

The contribution of black color to visual rhetoric of Brazilian packaging of hair care products.

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ABSTRACT

This paper consists of part of the results of a research in the field of packaging and the connotative uses of black color. The aim is to discuss symbolic values that black intends to evoke, beyond the already known concept of luxury and sophistication. The paper is both exploratory and theoretical, because we use rhetoric and semiotic approach to discuss the role of color, image and text in packaging design. Researchers divided the work into two phases. The first one consisted of investigating the possible meanings of black color in the packaging by going to point of purchases and analyzing existent packaging, cataloging them and finding common characteristics. The second phase consisted of a deeper analysis of each new approach found in the first phase. Researchers used semiotics as a theoretical framework to investigate visual rhetoric from the relationship among color, image and text. The discussion presented here consists of the results related to the self-acceptance new approach regarding the use of black color in hair cosmetic packaging.

KEYWORDS: packaging design; black color; rhetoric; afro-Brazilian; hair care; semiotics.

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1. Introduction

Color is one of the fundamental elements in visual communication and its study is part of the basic training of any professional in the design area. In the field of packaging, whether for the purpose of a denotative or connotative message, the repeated use of certain colors in certain product categories ended up generating chromatic identities at points of sale. For this reason, color has long been used in its potential for communication, identification, and persuasion.

Denotative message refers to analogical information, that is, the use of color by similarity, mentioning the product it contains. The use of color in packaging, in turn, is not limited to the obviousness sometimes important and necessary for the immediate recognition of a product. The symbolic use of color by metaphor rather than analogy is quite common. It is the use of color in the construction of a connotative message. The connotative use of color becomes possible through meanings that we have built over the years, as well as from established cultural conventions. It is notorious that the use of color in its connotative aspect is somewhat more complex, given the subjectivity and influence of the cultural context. However, when we correlate its use with both image and text it becomes easy to infer the symbolic meanings of color.

Among the different possibilities of using colors in packaging design, the black color aroused our attention because it is not quite common to find a naturally black product, except automotive products made from oils and greases and some foods like beans. Despite this, in recent years, we have seen an increase in the use of black in food and cosmetics. Which made us infer the probability that this is due to a connotative intention. According to the historian Michel Pastoureau (2011), for centuries the meanings of this color oscillated in an ambivalent way, among positive and negative perceptions: life and death; profane and religious; mediocre and sovereign; to name a few. In the case of packaging, the author points out the symbolic relationship between color and the concept of luxury and sophistication, and it is common to find them in high-value perfume, jewelry, and alcoholic beverage packages.

It is notorious that the use of color in its connotative aspect is somewhat more complex, given the subjectivity and the influence of the cultural context. However, this connotative aspect is important once the companies seek to differentiate their products at the point of sale. For that reason, in this paper, black will be addressed as connotative information on packaging. Moreover, we present the rhetorical contribution that this visual element

has presented in Brazilian hygiene packaging that promotes the acceptance of curly hair and female empowerment.

2. The mediatized rhetoric of packaging

In the mid-twentieth century, with the advent of supermarkets, packaging began to acquire new functions in addition to containment, protection, and transport (Camargo & Negrão 2008:26). As the figure of the counter salesperson disappears, the packaging starts to be 'silent salesman' (Pilditch 1961). From then on, we have come to understand packaging 'as: a system whose function is technical and commercial and aims to pack, protect (from the production process to consumption), inform, identify, promote and sell a product' (Camargo & Negrão 2008:29). The authors also state that it is necessary to 'understand that packaging is a permanent presence in the communication process' (Camargo & Negrão 2008:34). Therefore, considering its communicational and persuasive functions, and understanding that the packaging constitutes a support for a 'hybrid visual-verbal language' (see Santaella 2001), we argue the importance of studying and analyzing the relationship between verbal and non-verbal elements under the perspective of rhetoric.

The researcher Samuel Mateus says that Rhetoric in the 21st century should be called Mediatized Rhetoric (Mateus 2018:158), once it contemplates 'persuasion realized (and potentiated) through the Media' with both verbal and non-verbal content. In this sense, studying rhetoric nowadays and in communication media, such as packaging, is to consider the study of verbal rhetoric and of visual rhetoric. Consequently, it is necessary to recognize the symbolic and communicative aspects of both verbal and non-verbal elements. Certainly, considering packaging, not everything is rhetorical, just as not everything is rhetorical when it comes to information. In certain circumstances, what is intended with the message is just to inform. Data such as: food sales denomination; list of ingredients; net contents; expiration date; instructions on how to use; those are examples of technical information that has no intention of persuading, so there is no rhetoric. Likewise, the use of colors and images can only be related to a denotative message. However, messages that discuss the product's advantages, as well as 'connotative information' (Scatolim 2006:5) such as colors, images, and textures, can be considered a 'rhetorical exercise insofar as it seeks to persuade (make believe) spectators to modify a behavior' (Mateus 2018:21).

Thus, it is proposed as 'mediatized rhetoric' of packaging, the ability that it must communicate from the combination of words of persuasive character and visual elements (including colors) with the final intention of transmitting certain values to the consumer. Unlike classical rhetoric, which is based on speech and argumentative techniques of verbal language, on the mediatized rhetoric of packaging, designers and marketers use visual language techniques in line with short advertising texts. Hence, one must understand the characteristics of verbal rhetoric commonly used in packaging, as these will guide the selection and application of color in the packaging.

2.1. Analysis of rhetoric by a semiotic approach

Visual rhetoric, as well as verbal rhetoric, is based on the arrangement of basic units of language. As to visual rhetoric, the language is understood from the concept of 'image', which is composed by the union of shapes, colors, figures, among other visual elements that compose a visual message. According to Joly (2012), images provoke associations capable of identifying objects, attributing to them a certain number of sociocultural qualities elaborated through conventions. In the semiotic approach, it is possible to understand communication through the image considering it as a visual message. After all, semiotics studies the sign process (semiosis) in the construction of messages meanings, taking to account their use context.

Signs are any event that produces an interpretive effect, such as words, images, colors, sounds, among others. According to Peirce's semiotics, signs can be analyzed through their internal properties about what they represent - and all their application possibilities - or in the interpretive potential that awakens in their user effects on the interpreter (Santaella 2002). The sign relations take place through the object that gives rise to a semiosis. We consider the object as immediate when it represents, indicates, resembles, suggests, or evokes a dynamic object, that is, the original object. Moreover, a sign can present itself as an icon (by similarity), index (by suggesting) and symbol (by convention)

Knowledge about semiotics makes it possible to choose and use signs that are strategic for communicative purposes. According to Santaella (2002:70), "Colors, textures, composition and shapes have great power of suggestion: a color resembles something with the same color; a shape resembles something that has a similar shape, and so on". These elements and strategies of visual language can be adopted as a rhetorical resource. In the case of packaging, the decision of which look will be used must be centered on the consumer and on the possibilities of reading that he or she will make from each exposed sign.

Considering the visual language of the packaging, it is important to emphasize that in the image, color is one of the most important elements to compose the rhetoric. 'Color is an important element of product identification and product association' (Camargo & Negrão 2008:177), in addition to having a strong symbolic character. Unlike the texts on a package, colors can be identified from a greater distance and, therefore, have a first impact on the consumer, along with the visual elements of shape, dimension, and space. In this case, perhaps, colors symbolic character is already in evidence and the consumer may have intentionally selected a packaging because of it, in the search for a product category or a specific benefit. However, it is to the extent that the consumer interacts with verbal information that color will have the potential to act as persuasive information.

It is known that 'there is no meaningless color. The impression caused by each color is determined by its context, that is, by the interweaving of meanings in which we perceive it' (Heller 2013:18), with the meaning of colors being somewhat dynamic. When applied to packaging, it is the context of use of these colors (type of product in which they are applied, and verbal speech linked) responsible for the perception of their meaning. It is argued in this paper that both the color is influenced by verbal discourses, and in the same may be able to potentiate the effect of words on the consumer.

3. Case study: the use of text, image and black color in Brazilian cosmetics

The research presented in this paper was carried out in the Brazilian market. Firstly, we aimed to investigate the connotative approaches to the black color usage in food and personal hygiene products packaging. For this, we carried out a field research in some of the main points of purchases of Campina Grande city (Paraíba, Brasil) to understand to which extent black color is used in packaging.

The first stage consisted of cataloguing products packaging that predominantly adopted the black color. To do so, we developed a chart to register the front image of packaging, products' category, company's name, and keywords taken from packaging publicity texts. In this phase, we identify three current symbolic approaches: health, self-acceptance, and superior quality. In this paper, we present the analysis and discussions related to the self-acceptance approach, taking to account the use of black color in hair care cosmetic product packaging. Then, we move forward to a second stage, which consisted of a deeper analysis of self-acceptance approach identified in the first phase. So as to confirm the

specific use of black, we expand the analysis comparing those black colored packaging with other packaging from the same company. In this second stage of the research, we aimed to understand how the other visual elements could contribute to the consolidation of the symbolic discourse linked to black color. After all, since color is one of the elements that compose an image, understanding the use of color also means understanding its relationship with the meanings of the other visual elements that make up the packaging. To the extent that consonance was identified among the use of such visual elements, we could infer the potential of that color to generate chromatic identities at points of purchase.

Therefore, we performed an analysis of the textual and visual rhetorical resources presented in the packaging visual design. We elaborated a third chart that allowed us to observe the resources present in the packaging,

highlighting them as agents of rhetoric. This time, the intention was to understand whether these resources corroborate the construction of an oriented discourse. That is, a discourse that could favor the consolidation of chromatic identity through convention.

4. Results

Field research and packaging cataloguing allowed the discourse analysis of companies when they use black color. The figure below shows the second chart model with some of the packaging catalogued. By comparing them, we could perceive they are in consonance with the discourse. This analysis allowed us to infer that we can indeed use color as visual rhetorical element, serving as resource for the construction of specific speeches.

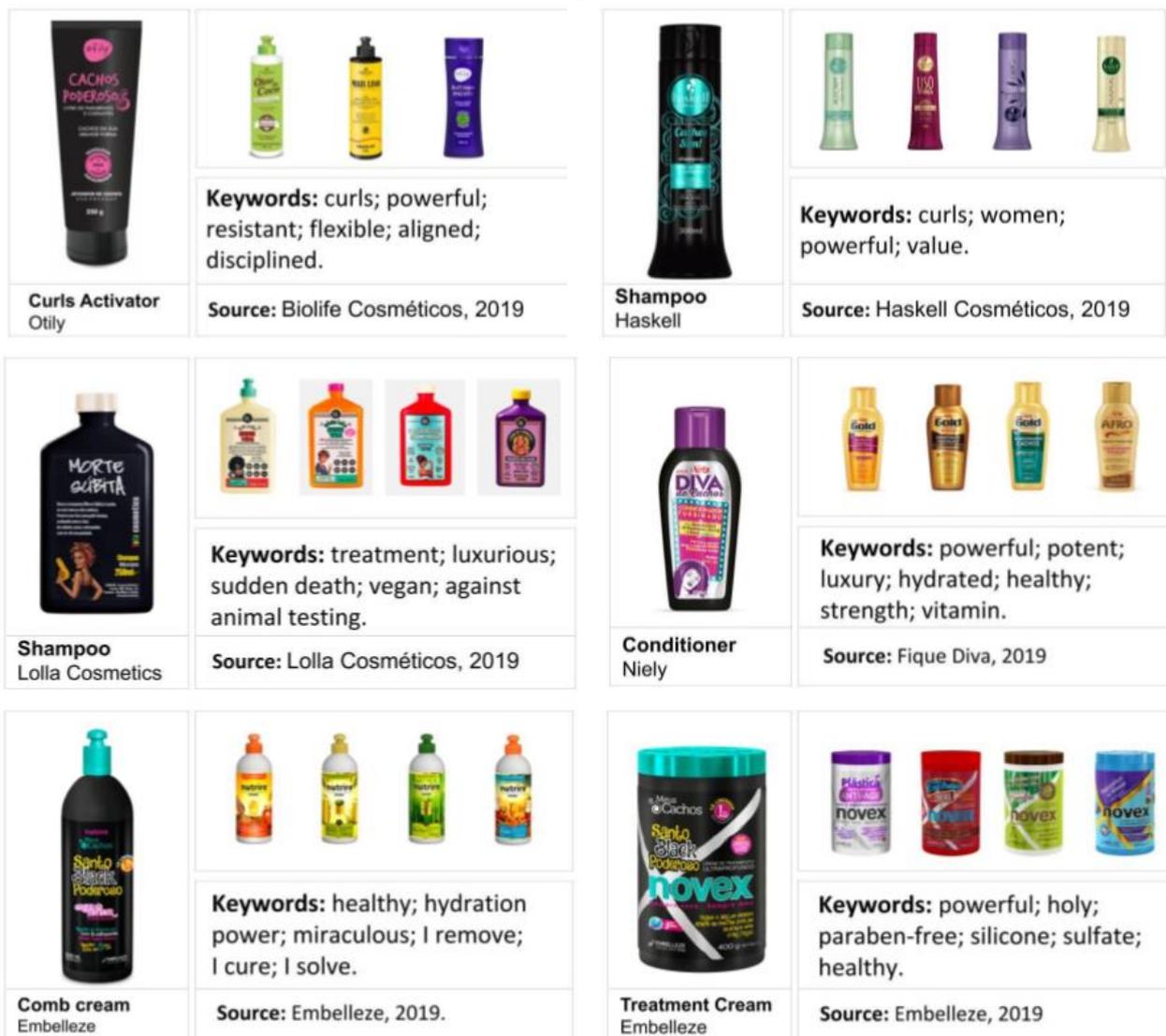


Fig. 1. Visual analysis of the use of black in the acceptance promotion category. Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research carried out.

Packaging with a predominance of black color stand out as carriers of speeches aimed at promoting acceptance to the detriment of other companies' packaging, which with disparate speeches, also adopt different colors with different purposes. This sort of predominance in packaging allows black color to be elucidated as a rhetorical resource to reinforce textual and imagery discourses. To further understanding this strategy, we extracted the main packaging verbal information (Figure 2) to analyze the possibilities of correlation between image and text.

Packaging / Verbal message	
 <p>Packaging 01</p>	<p>Powerful curls. Bunch at its best. The "Otily Powerful Curls" Curls Activator has exclusive AminoRepair technology, a mass repository composed of biofunctional amino acids and innovative active bioadhesive, obtained from the association of Chia and Flaxseed polysaccharides, it adheres to the hair fiber, forms a resistant and flexible film, which defines and protects the curls, keeps the hair flexible, disciplined, aligned and with natural appearance for longer.</p>
 <p>Packaging 02</p>	<p>Curls yes! Developed for <i>powerful women</i>, Curls yes! is a line of products for frizzy and curly hair, created exclusively to highlight the best of each curl and enhance the natural beauty of the hair"</p>
 <p>Packaging 03</p>	<p>Daily and very luxurious treatment for hair thirsty for life. Also excellent for use after staining or other chemical processes. Our sudden death treatment is like that, either you love it or you don't know it. It penetrates the hair strands without asking permission, ending the days of dry and blown hair without pity or mercy. Sudden death.</p>
 <p>Packaging 04</p>	<p>Contains coconut oil + D-Panthenol + Shea + 6 powerful oils. It leaves hair soft, powerful and lighter. <i>Phyna*</i> fragrance, a luxurious consistency, hydrated, healthy and soft threads, curls that shine. <i>*Brazilian slang for the Portuguese word fina, which can be translated for posh</i></p>

 <p>Packaging 05</p>	<p>Completely relaxed, without parabens, petrolatum, silicones, and sulfate. It still contains in its formula the intense oil of baobab seed, which besides having a miraculous hydrating power, is perfect for you who brings attitude and power in your head. I remove the tangled knot. I cure weakened strand of hair. I remove dryness. I solve everything in 3 minutes.</p>
 <p>Packaging 06</p>	<p>I bring the beloved shine. I remove the split ends. I undo knots. Cure frizz, Holy Powerful Black. Contains Baobab seed oil. Without parabens, petrolatums, silicones and sulfate.</p>

Fig. 2. Verbal message contained in the 11-packaging selected for analysis. Source: Prepared by the authors based on research

We could verify the use of black in personal hygiene packaging to promote the empowered female and the use of curly hair. All packaging we analyzed used, to expose this approach, verbal message oriented to the promotion of female empowerment and the use of curls. They used catch phrases or tips, as observed through the words highlighted in the previous figure.

It is important to highlight that the black packaging selected present as textual discourse two ways to promote acceptance: one being linked to the use of curls; and the other encourages female empowerment. Nevertheless, in addition to the textual, it is also possible to find the use of images that also reinforce the meanings imbued through the texts presented. From the six-packaging presented here, we selected only three of them to a deeper analysis in the present paper [1]. They can be observed in the following image analysis charts, which was based on semiotics.

In the analysis of these packaging, we can find somehow the textual discourse reinforced by the images that refer to the concept of 'promoting acceptance', such as images of women with curly hair and with attitude or illustrations that evoke it. Thus, it was possible to observe symbols and icons associated with female empowerment and the use of curls as imagery recurrence.

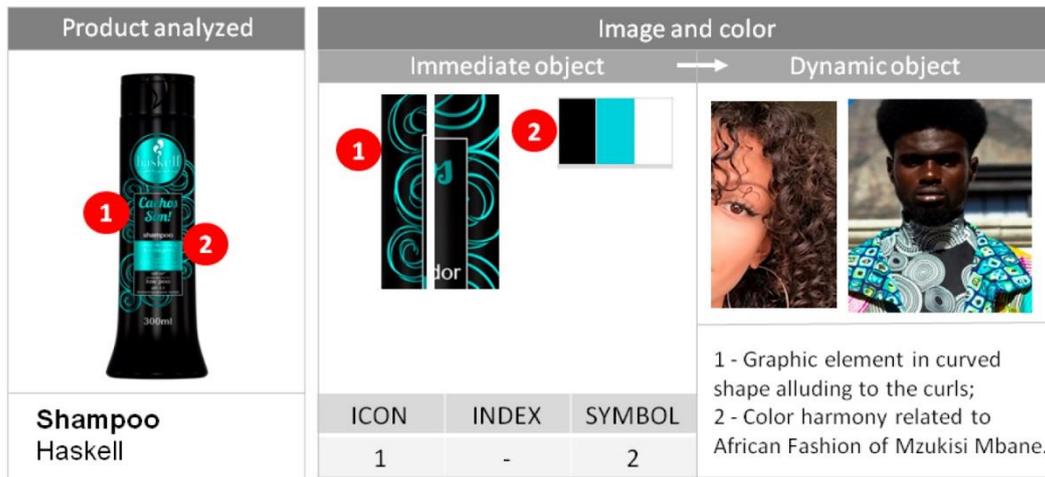


Fig. 3. Semiotic analysis of Packaging 02 [2].

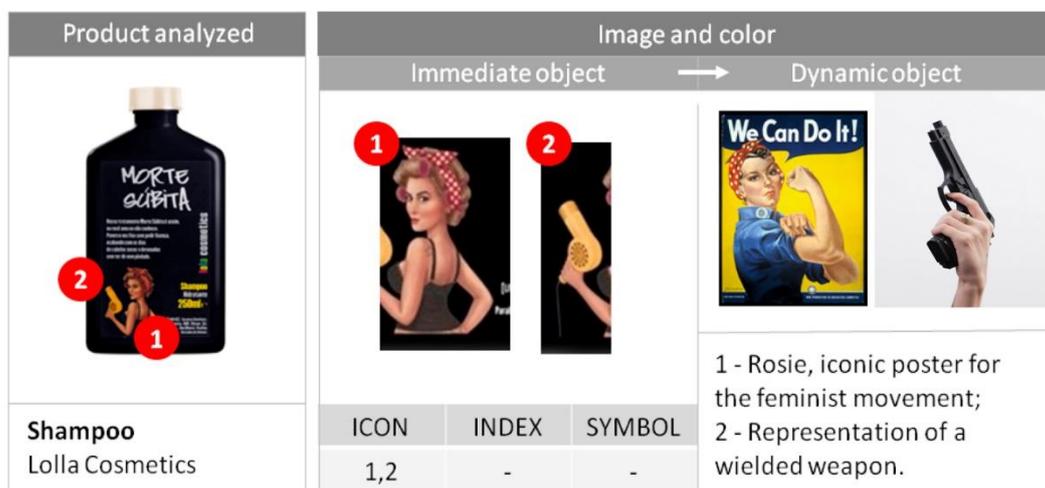


Fig. 4. Semiotic analysis of Packaging 03 [3].

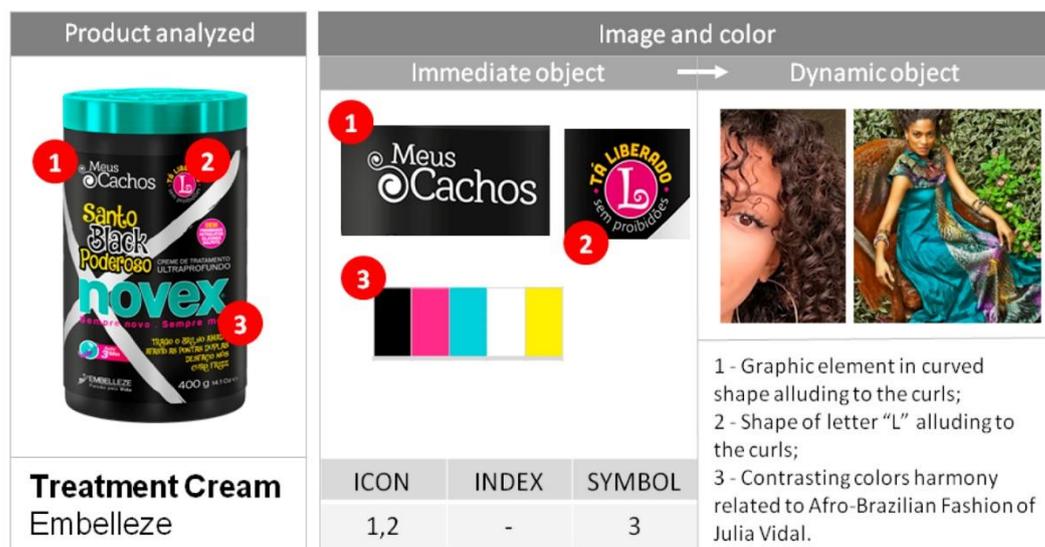


Fig. 5. Semiotic analysis of Packaging 06 [4].

Among these visual references to reinforce the discourse, we cite the case of the poster known as Rosie, which is a symbol of the feminist movement and was created in the 1940s by the American government with corporate intentions. The image showing a strong and apparently independent woman became famous in the 1970s as a symbol of female empowerment (Heine & Sales 2020). The use of the female image on the packaging refers to this feminist symbol, the handkerchief in the hair and the woman's position refer to Rosie, thus being an icon, since, according to Santaella (2002) they refer to their objects through the similarity.

The vibrant and contrasting colors, present in most of the packaging analyzed, can be associated with color harmony found both in contemporary Afro-Brazilian and African fashion. African multicolor way of dressing has influenced Brazilian culture (Vidal 2018). In the process of adapting to the new culture - imposed by slavery - blacks 'brought dance, rhythm, colors, brilliance and adornments, which are present in African Brazilian fashion' (Harger & Berton 2013). According to the authors, society has neglected the potential market for the black public for a long time.

By using colors, which can be symbolically associated with Afro-Brazilian and African culture in those packaging, companies, reinforce the market niche aimed. The symbol is a sort of sign in which the association is given by a convention process. Therefore, the symbolism of those colors could be aroused using other visual references from Afro-Brazilians such as curly hair. The growing wave of Afro-Brazilian people empowerment coupled with women's empowerment motivated companies to seek new formulas for their cosmetics as well as changing their marketing plans. This fact can be noticed when 'internet searches using the terms curly and curly hair, according to data released by Google BradLab, increased 232% and 309%, respectively, in the last two years' (Silva, 2017). In this same universe of images, we identified iconic figures of curls in the researched packaging, referring to the wavy hair.

5. Final considerations

The research revealed the adoption of black color in packaging from categories that were unlikely, such as personal care products. This demonstrates the way of perceiving color as a visual resource, extrapolating analog adoption and expanding it to new meanings that benefit communication. The first stage allowed the verification of the connotative use of black color in packaging of the investigated categories, through shared speeches, which together demonstrate the ability to

construct meanings about issues emerging in the current context, such as promoting acceptance.

The connotative use can be clearly seen as a strategy for the differentiation among black packaging and its competitors at the point of purchase. The research carried out demonstrated the black color being used as an indication of differentiation at the market shelf. Due to the visual contrast, those packaging with black color stand out more than the other ones. At the first glance, color takes our attention. At a second moment, other visual and textual information exert their communicative functions. The use of color associated with a textual discourse and specific and recurring images, among the universe of packaging investigated, corroborate the connotative use that the black color promotes in hygiene products.

The meanings we attribute to the black color in this research are confirmed by the content of the textual speeches and the types of images used. The recurrence in the use of black color linked to the concept of promoting the acceptance of curls and encouraging female empowerment leads us to infer the emergence of a chromatic identity for the category of hygiene and personal care products. This is because, in the field of packaging, the repeated use of certain colors in certain product categories ends up generating chromatic identities at points of sale, which assist in communication through assigned meanings.

It was apparently made possible the connotative use of black in hygiene products because a convention established by the companies responsible for the packaging design. Faced with a demand for differentiation, linked to the emergent discourses in the social context, black tends to be configured as a convenient option. However, we argue that its symbolic value will depend on the quality of textual and visual messages. As color, image and text are integrated in your rhetorical exercise; the chances of a package persuading your audience will be increased.

The repetitive use of black in packaging in the hygiene and personal care sector, linked to the same type of textual and visual discourse, contributes to the perception of a common meaning: promotion of acceptance and empowerment. Being black the color of strength and social struggle. With that, the perception and representation of the black color becomes one. It is likely that other products with a similar configuration and represented by the black color will be perceived as such.

The packaging with a predominance of black color, found during the research, demonstrated a new perspective for the adoption of color in the current context. It consists in

the use interconnected to the construction of a connotative approach, through issues that have been recently erected in the social space. Important topics such as acceptance have been the subject of discussion, and therefore have been consolidated in the public's imagination. This issue apparently aroused the need for differentiation in companies, with black being an apparently satisfactory alternative.

If, on the one hand, the use of black color brings up the discussion of new possibilities of rhetorical approach in the segment of hygiene and personal care, other colors that have been used for a long time in this category of products certainly present discourses that are worth studying. To continue this study, we would recommend carrying out a packaging investigation based on the sales verbal discourse, instead of starting it based on the black color of the packaging. After all, do other colours could also promote curly hair empowerment and acceptance in the context of hygiene and personal care?

6. Conflict of interest declaration

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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8. Short biography of the author(s)

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Notes

[1] The six charts are available at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CFpoRQXgy8eB9oyYnVqRTvq40dCydSR0?usp=sharing>

[2] Figure elaborated by the authors based on the images available at: <http://www.haskellcosmeticos.com.br/produto.php?id=6;> <https://www.naturallycurly.com/curly-hair/curls;> <https://theculturetrip.com/africa/south-africa/10-designers-whore-bringing-south-africas-style-to-the-world/> (Accessed 15 June 2019).

[3] Figure elaborated by the authors based on the images available at: [https://lolacosmetics.com.br/cabelo/;](https://lolacosmetics.com.br/cabelo/) https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_538122; <https://unsplash.com/photos/c676QsBVUTg> (Accessed 15 June 2019).

[4] Figure elaborated by the authors based on the images available at: https://www.embeleze.com/creme-de-tratamento-novex-meus-cachos-santo-black-poderoso/p?idsku=158&gclid=CjwKCAiAr6-ABhAfEiwADO4sfQPjhi9y0caj6vqXICn55SjKgWGRjjDfi5XTi_TJMEV4r9Or3Ymz_RoCRglQAvD_BwE; <https://www.naturallycurly.com/curly-hair/curls;> <https://www.facebook.com/julia.vidal.etinias/photos/a.557553467638764/1951435691583861/?type=3&theater> (Accessed 15 June 2019).

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