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Voluntary Simplicity: a netnographic study about the reasons of a social group for adhering to a simple lifestyle

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Abstract: The consumerism promoted by the Industrial Revolution, which favored the materialization of the consumer society, has begun to be questioned by a section of the population who started to realize its consequences and the need to establish actions to reverse them. In this context, the anti-consumption phenomenon was established, and a movement was created in search of a simpler life called voluntary simplicity. However, this movement still needs to be explored in studies investigating consumption. Thus, this paper aims to identify and describe the reasons that arouse the interest of individuals in adhering to a simple lifestyle based on a netnographic study with a social group. The cultural entry into this group occurred in the second half of 2023. Their posts and interactions for the past five years were analyzed to understand the group better. The data was collected through archiving and categorized using the coding technique. The interpretation stage allowed us to conclude that the reasons that aroused the participants' interest in adhering to the simple lifestyle are concern about the environmental crisis caused by economic growth, interest in sustainable solutions that minimize anti-consumption, reusing of goods used in everyday life in favor of anti-consumption, being happy through a simple lifestyle, saving financial resources to acquire necessary goods that cause satisfaction and happiness, and improving quality of life.

Keywords: Anti-consumption. Voluntary Simplicity. Netnography. Social Group.

1 Introduction

The current consumer society results from the influence of the Industrial Revolution, a time characterized by major innovations in producing and marketing goods. This society is based on the principle that consumption practices that underlie a materialistic life provide economic development and quality of life. Since then, subjects inserted in social contexts have come to believe that all their problems could be solved through consumption, including obtaining status before the individuals they live with and self-valuation (Balderjahn; Seegebarth; Lee, 2021).

Thus, this symbolic meaning attributed to consumption has become even more important, taking on a relevant role at the social and individual levels. Concurrently, the sophistication of the means of production intensified competition in the different sectors of the economy that permanently and continuously, like a cycle, accelerated the consumption dynamics by exploring consumers' needs. In addition to this movement, disposable products emerged, intended to be used at a reduced interval to make room for other new products, further intensifying consumption (Martin-Woodhead, 2021).

In this context, discussions about consumer society began by questioning the environmental and social impacts resulting from its positioning, raising reflections on the reasons that would lead people to consume excessively (Maseeh *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, the movement and phenomenon of anti-consumption is established, which, according to Souza and Fuentes (2023, p.50), “is adopted by those who voluntarily reduce the acquisition, use, and disposal of commoditized goods” and which focuses on investigating and understanding the reasons that lead individuals and social groups to adopt such a stance nowadays.

Paradoxically, for a section of the population, the satisfaction promoted by excessive consumption has become synonymous with dissatisfaction with the lifestyle. At the heart of this matter lies climate change related to excessive consumption and the complexity of capitalist society, which have become critical problems that require immediate solutions. As a result, it has led many individuals

to build resistance movements and lifestyles characterized by adopting simpler consumption habits (Sobreira; Silva; Coelho, 2018).

The study of anti-consumption and, consequently, of voluntary simplicity as a lifestyle has become popular because these fields of investigation represent much more than understanding the reasons against consumption. They extend to understanding this ideology and its functioning as a way of life (Sousa; Fuentes, 2023).

The search for a simpler life encompasses reflection and rethinking about reducing consumption, highlighting issues that expose the complexity of the topic (McGouran; Prothero, 2016). Suppose individuals inserted in society configured their consumption practices with more autonomy with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. In that case, the proposal for a simple life with fewer material goods presents a variety of configurations in contemporary society (Cándido, 2020). In addition, the meanings of simplicity attributed to life are not static. They are constantly reconstructed in society, which justifies ongoing investigations for a better understanding of the different facets of this phenomenon (Balderjahn; Seegebarth; Lee, 2021). It is also noteworthy that in the last thirty years, anti-consumption has emerged as a discrete research topic in Marketing literature, with few special issues dedicated to its discussion in some renowned journals. Likewise, voluntary simplicity, which is a type of anti-consumption movement, remains incipient, especially in developing countries like Brazil, in which the population has just recently begun to consume goods and services in large quantities in addition to those necessary for their subsistence (Aidar; Daniels, 2020).

Thus, this paper seeks to answer the following questions: What arouses individuals' interest in voluntary simplicity? To achieve that, we sought to investigate social behaviors that allow the creation of socially desirable consumption patterns, following the principles of voluntary simplicity and originating from a conscious change towards intrinsically healthy activities (Osikominu; Bocken, 2020).

Considering this problem, the general objective was to identify and describe the reasons that arouse the interest of individuals in adhering to a simple lifestyle based on a netnographic study with a social group.

According to Lee and Cha (2022), this methodology is justifiable as the internet facilitates the dissemination of social movements and the sharing of ideas and experiences, where virtual communities present themselves as a way to understand them through their public demonstrations, functioning as a forum, bringing together geographically dispersed individuals and allowing non-intrusive observations in the discussions that occur in this locus.

2 Literature review

2.1 Anti-consumption in the consumer society

Consumption is a habit present in society's daily lives, and this practice has been influencing the construction of the identities of its subjects because it is characterized as cultural reproduction. Nevertheless, this excessive consumption has been questioned in the past three decades. The emerging consumer society was tested by the arrival of social movements that advocate environmental preservation, a simpler way of life, and the contraction of media and reproductive mercantilist discourse, demystifying consumption as the basis for achieving satisfaction and happiness in life. That leads to the anti-consumption movement (Balderjahn; Seegebarth; Lee, 2021).

Many individuals and social groups have been practicing anti-consumption, and as Lee (2022, p.117), aiming at: "financial economy; [...] waste reduction; [...] moral issues; environmental sustainability; simple lifestyle (voluntary simplicity); [...]; desire to oppose the prevailing consumer culture".

Maseeh *et al.* (2022) confirm that the concepts of anti-consumption and resistance to consumption overlap, hence the focus on the reasons against consumption and the acts that oppose the products and practices associated with dominant structures.

By literary consensus, there is the assertion that anti-consumption is related to the disapproval of the capitalist system and the oppression of countercultures, resulting in a phenomenon that occurs through actions, attitudes, or behaviors to combat it (Lee; Egea; Frutos, 2020; Demirel, 2022).

Balderjahn, Seegebarth, and Lee (2021) associate the anti-consumption phenomenon to four kinds of consumers and their movements, namely: (1) global impact consumers, who are interested in reducing consumption as a whole because they believe that it is harmful and it promotes an imbalance in the ecosystem; (2) market activists, who refuse to consume products that cause harm to society and seek to influence other consumers to adopt the same position by raising awareness about these negative impacts; (3) anti loyal consumers, who exhibit behavior opposite to that of consumers loyal to a product/brand because they believe that they are responsible for harming society in some way, and also because they understand that the product is inferior to others with the same characteristics or because they have had a negative experience with the product or the company responsible for its production, and (4) simplifiers, who represent a group that is interested, voluntarily, in reducing the acquisition of goods and services, and adopting simpler habits because they believe that excessive consumption can compromise their quality of life, causing stress, for example. Moreover, the simplifiers argue that consumerism will prevent individuals from perceiving situations and experiencing important experiences through a simple life that provides happiness. Note that this last group is guided by the principles of the voluntary simplicity movement, which will be discussed below.

2.2 Defining voluntary simplicity

The “simple lifestyle” and the emergence of voluntary simplifiers are nothing new. According to Budai *et al.* (2019), this phenomenon was identified in the United States in 1936, and, on that occasion, it was explained as a reaction to the disappearance and transformation of traditional American values. That is why Aidar and Daniels (2020) state that the voluntary simplicity perceived today is a

contemporary version of a previous understanding that inner growth should be prioritized over riches and material accumulation.

Hook *et al.* (2021) propose a definition for voluntary simplicity based on an organized literary consensus, defining it as a lifestyle for the individual who seeks to distance themselves from an excessive and hectic life and who strives to build a simple life. Nevertheless, in a similar literature review, Rebouças and Soares (2021) highlight the difficulty of defining a simple life, claiming that this meaning has never been precisely fixed before, even if their representations are associated with a set of behavioral changes, ideas, and actions/activities, among which consumption practices are included.

On the other hand, Demirel (2022) understand voluntary simplicity as a practice of individuals who aim for a simple life while cultivating non-material values. The authors cite the production of their own goods to the detriment of those purchased as an example of this concept.

Tosun and Sezgin (2021) perceive this phenomenon as directly opposing the paradigm of excess and discuss the difficulties of reducing consumption by individuals living in society. Thus, those who voluntarily reduce consumption can be considered simplifiers (Pecot; Vasilopoulou; Cavallaro, 2021).

Sobreira, Silva, and Coelho (2018) state that a simple lifestyle represents an achievement for individuals who can raise awareness and mobilize others to adopt the same attitude. It becomes a collective phenomenon that allows the creation of a lifestyle that reconsiders the aesthetic, social, and spiritual dimensions to reformulate behaviors in favor of simplicity.

However, according to Aidar and Daniels (2020), although the definitions of voluntary simplicity are always related to limitations on the consumption of goods and services or the power of choice regarding what to consume (or not), this behavior change should not be associated with anything that affects it, such as economic recession and unemployment, for example. This phenomenon must be limited to the voluntary desire to adhere to another lifestyle, changes in ideas, and revision of values concerning consumption.

2.3 What leads individuals to adopt voluntary simplicity

The literature is consensual in stating that voluntary simplicity is a process that aims for a lifestyle change (Peifer; Chugani; Roos, 2020; Rebouças; Soares, 2021; Balderjahn; Seegebarth; Lee, 2021; Demirel, 2022). Osikominu and Bocken (2020) add that this process is not linear, presenting itself as complex, profound, and involving mistakes and successes until the desired change is effectively promoted.

The adoption of voluntary simplicity has been changing over the years. Before, it happened due to motivations such as (1) individuals who were born into families in which waste was intolerable and, therefore, are called “conservers”; (2) individuals who are members of families that defended ethical values focused on the practice of environmental conservation and social responsibility, called “crusaders”; (3) individuals who began to adopt voluntary simplicity for reasons that were not so clear nor evident, whether because they felt guilty for being more economically advantaged or due to the influence of their peers in society – these are called “conformists” (Demirel, 2022).

Nowadays, Lee (2022) states that this process is due to factors such as personal motivation (altruism), social motivation (social responsibility), ethical motivation, stress reduction, and environmental motivation (environmental responsibility), distancing itself from economic-financial deprivation but associating itself with consumption deprivation. Demirel (2022) believes that the adoption of voluntary simplicity has been growing because, whether practiced individually or collectively, it is organized without a hierarchy, a specific rule, or leaders' interference, in addition to valuing freedom and prioritizing happiness.

According to Sobreira, Silva, and Coelho (2018), the motivation for adopting voluntary simplicity is focused on (1) the self, or the search for independence in choices, actions, and acquisition of values that favor satisfaction and personal growth; (2) the relationships, or in the search for simplifying life by opening spaces for a life together with family, friends and the community; (3) the society, or in the search to reduce consumption, generating fewer negative impacts on society; (4) on earth, or in the search for experiences with nature.

For Hook *et al.* (2021), the main reason for adopting voluntary simplicity in consumer society refers to the desire of individuals to achieve balance in their way of life since material goods and the dynamics of the economic system do not allow for total personal satisfaction. Although it may seem like a simple lifestyle, it is internally rich, and this change in posture brings about the realization of the values that permeate this movement.

2.4 The effects of voluntary simplicity

It can be asserted that voluntary simplicity has four positive effects: increased education, well-being, and prosocial and pro-environmental impacts (Osikominu; Bocken, 2020).

Education occurs because voluntary simplifiers continuously learn to improve themselves as individuals who live in society and seek the necessary autonomy to accomplish what they want (Osikominu; Bocken, 2020). Thus, the acquisition of new knowledge allows the establishment of new practices to obtain more effective and significant results in their personal and social spheres (Balderjahn; Seegebarth; Lee, 2021).

Well-being occurs through increased vitality, authenticity, autonomy, and decreased anxiety (Osikominu; Bocken, 2020). It is also promoted by the following factors: increased life satisfaction, increased balance, greater freedom to do what you love, the feeling of personal accomplishment for having less, and improved health (physical and mental) and financial situation (Balderjahn; Seegebarth; Lee, 2021).

Prosocial effects are seen when individuals begin to contribute to society (Osikominu; Bocken, 2020), as consuming less reduces status competition and increases equality (Balderjahn; Seegebarth; Lee, 2021).

Meanwhile, the pro-environmental effects of reduced consumption promote universalism, which defends the idea that all human beings are equal and have the same rights and duties. Therefore, all individuals must have the same conditions to satisfy their subsistence needs in the society in which they live

(Osikominu; Bocken, 2020) which automatically promotes a healthier lifestyle (Balderjahn; Seegebarth; Lee, 2021).

However, we must consider that voluntary simplicity may cause negative effects or difficulties (Balderjahn; Appenfeller, 2023), namely prejudice and discrimination by individuals and social groups that do not have the same values, social barriers, distancing of friendships or breaking of family ties that can lead the voluntary simplifier to regret or to social isolation (Kuanr; Pradhan; Chaudhuri, 2020).

3 Method

The practice of voluntary simplicity, although little explored in the academic-scientific context (Aidar; Daniels, 2020), has been spreading through social media. Thus, in this study, netnography is the adequate methodological path to understanding it. According to Lee and Cha (2022), this method originated at the end of the eighties with the advent of the internet, offering the advantage of optimizing the conduct of research, being characterized as less subjective and invasive, more practical, and quicker.

Kozinets (2020) states that netnography allows the opening of windows into the reality of individuals and groups to understand how they lead their lives, using the internet as an observation environment, which stores evidence about the social behavior of those who are the focus of an investigation. In other words, it represents a detailed study of behaviors, preferences, impressions, habits, and routines of communities present on social networks. Mendonça, Rocha, and Costa (2019) add that for a virtual community to be eligible for an investigation, it must present a relevant number of participating members, expressive quantity and quality of descriptive information, a significant volume of posts, and continuous post traffic.

For this research, we chose a Brazilian discussion group on "Voluntary Simplicity" on the Facebook platform, which has existed for ten years and meets these requirements. This group has 681 members/participants (data from September 6, 2024). Regarding the sociodemographic profile of its members, the

majority are over 25 years old, have university degrees, and reside in different regions of the country, mainly in the Southeast, South, and Northeast.

According to Kozinets (2020), for netnography to be successful, it is necessary to carry out the following steps that make up its cycle: (1) cultural input, (2) data collection, (3) data analysis; (4) interpretation of data to certify the reliability of the information and; (5) conducting ethical research.

The cultural entry occurred in the second half of 2022 when the discussion group accepted the first author as a member. At this point, we sought to familiarize ourselves with the group to get to know its members, understand their discussions about voluntary simplicity, and learn how it works.

In the data collection stage, we selected file-type data, which refers to copies of the group's data (from their publications or posts) (Kozinets, 2020). Data was collected from the last five years, specifically from January 2018 to September 2024. At this point, reading the publications made it possible to select the relevant data, which were archived through copies of texts and images. A total of 87 posts were assessed. Also, the data analysis began simultaneously with data collection, as these were archived through classification or categorization.

To establish the analysis categories, we opted for the Gibbs coding methodology (2009, p.61), which allows us to define “what the data under analysis is about and involves the identification and recording of one or more passages of text [...] which, in some sense, exemplify the same theoretical and descriptive idea. Generally, several passages are identified and then related to a name for the idea, that is, the code.”

Subsequently, the stage of interpretation of the collected data (texts and images) occurred, using literature on the topic whenever necessary.

Regarding the stage of conducting the research following ethical principles, even though the data was exposed on a public social network, it was decided to use the anonymity of its members, with their identities being preserved, given that, as recommended by Kozinets (2020), the analysis of data (posts) in netnography is not limited to group members (people), but rather to their acts and behaviors.

Note that according to Resolution No. 510 of April 7, 2016, public opinion surveys with unidentified participants are outside the purview of the CEP/CONEP system.

4 Voluntary simplicity in a social group

The data from the discussion group on voluntary simplicity investigated allowed the establishment of the following analysis categories, which will be discussed below.

4.1 Concern about the environmental crisis caused by economic growth

We identified messages that seek to raise people's awareness about the current socioeconomic system that prioritizes supported economic growth and incentives for consumption, as from the group member's perspective, this system is responsible for the current environmental crisis that could make natural resources finite (Chen *et al.*, 2022). Thus, these individuals give evidence to a new social movement that searches for sustainable alternatives and considers the limits of the planet, choosing to avoid products/services/brands that are incompatible with this ideology triggered by their perceptions about the deterioration of quality of life and degradation of the environment due to excessive consumption and which is favored by the increase in consumer purchasing power, by technological advances that enable access to different offers and by society's incentives (Martin-Woodhead, 2021).

This discussion mentioned the documentary “Degrowth: from the Myth of Abundance to Voluntary Simplicity” on YouTube.

Posts on this topic mention actions to reverse this situation through the preservation and recovery of natural resources, such as lives and courses on rewilding of rivers and springs; climate, environmental conservation, counterculture, and food resilience; and the challenge of degrowth or the need to slow down.,

Furthermore, there are discussions about a video by Professor Leonardo Boff (Figure 1), a teacher and human rights advocate who talks about the

compromise of life on Earth in nine years. He says, “Global warming is just as harmful as the coronavirus. We are not going towards it; we are inside it” (Research data, 2024).

Figure 1 – Post by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

In this context, a report from one of the group members stands out: “just look at the extreme events in Brazil itself, such as the great floods in the Northeast and, at the same time, great droughts that frustrate plantations and harvests in the South” (Research data, 2024).

Moreover, many posts and reports state that “everyone benefits when nature prospers” (Research data, 2024); in other words, speeches that seek to raise awareness among the community to preserve nature, which is essential for the survival of humanity, convey the message that humans cannot dominate the ecosystem and that it is necessary to live in harmony with different forms of life (Osikominu; Bocken, 2020), as Figure 2 shows.

Figure 2 – Posts by group members



Source: Research data (2024)

As for the imbalance caused by economic growth, posts are raising awareness about the negative impacts of agriculture, livestock, and mining, among other sectors of the economy, which compromise natural resources, cause deforestation, affect water and soil quality, and harm fauna (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Post by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

We identified that they also shared information about situations caused by the communities where the group's members are located and which harm the environment, such as setting fire to vacant lots to "clean up" these places.

Expressions of appeal for action or an invitation for authorities to intervene are posted, along with indications of such situations. The following published report is one of many examples: "In my city and surrounding areas, smoke has been burning for days, tormenting us! Children, elderly people, animals, among this heat, very low humidity, and arsonists continue to create hell. Any authority to arrest, fine, or restrain?" (Research data, 2024).

Regarding this topic, Balderjahn and Appenfeller (2023) state that individuals will only voluntarily abstain from consumption or act in favor of environmental conservation when they are convinced that the climate must be protected because with or without the help of the authorities, the renunciation of excessive consumption and environment conservation attitudes will be understood as a way of avoiding such situations that are harmful to the planet.

Group members also emphasize the responsibility of voluntary simplifiers to address economic growth which, for them, can harm the environment and humanity (Martin-Woodhead, 2021). Look at the following reports, for instance: "In these moments of uneasiness and uncertainty, those who cultivate simplicity must remain strong and cohesive in order to help our planet and humanity" (Research data, 2024); "Be simple, see life as simple. Less in the end is more" (Research data, 2024); "those who learn to be happy with a little do not run the risk of wasting a lot" (Research data, 2024); and also: "Money does not fall from the sky. It comes from the ground. Only that which helps wealth sprout, grow, and bear fruit on the ground in abundance falls from the sky. Other notions of 'wealth' are based on scarcity; they are purely human inventions. Everything that used to be 'free' became consumption and a waste of life: selling life to buy 'life' [dead]" (Research data, 2024).

The preservation of the planet at the expense of economic growth and, consequently, waste and incorrect disposal has been advocated globally since the Rio 92 Conference, with the creation of Agenda 21. Moreover, due to constant

global concerns about the impacts caused by the development of nations, such as water scarcity, species extinction, and social inequality, this need had to be reaffirmed with the promotion of the 2030 Agenda and the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in which one of its goals is to guarantee responsible consumption and production patterns. Therefore, concern about the environmental crisis caused by economic growth is one of the reasons that currently lead individuals to adhere to voluntary simplicity (Wilson; Robson; Pitt, 2021).

4.2 Interest in sustainable solutions that minimize anti-consumption

In addition to being concerned and seeking to raise awareness among those around them about the negative impacts caused by economic growth, voluntary simplifiers value and are interested in research that aims to identify solutions to solve or minimize problems caused by human intervention, such as inadequate urban planning, since environmental and social awareness is one of the main values that guide the behavior of these individuals (Martin-Woodhead, 2021). Thus, members share articles in the discussion group that deal with these topics. An example is a post about an experiment from American scientists that consisted of transforming discarded plastic into fuel and an experiment by researchers at the University of São Paulo that created a type of asphalt that absorbs rainwater and prevents flooding. Another example is a post about an article in Nature Magazine about a new enzyme that breaks down plastic in hours, allowing high-quality recycling.

We identified a post reporting an experiment in Sweden that sought to raise awareness among its inhabitants to prioritize zero waste and enhance recycling. The group member's report was: "Sweden is so concerned about recycling that it is running out of trash. Our country should think the same way" (Research data, 2024).

Another piece of evidence is the sharing of a book published by Embrapa (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation) on the cultivation of vegetable gardens in small spaces and posts about movements in favor of sustainability that

do not have scientific proof, such as instructions not to iron clothes, an idea disseminated on social media to reduce energy consumption, which would benefit the environment.

Members of this community also present their own sustainable practices to inspire others (Demirel, 2022), such as growing aromatic herbs in their own homes in glass jars such as sage, rosemary, mint, and basil; using edible spoons made from cookie dough; using cloth coffee filters instead of paper ones; use of vegetable loofah (Figure 4) to wash dishes and take a shower instead of synthetic ones that, according to a member of the group “here at home it’s working fine” (Research data, 2024).

Figure 4 – Posts by group members



Source: Research data (2024)

Another member of the group advises: “When eating fruit, please don't throw the seeds away. Let them dry and store them. When you go down the street, throw them where there are no trees, and nature will do the rest. Several countries have adopted this idea and have fruit trees spread across cities. Don't be that exception” (Research data, 2024).

A member even posted a video showing the first production of mushrooms from his family's garden. Other posts encourage schools to teach practical sustainability from the early years of basic education.

These contexts portray the simple life through behaviors that are rewarding to simplifiers because they are anchored in fair and sustainable consumption practices that are capable of minimizing negative ecological and

environmental impacts by reducing consumption, mainly by discouraging the excessive purchase and acquisition of goods (Sobreira, Silva e Coelho, 2018). It is important to highlight that environmental education is treated as a strategy to naturally adhere to a simple lifestyle, as individuals learn through exposure to the negative impacts caused by economic growth, which could raise awareness that will lead them to adopt without much resistance, new values and behaviors in favor of sustainable development (Martin-Woodhead, 2021).

4.3 Reuse of goods used in everyday life in favor of anti-consumption

Voluntary simplifiers adhere to material simplicity, which consists of consuming fewer goods and services to mitigate negative environmental and social impacts. They seek to acquire only the essentials for their well-being in a simple lifestyle. Besides, they aim to have a less complex life by acquiring durable and reusable goods, not having to worry about frequently purchasing items essential to satisfy their basic needs and self-realization (Budai *et al.*, 2019).

Thus, we learned that some members value the reuse of goods such as clothes, shoes, toys, and household utensils, among other items, to avoid excessive consumption. There was a considerable number and frequency of posts that advertise second-hand stores in the group's cities (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Post by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

For example, followers' posts talk about reusing vegetable loofah by decomposing it to be used later as fertilizer (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Post by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

Furthermore, we identified the dissemination of projects that encourage recycling and reuse of waste. The project called “Recycling the Look”, is mentioned, which holds workshops so that children can create, with recyclable products, models of everyday places such as houses, churches, squares, and schools. It is important to highlight that these posts’ objective is to enable future generations to understand the importance of recycling/reusing materials to reduce the consumption of natural resources used as raw materials by industries and raise awareness about conscious consumption (Chen *et al.*, 2022).

It was also ascertained that they appreciated sustainable civil engineering, an innovative approach that applies environmentally correct practices throughout the entire construction cycle. The aim is to make projects economically viable and effective while reducing negative environmental impacts, including through the reuse of materials (Matos; Costa, 2018). To portray this scenario, we mention a post from a participant who presents a small rural house to store equipment built with used PET bottles (Figure 7).

Figure 7 – Post by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

For Sobreira, Silva, and Coelho (2018), the important thing for voluntary simplifiers "is to be and not to have ". That encompasses the search to reduce life's complexity to obtain the necessary tranquility that allows the individual to develop psychologically and spiritually. It is known that it is difficult for the voluntary simplifier to completely give up purchasing goods and services due to the need for subsistence. However, aiming for simplicity and reducing the complexity of their daily life can reduce consumption as much as possible, including acquiring goods with a long life cycle that can be reused in other functions. Voluntary simplifiers can also opt for manufactured goods instead of industrialized ones.

4.4 Be happy as a result of a simple lifestyle

It was ascertained that some group members consider voluntary simplicity as a lifestyle that can provide individual growth and happiness. According to the literature, many followers of this movement previously occupied positions that offered high salaries and significant benefits due to their professional training in renowned educational institutions and experience. Nevertheless, the work

environment was characterized by stress, continuous demands, and audacious goals, which led to long working hours including “overtime” to meet the expectations of their employers. As a result, employees were prevented from spending more time with their family and friends, and other pleasurable experiences such as playing sports, reading, and traveling, among other leisure activities. Given this scenario, these individuals chose a simple lifestyle, with less but happy to enjoy other pleasures that do not require a considerable financial investment (Hook, 2021).

An example is the post that mentions the story of Brazilian influencer Jesse Koz, who traveled with his dog in a 1978 Beetle to visit the Americas and who adopted a simple lifestyle but died in an accident in the USA in May 2022. The perception of happiness is seen in simplistic values, such as loyalty (of a dog) and freedom (in traveling), but which are only sometimes valued (understood) by individuals in society (Figure 8).

Figure 8 – Post by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

The voluntary simplicity that does not view rampant consumerism as something essential for life, whether to have comfort, to be accepted by certain social groups, or even because it is an imposition of society that views consumption and money as means to obtain a quality of life (Kuanr; Pradhan; Chaudhuri, 2020), causes a sense of freedom that is evidenced in some excerpts

of reports from group members, such as: "the less I need, the freer I am" (Research data, 2024); "happiness is knowing how to enjoy the simple things in life" (Research data, 2024); "simple, but not simplistic: how can you clear your mind to focus only on what is really important?" (Research data, 2024); "simplicity is love!" (Research data, 2024); These excerpts confirm the argument proposed by Lee (2022, p.217) that "in our society, we have social groups made up of individuals who have values (beliefs/ideologies) that can manifest themselves as 'lifestyles' or 'particular reasons' that justify anti-consumption", including the search for happiness and personal satisfaction with little and what is simple.

In this context, discussions arise stating that social inequality between classes, a predominantly economic division in which those who have the greatest financial resources occupy a privileged position with access to benefits, unlike those in lower classes, would favor violence: "Social inequality generates violence. Does anyone disagree?" (Research data, 2024).

Furthermore, we identified some speeches that present the socioeconomic system as a prison since those who follow its principles need to adapt to the rules that prioritize mass production, consumerism, and economic growth (Candido, 2020; Balderjahn; Appenfeller, 2023): "Anyone who wants social security, health insurance, comfort, and guarantees, must accept the chains and bars of a prisoner's life. On the other hand, anyone who wants to experience some freedom has to put themselves at risk and ignore the threats from society. The greatest certainty of all is that life ends. For everyone, for everything that is born. Accepting a mediocre life makes no sense. The sad thing is realizing this too late, which often happens" (Research data, 2024).

Also noteworthy is the posting of an article entitled: "Simplicity is the greatest luxury in life." This article states that few people can afford to live and be happy with a simple lifestyle, as not anyone can experience it. Among the comments on the post, the following excerpt stands out: "Not everyone can live without giving so much importance to what people say about them. No need to HAVE to BE. Without needing to BE, all the time, something more than what you truly are" (Research data, 2024).

This discussion between 'having' for 'being' and 'being' for 'having' is praised in current literature as a great debate carried out by individuals in search of simpler lifestyles.

[...] One of the main issues that seem to be at stake for people who are searching for a simpler life is "leading a life with purpose," valuing "being" more than "having," the experiences (which do not always depend on money). More human relationships should be prioritized instead of consuming material goods and valuing ethics (Cándido, 2020, p.7).

We observed some frequent posts about rich people being poor because their financial resources often come from illicit transactions. Thus, they will not be able to enjoy, with peace of mind, everything they stole, becoming hostages to the money, like in this excerpt: “Our poor rich! The greatest misfortune of a poor nation is that, instead of producing wealth, it produces rich people. But rich without wealth. Actually, it would be better to call them not rich but moneyed. The rich are those who own the means of production. Rich people are those who generate money and provide jobs. The rich simply have money. Or think they have. Because money is what owns them” (Research data, 2024).

“Richer are not those who have more, but those who need less” (Research data, 2024). In this context, we observed comments like: "Can a billionaire be minimalist? What do you think of these super-rich guys who live on so little? Would it be avarice, greed for more, or just simplicity?" (Research data, 2024).

Cándido (2020) states that simplicity gains a standard of sophistication based on the social status of those who experience it. To be perceived as positive, simplicity must not necessarily be associated with poverty or scarcity but with the idea that it is possible to survive with few resources that allow you to obtain quality of life and personal satisfaction.

To illustrate how simplicity brings happiness, some members post old photos of their families to confirm how happy everyone was while enjoying a simple life and highlight in comments that “before everything was so simple and everything was so good” (Research data, 2024).

In other posts, happiness was explained through photographs of landscapes, demonstrating that simplicity brings us closer to nature and that the socioeconomic system leaves us trapped in concrete walls that represent

development (Figure 9). The following story is quoted: "Simplicity brings us closer to nature and makes us happier" (Research data, 2024).

Figure 9 – Post by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

The group also mentioned the work of the plastic artist D'Jane Silper, who used her talent, art, and sensitivity to transform the simple house in which she lives. This illustrates that there is beauty in simplicity and that it provides happiness (Figure 10).

Figure 10 – Post by a group member



Source: Research data (2023)

In summary, the analysis of these posts and, consequently, the behavior of the members of the social group investigated give evidence of the statements of Demirel (2022) for demonstrating that wealth and consumption are not necessarily related to happiness and quality of life. In fact, according to Hook

(2021), material excess can be an indicator of dissatisfaction with life, covering up a reality that individuals in the consumer society do easily perceive since happiness would be a feeling of satisfaction with life in its entirety, involving both feelings and actions in favor of personal growth. Thus, for instance, happiness might be obtained through more than work or family and friends (Pravet; Holmlund, 2018).

4.5 Saving financial resources to use them for something that provides satisfaction and happiness

It is common for studies investigating the phenomenon of voluntary simplicity to focus on describing its reasons and benefits, with few discussing the challenges faced by those who choose to join this movement. The primary challenge is the difficulty of parting with material possessions acquired through financial means, which provide comfort, status, and societal acceptance. One can gradually practice voluntary simplicity by abstaining from luxurious goods to overcome this challenge, like purchasing a popular car instead of one with a high market value. Eventually, one can reach a more advanced level in which the individual chooses to live in self-sufficient communities where everyone shares the same values. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that, at any level, the orientation that financial resources are necessary and must be invested in essential acquisitions for subsistence, well-being, and personal satisfaction is present (Pravet; Holmlund, 2018).

Regarding this aspect, we identified that some group members encourage others to save small amounts of money for a certain period so that, in the end, they can purchase some good or service that causes satisfaction and happiness. The excerpt below is an example: “A 52-week challenge. The goal is to save small amounts every week until you reach 52 weeks. Of course, no one will become rich or a millionaire by doing this. However, you will have some extra money to spend more comfortably with the people you love at the end of the year, buy a better gift, travel, or keep the money there quietly and continue saving; it’s up to

you. The goal is for you to create the habit of saving money to spend on what matters” (Research data, 2024).

Therefore, the idea is to save money to consume with a real purpose that benefits yourself or other loved ones (Figure 11).

Figure 11 – Post by a group member

The image shows a screenshot of a social media post titled "DESAFIO DAS 52 SEMANAS". The post contains a table with two columns of data, each with three sub-columns: SEMANA, DEPOSITAR, and VALOR ACUMULADO. The table lists weekly deposit amounts and the cumulative total for each week from 1 to 52. The final row (week 52) is highlighted in pink, showing a total deposit of R\$ 52,00 and a cumulative total of R\$ 1.378,00.

SEMANA	DEPOSITAR	VALOR ACUMULADO	SEMANA	DEPOSITAR	VALOR ACUMULADO
1	R\$ 1,00	R\$ 1,00	27	R\$ 27,00	R\$ 378,00
2	R\$ 2,00	R\$ 3,00	28	R\$ 28,00	R\$ 406,00
3	R\$ 3,00	R\$ 6,00	29	R\$ 29,00	R\$ 435,00
4	R\$ 4,00	R\$ 10,00	30	R\$ 30,00	R\$ 465,00
5	R\$ 5,00	R\$ 15,00	31	R\$ 31,00	R\$ 496,00
6	R\$ 6,00	R\$ 21,00	32	R\$ 32,00	R\$ 528,00
7	R\$ 7,00	R\$ 28,00	33	R\$ 33,00	R\$ 561,00
8	R\$ 8,00	R\$ 36,00	34	R\$ 34,00	R\$ 595,00
9	R\$ 9,00	R\$ 45,00	35	R\$ 35,00	R\$ 630,00
10	R\$ 10,00	R\$ 55,00	36	R\$ 36,00	R\$ 666,00
11	R\$ 11,00	R\$ 66,00	37	R\$ 37,00	R\$ 703,00
12	R\$ 12,00	R\$ 78,00	38	R\$ 38,00	R\$ 741,00
13	R\$ 13,00	R\$ 91,00	39	R\$ 39,00	R\$ 780,00
14	R\$ 14,00	R\$ 105,00	40	R\$ 40,00	R\$ 820,00
15	R\$ 15,00	R\$ 120,00	41	R\$ 41,00	R\$ 861,00
16	R\$ 16,00	R\$ 136,00	42	R\$ 42,00	R\$ 903,00
17	R\$ 17,00	R\$ 153,00	43	R\$ 43,00	R\$ 946,00
18	R\$ 18,00	R\$ 171,00	44	R\$ 44,00	R\$ 990,00
19	R\$ 19,00	R\$ 190,00	45	R\$ 45,00	R\$ 1.035,00
20	R\$ 20,00	R\$ 210,00	46	R\$ 46,00	R\$ 1.081,00
21	R\$ 21,00	R\$ 231,00	47	R\$ 47,00	R\$ 1.128,00
22	R\$ 22,00	R\$ 253,00	48	R\$ 48,00	R\$ 1.176,00
23	R\$ 23,00	R\$ 276,00	49	R\$ 49,00	R\$ 1.225,00
24	R\$ 24,00	R\$ 300,00	50	R\$ 50,00	R\$ 1.275,00
25	R\$ 25,00	R\$ 325,00	51	R\$ 51,00	R\$ 1.326,00
26	R\$ 26,00	R\$ 351,00	52	R\$ 52,00	R\$ 1.378,00

Source: Research data (2024)

We observed that some participants make an effort to raise awareness among others about their responsibility as transformative agents in the process of interventions that attempt to solve and minimize social problems in communities that are vulnerable through the investment of their own financial resources in projects that defend certain causes (Figure 12). This attitude demonstrates the social conscience of the voluntary simplifier who views the use of financial resources as a means to guarantee their survival, quality of life, and well-being of society (Wilson; Robson; Pitt, 2021).

Figure 12 – Posts by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

Thus, many group members encourage participation in charitable campaigns that raise money for social projects or for people who are at risk (Figure 13). They argue that investing financial resources in such actions provides happiness and personal satisfaction (Cândido, 2020).

Figure 13 – Posts by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

Sobreira, Silva, and Coelho (2018) take a position on voluntary simplicity as a financial economy, ensuring that it is a lifestyle in which the rejection of materialism does not mean poverty or deprivation but rather, personal satisfaction by adhering to the consumption of what is sufficient and necessary for oneself. Consumption, when practiced, needs to focus on what can guarantee quality of life without the need to acquire something only to belong and meet society's expectations. Therefore, the individual's role in the search for personal growth and development of the society to which he belongs is valued.

4.6 Improving quality of life

The dynamic and even chaotic environment of capitalist society can make individuals ill. In the professional sphere, it is common for employees to develop illnesses, including those of an emotional nature, due to excessive work. Unbridled development can also cause a negative impact through climate change, increased pollution, and disease outbreaks (Budai *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, voluntary simplicity can be understood as a way to improve life quality. This situation became evident in a discussion about the Covid-19 pandemic: “ I have been analyzing these issues, and the situation is very serious but expected... People, whether they are class A, C, or 'M' (those who live on the margins), are creating resistance to the new reality... The global issue in this new era where viruses have entered the human habitat will not be a vaccine that magically solves the chaos that has taken place... It's going to be something more dramatic in everyone's lives that involves becoming aware of the lifestyle itself. For example, people want to live day and night the same way; the body does not recuperate itself, people sleep poorly and very little, and houses with architecture like true prisons, walls, and high bars, without air circulation, air conditioning have never been sold so much. The sun was banned, and you don't even sunbathe on the beach anymore, which was the first objective of going to a beach (the sun and the sea) because people go there to enjoy other things, for other purposes, and they must wear sunscreen all the time... Everything is covered in asphalt, the hot tar is the only chic black color for luxury car owners to travel without wearing out their

precious possessions (cars), driving through potholes and mud, lawns, etc., life is no longer natural, so, I keep on saying, once a simple lifestyle is no longer desired, what remains is all that we live and that has been bringing us tragic losses” (Research data, 2024).

For Lee (2022), despite the pandemic having favored an increase in the consumption of electronic and technological goods, the long period of social isolation allowed people to reflect on economic difficulties, sustainability, and the need for behavioral change to minimize physical and mental effects, caused not only by the period of social distance but also by the current society system, which led people to rethink their values and lifestyles, imposing a decision on them. As for Sousa and Fuentes (2023), this experience was significant in understanding that satisfaction with life is associated with actions that promote its quality and that, in this sense, voluntary simplicity meets this requirement by granting individuals and social groups a psychological, physical, and socioeconomic state based on well-being.

It was also identified that improving quality of life is associated with the possibility of having a peaceful life, without worries and, consequently, healthy so that the individual can experience pleasurable and meaningful experiences, which is generally not possible for those who follow the principles of capitalist society in which incessant work is considered essential for survival and well-being, that is, to meet everything from basic needs to those of self-fulfillment (Maseeh, 2022) (Figure 14).

Figure 14 – Posts by a group member



Source: Research data (2024)

Some simplifiers claim that the pleasures of life will only be perceived when people choose to have a simple life. From this perspective, what the consumer society values is seen as dispensable. A simple life characterized by the absence of complex problems, worries, stress, and frequent and accelerated changes, among other aspects, is viewed as the ideal way to live as it provides tranquility, happiness, and, therefore, health and well-being (Osikominu; Bocken, 2020) (Figure 15).

Figure 15 – Posts by a group membe



Source: Research data (2024)

In summary, voluntary simplicity is not just a lifestyle, but a philosophy that proposes rethinking the current paradigm that guides our society. Its objective is not to propose radical changes in behavior and positioning of individuals towards consumption but to promote reflection on the consequences of unrestrained consumption, in addition to demonstrating that it is possible to obtain quality of life by enjoying what is necessary and making our daily lives less complex (Hook, 2021).

5 Conclusion

Voluntary simplicity is a topic still little explored in netnography, which makes this work relevant to the academic-scientific community. It sought to identify and describe the reasons that arouse individuals' interest in adhering to a simple lifestyle.

In order to achieve this objective, the posts of a social group on the Facebook platform were monitored and analyzed. It was concluded that the reasons that aroused the interest of its members were: (1) environmental crisis – concern about the environmental crisis caused by economic growth; (2)

environmental education – interest in sustainable solutions that minimize anti-consumption; (3) anti-consumption – reusing of goods used in everyday life in favor of anti-consumption; (4) happiness – being happy through a simple lifestyle; (5) financial savings – saving financial resources to acquire necessary goods that cause satisfaction and happiness; (6) quality of life – improving quality of life. Therefore, the motivations for adhering to voluntary simplicity may be of a personal nature (personal values), to the detriment of the objectives of economic growth and society.

Mainstream consumer culture considers excessive materialistic consumerism to be a symbol of the “good life,” “freedom,” and “progress.” However, these values can become a reason to adhere to voluntary simplicity for individuals and social groups that privilege, for example, sustainable and conscious consumption and personal satisfaction through simple relationships and experiences experienced in everyday life. In our society, we have social groups made up of individuals who have values (beliefs/ideologies) that can manifest themselves as "lifestyles" or "particular reasons" that justify anti-consumption.

It should also be noted that the analysis carried out in this investigation allows us to confirm that the voluntary simplification of a lifestyle is not an unpretentious process and, thus, it is demanding and may require prior planning and adherence to certain formats so that consumption becomes conscious, taking place based on the individual’s needs, values, beliefs, and possibilities, whether through projects to change individual or collective behaviors, as occurs in virtual communities.

Therefore, this article's findings offer relevant contributions to the understanding of the phenomenon, expanding its dissemination and understanding. Regarding the contributions in the managerial scope, the focus is on the reality of voluntary simplifiers, which can help Marketing professionals establish strategies to deal with the motivations and cultural and psychological aspects that lead these individuals to consume or not consume certain products, services, and marks.

For future research, we suggest that new studies with the same purpose and methodological approach be carried out to validate or even complement the findings exposed and discussed here.

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Simplicidade Voluntária: um estudo netnográfico sobre os motivos de um grupo social para se aderir a um estilo de vida simples

Abstract: O consumo incentivado pela Revolução Industrial que favoreceu a materialização da sociedade do consumo passou a ser questionado por uma camada da população que começou a perceber as suas consequências e a necessidade de se estabelecer ações para revertê-las. Frente a este cenário, instaurou-se o fenômeno do anticonsumo e criou-se um movimento em busca de uma vida mais simples, denominado simplicidade voluntária; contudo, esse movimento ainda é pouco explorado em estudos que investigam o consumo. Diante do exposto, este artigo buscou identificar e descrever os motivos que despertam o interesse de indivíduos pela adesão ao estilo de vida simples, a partir de um estudo netnográfico junto a um grupo social. A entrada cultural neste grupo se deu no segundo semestre de 2023. Para compreender o seu funcionamento, analisou-se as suas postagens e interações dos últimos cinco anos. Os dados foram coletados mediante arquivamento e categorizados por meio da técnica de codificação. A etapa de interpretação permitiu concluir que os motivos que despertaram o interesse dos participantes pela adesão ao estilo de vida simples são: preocupação com a crise ambiental causada pelo crescimento econômico; interesse por soluções sustentáveis que minimizem o anticonsumo; reaproveitamento de bens utilizados na vida cotidiana em prol do anticonsumo; ser feliz por meio de um estilo de vida simples; economizar recursos financeiros para adquirir bens necessários que causem satisfação e felicidade; e melhoria da qualidade de vida.

Keywords: Anticonsumo; Simplicidade Voluntária; Netnografia; Grupo Social.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Letícia Rodrigues da Fonseca: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Validation; Visualization; Writing, original draft; Writing, review & editing.

Daniel Carvalho de Resende: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing, review & editing+.

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The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

RESEARCH DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All the data supporting the results of this study were published in the article itself.

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- The authors declare that the necessary Terms of Free and Informed Consent of participants or patients in the research were obtained and are described in the manuscript, when applicable.
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