

## Article

# What Brought Me Here? Different Consumer Journeys for Practices of Sustainable Disposal through Takeback Programmes

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**Abstract:** Despite being considered a consumption behaviour, disposal is still treated in an incipient way in the consumer literature. In addition, little is known about the entire journey of those who practice sustainable consumption disposal. In order to fill this gap, this exploratory, qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with 15 consumers who already discarded items through return programmes for recycling purposes of two products: slow fashion wallets and coffee capsules. The products are from two companies in Brazil, Dobra and Terra Cycle, whose managers were also interviewed. Records of photos and videos made by these consumers were also part of the research material, in addition to the analysis of brands' social media. Content analysis with deductive coding was used to analyse the data. The results allow for the proposition of a disposal journey framework and the understanding of this journey and its touchpoints for the products as a different trajectory. Still, it was found that detachment, emotional and mental separation from the product, only happens in some circumstances. The theoretical, managerial, and social implications of this journey of sustainable consumption disposal are discussed.

**Keywords:** disposal; disposal journey; customer journey; takeback programmes



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## 1. Introduction

*“And what am I going to do with this now? Where am I going to dispose of it? I don't want to throw it in the garbage.”*

This sentence illustrates the final stage of a consumption process in which the customer looks for ways to dispose of things in a sustainable manner. Our daily relationship with products takes us through several stages in the consumption process. We identify our needs, manage our desires, seek information to find out more about the products we buy, learn how to use them, and enjoy using them. Generally speaking, our thinking and our assessments focus on acquiring and using products. However, at some point, almost inevitably, our product fails, it becomes outdated, or no longer serves our purpose. So, we begin a journey with a view to disposing of the product, either because it no longer performs its functional role or because it does not meet the past expectations of the customer.

As the name implies, the “journey” is the path customers take during the consumption process, by which they experience elements that are offered by organisations either directly or indirectly through touchpoints [1]. Among the alternatives that customers analyse during their journey of sustainable disposal are product takeback programmes. These programmes are options developed by companies to take back products in order to recycle, remanufacture or reuse what is no longer used or wanted by customers [2]. Takeback programmes are good options for the customer to develop sustainable attitudes with regard to disposal, especially at a time when we are experiencing environmental degradation [3].

The main means of disposing garments and accessories is via common garbage. The fashion industry accounts for 17–20% of the world's water pollution, making it the

second largest polluting industry [4]. Our disused and unwanted clothing is creating ever-larger rubbish heaps, as society is consuming, hoarding, and discarding new garments at unprecedented levels [5]. Concerns with the depletion of natural resources and the amount of waste being generated—from production line to post-consumption—gave rise to the impulse to slow down consumption, as is already visible in some markets [6]. The deceleration of consumption in fashion—slow fashion—is based on the search for sustainability and social responsibility, which gives a new meaning to the consumption of clothing, retrieving pleasure and the experience, and thus creating an affective bond with these items [6].

A second example of a model that generates negative impacts on the environment and has accelerated the production of packaging waste is the new way of consuming coffee, using disposable capsules, which are responsible for creating large amounts of plastic and aluminium packaging waste [7]. In recent years, the coffee capsule market has given a new meaning to coffee consumption, by replacing the traditional preparation with an individual gourmet experience, starting a trend towards the consumption of coffee in a single dose [7]. The fashion industry and this new way of consuming coffee are examples of activities that generate environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change [7].

The latest research priorities listed by the Marketing Science Institute [8] cite the customer journey as a topic that needs to be better understood. The customer's journey has been extensively studied in the form of the customer's experience with brands—from the consideration phase to the purchase and post-purchase phases [9,10], but few studies have investigated how sustainable initiatives can improve customer engagement and experience at touchpoints and at the various stages on the decision journey [11]. Accompanying this consumption trend is a growing number of studies related to disposal behaviour [12], but we identified no robust literature that seeks to understand the customer's journey at this time, and little is known about what influences customer choice among the existing disposal options [13], beyond their managerial and social relevance.

In this sense, the aim of this research is to advance our knowledge of sustainable disposal behaviour and the journey customers go through during the disposal process. Our study seeks to answer the following research questions: How does sustainable disposal through takeback programmes occur? Is this journey the same for different kinds of products? In a search to answer these questions, we developed an exploratory study in two industries, slow fashion, an industry with products for continuous usage, and coffee that uses disposal capsules, an industry where products are for single usage. The decision to study these two products was because of the negative significance the sectors have to pollution contribution and their usage profiles (single usage  $\times$  continuous usage). Our literature review, methods, results, discussions, and final considerations are presented in the following sections.

### *1.1. Sustainable Disposal Behaviour*

Based on the perspective of sustainability with a focus on the customer [14], sustainable consumption refers to the acquisition, use, and disposal of products, focusing particularly on social, economic, and environmental concerns [15]. In essence, sustainable consumption is a normative concept that requires individuals to reduce their impacts with a view to their interest in protecting the environment and ecological integrity [16]. It also considers the interests of current and future generations [17]. White et al. [18] argues that unlike classic customer decision making, which typically concentrates on maximising immediate benefits for oneself, the choices of sustainable consumption involve long-term benefits for others and for the natural world.

As a field of study, sustainable consumption investigates the relationship between consumption and sustainability and the roles that customers and other stakeholders play in this relationship [17]. Customers are key agents in implementing sustainability strategies [18] and are directly involved in the three main stages of a product's life cycle: purchase, use, and management of the end of the product's lifetime [19].

Customer behaviour and decision making during these stages have direct implications on sustainability, such as the choice to reuse and repair, and resource recovery (recycling) at the end of the product's lifetime. Investing in more durable products or engaging in sustainable business models (purchasing), choosing to repair and reuse products (using), and the timely and proper disposal of products that have no reuse potential (managing the end of lifetime) are examples of sustainable customer behaviours [19]. Sustainable consumption is not a one-dimensional phenomenon, as it implies several dimensions that are related to customer attitudes and behaviour [20]. To promote sustainability, the heterogeneity of sustainable customers' needs to be recognised [20].

To seek a more sustainable scenario, it is essential to know to what extent customers have already internalised the idea of sustainability [21]. Awareness regarding sustainable consumption involves three main dimensions: awareness of environmental consumption, awareness of social consumption, and awareness of economic consumption [18]. The environmental dimension is related to the awareness of purchasing products that are produced, packaged, and disposed of in an environmentally correct manner. We perceive that the environmental dimension presented by Balderjahn [21] reiterates the practice of sustainable consumption at the time of disposal, while the social dimension is concerned with the treatment of workers, the respect for human rights, and no illegal child labour. With regard to the economic dimension, the authors provide evidence that this involves deliberate decisions about whether or not to spend money on a product [21].

One way of looking at sustainable consumption is by way of customer behaviour in relation to the disposal of products after they have been used, since this behaviour has implications for customers, companies, society, and the environment [12]. Like acquisition and consumption, disposal is also considered a stage of customer behaviour [12] and is essential in terms of sustainable development, since concern with environmental issues is increasingly present in society [22,23].

Although disposal includes throwing a product away, the marketing literature addresses the concept more comprehensively and defines several behaviours as being linked to disposal, including studies on the meaning of possessions, the objective of disposal behaviour, and disposal channels [24]. This process is also more complex than just getting rid of the product since it also requires the customer to separate from the product both mentally and emotionally. As Poppelaars et al. [25] point out, the term disinvestment is used for the final phase of the consumption cycle, since it represents the combination of the physical, mental, and emotional separation processes that customers go through when finalising the use stage of a product. Disinvestment is seen as the combination of discarding (physical separation) and detaching (mental and emotional separation from the product). Through a series of studies, Trudel et al. [26] show that the customer's connection to a product or brand helps them choose sustainable disposal.

The decision about disposal is a personal one taken by the customer, to the extent that the destination of the product in the different disposal channels is defined by their own personal assessment [27], and each method will result in a series of benefits and demand customer effort [28]. In their seminal article on the subject, Jacoby et al. [29] list factors that influence customers when they are disposing of products, such as their psychological characteristics and factors that are intrinsic and extrinsic to the product. Hanson [30], in turn, sophisticates the taxonomy of behaviours and considers the general stages of the disposal process as being: (1) recognition of the problem; (2) search and assessment; (3) the disposal decision; (4) post-decision results. Boyd and McConocha [31] suggest that discarded products take a longer path and that disposal behaviour can be linked with other consumption behaviours.

Cruz-Cárdenas and Arévalo-Chávez [12] compiled knowledge about customer disposal behaviour and considered all categories of tangible products. Their study indicates that customer behaviour in relation to product disposal has macro-environmental influences that are related to economic and cultural issues, and micro-environmental influences

that are related to the family, social networks, and the physical environment surrounding the customer.

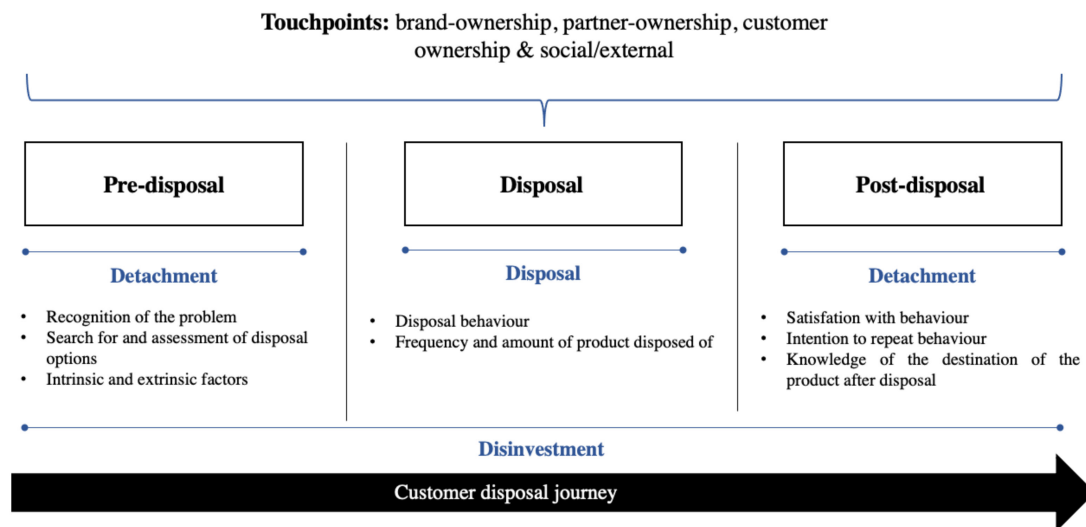
The marketing literature considers several behaviours as characterising disposal, such as donating, selling, giving away, keeping, returning, and others. In this study, we investigated takeback, which is the moment when the product returns to its origin. As the customer's willingness to sustainably dispose of the item is present in the disposal process, it is important to understand the journey that leads a customer to take a sustainable consumption decision at the time of disposal.

### *1.2. Integrative Framework Proposal: Disposal as a Journey*

The customer journey is defined as the different stages in the consumption process that the customer goes through [1]. During the entire customer journey, customers witness episodes of direct or indirect contact with the brand, which are defined as touchpoints [32]. These are present throughout the consumption cycle by way of different forms of interaction with the customer [1]. These touchpoints act as influences on the customer journey. They are owned by the brand, partners, the customer, and/or the external/social environment. Customers can interact with each of these touchpoint categories at each stage on the customer journey. Depending on the nature of the product or the customer's own journey, each touchpoint assumes a force that is more or less important at each stage [1]. In this article, we used the concept of touchpoints from Lemon and Verhoef [1].

The customer journey has been extensively studied as the customer's experience with brands, from the consideration phase to the purchase and post-purchase phases [9,10]. Despite being a contemporary concept in the field of marketing [33], there are still gaps in the comprehension of the "journey", such as identifying sustainable initiatives that can improve customer engagement and experience with touchpoints at various stages in the consumption journey, not just at the time of purchase. In this sense, and supported by the importance of disposal behaviours, we propose an integrative framework of the theory with the aim of designing the customer's disposal journey. In this proposition, recognition of the problem and the search for and assessment of disposal options are present at the pre-disposal stage [30], as are the intrinsic and extrinsic factors [2,29] and the detachment process [25]. As intrinsic factors, we consider product condition, lifespan, size, style, value, colour, etc. As extrinsic factors, we consider elements that go along with the product, such as finances, storage space, urgency, fashion changes, etc. [29]. At this moment, there is also thought about what people's options are in relation to the method of disposal, especially if we are talking about sustainable disposal; this is the detachment process.

The disposal period includes disposal behaviour [25] (in this study, disposal by way of takeback programmes) and the frequency and amount of the product discarded [12]. As we see later, this varies according to the type of product. Finally, post-disposal behaviour includes satisfaction with the result of the behaviour and the intention to repeat the disposal pattern [12]. These two elements are closely linked to each other, given that satisfaction (in this case, being positive) can impact the intention of a new sustainable disposal behaviour. It also includes customer knowledge of the destination given to the product after it is discarded [34] and the detachment process [25]. Touchpoints [1] are also included in the proposal, so it is possible to identify which touchpoints interact with the customer in the pre-, during, and post-disposal phases, as is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Customer disposal journey. (Source: prepared by the authors, 2021).

It is important to say that pre-disposal detachment can be influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In addition, the search for options can also be impacted depending on the person's level of involvement with the object. Thus, when there is a process of detachment, if emotional separation with the product occurs, there is a tendency for the person to discard in a sustainable way. The customer disposal journey presented in Figure 1 elucidates this discussion.

In addition to the conceptual development of the disposal journey, we applied this theoretical journey to analyse two products from different industries on an empirical application in this study.

## 2. Materials and Methods

To validate the theoretical framework and understand the disposal journey of customers who sustainably consume using takeback programmes, we performed an exploratory study using a qualitative approach. We chose to study coffee capsules, a product that is disposed of after a single use, and wallets, an item from the slow fashion portfolio. To do so, we selected Brazilian companies that use reverse logistics with their customers. This section is organised by presenting (1) the research field, (2) data collection techniques, and (3) data analysis procedures.

### 2.1. The Research Field

One of the companies chosen was Dobra, a fashion brand which has a recycling programme that allows customers to recycle their wallet by sending it back via the postal service. As with all of Dobra's products, the wallet is not made of leather, but of a special paper that does not tear. By the time that this research happened, the recycling programme had already received more than 7000 products. To take part in the programme, customers must register on the website and wait for an e-mail with instructions. An important detail is that customers are instructed to return their current wallet only when the new wallet arrives, if they have ordered a new one. As a result, the customers are not left without a wallet at any time. The second programme we chose was the National Coffee Capsule Recycling Programme called Reciclo, which includes some brands that work with coffee in capsules. So far, there are more than 1500 customers enrolled in the programme, and more than 780,000 capsules have already been collected. The programme has collected more than USD 3000 in donations for institutions since its beginning. To participate in the programme and return the capsules, customers must register on the website of Terra Cycle, the company responsible for organising the programme and issuing the labels required for



sending the product back via the post office. After sending products back, they accumulate points, and they can turn these points into donations.

## 2.2. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection phase began with the definition of the selection criteria for the participants. To be selected, the participants had to be nominated by the partner companies of the study and had, at least once, returned products through the recycling programme. For Flick [35], samples in qualitative research must follow different criteria from quantitative research, and examples of individuals who have some relationship with the object studied should be targeted. Respondents were chosen based on the criteria previously established and according to their availability, as it was necessary for the individual to be willing to participate in the research remotely. Following these procedures, we interviewed 9 Dobra customers and 6 Terra Cycle customers, who were identified by their gender and age during the analysis (a complete list and profile of the interviewees is available in Appendix B—Figure A1). This selection was intentional, heterogeneous, and based on researchers' judgement about participants' potential contribution for the study purposes, at the same time allowing for a comparison of the results and comprehension of the consumer's disposal journey for each one of the products [36]. Additionally, it must be highlighted that two exploratory interviews, with one representative from each company, were conducted before interviews with consumers, aiming to fine-tune the research guide with consumers, using the comprehension of the disposal journey according to the company's lenses. All interviews were semi-structured, and their scripts included questions about the customer's journey during product disposal and encompassed all stages of the disposal journey (scripts are available in Appendix A). The interviews were conducted remotely and lasted around 45 min. In addition to the interviews, when identified through the participants' reports (some recorded using social networks), the participant was asked to send photographs and videos related to their disposal journey, if they had made this record. For Holbrook [37], memories and recollections are subjective, but through personal artefacts filed by consumers, it is possible to identify topics, themes, ideas, and issues of interest.

## 2.3. Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis phase followed Bardin's content analysis guidelines [38] and was divided into three major stages. In the first stage, the coding process organisation was carried out. Thus, a list of descriptive a priori codes was prepared, including the categories and analytical codes. We based this on the theoretical bases of this study and on the proposed customer disposal journey. Figure 2 demonstrates the categorisation and coding process. The coding was deductive.

The second and third stages occurred concomitantly. In the second stage, we sought to identify and record all excerpts from the analysed materials that exemplified the same idea [39]. Thus, the first reading of the materials allowed a first understanding of the data and, after that, the analysis with consumers from both companies studied was carried out.

With the support of Atlas.ti's "change color" functionality, the descriptive codes were created in duplicate (one for Dobra consumers and the other for Terra Cycle ones), with each object having a colour that represented it. Excerpts from the transcripts were also identified according to the interview script questions that were answered and linked to other data sources (as social media ones) to which they were somehow related.

In the third phase, memos were created from the notes made in the researcher's diary. The memos helped in the identification of the researcher's ideas during the analysis, as well as in the characterisation of the concepts and in the in-depth examination of the dimensions identified from the literature. The researcher walked through the two phases in a cyclical way, where one phase complemented the other. Quality assurance was checked once this process was complete.

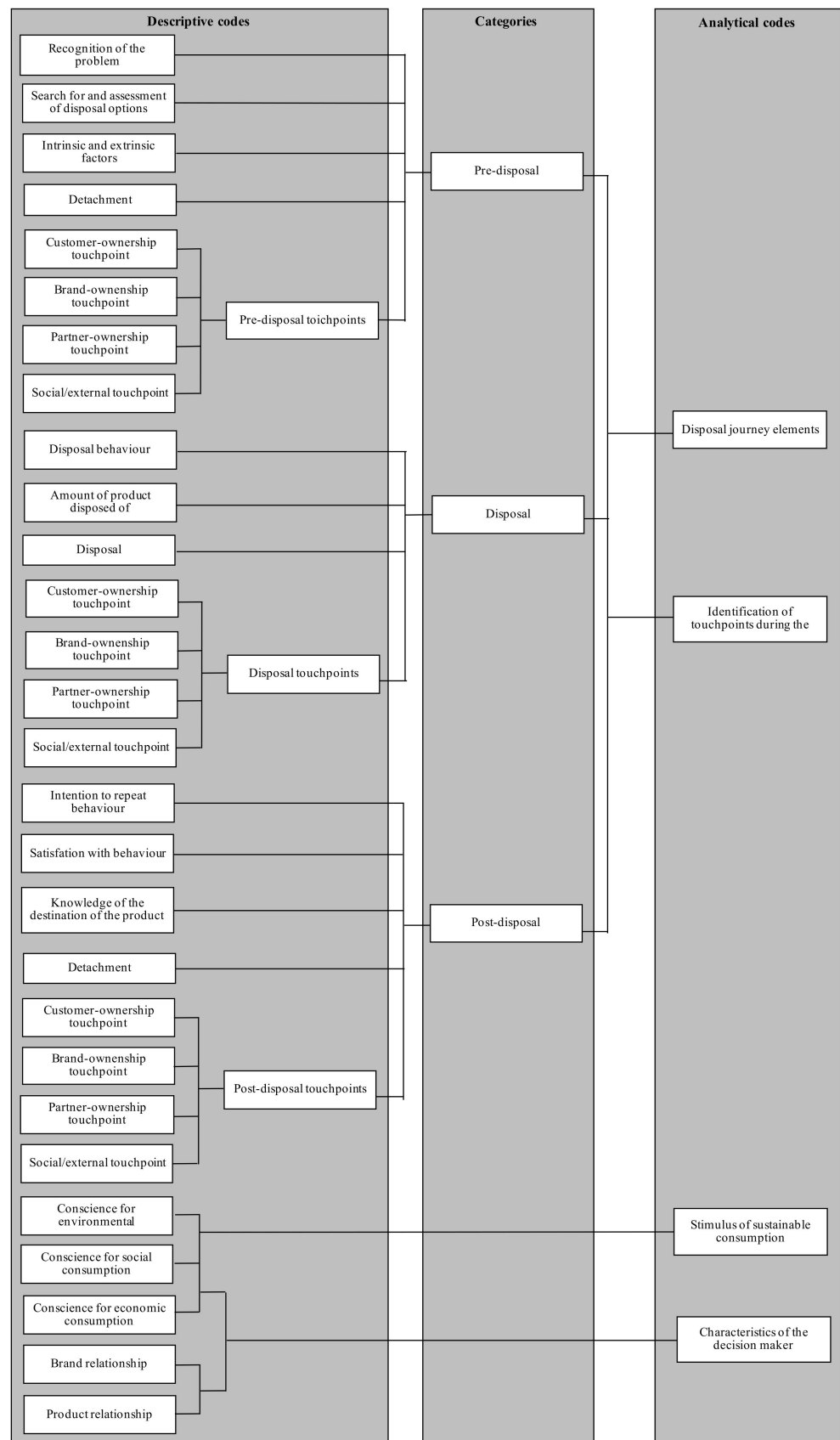


Figure 2. Categories for analysis (source: prepared by the authors, 2021).

### 3. Analysis of the Disposal Journey

To understand the proposed research problems, we first analysed data from each of the disposal journeys individually; then, in a second moment, we undertook a joint analysis of the whole research material, aiming to find similarities and differences between the studied consumer disposal journeys through takeback programmes. So, now, we present each one of the journeys separately and then discuss them jointly.

#### 3.1. The Disposal Journey of Wallet Customers

##### 3.1.1. Pre-Disposal

The pre-disposal phase is the first part of the customer journey. From the results, we were able to identify aspects related to: (1) problem recognition; (2) the search for and assessment of disposal options; (3) the characteristics of the decision maker; (4) the intrinsic and extrinsic factors; (5) the detachment process. Finally, we also identified the brand ownership, customer ownership, and social/external touchpoints.

At the beginning of the pre-disposal phase, we investigated how the problem is recognised. In this sense, we identified how customers recognise that they need to dispose of the product. The results showed that in the pre-disposal phase, customers see that recognising the problem is closely linked to the product's intrinsic factors [29], since recognising this sometimes comes from the condition of the product at the time it is discarded, as explained, respectively, in the statements of Charlotte (F, 24) and Henry (M, 22): "I only changed it because it was made of paper and crumpled, and as I was using it a lot, it became very crumpled and I ended up choosing to change it."; "I only changed it too because I kind of end up sitting on it and that crumples it up."

Emily (F, 22) repeats what the interviewees say, and adds an emotional connection factor with the product when she says that the wallet was "suffering": "And then it was already pretty well finished, like stained and really worn out. And so I said to myself: 'No, I need to change this wallet. It's already quite worn out, it's already suffering . . . soon it'll be falling apart.'" As Trudel et al. [26] point out, a connection between the customer and the product helps when it comes to choosing sustainable disposal.

These findings show that the wallet has a relative obsolescence [35], and that it has not yet lost its absolute functionality, but is discarded because of its quality, and new desires of the customer, as shown by Georgia (F, 25): "But I changed it because I liked the promotion and I had seen a print that I liked a lot and then I wanted to change it."

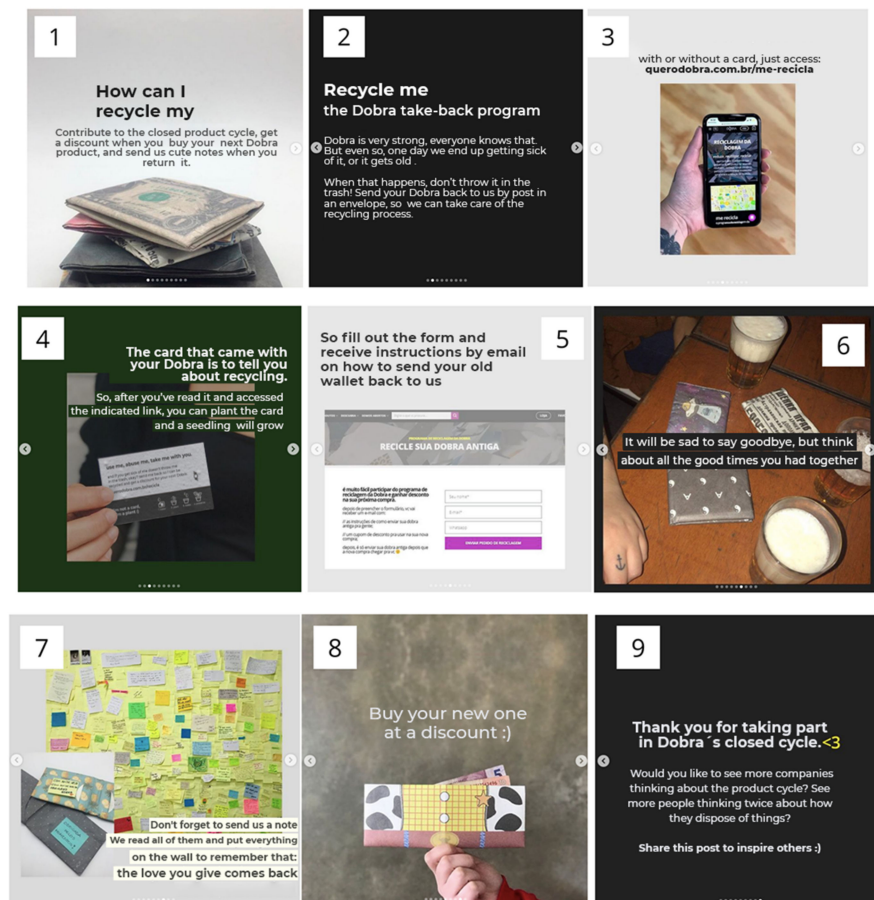
In recognising the problem, there is also the influence of the brand as a point of contact [1]; the company sends out an e-mail talking about the recycling programme a year after the purchase: "They sent an e-mail [asking] if I wanted to change my wallet." (Cristina, F, 23). So, the brand ends up helping the customer to recognise the problem, shows that the product can be disposed of, and even gives the option for this disposal to be done correctly, with the addition of a financial advantage. This e-mail can be seen as a suggestion, as White et al. [18] states: a message that is passed on to the customers before the behaviour occurs to remind them of the desired sustainable behaviour.

Recognition of the problem, therefore, is basically seen in two ways: related to the product's intrinsic factors [29], such as relative obsolescence [35], and under the influence of the touchpoint of brand ownership [1]. Ads and posts on the brand's official social media commenting on the takeback programme are also important stimuli that the brand provides to consumers and shows the brand's commitment by way of the guidelines it offers on how to recycle, as Scheme 1 indicates.

In the search for disposal options and the assessment of them, we observed that it is possible for customers to already know how they are going to dispose of the product even before buying it, because that is how they learned about it. Emily says that she found out about Dobra's product when a friend posted on social networks that she was disposing of her wallet: "It was a friend of mine [who introduced me to Dobra]. Which is exactly what she did; she had an old wallet and it was in exchange for recycling, right? And I



think she posted it in her stories. And I was looking for a wallet [ . . . ] I wanted a thinner wallet.” (Emily).



**Scheme 1.** Dobra posts about how to recycle. (Source: Dobra’s Instagram, 2020).

So, even before buying the product, the customer already knew how to dispose of it correctly. It is also possible to check the social/external touchpoint at this stage in the journey. She adds: “I kept in my mind ‘when this wallet is old, I’ll send it [for recycling.]’” (Emily). In this case, the disposal option was assessed by way of a social/external touchpoint [1], even before the purchase was made.

At the time of the purchase, the customer may have contact with the recycling programme by way of a brand touchpoint, or a card the customer receives when they buy the wallet. Grace (F, 23) says she liked the initiative: “And then I thought it was really great, because there was a little card with seeds to plant, and they said that when I wanted to return it, then I could send it back to the company.”

Another important point to be highlighted is the possible influence of the brand-ownership touchpoint: the product packaging, which has another use for the customer when it becomes another product. The wallet packaging already gives the perception of there being less waste. Charlotte (F, 24) reports: “As for their packaging, it becomes a piggy bank, so it’s less garbage to be discarded, because you end up using the packaging”.

According to Charlotte and from our analysis of the secondary data, it appears that reusable packaging can promote the perception of less waste being generated by the company, which can have an impact on the disposal decision, so the customer is also not generating garbage. Advertisements and posts on the brand’s official social networks addressing the recycling programme are also an important point of contact for the brand.

In the search for disposal options and an assessment of them, customers mentioned three behaviours (in addition to return): donating, throwing away, or keeping. As Yasmin

(F, 29) says, returning it was the best option: “Because I would have that spare wallet [ . . . ] I would probably throw it away, or it would be abandoned in the cupboard . . . And then they talked about the recycling programme. And they also give a discount, I think, for those who take part in the recycling programme. So, I took advantage of it and did it.” (Yasmin).

As for the characteristics of the decision maker, we analysed their awareness of sustainable consumption, the customer’s relationship with the brand, and other characteristics. The review by Joshi and Rahman [40] points out that environmental knowledge can have a positive effect on sustainable consumption behaviour. This statement is in line with the results found in this study in relation to the characteristics of the decision maker. The results show that environmental awareness is more pronounced than social and economic awareness.

Environmental awareness is sometimes linked to the consumption behaviours that are chosen by the participants, as reported by Georgia and by Grace, respectively: “I’ve given a preference to vegan cosmetics that are preferably organic and sustainable [ . . . ] I’m trying to reduce my consumption of meat, of any type of meat.”; “I saw a deodorant recipe that I wanted to make, because I saw that aerosols are harmful and also pollute [the environment] . . . ”

Characteristics of awareness in relation to social aspects are also found in the customer’s discourse, but not so strongly, as portrayed by Emily: “Sustainability reminds me a lot of the cycle of life, because it’s not just the disposal, it’s how it’s produced and also who the people in this environment are, do you understand? How they’re treated when products are developed.” Analysis of the interviewees’ words indicates that customers have a greater awareness of environmental aspects, followed by social matters and, finally, by financial issues.

A very important point to emphasise is the customer’s relationship with the brand and with the product, which is seen as an important point when choosing sustainable disposal [26]. Dobra’s customers have a strong relationship with the brand. Charlotte reports: “I really liked the experience I had. It was like love at first sight, because it’s all well done, it’s . . . how can I explain it . . . it’s all done with love, you know? It’s not those things we usually buy that are heavily industrialised.” Henry adds: “I really like the company, the product, and the way they treat us . . . I think it’s really great.”

Ethan (M, 25) says that he follows new releases and brand news: “Whenever they launch something I go after it to try and buy it, because I think their idea is totally different and innovative.” Cristina talks about the brand’s products: “[In addition to the picture] I bought another wallet; I’ve got two now. I don’t know if I’m going to send the old one back for recycling yet, but I like it a lot. I don’t intend to get rid of it yet. I’ve got three t-shirts, some tennis shoes, and a sweatshirt that they launched in the pre-sale.”

Dobra has an online community where customers can talk about anything from general subjects, such as Big Brother Brasil and Tik Tok, to options for new products and prints, thus promoting a relationship between customers. Customer involvement with Dobra, therefore, goes further than relationship with the brand and the product; it also promotes a relationship with other customers.

In short, in terms of the characteristics of the decision maker, we see a strong relationship characteristic with the brand and with the product [26], as well as an awareness of sustainable consumption marked mainly by environmental awareness.

In relation to intrinsic and extrinsic factors, the condition of the product is one of the characteristics most mentioned by customers as an important factor in the decision to return it [for disposal]: “It was in good shape; it wasn’t torn. It had been used for a year, it wasn’t that old, but it was crumpled . . . yeah, it wasn’t badly damaged. Really just a little crumpled.” (Cristina).

In relation to extrinsic factors [29], it is possible to verify in the discourse of some of the participants the desire to change the print: “I’d seen a print that I liked a lot and so I wanted to change it.” (Georgia). In this sense, it is possible to notice a relative obsolescence [35]; in other words, the product still had its functionalities, but it ended up being discarded.

The analysis enabled us to verify the detachment process as being one of the most important pre-disposal points in the Dobra wallet's customer journey. Detachment is mental and emotional separation from a product [25] and is marked by a customer ritual in relation to the product and the brand. In this detachment process, the brand exercises another institutional touchpoint, because in the brand's own communication, it addresses the possibility of the customer sending a message back with the old wallet, thus reinforcing the customer's emotional separation from the product. Cristina says that when she returned her wallet to Dobra, she sent along a post-it note with a drawing and a letter: "This is a thank you letter [ . . . ] I've talked a little about what I went through during the year that I spent with the wallet, so the wallet accompanied me on many occasions." Henry also reports sending a message along with the old wallet: "I sent [a message]. I wrote it on a little note of thanks and stuff . . . That I liked the wallet a lot."

These testimonies indicate the influence of disposal in the process of getting closer to the brand, since if the return programme did not exist, the letter/message from the customer to the brand would very possibly not exist either. In this way, the moment of disposal allows for a greater connection with the brand, because at that moment, the customer "opens up" and gets closer to it. This process is a point of contact for the customer, who lives an experience with the brand by relating to it through the letters and notes that are sent when the item is being returned. Charlotte relates that she sent a note with her wallet to reciprocate the gesture she received from the brand: "To retribute the same gesture I'd had when I received my wallet, which also comes with a little message."

The moment of detachment is also often marked by an encounter with a new product, since the customer can return the old wallet when the new one arrives. In detachment, then, two disposal behaviours can occur: exchange and return. Emily relates the encounter with the new wallet and the farewell to the old wallet in a post via stories on Instagram. In the video, the customer says: "I loved it [the wallet], but it was time to change. Since I'm not stupid or anything, I'd already bought my next wallet. [ . . . ] I've put my old wallet here, and tomorrow I'll go to the post office to post it. Bye, it was good while it lasted."

Because there is a connection between the customer and the brand and the product, detachment sometimes requires a reflection by the customer on how to emotionally separate from the product. It is also possible to notice that the return opportunity helps the customer detach from the product. Henry relates that he is attached to his objects and tends to accumulate things: "I get very attached to things, so it was very difficult for me to have to recycle, but I thought the suggestion was really great and so I recycled it."

### 3.1.2. Disposal

During the disposal period, (1) the disposal behaviour and (2) the frequency and number of products discarded were assessed. Regarding disposal behaviour, it is important to emphasise that there is a process of trust between the customer and the brand, since the brand allows the customer to send the old wallet back only after the new one arrives: "But you don't have to wait to send it back and then the new one arrives. You can get the new one first and then send it back to them." (Charlotte). Thomas (M, 29) reinforces this point: "But even if I didn't send it back to them, they'd never complain either [ . . . ] But it wouldn't be right for me not to send it back, would it? Having agreed to the discount on the old wallet."

Grace also talks about what the process was like for her: "I sent an e-mail to talk to them to see how to do it, because I'd never done it before, and then they told me how to, by e-mail . . . So I think I first ordered the new one and then when it arrived, I could send the old one back by post." Emily says that she felt obliged to return the old wallet after the new one arrived: "I thought it was great [ . . . ] Like, 'I'm trusting that you'll do your job. And I'm doing mine.' So it was also like . . . Since they did their part, I'm going to prove that I'm doing mine too, like, here's the wallet for you [she laughs]."

In general, the process of physically disposing of the product was seen as an easy process for the customer: "And I also liked the fact that the process was really easy. There

were no problems sending it back and receiving it. It was very enlightening like that. The guys were very, well, didactic [sic], I'd say." (Emily).

As explained previously, before the return behaviour, there may also be a behaviour of keeping it, since customers need to keep their current wallet while they wait for the new one: "Since I bought the other one, it's been here on my desk [kept safe]. And then I bought the envelope, I left it just right . . . Waiting for when I could take it to the post office." (Henry). In this sense, the customer's point of contact in disposal is the moment when the customer goes to the post office to take the envelope with the product in it.

The moment of detachment is also often marked by an encounter with the new product, since the consumer can only return the old wallet when the new one arrives. Emily (22) reports the encounter with the new product and the disposal of the old one in a post on Instagram Stories, as shown in Scheme 2. In the video, she reports: "I loved it [the wallet], but it was time to change it, right? As I'm not silly or anything, I've already bought my next wallet. [ . . . ] I've put the old wallet here, and tomorrow I'll post it at the Post Office. Bye bye. It was good while it lasted".



**Scheme 2.** Emily posts about detachment. (Source: Instagram Stories. Video sent by Jessica to the authors, 2020).

Customers generally reported that it was easy to get to the nearest post office to return the wallet. Going to the post office might have been exclusively to send back the product, or the customer may have taken advantage of another situation when they needed to leave their home to dispose of it. At that moment, the customer had no contact with the brand.

Regarding the number of products discarded, we verified that the number of wallets sent is, in short, one, but this can be two if the customer sends someone else's product back at the same time. Georgia reports that she sent two wallets back; hers and her boyfriend's: "When we became interested in changing our wallets, because [boyfriend's name] changed his with me at the same time . . ." Shipping frequency is also closely linked with the time the customer has had the wallet, since it is only disposed of after the customer no longer wants it. This frequency can range from one to four years.

### 3.1.3. Post-Disposal

In post-disposal behaviour, we sought to understand (1) the satisfaction with the result of the behaviour and the intention to repeat the disposal pattern; (2) the customer's knowledge of the way the product was finally disposed of; (3) the detachment process.

In relation to satisfaction with the behaviour, customers reported that it was a simple process, with no major problems. Emily relates: "I thought it was very simple. And so, there's no reason not to, you know?". Georgia and Thomas reiterate, respectively: "But it was really easy, I had no problem."; "It was very simple, there's not much secret to it."



The behaviour also brought satisfaction linked to positive feelings: “It’s always good to think that you’re contributing, isn’t it? ... To ... I don’t know ... Saying ‘helping the environment’ is kind of like, I don’t know ... but I like to think that I’m helping in a way, doing my part” (Christopher, M, 36). In this sense, satisfaction is also related to the customer’s perception of effectiveness, as it is a subjective assessment of a person’s ability to make a difference.

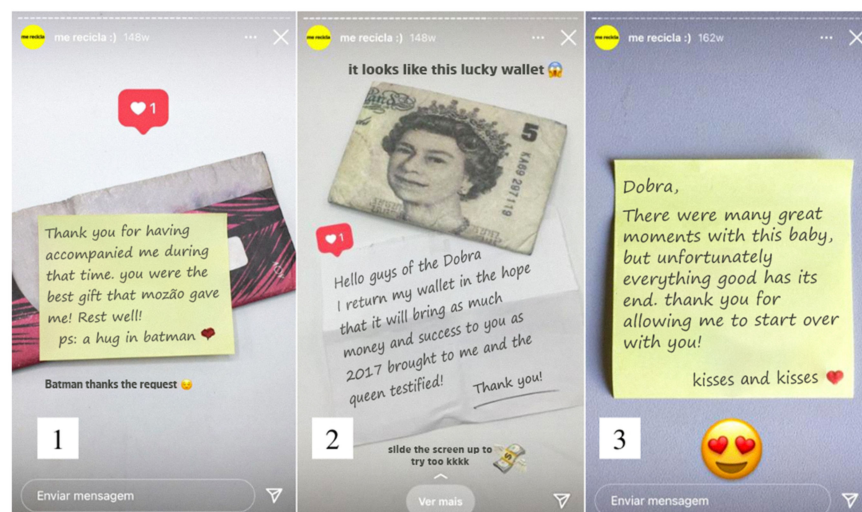
The possibility of returning also helps the customer decide what behaviour to adopt at the time of disposal, and prevents them from temporarily disposing of it [29] or from leaving the product at home, not being used: “Oh, it was great for me [ ... ] If I hadn’t returned it, I wouldn’t have thrown it away [ ... ] I’d find someone I could donate it to [ ... ] Or it would just stay at home, you know? Until someone would tell me to do something with it, like, throw it away or give it to someone.” (Georgia).

We found that customers had no knowledge of what is done with the wallet after it is returned, which is a point that the brand does not talk about much. We perceive those customers imagine what is done with the product, even though they do not know. This is illustrated in the passage: “All my gratitude for it is in this wallet, that it will become a new one, and that the next owner will shower it with love” (extract from a letter), which a customer wrote to the brand at the time they returned the wallet. In the letter, the customer wants the wallet to become a new product and shows positive feelings towards the next owner.

In post-disposal, we encountered touchpoints owned by the client and by the brand. We identified two customer-owned touchpoints. The first are posts on social networks that the customer registers after sustainably disposing of the old wallet and receiving the new one. Ethan posted on his Instagram account, indicating that it was already the third wallet he had bought. Dobra sent him a positive message, saying how good it was that he had bought the product again.

Another touchpoint owned by the customer is the fact that the customer tells other people that they used the recycling programme to dispose of the product. Georgia shared her behaviour with people at her work: “Because at the time I remember that I told a lot of people at my work.”

The brand’s post-disposal touchpoint is closely linked to the customer’s pre-disposal detachment process [25], since the brand posts news about the notes and letters written by customers when deciding to dispose of the product, as we can see in Scheme 3.

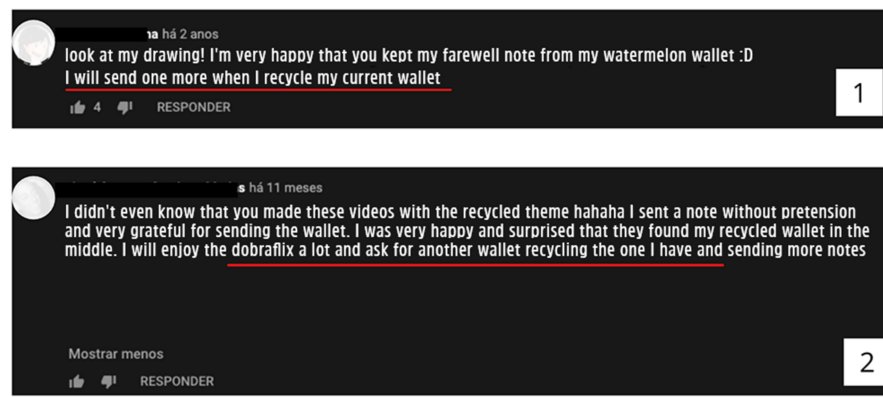


**Scheme 3.** Highlights on Dobra’s Instagram. (Source: available in Dobra’s Instagram, 2020).

One of Dobra’s own touchpoints is its official social networks. The brand posts messages sent by customers both on Instagram and on YouTube. On the brand’s YouTube channel, there is a box entitled “Recycled items of the month”, where company employees

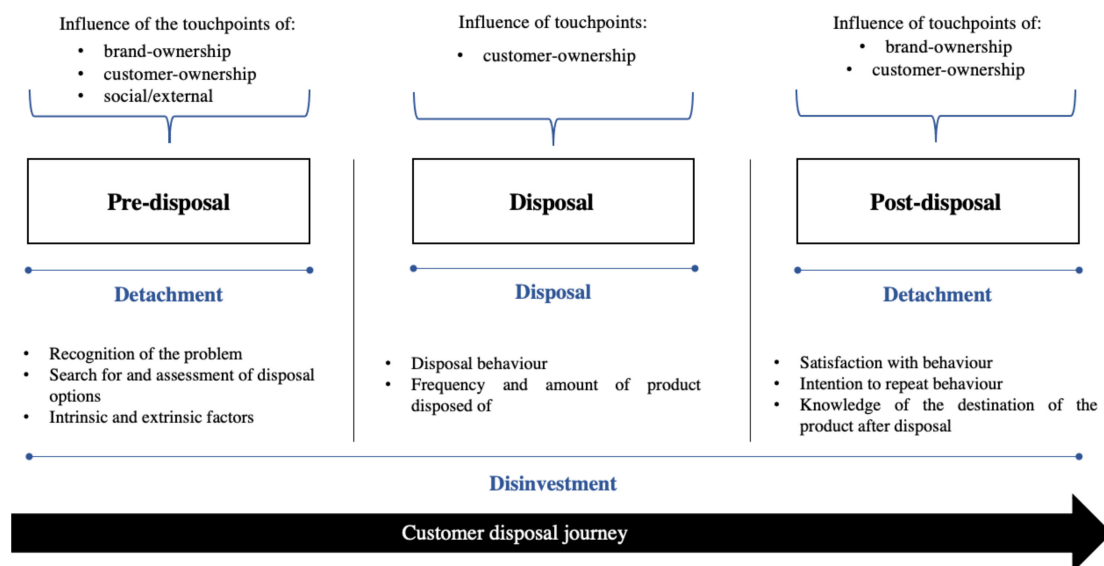
post letters and notes that were sent by customers. By way of posts about the takeback programme the brand is involved with, when some consumers receive their new wallet, they also reiterate their interest in returning it.

As already explained, customer detachment is very present at this touchpoint. An example of this is a report made by a customer that was read out in one of the channel’s videos: “Life is made up of cycles. That’s the end of one of them. [ . . . ] These two very different wallets give way to new ones, taking with me experiences and memories. Thanks for everything so far. It’s time to recycle and start again. It’s almost like 1 January; goodbye old wallet and happy new wallet. Thank you Dobra team and congratulations on the incredible work. I wish you a lot of success and inspiration. Lovingly welcome these two back with the same affection they received when they arrived here. We’ll continue with the partnership, because the new Dobras have already arrived. With my warmest regards.” Another example is in Scheme 4, that illustrate a report made by a customer.



**Scheme 4.** Consumer comments on Dobra’s YouTube channel. (Source: Dobra’s YouTube channel, 2020).

Based on the structure proposed in this research, the theoretical framework was revisited and presented in Figure 3 in order to understand which elements are present in the wallet disposal journey.



**Figure 3.** The disposal journey of wallet customers by takeback programmes (Source: prepared by the authors, 2021).



To contrast the journeys undertaken, we now analyse the customer journey in the disposal of coffee capsules.

### 3.2. *The Disposal Journey of the Customer of Coffee Capsules*

#### 3.2.1. Pre-Disposal

Analysing the journey of disposing of coffee capsules through the same phases and elements as the slow fashion wallet, we found no facets to demonstrate detachment on the part of the customer. In this phase, we also identified touchpoints owned by the client and the brand.

Recognition of the problem is directly linked to the factors that are intrinsic to the product [29] and to its complete obsolescence [35], since the product can no longer be used because it has lost its functionality after a single use. This characteristic of the product is a factor that causes discomfort to customers, as reported by Agatha (F, 57): “I always felt uncomfortable about it; you open it, use it just once and discard it, you know what I mean? [ . . . ] When I joined the world of capsules, I still didn’t care about it much, but then with every cup of coffee I drank, I thought: Wow, I use the capsule once for a few seconds, and I’m already discarding it. I throw it in the rubbish bin like it’s garbage.”

Recognition of the problem is also closely linked to an uncomfortable feeling the customer has because they did not dispose of it correctly: “It’s something that’s always bothered me. The town where I live doesn’t have recycling collection service. And when we started drinking coffee using capsules, I was indignant about throwing it away.” (Agatha). Dominic (M, 36) reports that he started discarding with a “throw away” behaviour, but soon changed: “But it lasted a very short time [throwing it in the garbage]. Soon it started bothering me—having those capsules there [ . . . ] all the time. I was looking at the capsule, and the capsule was looking at me and I thought ‘how unpleasant.’” At this stage, we can also perceive that the problem is so aggravating for some customers that they chose to change their coffee machine because of the waste that was generated: “I even changed the coffee machine because an old one we had didn’t have the correct disposal.” (Chloe, F, 57). Recognition of the problem may also occur before beginning to use brands participating in the Terra Cycle Reciclo programme. Isaac (M, 57), for example, reports that he was already consuming coffee in capsules from another brand. So, he was already aware of the waste generated when making espresso coffee at home, and that influenced him in the next stage of the journey, the search for and assessment of disposal options.

The search for disposal options and the assessment of them is related to a customer touchpoint [1], which looks for information on how to correctly dispose of capsules, using an internet search tool. Dominic reports: “I only found Terra Cycle when I went looking for a recycling programme for the capsules [ . . . ] by searching Google for ‘recycle coffee capsules.’” Agatha also reports having found the recycling programme in the same way: “And then I actually discovered Terra Cycle on the Internet.” It is clear, therefore, that the search for sustainable disposal options comes directly from a customer’s desire to behave correctly. Anthony (M, 27), who was already consuming the capsules of another brand before using the capsules of brands participating in the Terra Cycle Reciclo programme, also tried disposing of them using a competing brand’s programme: “Then I called [competitor brand] and asked if they recycled Lor and Pilão capsules, and they said no, that they would only recycle from [competitor brand]. Then I was like ‘Man, so I won’t be able to recycle these capsules? What are you saying?’”

Not having the option of discarding via the competitor brand’s programme, he used the same path as other participants and looked on the Internet for sustainable disposal options. The same situation happened with Isaac. After the customer registers on the Terra Cycle website, there is a touchpoint that is owned by the brand, which is an e-mail the brand sends the customer after they register on the site. With this touchpoint, the e-mail, the brand notifies the customer what is done with the capsules after they reach Terra Cycle, which is an important point for recycling, as pointed out by Winterich et al. [34].

Intrinsic factors are closely linked to problem recognition, as the condition of the product is the factor that determines return behaviour. Here, obsolescence is absolute [35], since the product has already lost its functionality after a single use.

### 3.2.2. Disposal

At this stage in the journey, we observed that before the return behaviour, there is a “keeping” behaviour, as the customer needs to gather a minimum number of capsules before they can be sent back for recycling. Before permanently disposing of the product [29], the customer retains the product by adopting a keeping behaviour. It is at this time that we also see the features that are extrinsic to the product [29], such as storage location. Participants reported that they keep the capsules in either the kitchen or the laundry area. Isaac said: “I live in a flat, and this window [shows the window] has a balcony, on the side of the kitchen. And there’s a corner where my wife and I put the recycled garbage. And I always kept the capsules there”.

As the capsules used by customers are not restricted to brands participating in the Reciclo Programme, the customer needs to separate the capsules after use, before sending them to Terra Cycle: “I do the following. I have a pot and when I finish making the coffees for the day, I take them [the capsules] out of the machine and put them in this pot. [ . . . ] And then when this pot is full, I separate the capsules, because as I told you, I can only send the Lor ones” (Agatha).

This stage of the journey, therefore, includes two behaviours: keeping and returning. When returning, the customer takes the coffee capsules to the post office to send them to Terra Cycle. With regard to the frequency and quantity of products sent, we see that this can vary according to the consumption of each one. Isaac says he consumes 2-3 capsules a day and collects approximately 1000 capsules to send to Terra Cycle: “I have an average consumption of two or three capsules a day. An average consumption of 70 to 90 capsules a month. I don’t think that’s an exaggerated consumption, but over the course of a year it adds up to close on a thousand capsules.” Dominic, on the other hand, reports sending the capsules more frequently: “We consume between six and ten capsules a day and I normally send them every two months. Then it’s around 200 to 300 capsules, or a little more, each time I send them.” According to Isaac, it is not to his advantage to return a small number of capsules: “It’s not worth sending them little by little. I wait until I’ve got 600 capsules. That’s a big package.”

### 3.2.3. Post-Disposal

In the post-disposal behaviour, we sought to understand satisfaction with the result of the behaviour and intention to repeat the disposal pattern [12]. We also asked about the customer’s knowledge of how the product was finally disposed of [34], and about the touchpoints [1]. We identified that there is no detachment process during the disposal of coffee capsules at the post-disposal stage [25].

Regarding satisfaction with the behaviour, customers reported that it is a process that requires more work than just “throwing it away” does, but in general, it is simple. Gaur et al. [2] point out that the ease of returning the capsules is seen as one of the main points for a customer choosing to return the product. Interviewees report: “It wasn’t very difficult. It was easy” (Dominic); “There’s a post office very close to me here that I can take them to on foot. I went to the post office and simply addressed them. I already had the label printed from the website itself.” (Isaac). The behaviour also brought satisfaction linked to positive feelings: “In a way it gives a certain feeling of well-being, because you’re not polluting the organic waste more, where it will probably end up in a landfill site.” (Isaac).

There is a positive feeling in relation to satisfaction with choosing the disposal option, and this satisfaction is linked to the intention to repeat the behaviour, since none of the customers interviewed had disposed of products only once, i.e., they had already recycled on other occasions. Here, we can also identify a touchpoint that is owned by the customer, who is satisfied with their behaviour and intends to repeat it.

With regard to knowledge of the destination of the product after it is disposed of, despite the information being set out in the e-mail that is sent to the customer, we found that only Ellen (F, 51) knew about the destination given after disposal: “They recycle aluminium [ . . . ] and what I liked is that they also recycle the coffee by composting it; they use the coffee grounds for compost [ . . . ] I found it very interesting [ . . . ] and with the aluminium they make other products for selling to end customers”.

In this sense, other customers reported knowing what competing brands do with the capsules after recycling them but said they did not know what is done in the Reciclo recycling programme. It is important to emphasise that this is a point communicated by the brand during the pre-disposal stage, in the e-mail that is sent to customers who register on the website.

In relation to the characteristics of the decision maker, we analysed characteristics in relation to their awareness of sustainable consumption, according to Balderjahn et al. [21], the customer’s relationship with coffee, and other characteristics of the decision maker. The review developed by Joshi and Rahman [40] points out that environmental knowledge can have a positive effect on sustainable consumption behaviour. This statement is in line with the results we found in this study in relation to the characteristics of the sustainable disposal decision maker. The results show that environmental awareness is more pronounced than social and economic awareness. One of the characteristics of the decision maker is just how much they like coffee. Because of this, they are interested in using coffee in capsules. The interviewees report: “So coffee is very important here at home. We drink a lot.” (Chloe); “We always liked coffee a lot. And then we discovered these capsules and bought a machine.” (Agatha); “I end up drinking a lot of coffee. Today I consider myself somewhat addicted to coffee.” (Dominic). Anthony says that his involvement with coffee meant that he started using coffee in capsules: “When I started enjoying [coffee] a lot, I saw that my thing was coffee in capsules.” Ellen says that she only drinks coffee in the form of capsules.

Another very striking feature of the interviewees is their environmental awareness in relation to consumption [21]. Anthony reports: “I think sustainability is not just about recycling. Recycling is the tip of the iceberg. When we talk about sustainability, we have to be concerned right from the origin of the product, and also worry if I really need to consume that product at all. Because the first thing is to reduce. Why am I going to buy something if I don’t need it?”

We could see that behaviours in relation to sustainable habits are not only limited to the correct disposal of capsules. Chloe relates: “First, we start using the bags, then we start recycling, separating the material. Encouraging other people. And now I’m composting. I also joined a composting system here, which is a company that brings you a little bucket and all my organic waste goes in there. So, we’re maturing and incorporating more attitudes every day.”

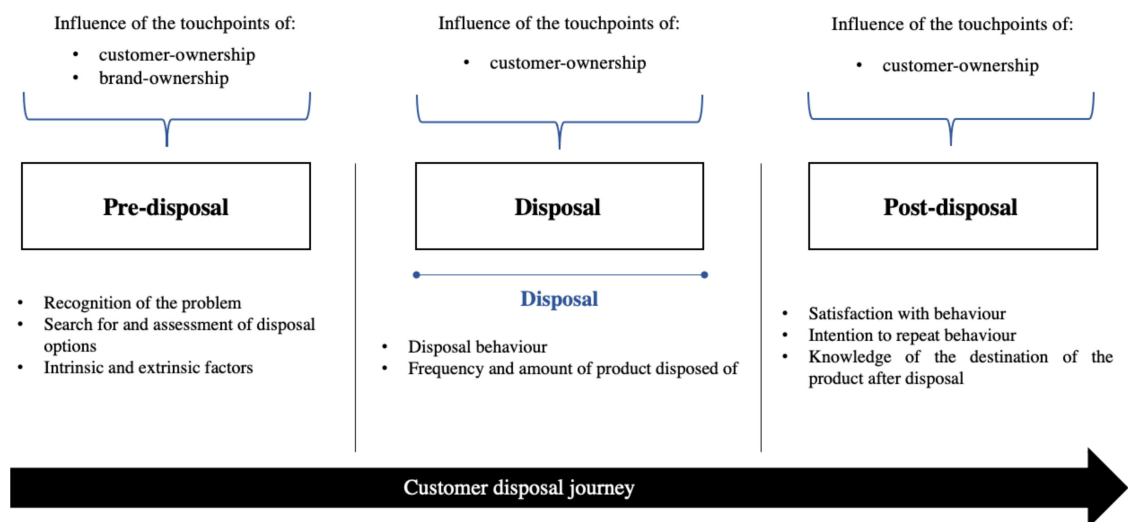
Anthony reiterates: “And one thing leads to another, doesn’t it? Because you already have the recycling seed planted in you. You learn to understand your food better, then you see how it’s made. And then you see . . . in your daily life you look at everything and everything has to do with the issue of sustainability. So then you think: goodness, before I buy a chair, can’t I see if there’s a chair . . . if there isn’t someone who doesn’t want to use theirs anymore. How am I going to buy a chair in a shop when I no longer know where it comes from?”

We perceived there is an awareness with regard to sustainable consumption [21]. We even noticed that capsule customers are aware that using the product is not the best option for the environment, but their relationship with coffee is greater, which means that they do not stop consuming. They are, therefore, customers with a lot of environmental awareness, but also an appreciation for coffee, which they do not want to give up. By participating in the recycling programme, they “minimise” the damage they are causing. In this sense, Dominic reports being aware of his excessive use of coffee capsules, and this made him look for an alternative option: “I realised that drinking coffee like this, in the volume I was drinking it, using coffee via a capsule, is completely unsustainable. It can’t continue,

there's really no way, like [ . . . ] but I like espresso coffee. I don't want to make coffee in a percolator. So, I was thinking: "what am I going to do?" So I kept the coffee machine and I bought reusable steel capsules."

Even with the reusable steel capsules, Dominic did not stop using coffee in a single-use capsule; he merely reduced the frequency and quantity of his use, because he found using only disposable capsules was unsustainable. The harm of capsules can also be seen in the discourse of Ellen: "In the case of the capsule, I have a bad conscience. It was mainly with the [competitor brand] because a lot of plastic was used. [ . . . ] I think this aluminium one is better, because you have a guarantee that you're doing less harm by recycling the capsule."

Therefore, it is clear from this discourse that there is an awareness of the harm of the product, but even so, customers do not stop using it because their appreciation of espresso coffee is greater. After analysing the disposal journey of coffee capsules, we again revisited the framework to check which elements are present in each of the disposal stages and present them in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** The disposal journey of coffee capsules by takeback programmes (Source: prepared by the authors, 2021).

#### 4. Discussion

Analysis of the disposal journeys of different products reveals that slow fashion wallet and coffee capsule customers have different trajectories in terms of their disposal behaviour involving takeback programmes. Table 1 below shows the stages along the customer disposal journey, including consumer behaviours in each one of these stages and the influences consumers suffer from touchpoints. This table allows a better visualisation of similarities and differences between the journeys studied.

As can be seen in Table 1, the journeys have several similarities, but some differences stand out. In the pre-disposal stage, social/external touchpoints [1] do not show up for coffee capsule consumers. Additionally, during the post-disposal stage, brand-ownership touchpoints [1] are not relevant for these consumers. In addition to this overview, deeper considerations appear from our data. First, we found that the disposal behaviour of wallet customers is mainly related to two other behaviours, purchase and, consequently, exchange. We did not observe this with customers who dispose of coffee capsules, who only perform the return behaviour.

**Table 1.** Journey similarities and differences between studies. (Source: prepared by the authors, 2021).

	Dobra Wallets	Terra Cycle Coffee Capsules
<b>Pré-Disposal</b>		
<b>Behaviours</b>		
Recognition of the Problem	✓	✓
Search for and assessment of disposal options	✓	✓
Intrinsic and extrinsic factors	✓	✓
Detachment	✓	X
<b>Influence of Touchpoints</b>		
Brand-Ownership	✓	✓
Customer-Ownership	✓	✓
Social/External	✓	X
Partner- Ownership	X	X
<b>Disposal</b>		
<b>Behaviours</b>		
Disposal Behaviour	✓	✓
Frequency of product disposed of	✓	✓
Amount of product disposed of	✓	✓
Disposal	✓	✓
<b>Influence of Touchpoints</b>		
Brand-Ownership	X	X
Social/External	X	X
Partner-Ownership	X	X
Customer-Ownership	✓	✓
<b>Post-disposal</b>		
<b>Behaviours</b>		
Satisfaction with behaviour	✓	✓
Intention to repeat behaviour	✓	✓
Knowledge of the destination of the product after disposal	✓	✓
Detachment	✓	X
<b>Influence of Touchpoints</b>		
Brand-Ownership	✓	X
Customer-Ownership	✓	✓
Partner-Ownership	X	X
Social/External	X	X

We also found that with the wallets, there is a very strong detachment process, i.e., mental and emotional separation [25] from the product, in addition to the physical separation [25]. As is known in the literature by Poppelaars et al. [25] and Dommer and Winterich [41], for example, an emotional relationship is important at this point in the journey, as it can make the customers pay more attention to how they will dispose of the

product, which affects sustainability. We did not see the same with the coffee capsules, as there is only disposition, which, as pointed out by Poppelaars et al. [25], is a physical separation of the product and a visible part of divestment.

A very important point is that during the wallet customer's journey, there is a connection with both the product and the brand, which is known by Dommer and Winterich [41] as an important aspect to the customer to better reflect on how to dispose of the item. Contrary to what happens with the wallet customer, with the coffee capsules, the biggest connection is with the result of the product, which in this case is a cup of espresso coffee. This may possibly be one of the reasons why we did not identify any detachment. With regard to the wallet, even though there is a connection with the brand and the product, the detachment is stronger in the pre-disposal stage than in the post-disposal stage, given that the wallet is replaced by a new one and there is no latent feeling of "missing" that product.

Another important aspect is the brand-owned touchpoints [1] that appear more strongly in the wallet customer journey than with the coffee capsule. As coffee capsule customers indicated, the brands do not encourage or advertise the possibility of sustainably disposing of the capsules after use. Thus, the fact that touchpoints owned by the brand are not predominant throughout the journey emphasises the brand's lack of communication at that time.

Another difference that we also identified was in relation to the communication of what is done with the product after disposal. Terra Cycle communicates this information in the e-mail that is sent to customers after registering on the website. There is also an explanation about this on the institutional website, unlike on Dobra's. However, this is not a point noted by most coffee capsule customers. Winterich et al. [34] discuss customers' greater willingness to recycle if they know that the product will become a product of another category, as with coffee capsules. A possible explanation for the lack of interest in the destination given to the product is that the brand only communicates with customers after registration; in other words, after showing interest in the behaviour.

We also noted the need for Dobra to find loopholes in the logistics for this return to happen. In its institutional communication, the brand instructs customers to send the wallet back as a "simple letter" at a post office instead of as a product return. This is so that the process takes place without burdening the customer and the company. It is interesting to see that this point does not cause inconvenience for customers, who portrayed it as an easy process, without difficulties.

With regard to the characteristics of the decision maker, we found that there is a difference in the relationship between the customer and the brand in the two products. Dobra's customers have a connection with the brand and the product on several levels, so this brand connection helps in the decision-making process for sustainable disposal, as Trudel et al. [26] point out.

Dobra also encourages this relationship in its institutional communication, but the same was not observed with customers of coffee capsules. In the journey we analysed, we found that the predominant characteristic of coffee capsule customers is environmental awareness [42], a factor that has even made customers give up their relationship with other brands for not disposing of the product correctly. Customers have stronger personal values than their connection with the brand, which can easily be replaced. At the same time, customers were seen to be aware of the sustainable consumption of both products, with environmental awareness predominating over social and economic awareness [21].

In this sense, brands can enhance identification with the product. In their study, Trudel et al. [26] address the fact that single-use products, such as soft drink cans, that have some connection with the customer (the customer's name on the can, for example), generate a greater willingness to dispose of the product in a sustainable way. Disinvestment [25] is seen as complete and strong in the disposal journey when there is detachment. The mental and emotional separation from the product, in addition to the physical separation, accentuates this disposal moment.



We see that in the customer disposal journey of the wallet, there are pre- and post-disposal brand-owned touchpoints, unlike the disposal journey of coffee capsules, in which we only identified the brand-owned touchpoint in pre-disposal. Furthermore, because there is no emotional separation from the product, these points are not as sharp as they are with Dobra. Customer-owned touchpoints are present in all three behaviour stages, since the customer is the protagonist of this journey. Finally, there is a predominance of customer-owned touchpoints in the disposal of coffee capsules.

## 5. Conclusions

The results of this study enable us to answer our research questions and contribute to research on disposal behaviour. In the following sections, we present our theoretical and managerial contributions and the limitations of this research, including future research directions.

### 5.1. Theoretical Contributions

We highlight several contributions of the study. First, we shed some light on disposal as a journey, considering that is a behaviour that is rarely addressed in the literature. Another contribution is the analysis of the disposal journey of different products. Even though the final behaviour may be the same—in this case, the return—the disposal journeys may have different touchpoints. We also notice that the detachment process is particular to each product; in other words, the emotional and mental separation from one product may not occur with another. This analysis shows that customers receive different influences when deciding on their disposal behaviour.

The third contribution concerns the understanding of which behaviours are linked to the disposal journey. The results allowed us to verify that, with the slow fashion item, the disposal journey is linked to purchase behaviour; in other words, an exchange takes place during product disposal. This is seen as an opportunity for brands to develop actions that encourage customers to buy something new during product disposal. This does not happen in the disposal journey of the coffee capsules, as disposal is not linked to a new buying behaviour. Even though return behaviour has been widely studied, we also identified other disposal behaviours during the journey, such as keeping and exchanging.

In addition, we found that consumers publicly say goodbye to products on social media, expressing their emotional attachment to a product at the time of disposal, as a farewell. It is common to see customers expressing themselves about products they buy at the time of purchase.

In this sense, this study deepens the discussion about the consumption journey by proposing a journey that focuses on disposal behaviour, developing an integrative proposal of the theory (Figure 1). This outcome shows that not only are touchpoints during the purchase process important, but all touchpoints that make up the journey are important. In this case, we observed that during the disposal journey, the brand strengthens its relationship with the customer.

These findings reinforce the importance of understanding the relationship between the product usage/sector activity and consumer behaviour. As could be found in this study, single-use items are purchased with a short-term disposal perspective, and this guides consumer behaviour and disposal behaviour. On the other hand, fashion items, especially slow fashion items, are purchased with a long-term disposal perspective, allowing the consumer to create bonds with the product itself, which can enrich the relationship with the brand. Therefore, our results indicate that the product usage perspective, whether a single-use product or a continuous/durable-use product, has an influence on consumer behaviour and consumer disposal behaviour.

### 5.2. Managerial Contributions

From a managerial point of view, this study contributes to learning that the moment of disposal can help the brand build and solidify its relationship with its customers, as in

the case of Dobra's customers. In this situation, disposal is no longer merely a behaviour for getting rid of the product; it becomes a ritual in which the customer has the opportunity to connect with the brand and the product. Therefore, it would be interesting for the brand to communicate this in advance, in order to generate interest in customers who are not yet part of the programme.

It could also be a strategy that the wallet company might adopt, as the brand does not address this aspect in its communication. In this sense, it is also something that coffee capsule brands can do, somehow transferring the connection with the customer not only to the product, the espresso coffee, but also to the capsule, so that there is a greater willingness to dispose of it sustainably.

The importance of the financial incentive to encourage sustainable consumption [2,3] is also understood, although it is not considered a determining factor in the choice of behaviour. In addition to the theoretical and managerial contributions, there are also social contributions, as correct disposal is beneficial to society and the environment, so there is great importance in learning how to encourage it at the end of the consumption journey.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is not without limits. We used only two cases of specific products, a slow fashion item and a single-use item. We encourage future research to suppress this weakness by looking at other products and industries. Furthermore, we understand that the proposed framework is subject to future validation using studies in different contexts and methodologies, including descriptive studies specially designed for validation purposes. Still, we studied a disposal journey in an isolated way, and we do not seek to understand how the disposal journey connects with the purchase journey. We encourage future research to analyse journeys in combination.

In addition, future studies considering products from different usage profiles (single use  $\times$  continuous use) and economic sectors (e.g., food  $\times$  technology) can deepen these findings. An important economic sector to be studied for continuous usage products is technology, with regard to the amount of waste generated by continuous technological improvements [43]. Additionally, it may be important to understand if customers are willing to pay more for a product that supports a sustainable environment, which can be communicated during the journey.

Finally, it is important to note that our study focused on consumers actively engaged with sustainability, as they had to take a volitional demanding action in order to dispose the product through the chosen takeback programme, which corresponds to a specific consumer profile that can be touched by sustainable disposal actions. Future studies can focus on consumer profiles prone to more passive sustainable disposal, such as trash separation at home for industries' data collection; in this case, the major effort is not in consumers' hands.

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## Appendix A. Interview Script Questions

### *Appendix A.1. Part 1—Characteristics of the Decision Maker*

Inspired by Jacoby et al., (1977); Gaur et al., (2017); White et al., (2019); Trudel et al. (2016).

- (1) Tell me a little about your view about sustainability. What does sustainability represent to you?
- (2) Have you ever taken a course or had any classes in your school or academic training about sustainability? Could you tell me more about it?
- (3) Do you think about issues related to sustainability in your day-to-day consumption?
- (4) Tell me if you are involved in any social cause (NGO, volunteering, etc.).
- (5) For day-to-day purchases, do you preferably buy from small producers or from large brands/networks?
- (6) How do you identify the consumption of the people you live with? Is it similar or different from yours? Could you give me some examples?

### *Appendix A.2. Part 2—Disposal Journey Elements*

Inspired by Lemon e Verhoef (2016); Demmers et al. (2020); Poppelaars et al., (2020); Jacoby et al. (1977); Hanson (1980)

- (1) What disposal methods have you used to dispose of wallets/coffee capsules?
- (2) Tell me about the first time you used the Dobra/Terra Cycle takeback program. When did you realise that you could dispose of the product through the takeback program?
- (3) Tell me about the last time you use the Dobra/Terra Cycle takeback program. Do you continue to dispose of wallets/coffee capsules through the takeback program? How often?
- (4) How do you store the wallet/coffee capsule until disposal it?
- (5) Where do you dispose of the wallet/coffee capsules? How far is the location from your home? Do you receive any monetary return when you dispose of the wallets/coffee capsules?
- (6) Do you know what is done with the product after you dispose it? How do you feel after disposing of it through the takeback program?

### *Appendix A.3. Part 3—Identification of Touchpoints during the Journey*

Inspired by Lemon e Verhoef (2016).

- (1) Do you follow Dobra's/Terra Cycle's social networks and website? With what frequency?
- (2) Do you usually dispose alone or accompanied?
- (3) Do you have friends or family members who are part of the Dobra/Terra Cycle program? Tell me a little more about it, please.
- (4) Have you read any news about Dobra's/Terra Cycle takeback program on any website/newspaper/blog/social network that wasn't from the brand?

## Appendix B. Interviewees

Interviewed	Gender	Residency	Age	Scholarity	Object	Interview date	Interview duration	Platform
Cristina	Female	Brazil	23	Ongoing undergraduation	Dobra	08/10/2020	47 minutes	Google Meets
Charlotte	Female	Brazil	24	Ongoing undergraduation	Dobra	06/11/2020	30 minutes	Google Meets
Henry	Male	Brazil	22	Ongoing undergraduation	Dobra	20/11/2020	33 minutes	Google Meets
Emily	Female	Brazil	22	Graduated	Dobra	03/10/2020	52 minutes	Google Meets
Ethan	Male	Brazil	25	Graduated	Dobra	22/10/2020	42 minutes	Google Meets
Georgia	Female	Brazil	25	Graduated	Dobra	28/10/2020	32 minutes	Google Meets
Yasmin	Female	Brazil	29	Graduated	Dobra	09/12/2020	25 minutes	Google Meets
Grace	Female	Brazil	23	Ongoing undergraduation	Dobra	09/12/2020	45 minutes	Google Meets
Christopher	Male	Brazil	36	Graduated	Dobra	01/12/2020	49 minutes	Google Meets
Isaac	Male	Brazil	57	Graduated	Terra Cycle	10/11/2020	63 minutes	Google Meets
Dominic	Male	Brazil	36	Graduated	Terra Cycle	01/10/2020	70 minutes	Google Meets
Anthony	Male	Brazil	27	Graduated	Terra Cycle	30/10/2020	58 minutes	Google Meets
Chloe	Female	Brazil	57	Graduated	Terra Cycle	08/12/2020	43 minutes	Google Meets
Ellen	Female	Brazil	51	Graduated	Terra Cycle	20/11/2020	47 minutes	Google Meets
Agatha	Female	Brazil	57	Graduated	Terra Cycle	23/10/2020	74 minutes	Google Meets

Figure A1. Characteristics of interviewees. Source: prepared by the authors, 2021.

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