

SAVING THE PLANET THROUGH CONSUMPTION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DISCOURSE BEHIND UBER PLANET IN BRAZIL

Thiago Lethi¹

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the discourse of cause-related marketing (CRM) employed by the app Uber to promote its “Uber Planet/Green” initiative, which aims to offer more sustainable and eco-friendly transportation options. The research examines consumer practices through a psychoanalytic lens (LACAN, 1999; STAVRAKAKIS, 2007; ŽIŽEK, 2000, 2008), along with extensions such as Rifkin’s concept of cultural capitalism (2000) and the practice of “causumerism” by Richey and Ponte (2011). The methodology involves a critical analysis of marketing campaigns and impact reports to understand their implications. The findings indicate that, while CRM advocates for significant social causes, it also commodifies social activism, aligning with contemporary critiques of ethical consumption and the practices of comfort and authenticity (BANET-WEISER, 2012). This research contributes to the discourse on the complexities of consumer engagement with sustainability initiatives.

KEYWORDS

Cultural capitalism. Consumerism. Causumerism. Cause-related marketing. Consumption critique.

1 INTRODUCTION

Consumption plays a central role in contemporary society, addressing issues such as waste, pollution (McCARTHY; LIU, 2017; ROY et al., 2021), identity (HUANG; WONG, 2019; WEEMS JR., 2005), and anti-consumerism (BRANDÃO; POPOLI, 2022; ZIESEMER et al., 2021). However, certain forms of consumption and consumerism² (BANET-WEISER, 2012) stand out for their political impact, particularly when aimed at causes such as disease treatment, victim support, or building restoration. In these cases, cause-related marketing (CRM) promotes partnerships between companies and charitable organizations to raise funds and increase awareness.

The emergence of new pandemics and global crises has spurred the creation of additional CRMs, fostering “causumerism,” a trend where individuals attempt to make the

¹ PhD candidate in the Graduate Program in Communication at UERJ. Researcher at the Laboratory for Image and Imaginary Studies (LABIM-PPGCOM/UERJ) and FAPERJ scholarship holder. Email: thiagoletthi@ufrj.br.

² A type of consumption tied to social values, where the consumer feels a certain security in engaging with a cause without taking many risks.

world a better place through their purchases, without deeply considering the complex social and environmental relationships involved in the products they acquire. These individuals rely on "the double guarantee that they are 'good' both as consumers and for the recipients of their help" (RICHEY; PONTE, 2011, p. 151).

This practice reflects what Rifkin (2000) describes as 'cultural capitalism,' where cultural resources are transformed into paid experiences—in consumerism, this is the experience of helping others. Rifkin (2000) explains this transition by citing sociologist Daniel Bell, who describes modern civilization as divided into three interconnected spheres: economy, politics, and culture. In the economic sphere, the fundamental principle is resource efficiency; in the political sphere, participation is emphasized; and in the cultural sphere, self-development and personal fulfillment are highlighted (BELL apud RIFKIN, 2000). However, over the last century, there has been an increasing commodification of political and cultural values, integrating them into the economic sphere. As a result, some brands now serve as cultural spaces, offering consumers authenticity, relevance, and security (BANET-WEISER, 2012).

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2009a) argues that in cultural capitalism, commodities are purchased not only for their utility or status but also for the experiences they offer. He links this logic to Lacan's RSI triad: the Real of utility (e.g., the quality of a car or healthy food), the Symbolic of status (e.g., buying a car to signal social position, from Thorstein Veblen's perspective), and the Imaginary of pleasurable experience. Žižek (2009a) illustrates this with a 2009 Starbucks advertisement promoting 'ethical coffee,' where part of the purchase was intended to support coffee farmers, enhancing the brand's atmosphere. He comments that this is

how capitalism, at the level of consumption, integrated the legacy of '68, the critique of alienated consumption: authentic experience matters. [...] The point is that, in buying them, we are not merely buying and consuming, we are simultaneously doing something meaningful, showing our capacity for care and our global awareness, participating in a collective project (ŽIŽEK, 2009a, p. 54).

This ethical consumption is tied to 'woke' culture, which Žižek (2023) contends awakens people only to keep them asleep. He argues that progressive liberal consumerist practices, such as ethical consumption and virtue signaling, provide individuals with a sense of moral satisfaction while allowing them to ignore the structural injustices and exploitation

that underlie capitalist consumerism. Žižek (2023) illustrates this through a dream analyzed by Freud, in which a father dreams of his dead son saying: “Father, can’t you see I’m burning?” Upon waking, the father realizes that the fabric covering his son’s coffin is on fire, and the dream was an attempt to prolong sleep and avoid confronting the painful reality. However, he eventually awakens to prevent further harm. Žižek (2023) compares this to woke culture, which seeks to alleviate guilt through savior narratives, thus allowing the continuation of consumerist lifestyles without facing their consequences.

Therefore, this paper aims to reflect on the motivations behind contemporary consumption from a psychoanalytic perspective, particularly in relation to CRM. It also presents a case study on Uber Planet/Green, a service that aims to reduce carbon emissions as part of the effort to combat global warming. By analyzing this case, the study explores current events within a specific context, facilitating the understanding of complex social phenomena (YIN, 2003). The research draws on the company’s institutional discourse, supplemented by news articles and critiques that expose certain contradictions in the CRM examined.

2 THE QUESTION OF CONSUMPTION

The idea of humans as consumers originated before World War I, gaining momentum in the United States during the 1920s. Since then, consumption has come to occupy a central role in society. Historically, people met their basic needs directly or relied on others, and before the 20th century, there was little incentive to expand consumption (HIGGS, 2014). Although the growth of consumption is often linked to the post-World War II period, historian William Leach traces its roots back to the late 19th century in the U.S., when stores expanded, mail-order shopping increased, and large department stores emerged. According to Leach (apud HIGGS, 2014, p. 69), the “cardinal features of this culture were acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness; the cult of the new; the democratization of desire; and money value as the predominant measure of all value in society.” It is important to note that it was individual desire that was democratized, not wealth or political and economic power.

Following the 1929 crash, pessimism was addressed with a consumer-centered solution. Edward Cowdrick introduced the concept of the 'new economic gospel of

consumption,' advocating for workers to develop consumption skills and for new needs to be created through advertising. People were encouraged to abandon thrift and personal savings, valuing goods over leisure time, in a context where envy of wealthier individuals fueled consumption and drove economic growth (HIGGS, 2014). To ensure the continuous purchase of new products, manufacturers adopted both planned and psychological obsolescence, where products are “designed to become obsolete in the mind of the consumer, even sooner than the components used to make them will fail” (PACKARD apud HIGGS, 2014, p. 75). Through this, consumers reinvent themselves by purchasing products marketed as modern and fashionable. Consumer culture, in turn, is always promoted as new (SLATER, 2002).

This cycle is closely tied to cultural practices, resulting in a consumer culture that “seems to mark the passage from a society of prohibition to a society of commanded enjoyment” (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 22). According to Don Slater (2002, p. 8), such a culture represents

a social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, is mediated through markets. Consumer culture marks out a system in which consumption is dominated by the consumption of commodities, and in which cultural reproduction is largely understood to be carried out through the exercise of free personal choice in the private sphere of everyday life.

For Slater (2002), consumer culture is not limited to the consumption of signs nor does it merely reflect the existing social order. Instead, it constitutes a space of contestation in three areas. First, it involves disputes over the social and cultural arrangements that mobilize material resources. Thus, it is essential to examine how access to consumer goods is controlled, as well as the productive arrangements, technologies, and labor relations that sustain their production. Second, consumption

animates public and social systems of signs, not necessarily in the sense of public display [...] but more fundamentally through the process of cultural reproduction [...]. As consumption has become an ever more central means of enacting our citizenship of the social world, struggles over the power to dispose of material, financial and symbolic power and resources have become central to the cultural reproduction of the everyday world (Slater, 2002, p. 4-5).

Additionally, disputes arise regarding the ethical dimensions of consumption, shaping the social, moral, or religious regulation of the self (SLATER, 2002). In postmodernity, following

the rise of the neoliberal ideology promoted by Thatcher and Reagan, “consumer choice became the obligatory pattern for all social relations and the template for civic dynamism and freedom” (SLATER, 2002, p. 10). Consequently, consumerism came to be viewed as the driver of both economic progress and individual freedom. Consumption thus became central to social life, displacing other spheres such as religion and politics. The values of this culture extended into various domains, including broadcasting and public health (SLATER, 2002), promoting experiences tied to cultural capitalism (RIFKIN, 2000).

The apparent eagerness of consumer societies for new goods, and the insatiability that follows, do not stem from materialism but from the meaningful pleasure derived from imagining a dream as reality. For the hedonistic daydreamer, desire holds more significance than possession. Postponing the fulfillment of a desire offers more opportunities to enjoy the anticipated pleasure and “pleasant discomforts” (CAMPBELL, 2018). Campbell (2018, p. 144) argues that this imaginative anticipation provides the most pleasure, claiming that “individuals do not so much seek satisfaction from products as pleasure from the self-illusory experiences that they construct from their associated meanings.” Once the daydream is realized, no matter how it compares to previous fantasies, the result becomes known and irreversible.

However, while I partially agree with Campbell (2018, p. 141) that “attaining an object of desire is likely to eliminate the pleasures associated with anticipatory day-dreaming,” it also triggers a cycle of desiring, acquiring, using, becoming disillusioned, and renewing the desire—mimicking the trajectory of psychoanalytic desire. According to McGowan (2016), capitalism keeps individuals in a constant state of desire without ever satisfying what they long for. With the promise of fulfillment, people consume within a logic of satisfaction-dissatisfaction, where “the future embodies a type of satisfaction foreclosed to the present and dependent on one’s investment in the capitalist system. The promise ensures a sense of dissatisfaction with the present in relation to the future” (McGOWAN, 2016, p. 12). Desire is a product of language; it exists within language itself, not in the objects, which only hinder the circulation of desire. It is tied to the production of new signifiers that alter our relationship with objects, and capitalism works to perfect this by producing more desire.

We can approach the issue of consumption through the lens of desire and *jouissance*³, as studied by Jacques Lacan (1999). But why use psychoanalysis in this context? Because it lies at the heart of public relations and advertising. Edward Bernays, influenced by Sigmund Freud's ideas, observed that it is not rational discourse that binds subjects to things but emotional and often unconscious ties (HIGGS, 2014; STAVRAKAKIS, 2007). Lacan's view of *jouissance* differs from Freud's (1925) theory of psychosexual development. Freud saw libido or sexual drive as focused on specific erogenous zones during childhood: in the oral stage, it is centered on the mouth in relation to the mother's breast; in the anal stage, it relates to the pleasure derived from controlling bodily waste; and in the phallic stage, it is directed toward the genitals. Lacan shifts this biological approach to focus on the symbolic and imaginary structuring of pleasure.

For Lacan (apud STAVRAKAKIS, 2007), libido is connected to the traumatic Real of *jouissance*. A child is born into a world unstructured by language and filled with *jouissance* unmediated by bodily impulses. Upon entering the symbolic order of language, the child abandons its direct relationship with *jouissance*, escaping its overwhelming intensity but also losing access to that pleasure. However, *jouissance* continues to influence the subject's symbolic universe, with a strange material persistence that is both disturbing and irresistible. Separated from natural needs and without immediate access to real objects that could satisfy it, human desire becomes a longing for something absent—part of the Real that is impossible to fully express in demand (STAVRAKAKIS, 2007).

Fantasy is a construction that stimulates or awakens desire by promising to fill the void created by the loss of *jouissance* with a substitute—the object a (*objet a*). In Lacan's theory, the essential structure of fantasy involves the relationship between the divided, lacking subject and the object a. The underlying idea is that the human condition is marked by a search for a lost or impossible *jouissance*. Fantasy presents the object a as the promise of an encounter with that desired *jouissance*, fantasized as filling the void in the Other and satisfying the lack in the subject. Therefore, psychoanalysis offers a profound understanding of how desire and fantasy are structured and how they can be mobilized within consumer culture. By

³ For Lacan, there is a strong relationship between desire and pain, suggesting that our relentless pursuit of desires leads to inevitable dissatisfaction and pain. Often, we desire so intensely that it becomes agonizing, but even painful experiences can contain pleasure. In this way, *jouissance* is a pleasure in pain. Thus, *jouissance* differs from pleasure itself (ŽIŽEK, 2000, p. 297).

recognizing that emotional and unconscious connections are fundamental to consumption, we can better comprehend the dynamics that lead to the incessant desire and continuous dissatisfaction that sustain the capitalist system.

When someone desires a car, they may list reasons such as appearance, speed, or social status. However, unconsciously, their desire for the car might be linked to the pursuit of perfection, overcoming inadequacies, or the wish to be desired. In this case, the car is not just an object; it represents something that attempts to fill a void in the person's life—something that will never be resolved by simply owning the vehicle. In this context, brands become “channels of desire, emblems of a world denied, embodiments of wishes unfulfilled” (EWEN; EWEN, 1982 apud STAVRAKAKIS, 2007, p. 240). Brands trigger fantasies that arouse desire, promising to fill the void with a substitute—be it a product, an experience, or some other element in the realm of consumption.

Fantasy does not aim to satisfy desire, as this is impossible. Rather, it teaches us how to desire, much like daydreams do (CAMPBELL, 2018; ŽIŽEK, 2008). Žižek (2008, p. 7) explains, “fantasy does not mean that when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality, I fantasize about eating it; the problem is, rather: how do I know that I desire a strawberry cake in the first place? This is what fantasy tells me.” In the context of cultural capitalism, fantasy involves the desire to consume a good while simultaneously acquiring some form of aesthetic, cultural, or political experience. Imagine buying a mobile app and, at the same time, contributing to the fight against global slave labor. This would attract consumers who are engaged with social justice (BANET-WEISER, 2012).

According to Banet-Weiser (2012, p. 138), the 21st century has witnessed a shift from traditional consumption—acquiring a product—to individual consumption that seeks to “do good by buying well,” often at the expense of broader communal concerns, such as equal access to markets or labor conditions. In this context, capitalism perpetuates its global ideology. For example, an environmental protest against capitalism's relentless exploitation of natural resources can be co-opted by the consumption of organic foods. Thus, ecology transforms into a lifestyle, an aesthetic that can be consumed to shape identities. This perspective reflects an adaptation of Foucault's (1986) view of ethics as a transformation of one's relationship with oneself into a work of art. In consumer culture, this translates into becoming a zen person by purchasing a yoga plan, adopting an eco-conscious stance by

choosing organic products at the supermarket, or shaping one's public persona by frequenting spaces associated with a desired social group.

When purchasing an organic product, we rarely have access to the full details of all the processes that brought it to market. Nevertheless, by doing so, we express our care and global awareness, participating in a meaningful collective project. This is how the ideology we are immersed in operates. According to Žižek (2009b), ideology is not just a 'false consciousness' of the world but a cynical experience of lived reality. For him, this ideology functions as follows: we know that we are following an illusion in our actions, yet we still carry them out. An example would be buying a bag of coffee from a major coffee chain to help farmers in some region of the Global South, while this masks the global labor exploitation that takes place. This makes us feel as though we are contributing to ending a social injustice in a comfortable and authentic way, even though we know that the issue will not be resolved by simply purchasing a product (NICKEL; EIKENBERRY, 2009).

Within the context of CRM, it is evident that consumer culture is shaped as a culture of consumption, where societal values are organized around and derived from consumption itself. It is a culture that emphasizes freedom of choice and consumer sovereignty, as well as being a culture of theoretically unlimited and insatiable needs. Furthermore, in contemporary consumer culture, the values expressed through consumption extend into other areas of social action (RICHEY; PONTE, 2011).

3 CONSUMING AND DOING MY PART

Many brands adopt CRM as an expression of "philanthrocapitalism," which proposes to address global problems through capitalism (EDWARDS, 2008, apud RICHEY; PONTE, 2011). However, from a critical perspective, CRM suggests that companies are merely returning something they had previously extracted (LITTLER, 2009; NICKEL; EIKENBERRY, 2009). The consumption of goods and experiences also mobilizes meanings, political action, and community integration, as Žižek (2009a) points out. Consumers, through ostentatious acts, demand social and environmental changes, supported by certification and labeling systems (RICHEY; PONTE, 2011). CRM campaigns bridge the economy and culture, transforming the interaction between consumers and goods, facilitated by post-Fordism and neoliberal policies.

It is easy to observe CRM operating in causes such as diseases, work conditions, and more. However, there are also instances where consumption is geared towards environmental conservation, particularly in addressing climate issues that have significantly impacted people's lives in recent years. For example, studies indicate that by the end of the 21st century, approximately 990 km of the Brazilian coastline could be flooded due to rising sea levels, which may increase by 50 cm⁴. One of the causes of this phenomenon is the greenhouse effect, which accelerates glacial melting and consequently raises sea levels. A 2018 study revealed that greenhouse gas emissions are accelerating, placing the planet on the brink of a series of climatic events that threaten life on Earth. Human activity has already increased global temperatures by 1°C above pre-industrial levels. If this rise exceeds 1.5°C, it could trigger uncontrolled feedback loops and a cascade of adverse climatic events, causing significant damage to ecosystems (RIFKIN, 2019). In November 2023, Brazil experienced extreme heat waves, with temperatures approximately 4°C above normal, along with more severe droughts and less wind. According to researcher Davide Faranda, leader of ClimaMeter, this temperature increase is linked to higher CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere, resulting in warmer temperatures and less rainfall due to climate change (NASCIMENTO, 2023).

In light of this concern, there has been a noticeable rise in green consumerism, defined as a “socially conscious or socially responsible decision making that is an outcome of personal ethical orientation or a set of pro-environmental personal values and attitudes [aimed at] to satisfy his or her needs in the everyday life causing as little as possible impact on the environment” (SHARMA; JOSHI, 2017, pp. 207-208, [emphasis added]). In a sense, green consumers theoretically “voluntarily contribute to environmental interests by making rational decisions in their purchase, usage and disposal” (SHARMA; JOSHI, 2017, p. 208).

To explore the CRM concept in the context of climate issues, we focus on Uber, a multinational company offering individual transportation services through an app. Uber began as a startup in 2010 in the United States and expanded to Brazil in 2014 (ANDRÉ et al., 2019). The platform not only facilitates passenger transport but also offers delivery services for commercial establishments and shipping between users. Initially, Uber launched the Uber Black service, which used luxury cars with highly rated drivers. Since then, the company has

⁴

More

information

available

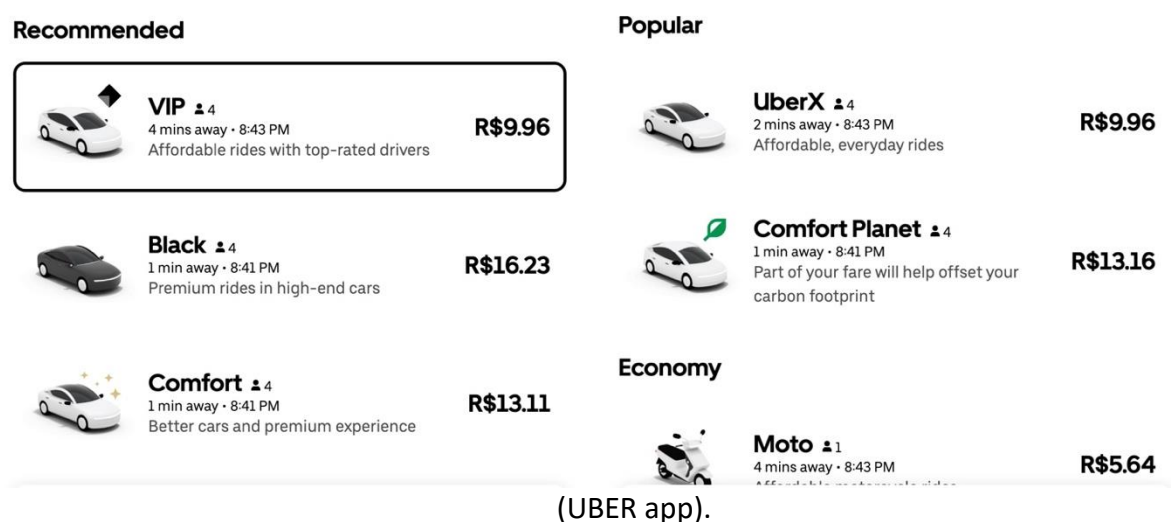
at:

<https://horizons.hdr.undp.org/#/country/BRA/sea%20level%20rising%20cm/SSP2-45>. Accessed: 19 jun. 2024.

diversified its services, especially in Rio de Janeiro, where it currently offers a wide range of options: Uber Black, with luxury cars and well-rated drivers; VIP, affordable rides with well-rated drivers; Comfort, featuring better cars and a premium experience; X, a more conventional mode with accessible rates; Comfort Planet, a Comfort service where part of the fare helps offset the passenger's carbon footprint; Priority, for priority passengers; Flash, for item deliveries; Flash Moto, the same Flash service but using motorcycles; Moto, for motorcycle transport; Tembici Bikes, bicycle rentals available at specific locations throughout the city; and Pet, for transporting pets along with passengers.

Originating in Costa Rica, Uber Comfort Planet (or Uber Green) is the company's eco-conscious option aimed at achieving zero CO₂ emissions by 2040 (Uber, 2022). Launched in 2021, its fare is, on average, 5% higher than an X or Comfort ride. At the end of each month, users receive a report detailing their CO₂ compensation. Figure 1 illustrates the price differences among the app's ride options.

Figure 1 - Travel costs for different modes of transportation in the city of Rio de Janeiro within a 1 km radius in June 2024.



The calculation of carbon emissions for Uber's green service is based on factors such as vehicle occupancy, the rate of trips without passengers, and the type of engine and fuel consumed by the vehicle (UBER, n.d.a). Green cars are defined as hybrid or electric vehicles that achieve at least a 25% reduction in CO₂ emissions compared to a standard trip (UBER, n.d.b). Silvia Penna, Uber's operations manager in Brazil, stated that this service gives platform

users the opportunity to move around while also contributing to environmental preservation. This option allows Uber to uphold its global commitment to becoming a more sustainable company and to actively participate in creating a healthier environment for everyone (UBER, 2021).

The company claims that the compensated carbon credits⁵ will be allocated to initiatives aimed at preserving areas at risk of degradation in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest (SASSINE, 2023; UBER, 2022). To this end, Uber has partnered with Carbonext, a company responsible for evaluating and offsetting the carbon footprint generated by trips made on the platform (UBER, 2022). Janaína Dallan, CEO of Carbonext, explains that carbon credits provide the forest with an economically viable alternative to deforestation for activities like soybean cultivation, livestock farming, or illegal logging, helping to preserve the biodiversity of the biome. Carbonext allocates 70% of the income generated from carbon credit sales back to the forest, focusing on the defense, benefit, and development of the local population. This initiative also raises awareness among customers, who, by using Uber's green services, contribute to a more sustainable future for the planet (UBER, 2021).

According to the Climate Observatory (*Observatório do Clima*) (2023), deforestation, particularly in the Amazon, is the primary source of CO₂ emissions in Brazil. In 2021, the country emitted approximately 2.4 billion tons of greenhouse gases. These emissions were distributed across various sectors: land-use changes (49%), agriculture (25%), energy and industrial processes (22%), and waste (4%). Agricultural activities, encompassing the first two categories, accounted for 74% of total emissions. This sector includes sources such as enteric fermentation in ruminants, disposal of animal waste, irrigated rice cultivation, burning of agricultural waste, and soil management influenced by nitrogen fertilizers and agricultural operations. Emissions from energy and industrial processes arise from the combustion of fuels for transportation, industry, and electricity generation, including gasoline in vehicles and natural gas in industrial boilers (OBSERVATÓRIO DO CLIMA, 2023).

In the transportation sector, trucks are responsible for 42% of greenhouse gas emissions, while automobiles account for 31% (OBSERVATÓRIO DO CLIMA, 2023). The significance of transportation in discussions about climate change raises questions about the

⁵ Segundo Sassine (2023), um crédito de carbono representa a redução de uma tonelada de CO₂ que deixa de ser lançada na atmosfera devido à prevenção do desmatamento.

impact of Uber's CRM efforts, especially considering that its service is more expensive than public transport and promotes the fetishization of private car ownership. Uber's green policy could be assessed by calculating the proportion of green cars in its fleet relative to the total number of vehicles in Brazil and the percentage of emissions from transportation within the energy and industrial processes sector, which likely reveals a negligible contribution to emission reduction. Another concerning issue is Carbonext's connection to the oil company Shell, which allegedly signed a contract with the Kayapó Mebengôkre indigenous leaders in southern Pará for exclusive rights to sell carbon credits from the forest areas inhabited by these peoples (SASSINE, 2023). The contract, purportedly made with the promise of advance payments to the community, did not establish a clear project and granted the company irrevocable and unrestricted exclusivity over the land⁶.

The nuances that CRM can evoke in consumers are noteworthy. By slightly raising its standard fare, Uber offers consumers a sense of comfort, allowing them to believe they are contributing to the fight against global warming. However, the company's overall impact remains minimal on a global scale, and its partnerships raise ethical concerns regarding indigenous communities in Brazil. Furthermore, as noted by the Observatório do Clima (2023), agriculture remains the predominant sector contributing to greenhouse gas emissions, with few effective actions currently underway to mitigate this impact. In terms of reducing emissions from automobiles, various measures could be implemented, such as promoting proximity between residences and workplaces to reduce the need for motorized travel, expanding telecommuting options, and shifting individual trips to collective transportation modes, which consume proportionally less fuel per passenger transported (OBSERVATÓRIO DO CLIMA, 2023).

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The dream analyzed by Freud (apud ŽIŽEK, 2023) and the comfort experienced by the father help elucidate what attracts consumers to CRM initiatives. We live in a world filled with adversities that affect many people globally. However, philanthropic gestures or ethical

⁶ More information available at: <https://brasil.mongabay.com/2023/10/empresa-ligada-a-shell-e-acusada-de-violar-direitos-indigenas-em-contratos-de-creditos-de-carbono/#:~:text=A%20Carbonext%2C%20que%20tem%20como,esses%20povos%20vivem%2C%20segundo%20Orelatos>. Accessed: 19 jun. 2024.

consumption rarely resolve these issues; instead, they often serve as political affirmations or forms of genuine engagement within cultural capitalism. Nickel and Eikenberry (2009, p. 985) discuss CRM through the lens of philanthropic consumption, emphasizing that transformative “philanthropy should represent the possibility for social change through a repoliticized and nonmarketized discourse.” Embracing CRM as a tool for change presupposes at least three underlying assumptions, according to Wirgau (2010): first, that individuals are unaware of the needs of others or that there is a necessity to raise awareness about how to alleviate these needs; second, that if individuals are informed, they will take action through the most convenient means available, such as consumption; and finally, it suggests that, given the first two assumptions, corporations are the capable and appropriate channel for administering this aid.

CRM manipulates consumerism by enabling individuals to feel politically engaged through their purchasing choices (WIRGAU, 2010). These companies contribute to the perpetuation of the current system by providing consumers with a way to feel good about themselves without challenging the fundamental structures of inequality and exploitation that underlie the problems. Uber, through its Planet/Green service, minimizes the responsibility of sectors that have a greater impact than vehicular emissions by selling a service that claims to combat global warming. Furthermore, there is little discussion regarding the working conditions of the drivers, who are ideologically referred to as 'partner drivers' (ANDRÉ et al., 2019).

Such contradictions may not be illegal, but they raise moral questions about whether the 'remedies' sold truly address the proposed issues. Oscar Wilde (1915, pp. 3-4) critiques philanthropy, arguing that these proposed solutions do not genuinely resolve problems; instead, they merely prolong them. He compares such actions to remedies that "do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it." According to Wilde (1915, p. 4), the "worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realized by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplated it." In this sense, capitalist ideology may keep the needy trapped in these injustices, helping only a few individuals while obscuring the structural causes of social issues.

This case study reveals that the analyzed brands encourage the consumption of a product or service rather than prompting consumers to direct their money directly to a cause.

They persuade consumers to believe that their simple purchases can have a significant impact on the world. This marketing strategy is effective: when criticized, companies can easily highlight other similar initiatives and argue that they are contributing more to altruistic causes than their competitors.

Lacan's concept of desire, as discussed by Stavrakakis (2007), provides a crucial framework for understanding how capitalist ideology operates at the individual level. In the context of cultural capitalism, desire is continually stimulated and manipulated, leading consumers to seek fulfillment through consumption. Initiatives like those of the companies studied capitalize on this inherent lack by promising consumers the opportunity to satisfy their desire for social change through purchasing. However, this desire is never fully realized, as it is based on a fantasy of transformation that remains perpetually deferred within capitalist ideology.

Thus, the intersection of cultural capitalism, green consumerism, and CRM exemplifies the complex ways in which capitalism shapes and exploits individual desires in the pursuit of profit. By elucidating these dynamics, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which capitalism maintains its hegemony and perpetuates the cycle of consumption and deprivation. Looking ahead, further research in this area could explore alternative modes of resistance and transformation that challenge the underlying structures of inequality and exploitation inherent in contemporary consumer culture.

REFERENCES

ANDRÉ, Robson Gomes et al. "Precário não é, mas eu acho que é escravo": Análise do Trabalho dos Motoristas da Uber sob o Enfoque da Precarização. **RECADM**, v. 18, n.1, p. 7-34, 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21529/RECADM.2019001>.

BANET-WEISER, Sarah. **Authentic™**. The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture. New York: NYU Press, 2012.

BRANDÃO, Amélia; POPOLI, Paolo. "I'm Hatin' It"! Negative Consumer-brand Relationships in Online Anti-brand Communities. **European Journal of Marketing**, v. 55, n. 2, p. 622-650, 2022.

CAMPBELL, Colin. **The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism**. New York: Colin Campbell, 2018 [1987].

FREUD, Sigmund. **Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie**. Viena; Franz Deuticke, 1925.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **The Care of the Self**. Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

HIGGS, Kerry. **Collision Course**. Endless Growth on a Finite Planet. London: The MIT Press, 2014.

HUANG, Shuzhen; WONG, Terrie Siang-Ting. 'More coming out, bigger market': Queer visibility and queer subjectivity in the Chinese pink market. **Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture**, v. 4, n. 3, p. 287-302, 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1386/qsmcpc.00013.1>.

LACAN, Jacques. **On Feminine Sexuality**. The limits of Love and Knowledge. Book XX. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 1999 [1975].

LITTLER, Jo. **Radical consumption**: Shopping for change in contemporary culture. Berkshire: Open University, 2009.

MCCARTHY, Breda; LIU, Hong Bo. Food waste and the 'green' consumer. **Australasian Marketing Journal**, p. 1-7, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ausmj.2017.04.007>.

MCGOWAN, Todd. **Capitalism and Desire**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

NASCIMENTO, Lucas Lacerda. Aquecimento global pode ter agravado onda de calor mais recente no Brasil. **Folha de São Paulo**, 24 nov. 2023. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2023/11/aquecimento-global-pode-ter-agravado-onda-de-calor-mais-recente-no-brasil.shtml>. Accessed: 19 jun. 2024.

NICKEL, Patricia Mooney; EIKENBERRY, Angela M. A Critique of the Discourse of Marketized Philanthropy. **American Behavioral Scientist**, v. 52, n. 7, p. 474-989, 2009. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764208327670>.

OBSERVATÓRIO DO CLIMA. **Gases de efeito estufa. E suas implicações para as metas climáticas do Brasil 1970-2021**. 2023. Available at: <https://energiaeambiente.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/SEEG-10-anos-v5.pdf>. Accessed: 19 jun. 2024.

RICHEY, Lisa Ann; PONTE, Stefano. **Brand Aid**: Shopping Well to Save the World. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

RIFKIN, Jeremy. **The Green New Deal**. New York: St Martin's Press, 2019.

_____. **The Age of Access**. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000.

ROY, Poritosh et al. Evolution of drinking straws and their environmental, economic and societal implications. **Journal of Cleaner Production**, v. 316, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.128234>.

SASSINE, Vinicius. Funai questiona exclusividade e falta de projeto em crédito de carbono em terra indígena. **Folha de São Paulo**, 28 jun. 2023. Available: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ambiente/2023/06/funai-questiona-exclusividade-e-falta-de-projeto-em-credito-de-carbono-em-terra-indigena.shtml>. Accessed: 19 jun. 2024.

SLATER, Don. **Consumer Culture and Modernity**. Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002.

SHARMA, Aasha; JOSHI, Seema. Green Consumerism: Overview and Further Research Directions. **International Journal Process Management and Benchmarking**, v. 7, n. 2, p. 206-223, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJPMB.2017.083106>.

STAVRAKAKIS, Yanis. The Consumerist 'Politics of Jouissance' and the Fantasy of Advertising. In: _____. **The Lacanian Left**. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

UBER. **22,5 milhões de usuários da Uber já fizeram viagens sustentáveis na América Latina**. 2022. Available at: <https://www.uber.com/pt-BR/newsroom/225-milhoes-de-usuarios-da-uber-ja-fizeram-viagens-sustentaveis-na-america-latina/>. Accessed: 19 jun. 2024.

_____. **Uber Planet chega ao Brasil**. 2021. Available at: <https://www.uber.com/pt-BR/newsroom/uber-planet/>. Accessed: 19 jun. 2024.

_____. **Uber's climate assessment and performance report: methodology**. s.d.a. Available at: <https://www.uber.com/br/en/about/reports/sustainability-report/>. Accessed: 19 jun. 2024.

_____. **Join Us on the Ride Toward a Green Future**. s.d.b. Available at: <https://www.uber.com/ca/en/ride/ubergreen/>. Accessed: 19 jun. 2024.

WEEMS JR., Robert E. "Bling-bling" and Other Recent Trends in African American Consumerism. In: Cecilia A CONRAD et al. (ed.). **African Americans in the US Economy**. p. 252-257. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

WILDE, Oscar. **The Soul of Man Under Socialism**. New York: Max N. Maisel, 1915.

WIRGAU, Jessica S. et al. Is Business Discourse Colonizing Philanthropy? A Critical Discourse Analysis of (PRODUCT) RED. **Voluntas**, v. 21, p. 611-630, 2010. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-010-9122-z>.

YIN, Robert K. **Case Study Research**. Design and Methods. 3rd edition. London: Sage, 2003.

ZIESEMER, Florence et al. Young People as Drivers or Inhibitors of the Sustainability Movement: The Case of Anti-Consumption. **Journal of Consumer Policy**, v. 44, p. 427-453, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10603-021-09489-x>.

ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. **Too Late to Awaken**. London: Penguin Books, 2023.

_____. **First as Tragedy, Then as Farce**. London: Verso, 2009a.

_____. **The Sublime Object of Ideology**. 2nd edition. London: Verso, 2009b.

_____. **The Plague of Fantasies**. 2nd edition. London: Verso, 2008.

_____. **The Ticklish Subject**. London: Verso, 2000.

Salvando o planeta através do consumo: Uma análise do discurso por trás do Uber Planet no Brasil

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o discurso do marketing relacionado a causas (CRM) empregado pelo aplicativo Uber para promover sua iniciativa "Uber Planet/Green", que busca oferecer opções de transporte mais sustentáveis e ecológicas. A pesquisa examina práticas de consumo através de uma lente psicanalítica (LACAN, 1999; STAVRAKAKIS, 2007; ŽIŽEK, 2000, 2008), juntamente com extensões como o conceito de capitalismo cultural de Rifkin (2000) e a prática do "causumerismo" de Richey e

Ponte (2011). A metodologia envolve uma análise crítica de campanhas de marketing e relatórios de impacto para entender suas implicações. Os resultados indicam que, embora o CRM defenda causas sociais significativas, ele também mercantiliza o ativismo social, alinhando-se às críticas contemporâneas ao consumo ético e às práticas de conforto e autenticidade (BANET-WEISER, 2012). Esta pesquisa contribui para o discurso sobre as complexidades do engajamento do consumidor com iniciativas de sustentabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Capitalismo cultural. Consumismo. Causumerismo. Marketing de causa. Crítica do consumo.

Salvando el planeta a través del consumo: Un análisis del discurso detrás de Uber Planet en Brasil

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el discurso del marketing relacionado con causas (CRM) empleado por la aplicación Uber para promover su iniciativa “Uber Planet/Green”, que busca ofrecer opciones de transporte más sostenibles y ecológicas. La investigación examina prácticas de consumo a través de una lente psicoanalítica (LACAN, 1999; STAVRAKAKIS, 2007; ŽIŽEK, 2000, 2008), junto con extensiones como el concepto de capitalismo cultural de Rifkin (2000) y la práctica del “causumerismo” de Richey y Ponte (2011). La metodología implica un análisis crítico de campañas de marketing e informes de impacto para comprender sus implicaciones. Los hallazgos indican que, aunque el CRM aboga por causas sociales significativas, también mercantiliza el activismo social, alineándose con las críticas contemporáneas al consumo ético y a las prácticas de comodidad y autenticidad (BANET-WEISER, 2012). Esta investigación contribuye al discurso sobre las complejidades del compromiso del consumidor con iniciativas de sostenibilidad.

Palabras clave: Capitalismo cultural. Consumismo. Causumerismo. Marketing relacionado con causas. Crítica al consumo.

Recebido em: 07/10/2024

Aceite em: 15/12/2024