



BBR - Brazilian Business Review

E-ISSN: 1807-734X

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FUCAPE Business School

Brasil

Carvalho Suarez, Maribel; Moreira Casotti, Leticia
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Household Perspective
BBR - Brazilian Business Review, vol. 12, núm. 2, marzo-abril, 2015, pp. 87-109
FUCAPE Business School
Vitória, Brasil

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Transcending Individual Approach of Consumption: an Investigation of Automobile Meanings by The Household Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In consumer behavior area, families are identified as fundamental reference group in the consumption process. Historically, research involving purchasing decisions have, mostly, focused on individual decisions without regard to the dynamics of interactions within this important group. Using a qualitative approach, based on the itinerary method this paper investigates how the meanings related to the purchase of a car help shape relationships within the family, when investigating consumption. Based on interviews and observations with several members of ten *São Paulo* families, this study highlights the cars as artifacts able to demarcate family values and hierarchies, it acts as an important "educational" and transition tool to adult life of the children.

Keywords: Consumer behavior families. Cars. Qualitative research.

Received on July 15, 2010; reviewed on October 01, 2010; accepted on December 16, 2010; disclosed on March 05, 2012

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Note from the editor: This article was accepted by Emerson Mainardes.



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1 INTRODUCTION

In consumer behavior area, families are identified as a key reference groups in the consumption process (EPP; PRICE, 2008; COMMURI; GENTRY, 2000; MORGAN, 1994; GIDDENS, 1992). Commuri and Gentry (2000) suggest that, often, the studies developed in this theme do not seem to consider the "metamorphoses" occurred in the family institution, such as: the growing participation of women in the labor market, increasing the number of divorces and the fight for the rights of families formed by homosexual couples. Another criticism refers to the predominance of studies done with North American families and there for the lack of studies looking to get aspects of family purchasing decisions in other cultures considering the important globalization of markets (LAKSHMI; MURUGAN, 2008). Within the Brazilian context, the studies that investigate such an important group are still rare.

For Epp and Price (2005), few studies seem to recognize the importance of understanding more deeply the family interactions or to seek knowledge that includes the day to day mundane interactions between members of a family in the consuming of goods and services. Researches involving household purchasing decisions have generally focused on individual approaches without considering the dynamics of interactions within the family unit.

Within this context, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of family dynamics from the research about the meanings of automobile consumption. Thus, having the family as the unit of analysis (and not individual consumers), we attempted to analyze the consumption of this category and how it helps shape the relationships within that group, making possible to identify identities and roles. As a durable good, with high financial and symbolic value, the purchase of the car raises the family involvement and discussion around the consuming process. Nevertheless, this category has been usually studied by researchers and managed by industry managers from the individual/buyer perspective.

For this research, we opted for a qualitative approach, from the application of the Itinerary Method (DESJEUX, 2000; BÉJI-BÉCHEUR; CAMPOS, 2008), which allows us to understand the purchase decision not as an arbitrarily individual decision at one point, but as a collective process in time. Ten *São Paulo* families who had bought a car in the three months prior to the interviews were selected. In each family, were interviewed both parents and their children (over 18 years old) who were living in the same household, allowing to enrich the knowledge of the profile of new car buyers families as well as compare and contrast what each member reported about the buying of the same car.

The following literature review is constituted from two main arguments. The first relates to studies on the family within the consumer behavior area. The second topic aims to analyze how cars have been studied by researchers in recent decades. Then, the work presents the itinerary method and the choices and procedures of this research. Finally, the results are presented and it is discussed the theoretical and managerial contributions of this study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature on family is multidisciplinary and extensive (COMMURI; GENTRY, 2000). This field of research on consumer behavior appeared to be a promising already in the 1970s and since then the analysis of the purchasing behavior of goods and services within families has been the target of different types of research.

Over time, research involving household purchasing decisions had its focus on individual approaches without considering the interaction dynamics within the family unit, thus focusing on topics such as the roles of the different stages of the purchase process; the influences on the decision to purchase and the strategies used in the process of influence, and the stages of the decision and conflicts involved (QUALLS, 1988; CAMURI; GENTRY, 2000; SU FERN; YE, 2003). Even more recent studies, which main objective was to understand the consumption in families, did not consider the group as the unit of analysis. Predominate studies regarding the understanding on how individuals influence, negotiate and organize household consumption (COMMURI; GENTRY, 2005), as individuals influence other family members (MOORE; WILKI; LUTZ, 2002), as individuals build aspects of their extended selves from the family (TIAN; BELK, 2005) or even as individuals change their purchasing decisions from family practices (AAKER; LEE, 2001).

Since the family works as the first and main unit of consumption, production and socialization, mediating their relationship with other elements of society (NETTING; WILKAND; ARNOULD, 1984), it is essential for it to be considered an important unit of analysis in consumer behavior studies, not only in the relationship between individual-individual or individual-group, but also considering the complex network of identities involving the family unit.

A recent study by Epp and Price (2011) emphasizes the importance of family collective identity in consumer behavior. The research adopted a network approach to understand how companies can orient their offerings not only for individual user goals, but to the collective objectives of the members of a given network. In order to understand the interaction of the various identities present in the network relationship, the authors chose the family as the unit

of analysis. The research suggest that family value propositions may differ from those that relational units and individuals adopt, and these proposals should therefore be considered in marketing and communication strategies.

Epp and Price (2008), when offering a framework to study the exchange of identity consumption practices of families, remember that, largely, consumer researchers tried not to look at the multiplicity of collective interactions in families. According to the authors, the look on the family dynamics and the formation of a family identity (as the group different from others and represents itself) can offer a reformulation of the way that we think about buying decisions of the households. When they talk about "traditional research family purchase decision" (EPP; PRICE, 2008, p. 60), they criticize the way homes and families are equalized in the polls and adjusted life cycle models producing inconsistencies with the relationships characterize the life of contemporary families.

In outlining this framework, Epp and Price (2008) give special attention to forms of communication already studied in consumer research: the rituals, (ROCK, 1985; WALLENDORF; ARNOULD, 1991), narratives (AHUVIA, 2005) social dramas (CHATZIDAKIS et al., 2004), day to day interactions (KLEINE; KLEINE; KERNAN, 1992) and transfers between generations (SHAH; MITTAL, 1997; MOORE; WILKY, 2005; MOORE; WILKY; ALDER, 2001). These aspects function, in turn, as a basis for the three key elements in the formation of family identity: the structure, responsible not only for indicating individuals that "belong" and do not "belong" to that household but also the hierarchy and the roles played by each member; the generational component, which describes the relationship between past and future generations; and character, comprising the characteristics or personality traits shared among the members, as tastes and values (EPP; PRICE, 2008).

Based on the model of Epp and Price (2008), it is possible to synthesize three fundamental aspects of the setting of this family identity: how the hierarchy and membership definition of the members are addressed; the transmission of values and preferences, and the responsibility for socialization and education of the younger generation.

2.1 CARS IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

Several studies show that cars are products that can arouse emotions (LUCE, 1998; DESMET; HEKKERT; JACOBS, 2000) and incorporate intense symbolic dimension (HIRSCHMAN, 2003; BELK, 2004; DALLI; GISTRI, 2006, LUEDICKE, 2006; LUEDICKE; GIESLER, 2008).

Hirschman (2003), in his semiotic analysis of the images related to the extreme North American individualism, points out the car as one of the goods that most often symbolize and embody, in the advertisements, human characteristics, values and goals of their owners, such as "strength", "evil", "toughness" etc. Belk (2004) studied consumers with a high level of involvement with the category, the so-called enthusiasts. The author, through this group, highlights the importance of this good and its association with meanings such as strength, danger, mobility, status, competition and domination of man over nature. For these consumers, cars are at the same time, living beings and an extension of themselves. Belk reviews the care with vehicles as fetishistic practices and of sacredness of these objects.

In the context of Italian cinema, Dalli and Gistri (2006) highlight the intense metaphorical capability of the product and, therefore, its recurrent use in masterpieces produced between the 40 and 70. According to the authors, the car is present in movies only from the 50. Initially sparingly, representing mainly military vehicles in movies that reproduce the period of war. In the 60s, cars become more frequent and been displayed as a new mass consumption, which models were capable of differentiating characters and situations. Thus, the Fiat 600 represents utilitarian aspects; convertibles appeared as social prominent elements and associated with more charming characters. The Rolls Royce is driven by snobbish and arrogant millionaires. Dalli and Gistri (2006) emphasize that the cars are presented as materialism expression of some characters, sporting luxury models, or as an element capable of placing different social classes.

Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003) show, from the discussions in US communities on the Internet, how the launch of the new Beetle mobilized meanings of a democratic car, imbued with the values of the hippie movement, as the dream of better spiritual and material conditions for mankind. The article also shows the discussions among the Internet users regarding the maintenance of that essence on brand's relaunch or if were, instead, only a marketing strategy to promote a different car.

Also analyzing the internet communities, Luedicke (2006) highlights the negotiation of meanings from the dialogue between owners and non-owners of the Hummer brand. The ownership of the car creates differentiation in terms of social class (upper class), lifestyle (athletic stereotypes of masculinity, success and fame) and is also associated with patriotism in opposite ways: on one side are the owners that highlight that the product was used in war by US troops and the freedom of choice (to buy cars even if they have high level of fuel consumption); on the other, are environmental activists who rightly criticize this feature. The

study also shows the ideological burden associated with the brand through several protests posted on the Internet (about 1600 photos submissions from people making obscene gestures for these vehicles).

In another study, Luedicke and Giesler (2008) used the study of the same brand (Hummer) to propose the definition of consumption challenged, as regards the development of discourses that question the legitimacy of choices, behaviors and ideologies of other consumers.

In the Brazilian context, Suarez, Chauvel and Casotti (2011) highlight the car as a category which abandonment is able to operate an affirmative, positive and strengthening of self-esteem differentiation, being able to form identities and ideologies.

Besides the works that focus on highlighting the symbolic importance of the automobile consumption, the category is widely portrayed in the work related to the decision-making process (for example, RATCHFORD et al., 2003; YANG; ALLENBY, 2003; ZHU et al., 2008; SASTRE et al., 2010), always based on an individualized approach. Cunningham and Green (1974) stand out for investigating the use of cars as a portrayal of the changes in family dynamics in the 1970s. The work, however, sought only to discover the opinion of the wives of the experience of that purchase (not several family members). When replicated in 1973, a study by Sharp and Mott in 1955, the authors noted an increase in women's participation in choosing and buying a new car for the family. According to researchers, in the 50s, about 70% of the purchasing processes were dominated by their husbands and only 25% of cases represented a shared decision of the couple. Eighteen years later, the authors found that the dominance of the husband was in 52% of cases and in 45%, the husband and wife jointly participate in the buying process.

The results of the research by Cunningham and Green (1974) suggest that, as in the 1970s, buying the car was approaching a joint decision process, no longer dominated by men. This reduction in the husband's dominance, according to the authors, can be explained by the reformulation of relationships, which have become more equalitarian in terms of decision-making between men and women. This change stems mainly in the greater participation of women in the labor market and in activities outside the home, which end up increasing interest in choosing the car that they will also use.

Although the car is an important consumption for the family, it draws attention to the absence of recent work seeking to investigate this consumption and their meanings not only

from the individual point of view, but from the perspective of this important group. This paper seeks to contribute filling this gap in order to investigate this category from the interaction dynamics within the family unit.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to investigate meanings associated with the car, taking the family as the unit of analysis (and not the individual consumer). For this, we used a qualitative approach in the process of collecting and analyzing data generated from in-depth interviews and observation. Ten *São Paulo* families were selected, classes A1, A2 and B1 (in Brazil Criterion), which had purchased a car in the three months preceding the interview. In each household were interviewed three to four informants (parents and their adult children who were living in the same household). This initiative allowed enriching the knowledge of the profile of the purchasing families of new cars, making it possible to compare and contrast what each reported about buying the same car. In total, the research included 34 informants.

The interview script was structured from the Itinerary method (DESJEUX, 2000; BÉJI-BÉCHEUR; CAMPOS, 2008), which has as guiding principle the relevance of material culture (MILLER, 1987) for understanding of the behavior of individuals. The method uses on its way of research the mapping of objects and spaces that make up the phenomenon under investigation. The practical implication of this choice of research through the objects and material culture determines that research is carried out on site which hosts the consumption practices and where objects are manipulated and stored. A key aspect of the method of the routes is that the interviews should be conducted along with the simultaneous observation, according to which the words are being illustrated by objects, which presence may even allow the respondent to be more precise, more true to life (DESJEUX, 2000; BEJI-BÉCHEUR; CAMPOS, 2008).

The choice for research using the product as central search element further minimize artificial deviations and elaborations that only a search based on the verbal report of the individual can generate. So, focus on the object of consumption ends up being a feature parallel to move the attention of the respondent. So, the respondent does not perceive himself as the center of the research, but as someone who describes minor things – the objects.

The itinerariy method practices an approach of the consumer that brings to focus the system of chained actions preceding and following the time when the product is consumed (DESJEUX, 2000; BÉJI-BÉCHEUR; CAMPOS, 2008). This method allows to understand the consumer's decision-making not as an arbitrary individual decision at some point, but as a

collective process in time. The interview from the route runs in a systematic way the various product consumption stages: the awakening of need, through the search for information, the purchase itself, the storage, the preparation for use, use and, finally, disposal.

In this study, the interviews took place in the home of families and were carried out by pairs of interviewers, formed by employees of a company in the automotive sector, which received 40 hours of training in qualitative research. The set of questions put the purchased car as a central element of the conversation and covering the factors that led the family to consider purchasing a new vehicle, through the sources of information used for the purchase, experience in visiting dealers, trading and buying itself, the current use of the car, supply and maintenance practices, parking places and forms and, finally, forecasts on a future exchange.

The interviewers were able to make contact not only with the discussion of automobile consumption, but also with a more contextualized view about the life of consumers. This approach not only with the residential location scenario in different districts, but also with the reality of space and contact with the product (car) in the context of life of respondents, was instrumental in this research. To ensure the privacy of respondents, all their names were changed.

All interviews were filmed and recorded. The recordings were transcribed to assist in analysis and interpretation of information. The analysis was coordinated and centralized by the authors of this work, but with the collaboration and the triangulation of a multidisciplinary team formed by two anthropologists, a psychologist, and three administrators, and industry officials who participated in the field. The method of the routes suggests that the review process try to describe and analyze the use of space by the objects and practices around the same. Thus, certain acts in relation to the object can be allowed or prohibited or mandatory or recommended. Additionally, the method allows the inclusion of pre-existing categories derived from the literature relating to the subject of study as well as the emerging of unanticipated issues arising from interviews (emerging categories).

In the analysis work, it was initially created a summary for each interview, trying to highlight the experience of the interviewees in relation to the steps of the consumption process. Then this individual perspective was confronted with reports of other family members. Both the recurring points as possible divergences led to further reflection on the theme of the research. After a holistic understanding of each family, the analysis walked towards comparing different family units.

4 ANALYSIS

The data analysis suggests that the purchase of the car can be considered an important consumption ritual of the constitution of the family identity. According to the literature, rituals are central in the creation, enhancement and transmission of collective identity (BAXTER; BRAITHWAITE, 2002, BONSU; BELK, 2003), serving as an indicator to belonging to that core. They also serve to reaffirm who "belongs" and who "does not belong" to the family (WALLENDORF; ARNOULD, 1991). The process of buying a car - who participates in the discussion, who goes to the dealers, who has the final decision - is able to express not only the role of each member in the family, but also the very familiar borders. Were common reports in which families with children that are married and living away from home are no longer consulted in the purchase of the new car - a clear indication of the formation of a new family group. We also heard reports of young adults who, although still they live with their parents, make their choice regardless of their parents' opinions in an effort perhaps to signal independence and autonomy that is not realized in the establishment of a new independent home.

In this research, we learned that cars are bought not only by that individually express about their owners, but also the differences that they are able to communicate among members of a family. The following cases were selected from all the interviews for their ability to illustrate these concepts from the review process of all families.

Pereira Family Case

The Pereira Family belongs to the A1 class rating on the Brazil Criterion. The father, Antônio is 59 years old, is anesthesiologist, married and has five children. His wife, Ruth, is a housewife, 50 years old. Two children still live with them (Roberta and Gabriel) and were also interviewed.

Besides the new Corolla (father's car, recently purchased), there are three other cars at home, which make each member of the household have their own vehicle: the mother has a Zafira and each child has a Palio, bought less than a year ago.

Hierarchy models

The father, Antônio, like Sedan cars and is approximately five years without change cars. The options raised by Antônio in the entire selection process, show that he sees himself as an "intermediate" consumer, in his own words. The taste for "intermediate" is expressed,

for example, in the car size, which should be spacious enough to hold the family comfortably without being too big as pickup trucks or a "SW", preferably style of his wife.

I don't really like SWs, pickup trucks, and stuff. But my wife does. She has a Zafira, she had a Scenic. She loves these big cars, but I don't. I like Sedan cars: many years ago, I had the other Corolla, before that I had a Mazda, I've had a Subaru, a Chevrolet Monza, all of them Sedans. (Antônio, father)

When he speaks of his car, Antônio rejects models that are above or below his standard - standard which can be translated mainly by the presence of automatic transmission and power steering, without which he "can no longer be without". The air conditioning is in the background, as he says he is a little "allergic". In his logic, the Azera would be above his standard, and Vectra, Honda and Corolla paired in the "intermediate" level desired by him. Out of consideration, the cars would be "1.0" well below his demands and incompatible with his current stage of life.

*I don't care much about a super car, but I also **don't want a car like that of my children** that are 1.0, no power steering, no air conditioning, **and other things missing**. (Antônio, father)*

In the Antônio's words, it stands out not only the attributes that his car should have, but also the distance from the car used by their children. In this sense, the automobile consumption seems to be able to realize the logic that organizes the generational component (EPP; PRICE, 2008) of the Pereira family, describing certain hierarchy in the relationship between parents and children. This position taken by Antônio is classified by him as his "luxury". He sees himself in a stage of life that "would not give up to go back", represented by the "Corolla Standard" (his own term). In the paternal point of view, the Palio, in turn, appears as the car of an incomplete consumer - which has no choice by their subordinate position, only consuming what was given. The full choice is for a future phase of adulthood (we deepen this meaning in the next section). At this stage of life, the car that Antônio has is the result of "worthiness" of his work and effort, as a justified "luxury".

Here we can also resume to the study of Shah and Mittal (1997), which describes the intergenerational influence (IGI) within the family context. The authors remind us that the positive influence is related to the perception of perceived similarity in lifestyle between the different generations. Antônio is away from the consumption of his children and wife, precisely because he wants to express a distinction. Their cars, which he classifies as "intermediaries", comfortable and stable are suitable for a mature and stable life, like his and therefore he allows himself "the luxury of having", as reported in the interview.

Hierarchy in use

In the Pereira Family, the car appears especially as a father's ascendancy expression in the family. His car is admired by all, as the "ideal" vehicle, such as a well suited good to what the family deserves, with the necessary ingredients of comfort and safety. The fact of the subject "car" showing a father ascendancy in the family does not mean that the mother has no bearing on the subject. She even has her zone of autonomy by having her own car, and has quite supported the purchase of the new father's vehicle. But even in the mother's autonomy sphere, Antônio shows his top hierarchical rank - it is he who drives the car of the wife when the family travels, as he himself says: *"I do not like going as a passenger in the car, I hate it."*

The children, even though they have their own vehicles, like their parents' cars and eventually drive them, especially on weekends when they can leave their "basic" Palios and enjoy "more comfortable" vehicles - which may be a preview for their future (car). The son Gabriel says that he likes these cars because they are more "comfortable" and "enjoyable to drive." However he identifies more with the mother's taste in cars - liking "big cars" and considering the Zafira a well suitable car to accommodate his family - that is also "big", he stresses - been the place that symbolizes, in a way, the possibility of meeting the whole family:

"We always go out on Sundays for lunch. I think it's the only time we all go out together by car. During the week, everyone has their own things to do." (Gabriel, son)

The children bear their father's car very carefully, because of the strict surveillance he has on the vehicle. But the use of the mother's car is much more "relaxed" and frequent, due to less control by Ruth; in her vehicle, the "mess" is allowed (as leave papers and magazines in the car).

I do not like to leave things in the car. If you get in my car and my wife's car you will see the difference, because it has a magazine thrown there, a package of something there, there is a lot of loose things (Antônio, father)

Because he [the father] has always been very nagging with us (about the car). So, we always knew that when using my father's car, we can't leave a piece of paper out of place. With my mother's car I get more comfortable, I am more relaxed. But with my father's not always, since childhood he always made us know that his car is his car and, thus, to be careful with dirt. (Roberta, daughter)

But the Palio of the children appear related to two distinct meanings: 1) as a car from one still in subordination phase of life; and 2) as a material tangibilization from a process of individuation, since the fact that each child have their car allows them to use the vehicle to "live their own lives" and use it as they wish, either for studies or for leisure.

In short, in the Pereira family, cars seem to have a "personality" and express the family hierarchy, relating directly to their stages of life. There are suitable cars for each one, which leads us to propose a typology as:

Showcase car - Corolla (father): denotes respect - as the posture of the children in relation to the father figure - and austerity. Highlights the traditional relationship of the family nucleus and the hierarchy led by the father, for which the rules are clear. Control space, tradition (expressed even in the fact that the father repeats the purchase of the new Corolla model already known and largest car exchange time) and rationality, markedly masculine.

Flex Car - Zafira (mother): "Family size" car- as a "mother's heart", fits everyone (the six members of the family and even her sister's boyfriend). A space that is more flexible, negotiable, dynamic (car exchange in less time than the father's) and emotional, markedly feminine. Despite being an autonomous domain (it is the mother's car, it is she who decides when to exchange it, etc.) it has a plan of subordination to male dominance - when the father runs it in travels.

These two cars, with association with the family personas of the father and mother, are like archetypes. Other "real" women's cars can be, of course, quite different from Ruth's Zafira, i.e. ultra organized internally and full of rules for other users of that car. We have here a model (possible) where there is a complementarity between female and male domains, with a hierarchical superiority of the latter over the former.

Everyday car- Palio (children): everyday cars, which are "good enough." It shows the subordination of children in relation to the father and their condition as "apprentices".

In a timeline, in the father's perspective, cars can be classified as those appropriate to a young stage of life, in which the car is basic (Palio of children); and a mature stage of life where the car should be comfortable, luxurious, but without exaggeration (Corolla)

Car as an educational tool

The analysis of the interviews suggests that cars seem to act as one of the latest educational tools used by the family to transmit values and influence the behavior of adult children. The Pereira family case also serves to illustrate this concept.

As already said the children Gabriel and Roberta have received each, as a gift from the father Antônio, a Fiat Palio 1.0. The brand new cars were bought together to ensure equality in the gift and a good discount at the dealership. The father felt the need to give the children a

car to use in their daily routine (both are in college and need to move). A "basic" car without optionals was the choice to start the life trajectory of both his children. Antônio reports that his first car was a basic "Beetle" and with this action shows the children the importance of starting with little and go through life winning and building your own ideal, i.e. a more comfortable and powerful car.

*When I gave the car, I said: I'm giving the car for you and it's your car. (...) Is this one and that's it. From **now on it's on you**. The day they want to change cars, if they are working, earning money, I have nothing to do with that. It is the first and that's it. If you can't change it in 2, 3, 4, 5 years, do not change it, keep the car. (Antônio, father).*

According to Cotte and Wood (2004), the effect of socialization that the parents have on their children are shown particularly in consumer behavior. Through rituals, intergenerational transfers and everyday interactions, family socialization can not only convey important values of family identity, but also influence the preference for brands, brand loyalty, search for information in the mass media as a means of gain information and even the price sensitivity (CHILDERS; RAO 1992). From this perspective, one can understand that the "Palio gift" offered by Antônio allowed: 1) ritually mark the passage of the children to a stage of adulthood that is the entrance into university (the daughter had just entered college) ; 2) "teaching" mode, teach them that life is hard and must start from a *lower* point, represented by *basic Palio*.

To leave this threshold of adulthood, children should strive and conquer other positions from their own merit. Antônio's first car was a "Beetle", and after twenty years of work and achievements he considers buying their cars as part of an evolution. To start with the "basic" and go slowly growing and maturing; according to their performance, gaining more quality and comfort. These are the values that Antônio seems to want to pass on to his children in this Fiat car.

Thus, the Palio is somehow a "no choice" car - the children passively accept the gift from their father. Even if the son Gabriel has said that if they did not like the car could have "vetoed" the present, prevails his father's perspective that he at that time did not refuse. In the future, if they are in another stage of life, through their work and effort, may enter the field of choice and have the car they want. The Palio given by the father to the children reinforces the hierarchy/parental authority and domain with regarding to the subject of the car.

In summary, from the Pereira family analysis, it is possible to highlight the exchange of cars like an element that exposes core issues of the family core and the greater or lesser

involvement of its members reveals the nature of ties that unite them. As in a game of mirrors, **the cars of the house faced and "talk" to each other** - the differences perceived between the cars are matches in personality, steps and lifestyles of each member. In this context, some cars/personalities are "mature" and stable, due to the current phase of life - the taste of the father for "Sedan" and the mother's "SWs" seems that will not change in the future. Also, the father quickly decide the purchase because he knows what he wants - the "Corolla standard". The children, in turn, are in a time of uncertainty, still testing "styles" as a tasting phase. The choice of their cars was defined by the father.

Similarly, the use of these vehicles is a reflection and makes tangible fundamental aspects in the configuration of family identity, according to the model suggested by Epp and Price (2008): how the hierarchy and membership definition of the members are addressed; the transmission of values and preferences and responsibility for socialization and education of the younger generation.

The following will be presented brief examples of other families that will serve as a counterpoint to illustrate key concepts (car as artifact to make tangible the family hierarchy, values and educational tool), from different settings.

Silva Family Case - Subverting the traditional hierarchy of models and uses

In the Silva's family home lives the father, Mauro (62, retired), his wife, Marilene (54, housewife), and Laura (24, business administrator). The family is located in the A2 segment and recently bought a Corsa. The car purchase was partly motivated by the end of the college and the hiring of Laura in the company in which she was a trainee. Besides this car, the family still shares a Palio.

Laura was in charge of the whole process of buying the new car, but was keen to share the decision with his parents, who contributed with part of the value for the family to make the purchase. As signaled by Shah and Mittal (1997), the resource control seems to be an element to enhance the intergenerational influence in the family context. However, as we see, more than a financial aspect, the buying process of this family seems to be anchored in a less hierarchical and relational view (as found in the Pereira family). If in the family described above, the purchase and use of the automobile expressed values such as distance and respect for the paternal power and success, the Silva family values found related to dialogue, commonality (all participate and decide) and social advancement of all household (expressed through the belief in a better future for the generation of the children).

Throughout the interview, you can also realize that the parents, Mauro and Marilene, use the purchasing process as an educational tool that teaches the young to negotiate and deal with the heritage autonomously. Mauro preferred the Volkswagen brand, but was persuaded by his daughter (after their research) to buy the Corsa. He even says that, in the buying process, he had no priority, and was a joint choice of the three (father, mother and daughter). The daughter, though she was in front of the entire process, including determining the choice of the brand, is keen to protect the parental authority, showing the importance of parents in this process, the choice of vehicle to the conclusion of contract:

They were not [at the car dealership], but it was they who gave me all coordinates, "do this, do that, do not let them charge you any extra money." They gave me all the backup support. I did not do anything without them provide orientation for me. (Laura, daughter)

In the use of the car, on a daily basis, the Corsa, newer car, is primarily used by Laura. She and her father prefer this car, as it consider "softer" (to drive). But in the case of any deadlock (for example, both going out on the weekend), Laura end up having priority, as the father, as he says, always ends up giving in. Mauro justified:

It is right and feasible that she [the daughter] uses it more. She is new, has to enjoy life, go to clubs. So it is hers on the weekend. (Mauro, father)

And when asked about any possible conflict, he adds:

No. Non quite yet, because, in this case, is the father, mother and daughter. So what won't a father and a mother do for their child? (Mauro, father)

The speech above suggests a paternal identity grounded not in authority or power, but as an example of giving and generosity. The "showcase" car is used by Laura and also seems to express the pride of the family for the young and the belief in the promising future (his daughter as someone who will achieve something better than the parents).

Barreto Family Case - Hierarchy on the shared use and division of tasks

The Barreto family is located in the Brazilian A2 class. Living in the same house the father, Jorge (63, engineer and professor), the mother, Nora (68, housewife) and two children: Maria Luiza (29, lawyer) and Fernando (26, engineer). There is still a third daughter, Perla, an engineer, who is already married, has two children and no longer lives in the same house.

The family recently bought a Fox. In the house, there is also a Corsa, which is owned by the son. The father (Fox buyer) spends much of his time at home, where he works, making only a few visits to the city. The car is also used by the wife on purchases and visits to friends, and the daughter to study and on weekend getaways. The son uses the car on Wednesdays, due to the current plates rotation system in São Paulo.

The Fox, recently purchased by the father, is clearly the family car. Everyone uses, including his son, who owns a Corsa. Yet this second car, even if eventually used by other household members, clearly has a more private character, being primarily used by Fernando in his day to day. In this behavior, it may be possible to see a strengthening of family structure: parents as providers, the children as users of the benefits offered by their parents.

In the process of buying, Jorge and Nora made the decision to replace the old Fox for a new one without consulting the children. These preferred to purchase a new model to avoid "six of one and a half dozen of the other", as regrets Maria Luiza (daughter). But decided not to interfere with parental choice, resigning herself with the suggestion of new optionals for the vehicle.

The car purchase and its use thus seem to be a consumption that reinforces the status *quo* of traditional family. Although they have adult children, who already work, they show a relationship in which the traditional hierarchy of parents as providers is enhanced (by both sides). Beyond the limits considered suitable for the participation of children in the negotiation, this relationship is also evident in the procedures of supplying and maintenance of the car. This is a product that allows parents to continue exercising their role of parents and children, the children's.

The maintenance, which has a clear division between "soft" and "hard" tasks, also acts to highlight this hierarchy. The woman looks after most of the day to day, everyday cleaning, made in a religious way all week. But the husband takes care of the mechanic, oil change, tires, etc. Both maintenances are described as carried out with care and attention or "everything right", as described by Nora. The fuel supply also almost always rests with the couple, as reported Nora:

They [the children] always get when it's well fueled, you know? Never when it is low. The father says "you are really smart Unless they go out on the weekend and fuel tank is running low, then they fuel it. (Nora, mother)

The mother and the other respondents, however, are keen to point out that when the children eventually fuel the car, do it with their own money, seeking to strengthen in their speech certain autonomy. According to Nora: *"Everyone pays his own, there was no asking 'mother, I'm going out'. No, each one pays for their fuel"*. This exception seems to be the concern of parents in covering the financial independence of adult children as a family value.

On the fuel supply practice, however, still prevails the maintaining of certain asymmetry between parents and children, according to which the first end always taking

responsibility and mainly fuel supply expenses. Fernando, who uses the car on Wednesdays due to rotation, for example, says that to not leave the car with empty tank, he fuels the car with minimal supplies to not leave the car without fuel.

We get the car, if it is out of gas, we put some. We usually do not always leave it [out of gas]. But sometimes it's bad luck when I caught and is almost empty. So I put some. Sometimes I get (the car) and my father had put thirty reais. As I use the car in the rotation system, I will not leave it empty for the next day so he would not go to work with an empty tank. So I put ten reais of gas. (Fernando, son)

Fernando thus uses an image management strategy, avoiding hassles in the family, as Maria Luiza says:

Everyone who uses, fuels the car. Because my father is crazy when he takes the car and is out of gas. (Maria Luiza, daughter)

With only R\$ 10.00, Fernando manages to avoid the perception of empty tank, which could lead to conflict with his father. In this strategy, is a logic that differentiates the parents from the children in the car use, which might be explained by a speech of Fernando. This suggests that fuel supply dynamic is not random, but rather reinforces the hierarchy and family values:

It is the family's car, but also he is the man of the house, he takes care. I have my car and I take care of my. (Fernando, son)

The Barreto family offers us so another example consumption as a path of the hierarchy and family values (EPP; PRICE, 2008). Through car usage rules (those who use, when to use, who as washes or supplies) also provide family roles, e.g. the father as the man of the house, the mother as keeper of order, the adult son as someone who is responsible only partially (and symbolically) the maintenance of the family car.

Moreira Family Case - Teaching how to handle money

The Moreira family belongs to the Brazilian A2 class. It is formed by the father, Roger (56, accounting consultant), the mother, Ana (47 years, housewife) and their children, Roger Jr. (26, business administrator) and Jessica (20, student). The family has a Gol, purchased and used primarily by the father. The son Roger Jr. purchased a Black Fox, from the mother's incentives. The new car is used by Roger Jr. mainly on weekend. On other days, is available to his mother and sister.

Roger Jr. recalls that Ana insisted him to buy an apartment. But as it was not in the boy's plans, appeared the idea of changing his Fiesta for a new vehicle. The car seems to put itself, for the mother, as a savings incentive mechanism of her son.

My mother started telling me to save money, to buy an apartment, but it was not what I wanted. Then she told me to change my car, because I wouldn't spend money foolishly. (Roger Jr., son)

More than savings, the car also seems to be a considered "appropriate" way for the mother to participate in the financial management of the boy's resources, as he, as well as an adult, presents himself quite independently from the parents. Ana recalls her arguments to convince his son:

I always said to him, 'Son, you need to do something to invest (money). At least buy a new car. It is needed and you like to drive.' I think the father has also said something and he decided to change. (Ana, mother)

Asked about his mother's reasons for insisting on a car purchase, Roger Jr. confirms this hypothesis:

Perhaps, because she sees that I go out, because I go out a lot. I have fun with my friends, I travel a lot. This year I went to Natal twice. So it may be that she, seeing from the outside, thinks that I am spending money and could be saving to buy something in the future, when I need. (Roger Jr., son)

By insisting on the purchase of the car, Ana shows to her son a pattern of behavior toward money. The earnings ought not to be fully spent, but saved at least partly to build an asset. The car purchase seems to the Moreira family as an educational tool (how to deal with money) and a rightful instrument of intervention in the child's financial management. In this sense, it approaches the concept suggested by Epp and Price (2008), consumption as a means of transmission of values, preferences, socialization and education of the younger generation

5 FINAL THOUGHTS

In the consumer behavior area, families are still identified as the main reference group for consumption (EPP; PRICE, 2008; COMMURI; GENTRY, 2000; MORGAN, 1994; GIDDENS, 1992). In the more conventional approaches, however, consumption is usually analyzed from an individual perspective. One facet less analyzed in the area of study concerns how the meanings of consumption circulate within families and help shape their relations and to transmit and form a collective identity.

This study aimed to contribute to a greater understanding of these dynamics in family consumption, in the Brazilian context. Taking families as the analysis units, triangulating the testimony of its members, this research allowed expanding the understanding of this phenomenon, investigating hierarchies and belonging, transmission of values and preferences and the process of socialization of younger generations within the families' universe.

Cars are products that can arouse emotions and incorporate intense symbolic dimension (LUCE, 1998; DESMET; HEKKERT; JACOBS, 2000; HIRSCHMAN, 2003; BELK, 2004;

DALLI; GISTRI, 2006). The analysis of several interviews conducted in this study suggests that, in the family structure, cars have the ability to act as a path of values and hierarchy, as well as serving as an important "educational" tool - perhaps one of the last consumption socialization features of parents for their children.

Through the testimony of family members on the same experience of consumption, it is noted that these are purchased and used not only for what individually express about their owners, but also the differences that are able to communicate with the family members and society in general. The differences between the chosen models and usage rules express their values and the roles played by its members.

In addition to defining the role of each member within the family unit, cars run as an educational and socialization tool in consumption. As they reach adulthood, the children are less subject to incentives and penalties imposed by parents. Thus, the cars represent one of the last educational tools used by the family to transmit values and influence the behavior of adult children. Thus, in our interviews, cars appear as a resource that teaches new generations the importance of work or the care for the construction of a heritage and the importance of saving.

Commuri and Gentry (2000) punctuate that the studies carried out on the family do not seem to consider the "metamorphosis" that took place in this institution, as the changing in roles played by women, divorces, prolonging the stay of adult children in their parents' house. This study shows that, within the diversity that characterizes contemporary society, the products end acting as symbolic markers that make visible and tangible values that are not universal.

Imbued with strong symbolic and economic dimension, the category of the car is positioned as an expressive device even more relevant in the Brazilian context. If the patriarchal logic of authority is no longer the only possible mean of family relationships, the choice of car models allows families to establish roles and distances. Similarly, the permanence of adult and unmarried children in their parents' house for longer periods than in the past, makes the car an element through which is marked the autonomy and independence of the younger generations and trade their responsibilities.

Thus, this research shows the car as an important research tool of the Brazilian family and society. At the same time, the results of this work also increase our understanding of this category, making it possible to suggest changes in business strategies that sell automobile. By mapping the collective consumer experiences and, more specifically, how the family

dynamics are presented throughout the buying process, makes it possible to propose improvements in this shopping experience. The interviews show that the choice of a car is not an individual decision, at any given time, but the result of interactions and dialogues that take place before and after the purchase and consider other cars and products consumed by the family. Thus, we highlight the importance of giving attention and satisfaction not only to the one who is actually buying the car, but also those involved in choosing, in the decision and use.

Understanding this complexity can help in the design of new products, communication and sales process at dealerships. This work offers a typology based on the functions and meanings of the automobiles, able to help professionals in these tasks. The **Showcase** car is one that makes family values tangible. The **Flex** car, as its name suggests, need to address the needs of various family members. Finally, the **Everyday** car focuses on functional aspects and mobility in daily tasks. Identify, on the first contact at the dealership, these differences can assist vendors in selling points and in advising models as well as the articulation of the views of family members at the time of purchase.

This look inside the family might suggest, also, changes in CRM initiatives, extrapolating the individual approach (of the buyer) to consider possible interactions within the family. This perspective can contribute to the offer of new products, as a new car for one of the family members can quickly cause the desire for renewal of another member's car.

In order to contribute to a deepening in the analysis of family dynamics and their consumption behavior, future research can investigate other product categories. An even promising field concerns the mapping of the factors that interfere with the consumption dynamics within the family, understanding how parents and children, couples and siblings influence each other in the purchasing processes.

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