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Happiness adjective: polyphony conceptual, social imperative

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Abstract

The past decade has seen an increasing use of happiness as argument for advertising campaigns and strategic positioning of various brands. The phenomenon is not homogeneous, as the representation of happiness takes different forms and points to different meanings. With this, some relevant questions emerge, which we seek to answer through theoretical research and the semiotics analysis of campaigns. This study is a reflection on this subject, in order to spark a discussion on three fronts: the conceptualization of happiness throughout the development of consumer society; the possible conceptual differentiation of happiness for different social strata; and, finally, the effective identification and analysis of the concept in advertising campaigns for brands.

Keywords: Happiness. Consumption. Advertising. Brand. Contemporaneity.

Introduction

The poor person's happiness seems/ The Carnival's great illusion
We work all year / For a dream moment
For making a king or pirate or gardner costume
for everything to be over on Wednesday
(excerpt from *A Felicidade [Happiness]*,
lyrics by Vinícius de Moraes and Tom Jobim)

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If a poor person's happiness is brief or even a fantasy, those who have just left poverty are experiencing the joy – and challenges – of enjoying the rights – and duties – associated with happiness for the first time.

"Come and be happy", is Magazine Luiza's invitation in its ad. This is the new destination of the mythic "Happiness Trunk", which has always brought magical objects that had the power to transform abject existences into fulfilled lives – complete with all the markers of happiness.

We will talk about happiness, a noun that is hard to describe. Is it a virtue? A state of mind? For now we prefer to qualify happiness as a condition, taking the lead from Harvey's (2010) conceptualization of post-modernity, because in our understanding, it is part of a complex and multifaceted process.

Along with hedonism and beauty, happiness seems to complete the triad of the essential pillars of social life in current times. Aspired by all, these desires elevate our quotidian expectations to the highest levels. Every experience and action must include pleasure, provide beauty or deliver happiness – if not all at the same time!

But let us analyze the parts. First, it is important to clarify that we will deal with happiness only regarding its relationship with consumption. Naturally it will be necessary to locate the discussion historically to give it context, especially in current discourse, but there is no pretension to provide here an in-depth exploration of all the philosophical discussion the theme has evoked since ancient times, or the initial manifestations of the value of subjectivity in different artistic and scientific expressions. We will explore happiness within the realm of consumption, how it is constructed, pursued, consumed, and how it is represented in Advertising.

We want to know: what guides the creation of advertising campaigns that have happiness as their theme? What senses outline them? What defines these distinctions? Our main objective is to explore issues associated with Brazil's newest consumers (the so-called new social class C), reflect on possible differences between social groups regarding happiness achieved through consumption and the implications for Advertising and brands.

Our starting point is Baudrillard (2008), whose work shows us that happiness, after modernity, must be visible and measurable, which implicates in an essentially expositive dimension. The discussion is updated with reflections on Lipovetsky (2007), Gianetti (2010), De Masi and Toscani (2012), but Freire Filho (2010) is the one that brings the definitive contribution to our critical and theoretical (re)framing of the theme.

The text is divided in three parts. The first briefly explores the history and describes some of the manysignifications of happiness. The second introduces the discussion about possible differentiations of the concept for Brazilian social groups – commonly called high social class and “new middle class”. The third applies the knowledge obtained to analyze, in an exploratory way, advertising campaigns that have happiness as their argument, both as verbal expression, and in their iconography and symbolism.

Happiness adjectives

Scholars encounter many adjectives while studying the bibliography about this theme. This part of the work is dedicated to contextualizing the different qualifiers of happiness, revisiting the authors that studied the concept. By the end of this step, it is possible to know what attributes contemporaneity confers to happiness and to construct an updated conceptualization.

a) *Enchanted happiness*

In previous retrospectives of the different significations of happiness, its temporal *locus* stands out as a facilitating element to unravel the complexity of the discussion, as happiness has moved, historically, to a time closer and closer to “us”. Where is happiness? In a future life, in the distant future, in the near future, in the present. However, the closer it is to us, the greater our discomfort and dissatisfaction with the definitions and uses attributed to happiness.

Without a doubt things seemed simpler when we were comfortably satisfied and used to the idea that happiness was located

in a distant future life, after our deaths; that the suffering, disappointments and sadness of our reality, as well as the challenges of the daily routine, were temporary and to be compensated for or rewarded in eternity. For centuries we concentrated our hopes in happiness that came from the belief and promise of an after life. Suffering could even be desired – as opposed to ephemeral and carnal pleasures, which should be avoided – so that the next “stage”, paradise beyond life, would be even more filled with joy. Suffering not only purged the sins, ensuring a purified life, it also provided future rewards to those who believed. More suffering, more reward.

b) Broad, general and unrestricted happiness

With the Enlightenment happiness becomes secular, consolidating the idea of faith in progress, founded in simultaneous changes brought by the “triple revolution”: scientific, industrial and French, “vectors of change that not only ran together but fed off each other and were mutually reinforcing” (GIANNETTI, 2010, p.23).

On such grounds, the idea of “perfectibility” of the human spirit emerges – individuals, as citizens, could perfect themselves indefinitely – a notion that is closely associated with the concept of progress, imposed simultaneously on individuality and society. Thus the project of construction of happiness was granted possible for all individuals, becoming an imperative in modernity in a broad, general and unrestricted way. Almost like a political motto, “happiness for all” spread the search for happiness in all areas of life and in every direction.

There is an overlap of individual happiness and the realization of a political and social project based on progress and science and that conditions the former to the collective living conditions and wellbeing.

Its time is not yet the present per se: although the promise is already to achieve happiness in this earthly world, it would occur in a historical future, not too distant, and in this sense, borrowing Giannetti’s expression (2010), to our contemporary eyes, in “yesterday’s tomorrow”.

Civilization's progress and modernity brought about undeniable benefits to mankind and we can summarize an entire set of health, education and comfort indicators in the concept of well-being. But beyond the concrete and clear wellbeing reached, was there also advancement in terms of human happiness?

Another issue is that the end of the belief in progress as a path to happiness, experienced in recent decades, introduced the concept of happiness here and now. With uncertainties about the future and moreover, uncertainties about the possibility of the future actually being better than the past, happiness has become the center of attention and of experiences, becoming part of the present.

c) *Imperfect and relative happiness*

The 20th century arrives with a novelty: Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* exposes the paradox of the quest for happiness – through the pleasure principle – and the impossibility to achieve it in a life tainted by suffering caused by awareness of death – mortality as a certainty –, by nature's power with its destructive force and the rules that regulate family, political and social relationships and frustrate natural desires (FREIRE FILHO, 2010, p.54).

In Freud's¹ analysis:

The progress of civilization and the advancement of rationality have a considerable cost from the viewpoint of human animal's ancestral aspirations and the price is paid in the currency of subjective wellbeing. Civilization saddens the human animal. (...) The Enlightenment's equation does not add up: it lacks a computable solution in the axis of time (GIANNETTI, 2010, p.54).

Be it from this viewpoint, called the “thesis of civilization barter”, be it from the viewpoint of the “thesis of incompleteness”², according to which the discomfort would be temporary once the Enlightenment's project has not yet been concluded, the reality is

¹ And, according to Giannetti (2010) also Diderot, Nietzsche and Weber.

² Combining the ideas of Hegel, Marx, the School of Frankfurt, Bentham and Mill, according to Giannetti (2010).

that the notion of happiness continued to be socially re-signified, clearly delineating a path that went from the soul to the body and that at this point moves from collective to individual. It is no longer sought out in the afterlife, and not in a fairer collective existence either. The project of social happiness through changes based on political struggle seems to have lost steam in face of the value given to individuals since the end of the last century, something fueled by the unmistakable establishment of consumer society. What we have here is the privatization of happiness.

Thus happiness presents itself as a temporary condition, as we constantly return to the state of dissatisfaction, which erodes happiness and causes a new searching cycle to begin (PEREZ, 2004b).

d) Measurable happiness

Although the focus has returned to the individual sphere, Baudrillard (2008) warns us that happiness in consumer society has nothing to do with a spontaneous view in which every individual naturally wants to be accomplished on his own. According to the author, its strength comes, “socio-historically, from the fact that the myth of happiness is the one that gathers and embodies, in modern societies, the myth of Equality. All political and sociological virulence that has surrounded this myth since the Industrial Revolution and the Revolutions of the 19th century has been transferred to Happiness” (BAUDRILLARD, 2008, p.49).

Happiness will equalize society and democratize it, but in an entirely depoliticized way, transferring its accomplishment *locus* to the individual in lieu of collectivity, distancing itself from the latter as a manifestation. According to Baudrillard (2008), in order to express such equality among individuals, happiness needs to be measurable by tangible criteria, that is, through goods that signify this condition, that demonstrate the comfort or wellbeing achieved. It is what the author calls the “egalitarian ideology of wellbeing”.

In spite of Baudrillard’s important criticism of the logic of consumer society, especially the concealment of the actual inequalities in its core, it is important, for our means, to understand

that consumption establishes a principle of equality of sorts among individuals, based on the free choice of products and consequently signs that express to others the measure of wellbeing reached, whenever they desire. According to this logic, there is a democracy of sorts operating here, in which everyone, as consumers, have the same opportunities to accomplish happiness.

Consumer society, as a whole, results from the compromise of egalitarian democratic principles that are able to sustain themselves through the myth of abundance and wellbeing, and the fundamental imperative of maintenance of an order of privilege and dominance (BAUDRILLARD, 2008, p.56).

We know that this is the beginning of a very fruitful discussion in contemporary literature that touches on many issues – among them the complex theme of needs – which, on one hand, is guided by different paradigms, on the other hand, reinforces one common point: the recognition that contemporary society celebrates happiness achieved through consumption. In so many words: individual consumption that legitimizes our way of life and thus translates itself as the best expression of earthly happiness.

e) *Paradoxical happiness*

Lipovetsky (2007), for instance, shares Baudrillard's (2008) interpretation of happiness through present and depoliticized consumption:

Life in the present has overcome the expectations of the historical future, and hedonism takes precedence over political activism; the fever of comfort has replaced nationalistic passions and leisure has replaced the revolution. Based on the new religion of continuous improvement of living conditions, living well has become a passion of the masses, the supreme objective of democratic societies, an ideal exalted in every corner (LIPOVETSKY, 2007, p.7).

He also shares the idea that we live in restricted freedom, proposing a reflection about the paradoxical condition of contemporary consumers, who are free to make choices in the market, while the market has strength to determine their choices. Thus the paradox:

On one hand, he affirms himself as a “consumer-actor”, well-informed and “free”, seeing his range of choices broaden, researching portals and price tables, exploring low-cost deals, acting and trying to optimize cost effectiveness. On the other hand, the lifestyles, pleasures and tastes become increasingly dependent on the commercial system (LIPOVETSKY, 2007, p.8).

But instead of focus on consumption with the objective to emphasize social status, Lipovetsky (2007) exalts consumption “for yourself”, based on hedonism, intimate pleasures, private theatricality, self indulgency – all manifestations consonant with the movement of individualization and privatization of happiness. Although it does not antagonize consumption “for others to see” and social distinction, this modality turns the act of consumption to the sphere of enjoyment, with predominance of sensations as well as quality of life and health: “we want objects ‘to live’ rather than objects to display” (LIPOVETSKY, 2007, p.36).

This society has as its utmost principles, displayed in the most varied forms and media, fun and preservation of young bodies; this “society of pleasure” has *Homo Felix* as its ideal type and it also cultivates adventure, risk and individual experiences, preferably exclusive ones, that take its members “further”. In the author’s perspective, the quest for happiness may someday no longer prioritize the market and ephemeral consumption, but today this is its undeniable feature.

In another reflective direction, De Masi and Toscani (2012, p.12) state that happiness is “the most perennial human obsession” and “friends” and “enemies” of happiness appear in light of contemporaneous society. Lack of time, loneliness and work appear as enemies, very much in line with the flavorful anarchy of Italian thinking and reflections about idleness. Friends of happiness, otherwise, are leisure, knowledge and idleness, of course. Unintentionally, the authors also present a paradox, also because the friend-enemy spheres coexist within the individual and bring new layers of complexity to the understanding of happiness.

f) Imperative happiness

And thus we arrive at the era of “compulsive and compulsory” happiness. According to Freire Filho (2010), current society grants

us more than the right to happiness, in fact it imposes the imperative that happiness should be accomplished immediately, right here and right now: *carpe diem*, in the meaning given by Horace.

From happiness pills commercialized as tasty sweets by the chain *Happy Pills*—but presented to look like medicine – to actual medication to attenuate anxiety, suffering or to prolong pleasure (a possibility for happiness), whose flagship is Viagra³, happiness must be conquered, and the offer is all encompassing!

And in the current context, with its neoliberal tendencies, this conquest can only be made by autonomous individuals. Birman (2010) states that the current happiness project is based on the articulation of autonomy, quality of life and self-esteem. “The three elements in question are always highlighted, in different ways, in all discourse about happiness in contemporaneity” (BIRMAN, 2010, p.37).

The imperative of autonomy is the utmost foundation of happiness in this society: without autonomy the individual would not survive, once it can no longer count on the support of the State, nor with the old solidarity from peers. On the contrary, he needs to do well against other individuals, who now appear as competitors, especially regarding the demands imposed by the new working conditions.

The imperative of quality of life focuses on “the practices that must be conducted by individuals to maintain self-esteem and autonomy” (BIRMAN, 2010, p.39): good health conditions, nutrition, physical activities, leisure, condensed in what may be defined as a balanced, healthy and beautiful lifestyle.

And it is in this combination of health and beauty that the imperative of self-esteem can be delineated: when the individual seeks to maintain his good health he is also working on his self-esteem, seeking to effectively look better and to subjectively be a winner. Meanwhile the loss of self-esteem is the “big ghost” that

³ Brand name of a drug (Sildenafil citrate), used to treat erectile dysfunction. Presented as a blue diamond and originally synthesized by the pharmaceutical corporation Pfizer.

has become an obsession for individuals today (BIRMAN, 2010, p.41).

Both autonomy and self-esteem are supported by the idea of performance, through which the person displays, shows, like in a spectacle, that he has the necessary attributes – “the subject can display his autonomy and simultaneously increase his self-esteem – undeniable signs of happiness and of the condition of winner” (BIRMAN, 2010, p.42). Victory, success and prosperity are interconnected themes that go side by side with happiness, sometimes as synonym, sometimes as reinforcement and promise. An associated manifestation that materializes the strength of these combinations are the numberless self-help books and manuals that invariably reach the top of the best selling charts in the country and worldwide, and that essentially present recipes for happiness.

Note that all elements listed here as constituting happiness are subject to the person’s exclusive handling and management, as required by the neoliberal ideology, and are not associated with social, economical conditions or any factors extrinsic to the person.

g) *Authentic happiness*

The first finding in Freire Filho’s (2010) severe criticism to what he calls “new happiness sciences” is the reinforcement of the individual character of happiness in the contemporary world, already pointed out by the authors mentioned above, but intensified by almost solitary accomplishment and responsibility: happiness depends solely on personal resolution and dedication to be happier. It is important to note that this is not just about being happy, but about being *happier*, being happy uninterruptedly, for a long period of time and in all encompassing way.

These precepts are disseminated by positive psychology⁴, combining various researches with an optimistic discourse that “translates” scientific findings into journalistic language. Its mes-

⁴ Positive psychology was instituted as a scientific movement in the turn of the millennium in the United States, having as representative authors: Ben-Shahar, Csikszentmihalyi, Fredrickson, Haidt, Lyubomirsky, Seligman, Snyder and Lopez. See FREIRE FILHO, 2010, p.55-56.

sage is clear: we should not be restricted to the pessimistic and discouraging interpretation that has been offered before by Freud's psychoanalysis – on the contrary, we should choose happiness and seek out concrete routes, through “practical methods to eradicate all unnerving personality traits that interfere with social interaction and work performance”(FREIRE FILHO, 2010, p.57).

Although positive psychology is not concerned about tracing a definitive conceptualization of happiness, stating that it may “encompass a variety of positive emotions”, through its studying in-depth research, Freire Filho was able to capture the essence of all ways the concept is used, stating that “for positive psychology happiness is one of the possible synonyms for the different levels of satisfaction we obtain when we explore (in the many senses of the word) the best in us, prospering everyday, in any situation”(FREIRE FILHO, 2010, p.58).

In this conception, there is an important change of the point we were in the discussion about the hedonist quest for happiness. From the perspective of positive psychology, sensations of happiness are functional, because, based on the improvement of the “human capital”⁵, they can generate social, physical and intellectual resources – they can be converted into a social investment that capacitates people for new challenges.

Happiness is not reduced to a ‘hedonically pleasurable state’ – we must see it and cultivate it as a trustworthy way to reach a constellation of positive purposes that surpass the individual realm (FREIRE FILHO, 2010, p.60).

Such centrality of individual subjectivity sets aside important questionings about the social context and its circumstances and any reflection in this sense is considered an attempt to excuse a lack of effort to reach happiness individually.

The construction of happiness and reaching the next level where there will be more happiness is seen as a never-ending practice, an eternal work in progress, to be conducted with good

⁵ The expression “human capital” was coined by positive psychology to designate people's potentialities such as optimism, perseverance, bravery. See FREIRE FILHO, 2010, p.57.

humor and optimism: ‘We can always be happier. Thus instead of asking whether I am happy, an useful question is ‘how can I be happier?’” (BEN-SHAHAR, *apud* FREIRE FILHO, 2010, p.76).

In the end of his criticism Freire Filho (2010) considers that the quest for positive psychology’s so-called “authentic happiness” is a reconfiguration of the quest for happiness of the Enlightenment, and that it is possibly causing a lot of suffering, as not everyone feels capable to accomplish this mission or is able to reach the ideal of the “chronically happy people”.

As we reach the end of this path it becomes clear that, regardless of whether it is seen through the optimistic eyes of positive psychology or through the perspective of more skeptical and traditional thinkers, happiness in the contemporary world is fundamentally individual and has been privatized. Even when happiness is based on elements such as quality of life or wellbeing, which could evoke the social realm of governmental protection or solidarity among peers, these elements are also regarded from an individual perspective – it is the individual wellbeing, the quality of life involved in personal decisions to improve one’s health and take private measures to improve one’s own life.

Reading these authors has also enabled the understanding of a path that has private consumption of goods as the background, but relocates their meaning in the quest for happiness on an axis that goes from expression and visibility for others, through hedonist satisfaction for one’s self and reaching, in the other extreme, the reinforcement of autonomy, quality of life and self-esteem, which in a synergetic way should amplify and improve the human capital, thus producing increasingly more happiness.

Regardless of the plausible criticism of this concept of happiness originated in positive psychology, the awareness of its dissemination and use by companies and brands, as well as citizens in general, is more than enough reason for it to be of interest in our attempt to understand how happiness has been represented in Advertising and if and how such representations display the elements described above.

Unequal happiness? The issue of the underprivileged

Based on this theoretical background, it is possible to pose some questions associated with the Brazilian context, which counts today with a sizeable contingent of new consumers, who are shaping a new configuration of the country's social topography, as it changes from a pyramid to a horizontally elongated lozenge, with striking predominance of the group defined by the Brazil Criteria⁶ as social class C. Are they the new happy people?

Strictly speaking, the first condition to reach happiness has been fulfilled: they are now able to conduct the first and fundamental act of our "consumer society"—in Bauman's words (2008) — the private consumption of goods; they also have a good chance to consume for themselves, to satisfy their individual desires; and, finally, they are also autonomous individuals, who can seek better quality of life and reinforce their self-esteem. Considering our conceptual path, the new social class C consumers also have the conditions to find and experience happiness.

However, it is important to remember that although they have reached consumption power and overcome the poverty line, this population still deals with the precariousness of social conditions in terms of infrastructure, healthcare, education, access to culture, and in the majority of the cases, are still restricted to their physically (and socially) segregated and poorer spaces, apart from the richer and more developed centers inhabited by the elite.

Certainly when we apply the widely discussed concept of Sloterdijk's trilogy (2004) *Spheres I, II and III*, we understand that familiarity ensures psychic wellbeing. Not leaving their homes, neighborhoods, time spent with the family, friends and neighbors, may be the only possibility for happiness. Therefore it is common for people and families who have conditions to move to areas with better infrastructure to choose not to leave their neighborhoods.

⁶ Brazil Criteria is the economical classification criteria developed by ABEP – Associação Brasileira das Empresas de Pesquisa (Brazilian Association of Market Research). Based on items owned in the household, i.e., consumption of goods, the criteria is used in market and opinion research in the country.

Birman (2010, p.27), on the other hand, states categorically that the social agents of the happiness project today are the middle and high social classes, and that lower social classes are not included in it – which leads us to a very controversial point. An increasing number of studies corroborate the image, already widely divulged in Brazil and internationally, that Brazilians have extraordinary *joie de vivre* and that, even among the underprivileged, this state of mind is contagious⁷. Although they lack basic goods, people supposedly find happiness in their children, friendships, work, not to mention more stereotyped factors such as fun, samba, Carnaval, dive bars, soccer, eroticism, the beach.

This discussion is extremely important because, as we have pointed out, entering the world of consumption does not remove people from their original cultural worlds (at least not immediately). Therefore it becomes fundamental to understand how much their values, tastes and perception of happiness are impacted by such movement.

An example that is also used to contest ideas like Birman's (2010) is the case of Bhutan. Nested in the Himalaya Range, in Asia between China and India, the small kingdom of Bhutan is considered the happiest country in the world. The country's population experiences profound social, topographic and economic hardships and still carries the title of happiest people in the planet, which establishes the paradox: does poverty bring happiness?

Unable to tackle this issue in-depth here – which will be done in due time – we will restrict our discussion to the groups that are already inserted in consumer society, the high and middle social classes, including the new social class C and excluding the base of the economical pyramid.

⁷ In addition to a number of market studies, see FREIRE-MEDEIROS, B. "Felicidade é... uma favela violenta com vista para o mar". In: FREIRE FILHO, J. (Org.). **Ser Feliz Hoje: reflexões sobre o imperativo da felicidade**. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2010. p.257-273.

The theme in Advertising

There are many examples of happiness being used as a theme in Advertising. Since 2009, Coca-Cola has been using the campaign “Open up happiness”, which has already become a classic in studies of the theme in Advertising; since 2011, Kibon has been working its brand using the same theme, having started with the “Happiness Club”, moving on to the “Happiness Chain”, always supported by the slogan “Share Happiness”, until the most recent viral “Laugh-o-meter”⁸.

But even before these brands, Pão de Açúcar had developed campaigns based on the theme “Happy”. The brand’s oldest slogan tells us that its customers are happy, or rather that Pão de Açúcar “is the place for happy people” and therefore it builds both the fence and the bridge for this condition⁹. Are you happy? If you are, you should be a Pão de Açúcar customer; to be a part of this group, be with your peers and stand out from the rest. But if you are not happy yet, you should also come, after all happiness is here and Pão de Açúcar can be the bridge to find it. But Pão de Açúcar still asks, insistently: What makes you happy? And a series

⁸ Regarding the Coca-Cola campaign, see FOGAÇA, J. **Felicidade consumida:** introdução ao estudo do conceito de felicidade e de sua aplicação na publicidade. Work presented at III Pró-Pesq PP – Encontro de Pesquisadores em Publicidade e Propaganda. CRP/ECA/USP, 2012. Available at http://www.eca.usp.br/propesq/downloads/ebook_III_Propesq_pp.pdf. Regarding the Kibon campaigns see SANTOS, J; FOGAÇA, J. **Signos da Felicidade:** recorrências simbólicas e diversidade de sentidos na publicidade. Work presented at IV Pró-Pesq PP – Encontro de Pesquisadores em Publicidade e Propaganda. CRP/ECA/USP, 2013. Available at: <http://www.eca.usp.br/propesq>

⁹ The idea of consumption as bridges and fences was developed by Douglas and Isherwood, in *O Mundo dos Bens* (2009). These authors look at consumption in terms of its cultural and collective reality, attributing to it the function to give meaning to the incomplete flow of events. Goods are the “visible part of culture”, the “ritualistic accessories” of the ritual of consumption (DOUGLAS; ISHERWOOD, 2009, p.112-114). From this perspective, consumption has the primary purpose to classify people and events, and material goods serve as “markers of lines in social relationships”, communicating the social status one belongs to or wishes to belong to: “they can be used as fences or as bridges” (DOUGLAS; ISHERWOOD, 2009, p.36).

of possibilities is given to us as inspiration in the commercials for the campaign: “Chocolate, passion, going to bed early, sleeping in... Rice and beans, end longing... The raise, the house, the car you’ve always wanted... *Or are dreams what makes you happy?*”

Figure 1 –Pão de Açúcar Campaign– *What makes you happy?*



This campaign, released in 2007 but still very present today although reconfigured, is an example of how Advertising reactivates desires through persuasive images and verbal messages. It successfully reinforces individual pleasure and private consumption as privileged expressions of contemporary happiness. And it also feeds the possibility of differentiation, autonomy and individuality, as each person can be happy in a different way, exercising free choice, but all equally having the same “right to happiness”. Finally, with a clear psychoanalytical approach¹⁰, emphasizing emotional and affectionate stimuli, the campaign is able to lead consumers to imagine the pleasure they will obtain, achieving what Campbell (2001) named imaginative hedonism.

¹⁰ According to Perez (2004a), in the psychoanalytical approach of Advertising, “The main issue is consumers’ emotional motivation. There are internal and usually unconscious factors that lead to the purchase of a certain product. The impulse, the endless quest for pleasure. Advertising should work with a suggestive, somewhat detective-like, indicative and symbolic language, letting consumers’ emotional imaginary operate” (PEREZ, C., 2004a, p.123).

But the Pão de Açúcar campaign is still in movement, reinventing itself and introducing new elements. In the 2012 campaign sensorial elements are reinforced in the images, evoking more consumption “for oneself” than consumption “for others”, and with truly striking presence of an explicit and highlighted imperative character of happiness, as well as individual responsibility to achieve it. It says, in bold letters: “A happy moment is something we create” and, in smaller print: “Some of the ingredients are at Pão de Açúcar” (Figure 2). The message indicates that the re-conceptualization of the campaign updated the concept of happiness, suggesting, by highlighting elements present in the proposal of “authentic happiness”, the use of the principles of positive psychology.

Figure 2 –Pão de Açúcar Campaign– “A happy moment is something we create”



But it is in 2013 that these principles are consolidated in the Pão de Açúcar trajectory. Reworking and updating its advertising campaign, based on a play with words, the company clearly expresses the precepts of positive psychology, strengthening the ideal of individuality and autonomy. In the campaign’s institutional film-manifest entitled “All it takes to be happy is to start” (Figure 3), the already familiar sentence “What makes you happy?” is followed by other phrases that at first just seem to be a scrambling of the order of the words, but that in the end indicate a meaning different from the one in the beginning. The sentence is transformed in the lyrics of the accompanying song as well as in the lettering on screen, at first to “What do you make to be happy?”, transferring the action from an undetermined subject to the recipient of the message; followed by another transformation and a new question “Do you make what makes you happy?”, and

finally the last transformation into a sentence (and no longer a question) “You make what makes you happy”, stating on one hand the autonomy in the achievement of happiness and, on the other hand, the individual and even lonely responsibility for the success or failure of this endeavor. To be happy or not depends only on you, not on Pão de Açúcar, the State, or anyone else. Take the initiative, be happy.

The word “you”, fiercely underlined in all sentences that appear on screen reinforces who the subject of the action is, with every new picture.

Figure 3 –Pão de Açúcar Campaign – “All it takes to be happy is to start”



The consistency of Pão de Açúcar’s campaigns using the happiness theme is based on the constant updating of the concept, and it is possible to identify in them almost all adjectives raised in our theoretical research.

The first sentence – A place for happy people – establishes the fence around those who belong in consumer society and serves as a bridge to those who want to belong, making it possible to achieve “wide, general and unrestricted happiness”, as long as you go to the right place, as well as “measurable happiness”, which can be displayed through the goods acquired there.

The second sentence – What makes you happy – illustrates “paradoxical happiness”, as it places potential customers in a situation where they can choose, among numberless alternatives, what will satisfy them, as long as it is something that is available on the shelves of the chain’s stores.

The third sentence – A happy moment is something we create – carries the concept of “imperative happiness”, with its triad of imperatives: autonomy (“we create” indicates the possibility of individual accomplishment); quality of life (by changing the focus

from the act of shopping and consumption to moments and experiences with family members and friends); and self-esteem (which will stay high through the good practice of the two first points).

Finally, the fourth sentence – All it takes to be happy is to start – is an almost perfect translation of “authentic happiness”, once it clearly translates positive psychology’s message: happiness depends solely on personal resolution and dedication, embodied in “different levels of satisfaction we obtain when we explore the best in us, prospering everyday, in any situation” (FREIRE FILHO, 2010, p.58).

Having in this advertising campaign, that seems to consolidate the positioning of the Pão de Açúcar brand, such a clear example of the use of contemporaneous attributes of happiness, and having no question about Pão de Açúcar’s premium positioning, it seems interesting to contrast this case with the example of a chain of stores geared at medium and lower class consumers, Magazine Luiza, which also uses the happiness argument in its Communication, through the signature “Come be happy”.

Looking at Figure 4, we see that the relationship established with the concept of happiness is very simple and basic. It is possible to emphasize in this set of representations the presence of bright colors¹¹ and the large number of elements, in direct reference to the concrete acquisition of goods and abundance, which are generally in line with what was defined as inclusion consumption¹², the type geared at meeting basic and emotional

¹¹ Proofreader’s note: the figures in this article were reproduced in black and white.

¹² The two concepts we will use here were developed by us in a previous study: “Inclusion consumption is a condition characterized by obtaining whatever materializes a situation of prosperity and security, as seen in the society of producers. It is in this condition that more substantial material goods are acquired: a home, electronics/appliances (starting by the white line), furniture, as well as items that enable them to find and relate to groups and individuals: computer and cell phone.” (...) “Ascension consumption is a condition characterized by obtaining what will signify accessing a superior position or social class. It is in this condition that they acquire material goods that have symbolic value, and brands gain increased importance.” See FOGAÇA, J. O **Consumo, o Gosto, a Ponte e a Cerca**: um estudo exploratório sobre gosto e referências estéticas em propagandas dirigidas à baixa renda. Available at <http://www.intercom.org.br/papers/nacionais/2011/resumos/R6-2471-1.pdf>

needs through the consumption of the value materialized in the products and at the same time concerned with the denial of the scarcity left in the past. The ad is a call, in which we identify the bridge for the consumer society, but it does not bring any other element – beyond explicit text, the cheerfulness of the colors and the abundance – which indicates the complexity of the current concept of happiness.

Figure 4 – Magazine Luiza. “Come be happy” and “Grab what you can” Promotion



However it should not be inferred that the ads for the groups of consumers of medium or low socio-economical level do not work with more complex elements of the current contemporary conceptualization of happiness. Not only due to the obvious limitations of the exploratory character of this work, but also because it is possible to find other examples of brands geared at middle and low social classes that express the elements covered by the theoretical review above.

We present as an example of this possibility the case of O Boticário, which brings in its campaign the “positive” concept that it is always possible to be *happier*, even if you already lead a good life (quality of life), even if you already feel pretty (self-esteem), everything can be better, it can be amplified and maximized: “Life is beautiful, but it can be gorgeous.” (Figure 5). The campaign further

reinforces the element of success, resulting from a happy life and beauty, as preached by positive psychology, and talks directly to those who are climbing the social ladder, in line with the concept of ascension consumption: “I want to get there, but I want to be gorgeous when I do”.

Figure 5 – O Boticário. “Life is beautiful, but it can be gorgeous”. “I want to get there, but I want to be gorgeous when I do”.



These examples are very instigating to continue the discussion we started here, in which we seek to understand the conjunction of economical (substantiated by the differences in socio-economical levels), social and political (of democracy and neoliberalism), philosophical and moral elements, but above all the order of the representations, the symbolical universe, that emanate the beat of all of these spheres, reflecting and reinserting into themselves the values that qualify our quotidian happiness.

Final considerations

The present text sought to understand the transformations of the concept of happiness and to contextualize it in the realm of contemporaneity and the values of consumer society. Based on the concept of ‘happiness adjectives’ – as it always requires a quality to contextualize it–, we explored the path happiness has made in the imaginary and social practices, focusing on its relationship with consumption. From enchanted and always future happiness we moved on to broad, general and unrestricted happiness, to imperfect and relative happiness sometimes with the need to measure and display it, but also paradoxical, imperative,

and perhaps authentic. Living with the complexity of possibilities is a realization. With the exception of enchanted happiness, too distant from the rules of consumer society, all the others blend together and become confused with each other depending on the epistemological angles assumed.

In order to consolidate our understanding, we sought to investigate which and how the conceptual elements of the most recent theories about happiness have been used by many brands, through the presentation and analysis of examples of advertising campaigns geared at different social strata, but always based on the Communication of happiness.

It was possible to identify that this is an advertising theme that breaks with all social restrictions of gender or age. It is treated like a possibility that is available to all and that all should and are able to obtain. The differences in terms of positioning between Pão de Açúcar's and Magazine Luiza's proposals, for instance, are restricted mainly to aesthetic manifestation and production rather than the essence of the message. Thus we note that the complexity of the elements that make reference to happiness are not exclusive to ads destined to the higher social classes and that there may be a relationship between the type of consumption (ascension or inclusion) and the representation of happiness adopted in the ad.

We do not deny the limitations of this theoretical-exploratory study, with an interpretative approach. However, the path taken was fruitful to broaden the historical and evolutionary understanding of the concept of happiness and how it can manifest itself on a contemporary socio-cultural expression, namely Advertising. Future studies must be conducted to further reflect on happiness as well as to expand the documental research of advertising materials and the investigation of the reception by audiences belonging to different social classes, comparing them.

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