (Cristiane, 29 , economist)

Studied in the context of anti-choice (together with aversion and avoidance behavior), Hogg, Banister and Stephenson (2009) affirm that abandonment is motivated by the desire to protect self-esteem and avoid humiliation of the self-concept. In the present research, abandonment appears not only as a reinforcement of social order, but, from an individual perspective, as a reinforcement of self-esteem, demonstrating the psychological strength and resistance of those who have managed to overcome their addiction.

Evidence of this can be found in the way abandonment is communicated. There are frequent accounts in the interviews that reveal a commitment with this initiative through communication, due to the social control it engenders. This is what made Amanda (36, psychologist) make her abandonment process public: *"Because I am very stubborn, and it would be a serious problem for me to **admit defeat**. So telling everyone about this was a kind of **insurance** for me".*

Amanda's account evidences that abandonment acquires meanings of victory and achievement and therefore starting to smoke again would be "to admit defeat". Abandonment makes the consumer appropriate the meanings of determination, strength and personal effort. Thus, after associating oneself with such positive meanings, taking up smoking again represents "throwing away" these qualities that have already been transferred to one's reputation.

Communication seems to seal one's commitment to the initiative and establish definitive ties with positive meanings of abandonment. Priscila (39, web-designer) went beyond the usual limits of this kind of communication, which is usually restricted to groups

of acquaintances, when she created a blog devoted to the theme. In her blog, which receives 30 thousand visits a day, she talks about the challenges of the abandonment process, gives tips, recommends books and provides a space for interaction between participants.

From an individual perspective, however, abandonment represents a break with the order and predictability that cigarettes used to confer on the routine of some interviewees. For various informants, cigarettes serve as a ritual artifact that communicates temporal organization (when to wake up, the beginning or end of the day, after lunch, beginning and end of work, etc.); and different tasks and emotional states (activating, concentrating, relaxing, socializing, etc.). Thus, some interviewees recounted that giving up cigarettes led to disorientation in relation to scripts and roles performed on a day-to-day basis. Nancy, for example, spoke of the difficulty she and her husband had to restore the moments of intimacy and relaxation they used to experience when sharing a cigarette late at night. Shirley sadly laments the loss of moments of introspection that cigarettes provided her with and affirms that she has "no longer been able to be with herself, always being in a state of movement".

COMMUNITY

The abandonment of cigarettes was used by various interviewees as a ritual experience of reinforcing emotional ties. Antony, one of the informants offered his decision to his girlfriend on St Valentine's Day. It is also the gift Marylin gave her father on Father's Day":

> *The idea was to offer it to someone as a gift because if you offer a gift you can't take it back. **My father felt very guilty** because I smoked. He had already given up and he used to smoke a lot more. He was very worried about this and as he doesn't like actual gifts, I said this on a card: "I've given up smoking".*

For this interviewee, this gift-giving ritual helped her stick to her abandonment decision as "you can't ask someone to return a gift you've given them". The meanings of gift and reward are both present in her words. What is being offered here is not a material good but abandonment, as a sacrifice, as a commitment, something that cannot be obtained with money and thus is worth much more. Belk (2005) reminds us that, in rituals of exchange, distinctions are made between "pure gifts" and "exchanges", between "gifts" and "barter of commodities". The first belong to the sphere of personal relations exchanges take place in the world of commerce and impersonal relations. Marylin appears

to seal the absolutely intimate and special character of this relation, where no calculations are made in terms of what is given and what is received and the value of the gift is not monetary but resides in the symbolic content it represents. One of the interesting aspects of this initiative lies precisely in the suppression of consumption, of the merchandise. By giving her father the gift of abandonment, Marylin shows that she is close to him and knows him ("he doesn't like actual gifts"). The initiative also brings back memories of a story of life together and his importance in her trajectory and, especially, the attention and care she devotes to his wellbeing, seeking to minimize his concerns. The initiative thus confers sacred status (Belk et al, 1989) on the decision in two distinct ways: 1) by evidencing the "pure" character of that relation, which is not based on material goods or on the conversion of the gift offered into money; 2) by imbuing it with a transcendental character that goes beyond the ordinary, everyday sphere.

TRANSFORMATION:

Through their magical nature, rituals are able to accomplish instantaneous symbolic changes. Thus, we met interviewees who used the abandonment of cigarettes in classic rites of passage like weddings, births and marriage dissolution. Rose, one of the interviewees, said that she wanted to "cure a whole lot of things" with her separation and, for this reason, she also abandoned cigarettes. Rachel was pregnant when she decided to give up cigarettes. Although she did not have a wedding ceremony, the move to the new house and the abandonment of cigarettes served as a symbolic mark of her new status as wife and mother: *"I managed to stop just like that, **miraculously,** I managed to stop and have never smoked since!"*.

Through their magical character ("miraculously"), ritual are able to produce instantaneous symbolic changes. The difficulty usually associated with the act of abandoning cigarettes (recognized by the interviewee herself in other situations) confers great symbolic value on her decision – materializing both the investment she has made in these relations (as wife and mother) and the special, almost magical, character she confers on them, given that they are capable of producing "miracles", making it easy for the interviewee to abandon cigarettes.

She herself acknowledges the symbolic importance of this decision when she describes what she felt on entering the new home: "so nicely done up and pretty. I said, I'm not going to poison it, pollute it, something like that".

"Not poisoning", "not polluting" seem to transcend the idea of a house, encompassing more symbolic aspects like the new marriage and, above all, motherhood.

The example of Rachel suggests that, similarly to consumption, abandonment is capable of serving as an evocation of what McCracken (1986) classified as "displaced meaning". The author defines a strategy of "displaced meaning" as the behavior which seeks to fill the gap between the "real" and the "ideal" in social life. If certain established standards are unreal, both society and individuals can try them out, even if briefly, by purchasing products and services. According to the author, consumption is one of the ways through which culture re-establishes access to values in some intangible cases, making goods bridges to hope and ideals. Rachel's example suggests that abandonment can also play this role, evoking the idea of a house that does not become dirty when used, but mainly of pure relationships which do not deteriorate.

The abandonment decision, in this case, suggests the possibility of achieving an emotional state, a social position and a life-style whose materialization occurs as a consequence of abandonment – an idealized version of how life should be lived. Giving up smoking transcends functional benefits related to health to also represent a new life-style, the type of wife and mother that Raquel intends to be.

ABANDONMENT RITUALS

The present research suggests that individuals create and manipulate meanings related to goods not only through consumption but also through abandonment and non-consumption. In abandonment, the individual foregoes the functionality related to the product, while symbolic associations continue to be used, created and manipulated even after this occurs. When talking about the benefits and advantages of this decision, consumers appropriate and "take advantage" of the meanings of the discarded category. Describing the abandonment cigarettes, for example, ex-consumers express what they value, reject, intend to be or how they wish to differentiate themselves. The results of the interviews enabled the research to map three types of abandonment rituals, thus complementing the consumption rituals proposed by McCracken (1986).

a) Decontamination rituals

They seek to distance individuals from negative meanings associated with the product and its consumption. Accounts which describe consumption and its consequences as a punishment, emphasize physical illness, inconveniences, limitations and losses caused by the product. Thus they constitute actions that, through the control of consumption and finally by effective abandonment, disengage consumers form the worst features that the

consumption of the category expresses. Limiting consumption due to specific locations, people (for example, not smoking in front of one's parents), situations and routines (not smoking before breakfast) and even establishing specific schedules (for example, only smoking one cigarette an hour) are examples of this kind of ritual.

Antônio (60, business consultant), for example, remembers a remarkable story from the time when he still used to smoke : the day, after doing the check-in and going to the departure lounge, that he felt compelled to go out for a smoke, he had to go through all airport control procedures once again. Thus, before abandoning consumption definitively he created a personal rule of abstinence inside planes, even before it was forbidden by law:

> *I decided that I wasn't going to smoke in planes anymore and started buying non-smoker seats. I stopped smoking and didn't want to anymore. I was completely conditioned: I would get on the plane and fell like a non-smoker. I was angry with people who smoked, I complained about everything. The first thing I did after getting off the plane was to light up a cigarette, but I was completely calm during the whole trip, I didn't even miss my cigarettes.*

Even limited to the duration of a flight, abstinence engendered an important transformation: turning Antônio into a non-smoker. He was able to experience not only a state of independence from the product but also the inconvenience it caused to those who did not share his addiction. During these moments he was able to observe consumption from a non-smoker's perspective, thus distancing himself emotionally from the category. This distancing seems to have contributed to exacerbating his perception of the smoker as a kind of "social outcast", a feeling that was decisive for his abandonment.

Raquel (42, economist), initially reduced her consumption by removing the stock she kept of the product. She says that, working at home, she began to worry about her excessive consumption. Therefore she began to keep the product outside her office, thus forcing her to go out to get a cigarette: "because if I had them beside me, I would lose control and start chain-smoking". In Flavio's (63, lawyer) case, abstinence was practiced through the purchasing method. When he decided to give up smoking he stopped buying packs. So he began to buy single cigarettes. :

> *If you add things up it's much more expensive to buy ten cigarettes at 25 cents each than buying the whole pack. But we reason like this "I didn't buy a pack, I bought a cigarette".*

The examples above evidence the expressive and symbolic importance of these actions. Antônio, Raquel and Flávio develop private rituals - behaviors that occur in a episodic sequence, that tend to be repeated over time. Such activities are performed with inner intensity, as they represent an inconvenience and even financial sacrifice for the consumer. However, in return, interviewees seem to wish to "declare" their control over their consumption, gradually disengaging themselves from meanings such as addiction, lack of discipline and neglect of one's wellbeing generally associated with users of the product.

b) Mourning rituals

These rituals refer to feelings of loss, sadness and nostalgia related to abandonment, evidencing the positive meanings perceived by ex-consumers in the category. Remembering the pleasures and benefits that the product provided, lamenting its absence, emphasizing the unique and irreplaceable character of that category and longing to resume consumption, constitute some of the examples found in this research.

Antônio (60, business consultant), Fábio (40, actor and film-maker), Carlota (44, journalist), Marylin (42 anos, philosopher) are examples of consumers who expressed the abandonment of cigarettes as a kind of death. Antonio's account, shown below, exemplifies this symbolic elaboration:

> I used to like smoking a lot. Smoking was a pleasure for me, something that accompanied in all situations. I couldn't work without smoke, think, feel jealous, drink, have a cup of coffee. I'm not going to go through that again. But nowadays, nostalgically, I have fond memories of that time. It's like remembering a friend who has died. It was great while he was alive but he is dead, he's not here anymore.

For Antônio, the cigarette seems to be part of what Belk (1988) calls the extended self, defining the consumer's identity itself. This product which is so essential in his life can only be abandoned through a ritual of death. Antônio made a choice not to depend on cigarettes ("I'm not going to go through that again") but copes with the losses by remembering this friend with nostalgia. The mourning rituals seem to communicate to the ex-smoker that, just as the dead cannot come back to life, the experience of consumption also cannot be resumed.

Mourning, in addition to expressing a sense of loss, manifests itself in some cases through feelings of revolt and contestation, in which the consumer evidences abandonment as an imposition (something extrinsic to the choice itself). Isadora (57,

psychologist) shows great irritation when commenting the campaign which represents the cigarette as the great villain of health, saying that "it is not alone", referring to diseases like obesity which, in her opinion, is hardly discussed by society.

Another manifestation of mourning is to list the negative consequences of the abandonment decision. Amanda (36, psychologist), for example, recounts that she developed a serious heart condition due to the stress caused by abandonment. She says that "nothing improved in my life after I stopped smoking, because as well as wanting to smoke, I had a sick heart". Although she doesn't regret abandoning cigarettes, as she perhaps "wouldn't have survived", she comments that she did not experience "this enchanted tale that people tell of recovering their sense of taste, because all that stress did me a lot of harm".

REINFORCEMENT RITUALS

These emphasize the positive meanings of non-consumption, with the consumer appropriating or reliving them when recalling the abandonment decision. Actions that celebrate the initiative (commemorating the abandonment day), strengthen the commitment to keep away from the category (like telling all friends about the decision to offer the initiative as a gift) or to underscore the gains and new positive consumptions that resulted from this decision (pleasurable experiences obtained with the money previously spent on cigarettes) constitute examples of this type of ritual.

For example, Cristiane (29, economist) decided to stop smoking for personal appearance reasons (teeth, skin, hair, nails). So she took a decision related to this abandonment: invest in whitening her teeth.

I am going to lash out because if I smoke I know I'll be tearing up the money I spent whitening my teeth. So this is one more action that's going to help me stop smoking.

She also recounts that she now uses the money she spent on cigarettes on weekly manicure services. As well as the commitment to the initiative (enhanced by the financial investment) Cristiane tangibilizes a positive result of abandonment, given that the consumption of cigarettes is usually associated with mouth diseases and yellowing of the teeth and fingers. Her abandonment, however, "does not leave marks" as its benefits are long term ones and are almost imperceptible because they merely avoid the problems that

would be created by consumption. By whitening her teeth and manicuring her nails, Cristiane is quickly able to perceive the gains she is obtaining from the initiative.

DISCUSSION

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

This study permits the identification of abandonment as a reinforcement of "Order", in which consumers undertake this initiative to maintain a positive self-image. Thus, they distance themselves from socially "risky" products associated with negative stereotypes or reference groups (HOGG and BANISTER, 2001). The present research also suggests that abandonment makes positive differentiation and the reinforcement of self-esteem possible. In the case of cigarettes, many accounts made abandonment a declaration of determination and strength of will.

The discourses also relate abandonment to transformation where this serves as an indicator of new identities and social positions (KLEINE and KLEINE, 2000). Similarly to consumption, abandonment is able to help in the construction of new roles and signal important changes, new lifestyles.

One aspect which is not discussed in the abandonment literature and which has risen to prominence due to the interpretation suggested by the social function of rituals (Driver,1991) is constituted by abandonment as a tool capable of building and communicating community. The interviews with ex-smokers suggest that the abandonment of cigarettes can be offered as a connection, gift, sacrifice that make relations special and even magical.

Although several advances have been made in understanding the impact of pharmacotherapies and media campaigns on smoking cessation (ZHU et al., 2012), most of these studies concentrate on physical or cognitive aspects. Recent initiatives to combat smoking and abusive alcohol consumption are based predominantly on cognitive aspects (provision of information about the problems and diseases caused by products) or on the emotional component of the attitude, through fear (WOLBURG, 2005).

The ritual approach focuses on the special meanings that products have for consumers, either because they represent ties with others who use the same good, an

organization of routine due to their links with specific moments or events or the reinforcement of self-esteem and the construction of identity itself. Wolburg (2005) comments that people are more open to behavioral change when new meanings are put in the place of those that are being abandoned.

The analysis of the various accounts presented in this research represent a wide repertoire of actions and meanings that can be used by companies, governments and NGOs in the challenge of changing harmful consumptions. The research reveals diverse examples that can be included in public health programs for the treatment and support of smokers, by providing help during the abandonment process.

A considerable challenge when dealing with the communication of social meanings is related to the undesired collateral effect of producing stigmas and encouraging the discrimination of individuals. Even though representing a serious worldwide public health problem responsible for the death of six million people a year, the fight against tobacco use should include the ethical preoccupation not to marginalize those who are currently consumers of the product.

The experience of ex-smokers suggests an alternative path that takes the abandonment process into account and reinforces especially the positive meanings associated with this decision. Thus, given the dissemination of information regarding the harm caused by the product, a complementary route would be to support smokers in their strategies aimed at restoring "order" in their routine without cigarettes, reinforce self-esteem based on this movement and "connect" with other individuals, thus generating a sense of community.

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