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Frota, Renata; Casotti, Leticia Moreira

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Who are we and who are they? Historical transformations of violence in the human-animal relationship represented in artistic expressions

RENATA FROTA¹

LETICIA MOREIRA CASOTTI¹

¹ UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO DE JANEIRO (UFRJ) / INSTITUTO COPPEAD DE ADMINISTRAÇÃO, RIO DE JANEIRO – RJ, BRASIL

Abstract

This study investigates the course of the transformations of violence present in the human-animal relationship in multiple periods of time, using artistic expressions to contribute to this theme. The study uses a multidisciplinary approach from the fields of Arts, History, and Philosophy seeking contributions to the literature on marketing and consumer behavior. Visual critical analysis is the methodology used to analyze six works of art from different historical periods and to understand the human-animal relationship over time. Findings suggest that forms of violence are present in the transforming human-animal relationship. The research challenges the marketing domain of the discussion about this relationship, limited to positive experiences with companion animals; it brings interpretations of the ways of violence in the human-animal relationship over time to understand the meanings and practices of the present; adds elements aimed at discussions and reflections necessary for researchers and marketing professionals, on the human-animal relationship and violence.

Keywords: Human-animal relationship. Violence. Art. Marketing. Consumer culture.

Quem somos nós e quem são eles? Transformações históricas da violência na relação homem-animal à luz de expressões artísticas

Resumo

Este estudo investiga o percurso das transformações da violência presente na relação homem-animal, em múltiplos períodos do tempo, recorrendo a expressões artísticas, de forma a trazer contribuições para esta temática. O estudo utiliza uma abordagem multidisciplinar dos campos das Artes, História e Filosofia buscando contribuições à literatura de *marketing* e comportamento do consumidor. A análise crítica visual é a metodologia utilizada na análise de seis obras de artes de diferentes períodos históricos e compreensão da relação homem-animal no tempo. Os achados sugerem formas de violência que estão presentes nessa relação e se transformam. A pesquisa desafia o domínio da discussão sobre a relação homem-animal no campo do *marketing*, circunscrita a experiências positivas com animais de companhia; traz interpretações dos caminhos da violência na relação homem-animal ao longo do tempo para melhor compreender significados e práticas do presente; adiciona elementos visando discussões e reflexões, necessárias a pesquisadores e profissionais de *marketing*, sobre a relação homem-animal e violência.

Palavras-chave: Relação homem-animal. Violência. Artes. *Marketing*. Cultura do Consumo.

El papel de las relaciones raciales en el mercado de trabajo brasileño: procesos de reclutamiento y selección en el punto de mira

Resumen

Este estudio investiga el curso de las transformaciones de la violencia presente en la relación humano-animal, en múltiples períodos del tiempo, utilizando expresiones artísticas, con el fin de traer contribuciones a esta temática. El estudio utiliza un enfoque multidisciplinario de los campos de las Artes, la Historia y la Filosofía en busca de contribuciones a la literatura sobre *marketing* y comportamiento del consumidor. El análisis crítico visual es la metodología utilizada para analizar seis obras de arte de diferentes períodos históricos y comprender la relación humano-animal a lo largo del tiempo. Los hallazgos sugieren formas de violencia que están presentes en esta relación y se transforman. La investigación desafía el dominio de la discusión sobre la relación humano-animal en el campo del *marketing*, limitada a experiencias positivas con animales de compañía; trae interpretaciones de las formas de violencia en la relación humano-animal a lo largo del tiempo para comprender mejor los significados y prácticas del presente; añade elementos destinados a discusiones y reflexiones, necesarias para investigadores y profesionales del *marketing*, sobre la relación humano-animal y la violencia.

Palabras clave: Relación humano-animal. Violencia. Arte. *Marketing*. Cultura de consumo.

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INTRODUCTION

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted different controversies regarding the human-animal relationship. First, with the debate about the origin and dissemination of SARS-CoV-2 related to the use and exploitation of wild animals, then with the discussion regarding the use of animals in the scientific efforts to develop vaccines. On the one hand, activists shared hashtags on social media denouncing violence and advocating animal rights – some examples shared in Brazil and abroad are #vacinavegana, #covidanimals, and #TireAsPandemiasDoCardápio. On the other, groups advocating scientific practices involving animal testing also created and shared hashtags such as #AnimalScience, #AnimalTesting, and #AnimalResearch. Other controversies at the time involved celebrities who self-declared animal activists and adopted an anti-vaccination stand. Some of these influencers proposed testing vaccines on humans in prison instead of animal testing (Folha de S. Paulo, 2021a, 2021b).

The controversies observed during the COVID-19 pandemic are just examples of the violence in the human-animal relationship. It is a complex and paradoxical relationship that has been transformed over time, marked simultaneously by violence and worshiping, submission, love, and compassion (Belk, 1996; Hirschman, 1994). Animals can represent livelihood, pleasure, love, company, and entertainment for people (Oliveira, 2016). Researchers such as Bettany and Kerrane (2018) and Oleschuk, Johnston, and Baumann (2019), have explored the human-animal relationship and its paradoxical feelings and practices of affection and violence.

Several consumer studies explore positive aspects of the affective relationship with pets (Apaolaza, Hartmann, Paredes, Trujillo, & D'Souza, 2021; Bertuzzi, 2022; B. Brockman, Taylor, & C. Brockman, 2008; Cheetham & McEachern, 2013; Hirschman, 1994; Holak, 2008; Kirk, 2019; Maille & Hoffmann, 2013; Rötzmeier-Keuper, Hendricks, Wunderlich, & Schmitz, 2018; Syrjälä, 2016; Wunderlich et al., 2021). However, few studies address negative aspects of this relationship (Beverland, Farrelly, & Lim, 2008; Littlefield & Ozanne, 2011; McGuigan, 2017; Simon, 2019; Souza, Casotti, & Lemme, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that few studies (Ayrosa & Oliveira, 2018; Oliveira, Ayrosa, & Sauerbronn, 2019) have investigated violence in the human-animal relationship and different consumer relationships. This lack of interest seems to inhibit efforts to understand meanings and practices around violence, including its possible positive effects on consumption experiences in contexts such as video games, movies, and sports (Frota & Casotti, 2022). The sociocultural perspective of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) can contribute to research on violence by investigating meanings and practices in different human relationships.

This research analyzes violence and violence transformation in artistic expressions representing humans and animals produced in different periods of history. The study identifies authentic cultural meanings and practices of each historical era. We recognize history as a place of negotiation and fixation of cultural meanings that circulate in society (Hall, 1997). Important scholars have turned to the past as a foundation for understanding contemporary consumption (Crockett, 2017; Karababa & Ger, 2011; Trentmann, 2009). We are aligned with Smith and Lux (1993), advocating that historical research makes it possible to interpret changes over time to expand our understanding of the meanings and practices observed in the present.

The use of artistic expressions as a methodological choice is inspired by Humberto Eco's book *The History of Beauty* (Eco, 2004), in which the philosopher uses different paintings, sculptures, architecture, and objects to build the history of how representations of beauty changed over time in Western culture. Consumer studies (Hirschman, 2000; Hirschman, Scott, & Wells, 1998; Holbrook & Grayson, 1986) recognize artworks as eligible texts for analysis from a sociocultural perspective and as mediators of symbolic constructions that involve consumption rituals.

First, this study contributes to the literature by opposing the current mainstream discussions and expanding the analysis beyond the positive experiences with pets, which dominate marketing and consumer behavior studies on the theme. The second contribution refers to interpreting how violence in the human-animal relationship has developed over time to understand the current meanings and practices. Finally, the third contribution is to open multiple lines of research and promote reflections among marketing professionals, adding elements to crucial discussions on violence and the human-animal relationship.

The following section reviews marketing and consumer behavior studies on human-animal relationships. The subsequent section describes the historical perspectives developed by H. W. Janson and A. Janson (2009) and Thomas (1998), used to position artworks in time. We also offer a synthesis of the philosophical perspective on violence by the Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2017), which supports the analysis of the artworks observed in this study. In addition, we summarize the contributions of the three areas of knowledge – history, art, and philosophy – wrapping up the theoretical bases adopted in the study. Subsequently, we describe the steps for using the critical visual analysis method (Schroeder, 2006) and discuss the findings, presenting our final considerations.

HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP: MARKETING STUDIES AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The growing importance of the human-animal relationship in marketing research can be exemplified in the special issue of the Journal of Business Research, dedicated to the relationship between pets and humans (Holbrook & Woodside, 2008). Researchers have examined experiences with pets and how relationships with them can represent situations imagined to be human-human connections such as companionship, friendship, and family (Downey & Ellis, 2008; Kennedy & McGarvey, 2008; Mosteller, 2008). Some scholars observe movements of transcendence of the limits of the animal-human distinction in the studies published in that special issue. The articles by Brockman et al. (2008) and Holak (2008) are examples of such transcendence, considering animals as having a soul or being the source of unconditional love (Brockman et al., 2008; Holak, 2008). Other studies published in the issue discussed marketing management aspects in the context of the growing market for pet products and services, including the perception of increasing spending on these animals (Brockman et al., 2008; Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney, Monroe, & Chamberlin, 2008).

The articles by Belk (1996) and Hirschman (1994) are prominent in marketing research and cited as seminal to studies of consumers and their animal companions. These articles adopt the consumer culture perspective (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and used metaphors to create a typology of the human-animal relationship that influenced later studies on this theme. Hirschman (1994) organized companion animals into two broad categories with subgroups, as shown in Box 1.

Box 1
The roles of companion animals, according to Hirschman (1994)

Animals as Objects/Products	Animals as Companions
Animals as ornaments	Animals as friends
Animals as status symbols	Animals as self
Animals as avocation	Animals as family members
Animals as equipment	

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Belk (1996) organizes companion animals into four large groups, which bear similarities with Hirschman's (1994) proposal: "pets as pleasures, pets as problems"; "pets as part of self"; "pets as members of the family"; and "pets as toys." Belk (1996) takes a different look at pets when categorizing them as both a source of pleasure and problems, remembering not only the joys but the difficulties of raising a pet at home, which may encompass damage, interruptions, and confusion caused by living together.

We found few studies in the area of marketing and consumer behavior with different or critical perspectives on the human-animal relationship. For example, the oppositional relationship between humans and animals appears superficially in research in the context of hunting as a sport and industry (Littlefield & Ozanne, 2011; McGuigan, 2017; Simon, 2017). Some studies discuss animal objectification in situations where they are treated as toys, elements of status in the social environment, collectible items, or for use in exhibitions and contests (Bettany & Daly, 2008; Beverland et al., 2008; McMullen, 2008; Syrjälä, 2016; Syrjälä & Norrgrann, 2019). The opposition and objectification in the human-animal relationship can also be understood as expressions of violence, as negative aspects that studies in marketing have little contemplated. However, there is a historically legitimized violence in the human-animal relationship, studied by historian Keith Thomas (1998) and represented in artworks analyzed by researchers H. W. Janson and A. Janson (2009), as described below.

HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The study by H. W. Janson and A. Janson (2009) offers an overview of the historical phases and the art produced in each of them. According to the authors, human beings in Prehistory sought survival in a hostile environment, with constant threats to their lives. Animals were consumed mainly as food and to make tools, ornaments, and utensils. Manifestations of this necessity are observed in cave representations of bison, deer, horse, and oxen hunting.

Also, according to H. W. Janson and A. Janson (2009), many animals had already been domesticated in the subsequent period of the Ancient Age, indicating a change in the human-animal relationship. In artworks of this period, animals appear as symbols of deities, glorified, humanized, or humiliated. H. W. Janson and A. Janson (2009) point out that, by endowing animals with magnificent strength and courage, the artists of this period praised the king or hero who defeated them.

In the Middle Ages, the understanding that animals existed to serve human needs was widely disseminated and became dominant. For H. W. Janson and A. Janson (2009), religious beliefs subordinate animals to the interests and desires of humans, whether for practical, moral, or aesthetic purposes. Images of animals, for example, were used symbolically for religious purposes and in myths, fables, and rites. In artistic representations of the time, animals appear as food and instruments of war, transport, and protection.

The Modern Age, the period between the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire and the French Revolution, maintained a vision of animals as subordinated to humans created in the Middle Ages. Artworks reflected the anthropocentric view of Western society and portrayed animals primarily for their practical use, which could include moral and aesthetic connotations (Thomas, 1998). Historian Keith Thomas (1998) studied the relationship between humans and nature. The author observed that the difference between the Modern Age and the previous periods consists of a shift from religious-based thoughts to more rational thoughts.

This vision changed in the Contemporary Age. Humans are no longer the center of the world. The expansion of scientific knowledge in the areas of botany, zoology, and astronomy contributed to a more egalitarian relationship between human beings and other species. For Thomas (1998), at this time, the human develops a self-perception as just another being in nature, as important as any other. Movements against animal cruelty and abuse and advocating animal rights emerged (Thomas, 1998). Also, animal feelings became the object of artistic expression. The philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2017) helps us to understand changes in the representations of human relationships with other animals when dealing with violence throughout history.

HUMAN VIOLENCE: PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the book *Topology of Violence*, the Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2017) suggests that human violence has manifested differently throughout history and divides human violence into three moments: premodern, modern, and postmodern.

The premodern period went from Prehistory to the Middle Ages, and society was archaic. It was characterized by values of sovereignty and blood, and violence was widespread and ostensive. Torture and bloodshed were common and present in spectacular rituals such as beheadings and duels. Violence served as a means of conflict resolution and a natural and legitimate right to achieve goals.

Differently, in the modern period, violence lost protagonism. Modern society was more rational and ashamed of violent acts, which were hidden. Violence, previously used for political and social communication, “[...] shifted from the visible to the invisible, from the direct to the discreet, from the physical to the psychic, from the martial to the medial and from the frontal to the viral” (Han, 2017, p. 8). Han cites as an example the gas chambers used to kill thousands of people during World War II. Rather than bloodthirsty and public, this kind of violence is aseptic and discreet. Terrorism and cyberwar are characteristic of this period when coercion took place more in the psychic sphere and much less by external physical threats.

Up to this moment in history, there was a clear bipolarity in the context of violence, with opposing forces between “enemies” (Han, 2017, p. 41), whether external or internal to the individual. Han classifies this conflict as a form of negativity. However, in postmodern society, globalization has contributed to the suspension of borders and reduced negativity and differentiation. The individual no longer feels obliged to obey and does not object to the rules. With a false absence of an “enemy,” violence is freely manifested.

In the so-called “performance society” (Han, 2017), the logic of capitalist production has developed and matured to the point where there is little need for control. Simulating an environment of individual freedom and choice, where the human being is self-coerced toward manifesting a specific behavior, the individual obeys himself, acting simultaneously as victim and perpetrator. Without a significant resistance strength, the environment promotes hyperactivity with excessive stimulation of communication, production, and performance. The individual is programmed to consume and produce unbridled to feel pleasure and is ultimately driven to exhaustion and self-destruction. The violence that initially had an external source started to be generated within the individual’s psyche. The person becomes the source of the violence and origin of a state of self-aggression.

THE ENCOUNTERS OF HISTORY, ART, AND PHILOSOPHY OF VIOLENCE

The historical evolution of humanity, the consequent displacement of forms of violence, and the reflection of these changes in the visual arts were organized in Box 2. We intended to combine the history of art by H. W. Janson and A. Janson (2009) and Thomas (1998), and Han’s (2017) philosophical thought. The time division observed in these different disciplines does not always overlap perfectly. For example, Han’s understanding of modernity comprises a period distinct from the Modern Age defined in history, advancing through the Contemporary Age. Even so, the proposed combination allows for a language system that builds the historical understanding of the human-animal relationship and the violence involved. This integration helps marketing and consumer behavior scholars – and researchers from other fields – to understand and reflect on the topic.

Box 2
The parallel between history, art, and violence through time

Historical phases	Prehistory	Ancient Age	Middle Age	Modern Age	Contemporary Age
Period	Until 3500 BCE	3500 BCE to 476 CE	476 CE to 1453 CE	1453 CE to 1789 CE	1789 CE to nowadays
Artistic expression	Cave art	Ideological foundations	Religious values	Rationality	Rupture with the traditional
Topology of Violence (Han, 2017) - Periods	Premodernity			Modernity	Postmodernity
Characteristic of violence (Han, 2017)	Sovereign, bloodthirsty, ostensive			Hidden, deformed	Depressive, coercive, self-coercive
Representation of the dominant human-animal relationship (H. W. Janson & A. Janson, 2009; Thomas, 1998)	Means of survival, target of hunting	Domesticated, deified, glorified, humanized, or humiliated	Food, force of traction, instrument of war, transport, protection, others	Anthropocentric and guilt-free use of animals. Practical, moral, or aesthetic use of animals	In a more egalitarian relationship with human beings. The feelings of animals matter

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

THE RESEARCH

This study is based on Hall (1997) and follows a cultural perspective. The author divides culture into two dimensions: a “substantive” dimension, linked to the empirical structuring of reality, and an “epistemological” dimension, which is the focus of this study. The epistemological dimension seeks to transform the conceptual models used to represent the world, i.e., how we have represented and transformed the human-animal relationship over time.

Cultural production – such as movies, advertisements, television programs, songs, books, and memes, among others – are manifestations that represent current behaviors and thoughts (Deus, Campos, & Rocha, 2022). The analysis of these products can be used as a research strategy, enabling the understanding of beliefs, images, norms, patterns, contexts, and ideologies that build and modify culture (Hirschman, 1988; Hirschman & Stern, 1994). Hall (1997) considers artistic activity part of the cultural dimension since it can be understood in terms of “shared meanings.”

The documentary research of cultural production used the websites of reputable museums and news outlets. The chosen drawings and paintings are cultural manifestations of primitive to contemporary humans, meeting the study’s intention of presenting a historical overview of the human-animal relationship. Artists or artworks of historical and cultural value were used as objects of analysis. An artwork originating from each historical period was selected to simultaneously meet the historical approach to art by H. W. Janson and A. Janson (2009) and Thomas (1998) and the philosophical approach to violence by Byung-Chul Han (2017). The research focused on the representation of violence between humans and animals, constructed and organized by the discourse of each time. Images of affection and adoration were not selected. The first version of this study was presented to the academic community in the field of culture and consumption at a national congress, and suggestions for improvement were received. Study groups in the field of consumer culture also gave opinions and validation on the selected artworks.

The artworks were contextualized (Skinner, 2002) in their historical periods, with Han’s (2017) philosophical and historical contributions. The critical visual analysis proposed by Schroeder (2006) was used to understand and contextualize images from a sociocultural perspective and contribute to knowledge in marketing. The critical visual analysis proposes the following categories: description, subject matter, form, medium, style, genre, and comparison, which are presented in Box 3.

Box 3
Analytical categories for critical visual analysis, according to Schroeder (2006)

1 – Description	Pointing out features such as formal properties of composition, color, tone, and contrast.
2 – Subject matter	Identifying and describing persons, objects, places, or events.
3 – Form	Refers to how the subject matter is presented.
4 – Medium	The material used – canvas, wood, paper, bronze, among others.
5 – Style	Similarity between an artist’s subject matter, movement, period, or geographic location. It is recognized based on a characteristic handling of subject matter and formal elements.
6 – Genre	Type or category of art.
7 – Comparison	Unique characteristics of something, by holding it up against something similar but significantly different.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Schroeder (2006) and supported by Barnett (2002).

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED ARTWORKS

The human-animal relationship is described and analyzed based on tensions, contradictions, contingencies, and historical transformations. This part was contextualized in the three periods recommended by Han (2017). The first period, Premodernity, was divided into Prehistory, Ancient Age, and Middle Ages, following the classical division of history. Modernity was divided into the Modern Age and the Contemporary Age. Postmodernity encompasses the present day.

Prehistory

Prehistoric drawings are records of human expression, and the color red possibly originates from the blood of a slaughtered animal (Berger, 1980). Blood is raw material and means for this manifestation. In the buffalo hunt scene (Figure 1), human figures can be seen with hunting implements, similar to spears, pointing in the direction of the animal. The buffalo is proportionally larger than the human figures, representing reality, which indicates a relationship of inferiority and fear of humans in front of the animal or even the animal's superiority and strength.

Figure 1
Image of a buffalo being hunted – unknown artist



Source: BBC News Brasil (2019b).

This is a selected part of an almost five-meter wide panel showing the hunting of buffalo and wild pigs (Aubert et al., 2019). The human beings represented are therianthropes – fantastic beings capable of transforming into animals, according to Aubert et al. (2019).

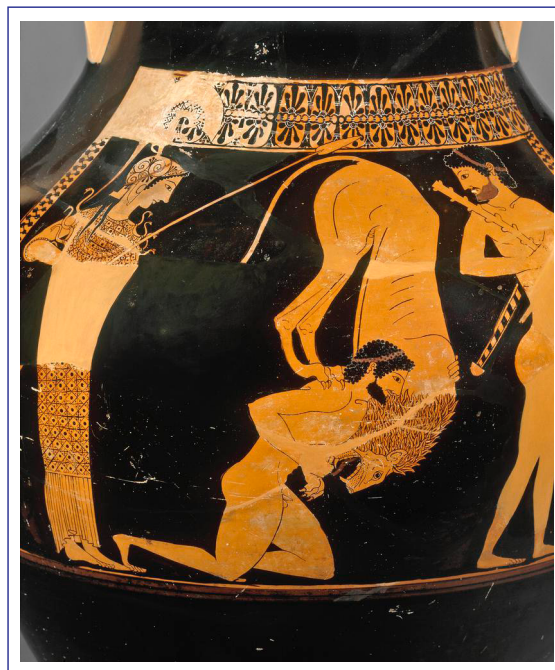
Ancient Age

Unlike the previous period, in the Ancient Age, some animals are already domesticated and are thus artistically portrayed. Situations of struggle or religious sacrifices involving animals, which appear in different artworks, suggest that they are still victims of ostensive violence.

According to a description in The British Museum (2022), in the drawing made on a ceramic amphora from Ancient Greece (Figure 2), red images on a black background were used. The scene represents one of Heracles' twelve labors – Slay the Nemean Lion. In the Greek painting (Figure 2), Heracles (known as Hercules in Roman mythology) is fighting a wild lion. He is naked and bearded, kneeling and holding the lion's head down over his left shoulder, delivering a blow that suggests the lion will be thrown to the ground. On the left is the goddess Athena and on the right is the hero Iolaos.

It took the strength of a demigod to defeat the beast, something impossible for ordinary humans. The myth inflates both the strength of Heracles and the lion, but the hero defeats the monster nonetheless.

Figure 2
Heracles and the Nemean lion – detail of a painting on a pottery amphora –
attributed to Andokides or Lisipedes



Source: The British Museum (2022).

Middle Ages

At the time of the Late Middle Ages, bestiaries – books used to describe, record, and study real and imaginary animals – were common in Europe. The hunting scene of a monkey and its infants, drawn in the Aberdeen Bestiary, created in England around 1200, represents this period (Figure 3). The colored figure was drawn on a gold background, highlighting the outlines in dark tones. The title of the book chapter from which the image was taken is “Apes.” The description of each animal in the Bestiary is accompanied by moralizing messages, such as the following excerpt (University of Aberdeen, 2022) from the illustration examined:

A characteristic of the ape is that when a mother bears twins, she loves one and despises the other. If it ever happens that she is pursued by hunters, she carries the one she loves before her in her arms and the one she detests on her shoulders. But when she is tired of going upright, she deliberately drops the one she loves and reluctantly carries the one she hates. The ape does not have a tail. The Devil has the form of an ape, with a head but no tail (University of Aberdeen, 2022).

Unlike Prehistory and the Ancient Age, medieval art represents the superiority of the human figure in relation to the animal. In Figure 3, a single person with a spear appears to be able to hunt down or chase away a female ape and her infants. In this situation, hunting does not seem to be for food, as Europeans do not usually eat this animal.

Figure 3
Hunting a female ape and her twin babies – unknown artist



Source: University of Aberdeen (2022).

The three paintings chosen to represent Premodernity show the explicit violence toward animals. Han (2017) described the violence as being ostensive and widespread in archaic society. The artworks show the progression of humans' sovereignty over animals. The representation of the human-animal relationship (H. W. Janson & A. Janson, 2009) begins with hunting for food (Figure 1) and, in turn, survival; it goes through the mythological construction of heroes capable of facing and humiliating a terrifying lion (Figure 2); and it develops to using the animal as human entertainment (Figure 3).

Modern Age

As an artistic expression of modernity, we selected preparatory studies by Leonardo da Vinci (Figure 4), which consisted of drawings produced in 1505 for the painting "The Battle of Anghiari," which was never completed. The artist researched the anatomy of animals before painting them. Due to the accuracy of his drawings, da Vinci is believed to have dissected animals to create his compositions (O'Malley & Saunders, 2012).

Monochrome drawings made with pen and ink on paper show expressions of fury from a horse, a lion, and a man, suggesting a case of comparative anatomy. These elements would be part of the background scene of the unfinished work 'Battle of Anghiari,' showing extreme violence involving animals (The Royal Collection Trust, 2022).

Figure 4
Studies of the anatomy of animals by Leonardo da Vinci



Source: The Royal Collection Trust (2022).

The drawings show da Vinci's dedication to the detailed investigation of animals and human figures, with the scientific care characteristic of the time. The medieval "beast" gains an aesthetic and dramatic function in modern artistic representation. Violence against animals is no longer evident (Han, 2017). The horse's death is no longer explicit on the canvas; it happened in a context not represented in the picture.

Contemporary Age

Pablo Picasso's painting "Guernica" (Figure 5), from 1937, was selected as an artistic manifestation of the beginning of the Contemporary Age and an expression of modern psychological violence, as thought by Han (2017). The work shows people and animals under bombardment in the city of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. Anthony Blunt (1969), a scholar who specialized in this painting, connects the composition in shades of black and white with the colors of newspaper photos of the time. Blunt divides "Guernica" into two groups of protagonists: a group formed by animals – the bull, the horse, and the bird, in the background, on the left – and another group formed by human figures, among which there is a dead soldier and several women – a woman (top right) holding a lamp and leaning through a window; the mother (left) holding her dead daughter; a woman running (right); another that screams with raised arms and seems to be trying to escape the fire.

Figure 5
Guernica by Pablo Picasso



Source: Galrinho (2022).

Both humans and animals are portrayed with facial and body expressions of drama and despair, suggesting that both are endowed with feelings and capable of moving the viewer (Thomas, 1998). This differs from the unequal relationships expressed in earlier phases when animals were portrayed as superior or human figures were portrayed as sovereign over animals. "Guernica" does not show struggles, only suffering. Han (2017) observes in modernity, concomitantly with the beginning of the Contemporary Age, a non-explicit violence that does not involve blood; it is often invisible, as it is caused by a context not represented in the painting. Han speaks of psychological depression as a feature of the time. The deformed images of people in Picasso's work seem to seek more the expression of psychic and emotional violence and less physical violence (Han, 2017).

Postmodernity

Another artwork was selected to reflect the Contemporary Age, considering the more recent perspective of postmodernity (Han, 2017). The untitled urban art (Figure 6), attributed to the artist Banksy, features black and white graffiti on a wall in an unknown location. It shows figures of monkeys with antennae carrying signs that read "Laugh now, but one day we'll be in charge" and "Keep it real."

Figure 6
Graffiti attributed to Banksy



Source: BBC News Brasil (2019a).

This stenciled artwork places monkeys in a superior position in relation to humans, as it warns of society's path to self-destruction, critically suggesting a setback (Han, 2017). Like Picasso's "Guernica," the violence is not explicit; it is indicated by the idea that, in the near future, apes will command life on the planet in extreme conditions caused by humans.

The first prehistoric figure with signs about the inferiority of men in the artistic expression of the large buffalo can be symbolically connected with Banksy's urban art, which also signals the inferiority of humans who follow a path of self-destruction.

DISCUSSION: WHO ARE WE AND WHO ARE THEY?

The relationship of humans with nature, similar to their relationship with objects, is based on an ontological, historical, deep connection with different interfaces, such as the interface with violence. This study suggests a way of questioning and criticizing violence and its legitimacy, starting from the human-animal relationship and provoking reflections on other relationships and contexts.

Taking as an example the human relationship with objects and animals, we envision relationships of dependence between them and beliefs that humans control objects and are hierarchically superior to animals. In the social sciences and marketing, vast literature discusses material culture and human relationships with objects (Appadurai, 1988; Belk, 1988; Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Epp & Price, 2010). We do not identify in these same areas of knowledge literature on the complex meanings and practices of "animal culture," i.e., how humans relate to animals. In marketing studies, the positive aspects of the animal as a companion predominate. We found some exceptions in research that indicate violence in the human-animal relationship, such as the objectification of animals and experiences of hunting. Objectification seems to compose the construction of the image of superiority and human strength in relation to animals or, seen in another way, composes remarkable anthropocentrism that is strengthened mainly from the Modern Age. Belk (1996) reminds us of the sociocultural construction that makes other living beings available to serve human desires and needs. However, we know that animals have always existed on the planet independently of humans' experiences and meanings. Therefore, the current marketing literature allowed us to understand the contemporary situation of this relationship, restricted in time and the interest groups involved, which means that this literature cannot help in discussions of this relationship from a broader and cross-cutting historical perspective.

This study suggests changing forms of violence present in the human-animal relationship. Therefore, contemporary experiences associated with the human-animal relationship are part of a historically constructed logic wrapped in cultural texts that seem to have hidden or disguised the violence of humans with animals and highlighted the violence of animals – considered savages – with humans. The anthropomorphism that surrounds the human-animal relationship (Mitman & Daston, 2005) seems to contribute to erasing the violence existing in the relationship; at the same time, animals assume human behavior in fables, movies, advertisements, and other cultural expressions.

Banksy's graffiti (Figure 6) can also be seen as an anthropomorphic and inverted cultural manifestation, as apes ironically warn humans about their weaknesses or loss of centrality in the world. The graffiti symbolically gives animals a hierarchical position superior to human beings. It seems curious that the artistic expression in Figure 6 may suggest a return to a prehistoric relationship when humans feared animals (as in Figure 1). As the philosopher Bruno Latour (1993) reminds us, what is new is also old.

Marketing and consumer behavior are characterized by studying contemporary forms of consumption. Many forms of violence are present in consumer culture and seem to be obscured by the proposal of free choices of neoliberal ideology. This study reinforces the importance of historical paths and shows how the contemporary world is situated in a continuum of socio-historical contexts.

Han (2017) mentions the lack of transparency, a process of covering up violence related to animals in contemporary times, including practices in different consumer markets. Food companies have been discreet about slaughtering animals, as have health-related industries about necessary animal experimentation, as in the recent case of COVID-19 vaccines. Movements to protect animals and to advocate legal requirements to enhance such protection and animal welfare suggest both reactions to animal violence historically legitimized and present in various markets and changes in the vision of who we, humans are, and who they, the nonhumans or posthumans, are.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Symbolic visual expressions, like the artistic expressions analyzed in this study, are culturally constructed and part of a process of continuous movement over time. This study contributes to a historical understanding of the human-animal relationship and violence, supported by the topology of violence brought by Han (2017) and the art history perspective of H. W. Janson and A. Janson (2009) and Thomas (1998). The study presented interdisciplinary research, recognizing that marketing studies, in general, and consumer culture, in particular, have not addressed this issue. Thus, we followed consumer culture researchers (Askegaard, 2021) who advocate opening more dialogues with theories and areas of knowledge to understand the complex human being.

The long historical period covered in this study showed that the violence in the human-animal relationship changed over time, becoming invisible and/or hidden through historical leaps. Art and its historical movements allowed an innovative understanding of the human-animal relationship and the violence experienced in this relationship. The first contribution of this study is to challenge the discussion in the field of marketing and consumer behavior. Most of this research is predominantly focused on positive experiences with pets. This study provokes the field to reflect on the violent aspect of the human-animal relationship, regardless of referring to domesticated animals.

MacInnis et al. (2020) recall the importance of examining the past to understand consumer behavior in the present – the means of violence in the human-animal relationship of the past can support a better understanding of meanings and practices of the present with the support of places of violence mapped in the work of Han (2017). The second contribution refers to looking at history not only as a way to interpret meanings and practices of violence in the human-animal relationship. It is important to face history as crucial regarding the emergence of theories, support for empirical studies, as a source of innovative insights, and capable of contributing to impacting marketing management spheres and public policy best practices. The research advocates the importance of understanding the elements encapsulated throughout history.

The third contribution of this study is to open multiple research lines, adding violence as a necessary element to discuss the human-animal relationship. Violence occurs in several areas of this relationship, and interdisciplinarity is crucial to understand the context better. Diverse markets involve animals and promote affection and opposition to the invisibility or objectification of animals. A possible path for future research is the investigation of internalized and/or socially accepted contemporary violence in consumption behaviors. For example, human self-aggression is present in studies on compulsiveness, but we have not identified many studies that propose to understand the contemporary human being, individually or collectively, in manifestations of violence in consumption.

We are sometimes faced with the feeling that things are not quite as they seem, which arouses the researcher's curiosity. This study begins and ends with that sensation, as it involves many complexities and frontiers of knowledge. Here, challenges were launched so that marketing studies can explore the close connections between consumption and the human-animal relationship, not only relationships of love but also those that involve violence. We are presenting this article amidst violent worldwide events of different origins, which brought to light defenses of economic policies that trivialize the value of human life.

The unprecedented pandemic and the outbreak of war in Europe, involving powers with nuclear war power, are reminiscent of the self-aggression brought by Han (2017) and its possible effect of self-destruction on human life. The arts tend to anticipate events; thus, in Banksy's artistic expression (Figure 6), he warns of a dark future.

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Renata Frota
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7237-7400>

Ph.D. student in business administration and researcher at the Center for Studies in Consumption and Society at the COPPEAD Graduate School of Business of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ); Professional master's degree in business management from Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV EBAPE). E-mail: renata.frota@ufrj.br

Leticia Moreira Casotti
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7718-5072>

Ph.D. in production engineering from the COPPEAD Graduate School of Business of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ); Full Professor at the COPPEAD Graduate School of Business; Coordinator of the Center for Studies in Consumption and Society. E-mail: leticia@coppead.ufrj.br

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Renata Frota: Conceptualization (Lead); Data curation (Lead); Formal Analysis (Equal); Investigation (Lead); Methodology (Equal); Project administration (Lead); Visualization (Equal); Writing - original draft (Equal); Writing - review & editing (Equal).

Leticia Moreira Casotti: Conceptualization (Supporting); Formal Analysis (Equal); Investigation (Supporting); Methodology (Equal); Project administration (Supporting); Supervision (Lead); Validation (Lead); Visualization (Equal); Writing - original draft (Equal); Writing - review & editing (Equal).