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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## EXPERIENCE MARKETING IN LARGE EVENTS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY AT RIO 2016 OLYMPIC GAMES

**<sup>1</sup>Fábio Francisco de Araujo, <sup>\*2</sup>Isabel Cerchiaro, <sup>2</sup>Renata Celi Moreira da Silva Paula and <sup>2</sup>Roberta Schottz Espíndola**

<sup>1</sup>Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Josué de Castro Institute of Nutrition, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

<sup>2</sup>Fluminense Federal University (UFF), Macaé Department of Management, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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*\*Corresponding author: Isabel Cerchiaro,*

### ABSTRACT

The expectation around the behavioral changes that would mark the new millennium stimulated studies since the 1980s revealing a paradigm shift in the discourse on marketing and brands. The concept of experience was introduced as the new trend for business and consumer studies (Holbrook, Hirschman, 1982, Pine II, Gilmore 1998, Schmitt 2001). The idea defended by the scholars of the subject is that, in the contemporaneity, the promotion of memorable experiences allows to establish a deeper relation with the consumer. The present study sought to analyze how experience marketing has been applied by companies in Brazil, focusing on the companies that sponsored the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. We analyzed the experiences of people who participated actively or passively in experience marketing initiatives of the sponsoring brands during the Olympic period. The research results point out that experience marketing awakens consumers' interest in the brand and activity in question, feeling that it is being valued as a customer, generates real interactions and, lastly, modifying the consumer's view of the brand, generating a positive attitude towards it. However, it is important to note that each brand carries out a different kind of approach, generating different degrees of brand engagement, depending on the impact of its strategies.

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### INTRODUCTION

The changes in the consumer's relationship formats and approach would mark the new millennium. These changes have stimulated studies, since the 1980s, that reveal a paradigmatic change in the area of marketing and brands (VARGO; LUSCH, 2004). Authors such as Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Pine II and Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt (2001) introduce the concept of experience as the new trend for business and consumer studies. We can notice that there is a change of paradigm in marketing, the paradigm of exchange that looks to the delivery of goods or services and now, transfers it to the relationship process with the client. Among the strategies used, the marketing of experiences emerges with great potential, considering that this strategy is often perceived through the proliferation of companies that offer singular shopping experiences, in spaces thought out and relationships offered that are totally aligned with the proposals and values of its business, increasing and strengthening the contact of consumers with the brand through the promotion of

experiences. In this scenario, researchers deepen their studies on consumer experiences, developing the concept of experience marketing, expanding the discussion to experiences related to the purchase and the brand (BRAKUS; SCHMITT; ZARANTONELLO, 2009) within the new marketing approach called experiential (SCHMITT, 2001). In this context, we observe the movement of companies that intentionally seek to engage their consumers through the creation of memorable experiences (PINE II and GILMORE, 1998). Realizing that marketing strategies are increasingly influenced by this logic, this study proposes to narrow the analysis of this phenomenon to better understand about consumer perception and the relationship with the brand after experiencing an experience. To achieve this goal, we chose to select a major event to investigate the use of experience marketing by sponsoring companies. The selected event was the Rio 2016 Olympics, a world-class sports event, in which many companies invested in different forms of experiences as a promotional strategy. This paper's relevance is to deepen concepts derived from a new market approach, which deserve to be widely studied for their

paradigmatic innovation and for being still in the stage of development and implementation in academia and in companies worldwide.

### Theoretical foundation

**Experience Marketing:** Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) pioneered the concept of experience in consumer behavior studies. Concern about investigating this phenomenon began in the 1980s. From that moment, research that relates consumption and experience is the object of investigation by a number of authors, laying the foundation for the development of theories about marketing and the economy of the future (CARÚ; COVA, 2003). For these authors, the act of buying is more complex than just going to the stores in search of products (GRIFFITH, 2003). The experience of the purchase must satisfy beyond attributes utilities, giving account of emotional and multisensorial attributes, called hedonic experiences (GUIDO; CAPESTRO; PELUSO, 2006). According to Araujo and Rocha (2016), hedonistic products promise the possible realization of fantasies, because they disturb people's senses, dreams and their unconscious processes. In this sense, as Solomon (2002) affirms, the consumer when moved by symbolism at the time of purchase tends to attribute personal meaning in the search to determine their identity to other people. Baudrillard (2008), in this same line, points out that consumption goes beyond purely utilitarian issues, being more related to the meanings that this consumption can bring to the individual. The emergence of studies on the hedonic culture of consumption reflects the economic and social changes that have taken place since the end of the 20th century. For Pine II and Gilmore (1998), we are in the age of "experience economy". As the offer of products and services was "commoditized", the promotion of experiences emerged as the main strategy for differentiating brands and, consequently, seeking competitive advantage.

This context, together with the domain of information technology, the rise of the entertainment culture and leisure (ARAUJO et al., 2013; BREHENY; STEPHENS, 2017) and, in the field of marketing, the emergence of the discourse of brand supremacy, became a fertile ground for the birth of the concept of experiential marketing (SCHMITT, 2001). Different from traditional marketing, focused on the characteristics and benefits of products, the marketing of experiences turns to the experiences provided in consumer situations (ARAUJO; ROCHA, 2019). The great emphasis given to the value of brands in the 1990s begins to propose some changes in the traditional marketing approach. The brand becomes the center of attention and the great factor of differentiation of products. However, most studies, at that time, still defined brands as mere identifiers (SCHMITT, 2001). That is, the brand translated the identity of the product and, through it, the consumer could identify its property and attest its quality. However, little was said about the emotional associations of brands with consumers (SCHMITT, 2001). Schmitt (2001) proposes that sensory, affective and cognitive associations of consumers with brands can result in memorable and rewarding experiences. From this perception, the author develops the experience marketing approach, believing that today's consumers expect products and services to stimulate their senses and their emotions, translating into their lifestyles. Experiential marketing would then be a concept capable of accounting for a change in contemporary consumer behavior: rather than buying, the consumer wants to gain unique

consumer experiences. It is important to note, however, that the theoretical propositions of both Schmitt (2001) and Pine II and Gilmore (1998) are not free of controversy. Some authors point out that Pine II and Gilmore (1998) use an approach considered spectacular (HOLBROOK, 2000) and culturally skewed (CARÚ and COVA, 2003). However, the main criticism is related to the fact that the desire to obtain experiences through consumption is not something new (HOLBROOK, 2000). In this sense, it is observed that there has been a change in the way researchers understand their experiences, not a change in consumer behavior. This paradigm shift contributed to the academy recognizing and giving more importance to these phenomena (HOLBROOK, 2000). It is important to note the growing interest among researchers about issues related to experiential marketing, questioning traditional marketing paradigms, as can be observed in recent studies (ARAUJO; ROCHA 2016; BRITO et al., 2017; SCHMITT; BRAKUS; ZARANTONELLO, 2015; SHAMIM; BUTT, 2013, among others). In addition, it is important to note that, it is observed that the concept of experience must be perceived as a relevant variable for the search of competitive advantages for the companies in the market today (HOLBROOK, 2000). In discussing a deepening of the marketing approach proposed by Schmitt (2001), it is important to present the concept of experience used by the author, since this is a concept worked in several academic areas.

... experiences are individual events that occur in response to some stimulus (eg, marketing stimuli before and after purchase). The experiences last a lifetime. They are usually the result of direct observation and / or participation in events - real, imaginary or virtual (SCHMITT, 2001, p.74).

In turn, Ding et al. (2010) and Meyer and Schwager (2007) follow in the direction that experience is the service process interpretation and personal feeling by the consumer, of the interaction and involvement during this process through a series of points of contact. For Vargo and Lusch (2004), the experience is perceived purely from the individual point of view of the client, being inherently personal, existing only in the client's mind. According to Adjei et al. (2010) note that nowadays new technologies emerge with speed, as virtual stores, search tools, publications and goods and services within the reach of a click of the consumers, which allow for greater interactivity and contribute to the consumer experience. According to Schmitt (2001), experiences are generally not spontaneous, but rather induced; companies need to prepare the right environment and scenario for them to happen. Schmitt points out five conceptual modules for implementing a successful experiential marketing strategy. The first module is the "Sense", in which the goal is to create sensory experiences through vision, sound, taste and smell. The second is the "Feeling", which seeks to create affective experiences with the consumer. The module of "Thought", which stimulates the intellect to create cognitive experiences. The "Action" module, which stimulates behavioral and lifestyle changes through motivation, inspiration and spontaneity, is sequenced. Finally, the last module, "Identification", which combines elements of all others, going beyond to achieve individual and private feelings, increasing "personal experiences" (Schmitt, 2001). Among these opportunities to experience a consumption experience, those made in the physical environment of the stores are one of the most prolific,

triggering a series of studies that have emerged the concept of shopping experience. This concept is related to any and all experience lived by the consumer at the time of purchase, being intentionally prepared by the company or not; and may occur in a physical or virtual environment. However, according to Carù and Cova (2003), the experience of consumption can not be reduced only to the experience of the purchase.

**Brand Experience:** Shamim and Butt (2013) note that researchers and managers are seeking substantial empirical evidence on contexts that produce experiences that are capable of deep into the memory of consumers and subsequently influence their attitudes towards relation to the mark. Schmitt, Brakus e Zarantonello (2014) research deepened the knowledge on experience marketing proposing the concept of brand experience to give account of sensations, feelings and behavioral responses provided by stimuli related specifically to brands. According to the authors, when consumers go shopping, they are exposed to utilitarian attributes and also to various stimuli related to brands such as colors, design, shapes, communication, slogans, mascots, among others. These stimuli are parts of brand identities and constitute the major source of consumer subjective responses. For the authors, experiences can occur anywhere, even if the consumer has no previous involvement with the brand, because the experience involves the search, purchase, receipt or consumption of products or services by consumers. For the authors, brand experience corresponds to the internal and subjective responses of consumers, such as sensations, feelings, as well as behavioral responses, to the stimuli that are promoted by brands. In spite of a dialogue with a number of other conceptual formulations related to brands, such as brand attitude, brand involvement, brand attachment and consumer delight, the brand experience differentiates itself because it does not precede a consumer's motivational or emotional state (GUIDINI, 2016). Thus, experiences provided by the brand can occur anywhere, without the consumer having prior interest and even without they having an earlier involvement with the brand. The emotional relationship of the consumer is only one of the results of experience, just as attitudes and judgments about the brand are only a small part of what makes up the whole experience with it. In addition, the brand experience differs from the brand personality concept developed by Aaker (1997). While in brand personality, consumers place human characteristics in the brands (like sincerity, competence, sophistication, among others), in brand experience what is considered are the sensations, the feelings, the cognitions and the behaviors that respond to the stimuli of the experience provided by the brands (SCHMITT; BRAKUS; ZARANTONELLO, 2014).

Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) demonstrate that the concept can be divided into four dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral) evoked distinctly by different brands, through the development of a scale and evaluation model for brand experience. Thereby, the authors use their methodological apparatus to predict satisfaction in current buying behavior. As Pine II and Gilmore (1998) argue, experiences create value and the more a brand evokes multiple dimensions of experience, the more the consumer will be satisfied. Because experiences tend to provoke pleasurable stimuli, consumers are expected to want to repeat them. In this way, the authors conclude that the brand experience has a strong consumer impact, affecting its satisfaction and loyalty

to the brand and punctuating the brand experience as a subjective internal consumer response (sensations, feeling and cognition) in addition to behavioral reactions, evoked by the stimuli related to a brand. In a more recent study on the subject, Schmitt, Brakus and Zarantonello (2015) argue that the experiences that occur during the use and consumption of branded products are undoubtedly the strongest stimuli for the repeat purchase and word-of-mouth recommendation, as well as online recommendations. On the other hand, Grace & O'Casey (2004) affirm that the place where the service is rendered provides, besides values about the brand, important dimensions of the experience to which the consumers will be exposed, also emphasizing the importance of the purchase environment in the experience. In these places, the client is affected emotionally, cognitively and psychologically. In this sense, the experiences lived in the stores have enormous power of influence in the evaluation and the behavior of the consumers (GRACE; O'CASEY, 2004). The interaction that exists in physical stores, where customers go in search of purchasing products, makes it possible to perceive that the way these products are offered, whether by sellers, by the environment or by visual communication, translate into services rendered to the customer until he effects the purchase of the product (HOLBROOK, 2000). Experiences thus occur when the provision of these services is performed in a unique and memorable way, in a way that involves the client as a participant in the process (MORGAN, 2006).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study aimed to investigate the application of experience marketing by companies sponsoring Rio 2016 Olympic Games to better understand the perception of customers who lived the experience with the company or its brand. We sought to focus research and analysis on the implementation of experience marketing and the relationship that the brand image created in the consumer from the experiences. We opted for an exploratory qualitative research, since this option is based on the experience of the client inserted in the environment in which the phenomenon under analysis is experienced. In addition, Mattar (1997) affirms that this method allows to deepen the knowledge of problems about which there are few elements, which represented an important advantage for the research, since the concept of experience marketing is still little explored by academics, especially in Brazil. Data were collected through an in-depth interview with eleven people. This technique seeks, based on assumptions stipulated by the researcher, to obtain answers based the subjective experience of a source chosen for possessing information that one wishes to know (ELLIOT; JANKEL-ELLIOT, 2003). Data was collected from a group of people who attended the Olympic Park, Boulevard Olímpico, sponsor parties, country thematic houses or ran with the Olympic Torch in their respective cities during the Olympics and Paralympics games of Rio de Janeiro in 2016. The selected informants participated in some experience marketing strategy promoted by one of the sponsoring brands of the event. The interviewees reside in the state of Rio de Janeiro, in the capital and in neighboring cities, such as Macaé, Araruama and Nova Friburgo. Their ages range from 13 to 45 years. The interviewees' profile is detailed in Table 1. The interviews were conducted between September and October 2016 and had an average duration of 30 to 50 minutes. They were fully recorded and transcribed for analysis. They were conducted and guided by a semi-structured script that approached the topics pertinent to the

Table 1. Interviewee Profile

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Occupation	City	Mentioned Consumption
Gabriel	21	M	Student	Rio de Janeiro	NBA
Marina	21	F	Student	Macaé	CAIXA
Renata	45	F	Juíza Leiga	Nova Friburgo	BRADESCO
Bianca	13	F	Student Lower school	Nova Friburgo	NISSAN
Amanda	21	F	College Student	Rio de Janeiro	SKOL
Brenda	17	F	Student high school	Macaé	NISSAN
Gustavo	45	M	Professor	Araruama	COCA COLA
Armando	21	M	College Student	Macaé	SAMSUNG
Gilberto	21	M	College Student	Rio de Janeiro	HEINEKEN
Lucas	25	M	Intern	Macaé	SKOL
Matheus	21	M	College Student	Rio de Janeiro	Various

experience lived in some event sponsored by a company sponsoring the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. All data collected were analyzed jointly, seeking to observe perceptions and meanings attributed to the experience lived, observing the meanings attributed to the brand from this. After this process, the identified phenomena were generically labeled (STRAUSS; CORBIN, 2008). From this first classification, a refined reading was made to obtain a greater depth, which allowed the categories of analysis to emerge from the data.

## FINDINGS

This section presents and discusses the results of the field research, presenting the meanings attributed to the Experiential Marketing experience during the 2016 Olympic period in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The observations aligned with the interviews carried out formed different categories of analysis, namely: (1) valuation of the client; (2) actions that arouse interest; (3) actions that promote real interactions with consumers; and (4) change of attitude towards the brand. It is important, however, to briefly discuss about the selected event in order to understand the environment and the varied contexts in which experiential marketing was inserted in the Olympic scene.

**Rio 2016 Olympic Games as an experience scenery:** The city of Rio de Janeiro was chosen by the Olympic Committee to host the 2016 Olympic Games, this sporting event became known as Rio 2016. The games took place from August 5 to 21 and during the period from September 7 to 18, the Paralympics games took place. The facilities where the games and other leisure activities took place were spread around the city after a deep planning and investment to build spaces appropriate to the competitions, seeking to offer a structure that could generate good experiences with the games for both competitors and spectators. It was possible to perceive that in addition to the experiences promoted with the sport activities of the event, several companies interacted with the consumers, using the space to divulge and promote their brand through the strategy of Experience Marketing. These actions occurred in different spaces around the city, used for event activities, such as:

**Boulevard Olímpico at Porto Maravilha - Olympic Boulevard at Porto Maravilha:** In the downtown area of Rio, between Gamboa and Praza XV neighborhoods, were installed stands, high definition screens to accompany the games, a concert daily schedule, street performers presentations, theme parties and cultural interventions. The 3 km of extension area also possessed a panoramic balloon, bungee jump and a model of the city made of Lego blocks. The Olympic Pyre was inside the Boulevard, in front of the Candelária church square.

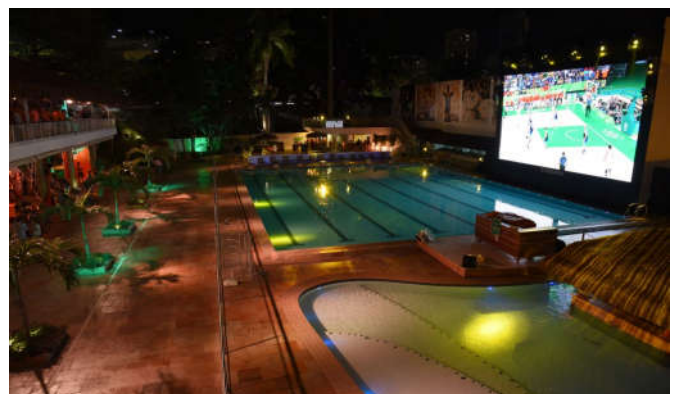
**Olympic Park:** Rio de Janeiro Olympic Park was a set of facilities in the created for the event Sports Complex Cidade dos Esportes (Sports City), built in the neighborhood of Barra da Tijuca. It was the main center for the competitions and meeting point of the event, with 1.18 million square meters and nine facilities. The space hosted disputes of 16 Olympic and 9 Paralympic modalities, and was composed of permanent equipment, integrating the Olympic Training Center (COT) after the Games.



Source: <http://www.boulevard-olimpico.com/portfolio-item/mais-sobre-o-boulevard-olimpico>

Figure 1. Boulevard Olímpico (Olympic Boulevard)

**Skol Beer Parties:** During the Olympic period, Skol beer, one of the event sponsors, sponsored around 19 parties at various points of Rio. Skol Village was set up at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM), on the shores of Guanabara Bay, Skol Live House, within the Olympic Park, with rotating mirrors pulsing according to the rhythm of party music, FanZone Skol was located inside the Olympic Park with a concept bar, the Beer Garden and a 150-meter-high panoramic balloon, as well as the Skol Arena, located in Maracanã and its Stand in Boulevard Olímpico.



Source: <http://visit.rio/evento/casa-da-holandia>

Figure 2. Casa da Holanda (Netherlands House)

**Countries Thematic Houses:** The countries theme houses, which are a tradition in the Olympic Games, served as hospitality spaces, a show window to the culture of tourists around the world, having leisure activities, food, typical music and medal celebrations of their respective nations, also helping to make their fellow countrymen to feel at home.

**Olympic Torch:** Carrying the Olympic torch is an important symbol of the games. 12,000 people in more than 300 cities across the country had the opportunity to participate in this year's 95-day relay. The people were chosen by the sponsors for standing out, making a difference in sport or in their communities.

**Other Experiences Events:** Among the many sponsors of the Olympic Games, which contributed to the success of the event, Coca Cola (putting up toy stands and sponsoring the torch relay), Samsung (with virtual reality stands), Bradesco (House of Mascots) Caixa Econômica (showcasing many Paralympic sports), Skol (many parties around Rio de Janeiro), Nissan (Stands with car parts, lights, sponsorship of the torch relay) and Heineken (sponsoring the Netherlands house) stood out by directing their marketing strategies during the event through the promotion of unique experiences aimed at the public that were present at the aforementioned facilities. These experiences could be related to the image of the brand, narrowing its relation with the consumer.

**Customer Appreciation:** Feeling valued is something that enchants and transforms customers into people in love with the company. This relationship only offers gains for the organization because besides these customers make the business grow, they are also the ones that make the most effective recommendations. And on the consumer side, it is a massage of self-esteem to feel not only as a number but as a single person, with own tastes and desires to which the brand seeks to offer due attention. The concept of value refers to what consumers perceive to have to gain from the shopping experience (HOLBROOK; HIRSCHMAN, 1982). The interviewees said that this experience made them feel valued by the brand. This happened after the experience was absorbed by most of the interviewees that the brand has consideration for them as consumers or for the cause they sought to emphasize, as in the case of CAIXA and the games they offered with Paralympic sports.

Observing this "value" is a consumer-brand approach that may potentially influence future buying, as described by Matheus:

"I felt good about the brand, I felt valued by the brand and interacted with everything they had to offer" (Interview with authors, 2016).

E by Marina:

"Nowadays, maybe I look with a more human look, I see CAIXA caring to, maybe, people in general because the other brands, from other sponsorships, were also experimenting, but not giving so much value to the Paralympic sport, were doing different things, but CAIXA was paying attention, you know? This value, the person, the life, the person with the disability and I found it very cool. I found a great initiative, then I started looking with that eye, you know?". (Interview with authors, 2016).

In the first testimony, it is possible to perceive that the experience lived by Matheus modified the way he was feeling: living it made him feel good and valued, therefore, happier, so he interacted with all the activities proposed by the brand. While Marina, from experience, she could perceive that the brand shared the same personal values that she does from the care and attention to people with special needs showed by Caixa Econômica. In addition to the event providing a shopping experience, because it happens in a store environment, it is clear in this example that the company also worked on the brand experience concept proposed by Schmitt, Brakus and Zarantonello et al (2015). The experience provided by CAIXA has stirred the sensations, the feelings and stimulates the behavioral responses of the consumers to the company brand. Schmitt (2000) stresses the importance of promoting brand identification in large events, pointing out that marketing identification that appeals to the norms of reference groups works better in the collectivist than in the individualistic environments. That is, it becomes easier to promote these actions in places where groups encourage and guide brand identification.

**Actions to arouse interest:** All interviewees, regardless of the experience they lived or their degree of involvement with them, claimed that the promotion of these initiatives was interesting and / or aroused their interest. The fact that the experiences have attracted attention of the interviewees contributes to the perception of one of the basic requirements of experience marketing that is to promote a unique and unforgettable experience. Schmitt (2000) presents the ingredients for a successful thinking experience: a sense of surprise, being visual, verbal or conceptual; a dose of interest, to arouse curiosity; and a dash of provocation, defying common sense, innovating. A feature that is directly related to the concept of experience marketing, since the strategy translates into actions capable of producing a memorable experience (PINE II; GILMORE, 1998). This was noted in Gabriel's testimony. "Because it's unlike anything I've ever been in relation to. I've watched games at the stadium, but it was not that experience you had of being able to have the court there for you to play, challenge my skills, you can see yourself as a player, was an innovative experience" (Interview with authors, 2016). Having lived an innovative experience will possibly make it a "milestone" for Gabriel and, no matter how many more the interviewee lives in the future, the NBA house, as the first, will always be remarkable, which makes the experience memorable. In the same vein, Lucas, another interviewee, mentioned that he would not be able to forget his experience of having participated in a creative event that was a surprise.

"The coolest was Skol, had the Skol delegation with a DJ playing music during the entire event and had a Skol bar there, so it looked like I was at a party, it did not look like I was at a sporting event, it was pretty cool" (Interview with authors, 2016).

The party organized by Skol in the Olympic Park drew Lucas's attention to the brand, since such an initiative eluded him at the time. It is possible to observe that the novelty presented by the brands stimulated the curiosity of the interviewees, which served as motivation for them to participate in the proposed activities.

According to the interviewees, the perception of the results from the application of experiential marketing is carried out in an indirect way, through the interconnection of experiences lived by the clients to the experience that can be converted into sales, but which certainly strengthens the brand. It was observed that all elements of shopping experience were being applied in the various events promoted at the Rio 2016 Olympics, and the games proved to be very opportune for experience marketing actions, since the biggest challenge faced by companies is to extend this complete application outside a context of a major event due to the physical limitation of spaces.

**Actions that promote real interactions with consumers:** As reviewed in the literature, the promotion of consumer experiences appears as the main strategy of differentiation and for gaining competitive advantage by companies in the current scenario. Following this line, companies seek to offer much more than products or services. Words such as “fun”, “funny” and “joy” were widely used in the interviewees' speeches. It is possible to identify hedonic aspects in these initiatives, where consumption of the product does not occur directly, but rather good times. According to Holbrook and Hirshmann (1982), while the traditional approach focuses mainly on the utilitarian and functional aspects of consumption, the hedonic dimension focuses on the subjective, symbolic, emotional, unconscious and psychological aspects.

“I did not imagine people would be so happy. Even after that, to take the torch to school, for the children to see, for my indoor soccer team practice, the joy that the people have as a hero, as an artist, it is amazing how people vibrate with it, the importance that that brings” (Gustavo in an interview with the authors, 2016).

The interviewee Gustavo hoped the experience would be great for him, but what surprised him most was the joy it also brought to the people of his conviviality, students and spectators of the Olympic torch relay. The interviewee Renata pointed out:

“Joy. Because that moment was a success. Music, dance, even bringing the Olympic spirit, a thing of fun, health, joy, pleasure.” (Interview with authors, 2016).

These good moments and feeling of well-being that were consumed by the interviewees will play an important role in creating the memories of the lived experience, as affirmed by Collin et al. (2012, p.194): “When we are in a good mood, we tend to record positive events in the memory because we pay more attention to the information that best fits our mood. Events and Emotions are stored together in memory. When we are happy, we find it easier to remember memories of a happy period.” Bianca's account also made clear the relationship of the moment with relaxation, able to provide fun and reflect the joy of the moment recorded in her memory:

“It was really cool to visit the Nissan booth, it had some toys and it attracted a lot of attention from the public because it was a dynamic thing that I actively participated in. I played at the stand in the archery, jumping, tobogganing and it was really cool.” (Interview with authors, 2016).

As noted, Shamim e Butt (2013) and Pine II and Gilmore (1998) emphasize that the concept of experiential marketing is

related to the stimulation of the five human senses - sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing - coupled with the unforgettable shopping moment. According to Schmitt (2001), if this environment results in an effective purchase, the company has managed to make the moment of purchase unforgettable. If a surprise element is then included, like any action that refers in symbology to the physical materialization of the experience, be it a souvenir, a photograph or an accessory that relates what was consumed to the brand, it will be considered a complete action of shopping or brand experience. This is because, according to Carù and Cova (2003), the experiential perspective of consumption is not limited to the purchase and use of the product, or to post-purchase activities, such as satisfaction assessment. Instead, it includes a series of other activities that, filled with meaning, influence consumer decisions and future actions. It is also observed that the interviewees' statements about the purchase made during the experiment are in line with what Guidini (2016) dialogues about the need of the shopping experience to satisfy more than utilitarian attributes, giving account of emotional and multi-sensory attributes. In the same sense, Schmitt's (2001) proposal is that the sensorial, affective and cognitive associations of consumers with brands result in memorable and rewarding experiences. However, he says, there is evidence that, when implementing the shopping experience, some companies move away from their core business. With this, it is emphasized, the need for the implementation of the concept to be made very carefully so that the focus on the experiences does not overlap that of the main business.

**Change of attitude towards the brand:** The interviewees underwent intense experiences in this event, whether promoted by companies or by the organization of the event, for example, when they relayed the torch. People have claimed to have perceived a different environment than they are accustomed to. Other interviewees related the experience lived with the atmosphere provided by the Olympic moment, enhancing it. An environment thought for providing experiences to consumers is of enormous importance as it makes it easier to create positive brand associations since it creates a favorable environment for exchanging good interactions. In this sense, Amanda points out:

“What struck me most was the layout of the place, they had several different things where the party went. The walls were composed of circles that kept moving along with the music and the lights were also in a very interactive rhythm with the music, which made the atmosphere much cooler and more agitated” (Interview with the authors, 2016).

From this report, one can also see that Skol, with the promotion of the party, endeavored to create an impactful environment through the activation of the senses, as proposed by Guidini (2016), with emphasis on the vision through use of lights and walls that moved, hearing due to the music and, along with that, tasting Skol products. In addition, the architecture in those locations and the objects that made up Skol's party settings were designed to enhance the engagement of guests in the magic of the moment and ensure that the audience was immersed in the same feeling. These actions are in line with what Morgan (2006) and Jones (1999) mentioned about the importance of investing in the setting and the scenario in which the marketing actions of experiences

“I think it was the atmosphere that was there right now, everyone who enjoys basketball together, talking about, exchanging experiences, because it is not common to have people who like basketball in Brazil and there everyone was united and with only one purpose” (Gabriel Diniz in an interview with the authors, 2016).

At the NBA's home, Gabriel experienced the union of people who shared his love of basketball, where they could talk and share experiences. As Kotler and Keller (2006, p.80) mention: “events and experiences are opportunities to be part of relevant and more personal moments in the lives of consumers.” This phenomenon was also observed in Brenda's interview.

“It's hard to talk because it was kind of a dream. I was not actually practicing any sport, but I was there. Only at the day I had the notion: it is a world event. I participated actively, enjoying every minute and a lot of strange people coming to take photo, chasing after me because I was with the torch. There was a Nissan truck that just before I started to carry the torch, it passed by with my name on the big screen and it was incredible” (Interview with the authors, 2016).

All the novelty brought by the experience of carrying the Olympic torch made Brenda feel that such an experience would indeed be a memorable moment, a magical moment of fantasy and fun that allowed her to escape from reality for a few moments (HIRSCHMAN;HOLBROOK, 1982) and which will be unforgettable for her (SCHMITT et al., 2015). The magic moment is the moment in which the subjective is realized. When it seems to be real, it is magic, when one has the notion of being fantasy, it is subjectivity. “The magical universe is the subjective vision that is believed to be real and objective” (MORIN, 1983, 147). In this sense, it is subjectivity that feeds magic. And magic is when it seems real what is subjective. Magic continues to be something subjective, but it seems to the subject to be something objective, real (LANGIE, 2005) and, as underlined by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), moments of magic that refer to pleasure and fantasy can be valuable to consumers, and from the hedonic experience contribute to modify their perception and attitudes towards the brand. These experiences, in the light of the data analyzed in the interviews, tend to generate a change in the relationship that the consumer created with the brand. According to the interviews, the change was never negative. Thus, only two scenarios were observed: when the change did not occur, or when it occurred for the better. That is, even in cases where the experience has not been so impacting to the consumer, the concept of the brand in the mind of the consumer was not diminished, but those who have impacted, now value the brand more. Thus, the use of experience marketing can represent the return of the consumer as a result of the new image achieved within the consumer, thus generating attitude change, since the actions of experience marketing function as tools of interaction between brand and consumer as mentioned by Shamim and Butt (2013). According to Dias (2003), the clients are arranged in a hierarchy in terms of involvement with the brand. The author mentions that at the top of this hierarchy are clients classified as brand attorneys. They are customers who, in addition to repeating the purchase, have a high emotional involvement with the brand and indicate the product or service to others. The intention of the companies is to reach this level of customer loyalty with the brand, being a strong ally for this

relationship marketing called the word-of-mouth effect (DIAS, 2003). This phenomenon was observed in Renata's speech.

“I already have a commercial relationship with Bradesco because I hold an account there, but I found the sponsorship of an event like this, which strengthens health promotion, integration of people, joy and everything that sport brings to be very interesting, I think it strengthens the brand a lot” (Interview with authors, 2016).

In Renata's first case, as in Gabriel, there was already a sympathy for the brand and a consumption relationship, but they gain strength after the interviewees have undergone the experiences.

“My relationship with the brand has always been very good and I believe that the experience only improved my image about the brand because in addition to producing a quality product it still sponsors interesting events like this” (Gabriel Guimarães in an interview with the authors, 2016).

In Brenda's case, there was no relationship with the Nissan cars, but the impact of the experience was such that it even aroused in her the desire to consume them.

“My relationship with the brand before ... Well ... I knew it was a very good car brand, but I had no bond, even my parents or my older brother never had a Nissan car and I heard of this promotion because I saw it happening on TV, so I decided to sign up, but only because I really like sports. Now I have a special affection, whenever I see some commercial, Nissan advertising, I'll remember that experience I had, so I'll have a positive look” (Interview with authors, 2016).

The change of attitude towards a brand is developed through different factors and actions, but is related to the sensorial experiences related to the brand of which they speak. (ADJEI et al., 2010; PINE II;GILMORE, 1998; SCHMITT, 2001). In addition, other dimensions of the brand that influence consumer loyalty are: knowledge, promoted associations and perceived brand quality (BLUME; LEDERMANN, 2009; GUIDINI,2016). In some cases, Aaker (1997) argues, loyalty can arise from one of these factors alone or from combinations of two or more of these factors.

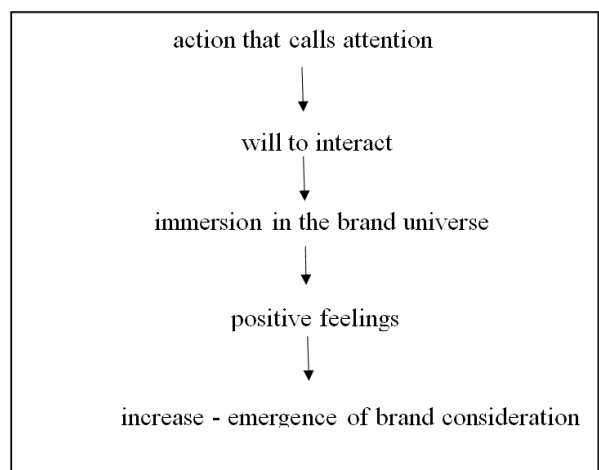


Figure 3. Effects of Experiential Marketing on Consumer Perception

## Conclusion

The objective of this research was to investigate the application of experience marketing by companies sponsoring Rio 2016 Olympic Games. To achieve this purpose, the authors analyzed the perspective of the consumers who participated in the event and lived some experience promoted by a company in the context of the Olympics or Paralympics. The application of experience marketing in the Brazilian market is still a vast field to be explored and its possibilities are innumerable. Therefore, there is still a great way to go in order to achieve greater consistency and depth in the subject since the concept itself, for being very recent, still creates some confusion for marketers. The results of this study indicate that, when participating in the experiences provided by the brands during the Olympic Games, the interviewees felt valued because they experienced unique moments that will be kept in their memories and that were able to generate positive influence in relation to the product, to the service or to the brand. These sensations are in line with what Pine II and Gilmore (1998), Schmitt (2001) and Schmitt, Brakus and Zarantonello (2015) refer to as effects of experience marketing actions. Through the interviewees' reports, it was possible to perceive that the first contact with experience marketing in this type of event occurs firstly through some action, be it music, colors, play of lights, signpost, that gain the attention of the consumer. From this, the interviewees, for the most part, decided to interact with the brand proposal, since it had aroused their interest and curiosity.

Shamim and Butt (2013) argue that researchers and managers are seeking substantial empirical evidence on contexts that generate experiences that can penetrate deeply into the long-term memory of consumers and can subsequently influence their perceptions and attitudes towards the brand, having experience marketing turned out to be a tool that allows to obtain this result. Already interacting with the situation that the brand offered, the interviewees were immersed in an environment completely different from their daily situations which in several cases made them feel valued by the brand in question, brought them good moments of success, joy and excitement. A kind of escape from reality that was able to potentially increase the images that many of them possessed regarding the brands in question, having then a great relevance for the companies that develop this technique correctly. The synthesis of the results is presented in Figure 3. Care should be taken, however, to sponsor such an event by promoting experiences so that the brand image is not obscured by the image of the Olympic Games. The Olympics alone already have great potential to spark interest and provide magical moments. Knowing this, marketers of sponsoring companies, as they choose to work on experiences, must ensure that they are remembered as provided by the brand and not the big event. The paper reinforces the trend of using elements of experiential marketing by companies as a way of differentiating their brands and gaining a competitive advantage over competitors. Marketing practices begin to turn to the individuality of the consumer and seek to provide experiences that influence their satisfaction. As it turned out, different strategies generated varied impacts for those who lived the marketing experiences promoted by the companies, which were able to generate, in some cases, a change in brand perception and influence on consumption decision.

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