

Olympic Mascots and brand humanization: na exploratory study from the consumer's perception

Mascotes olímpicas e humanização da marca: um estudo exploratório a partir da percepção do consumidor olympic



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to analyze the Olympic mascots from 1972 to 2016 from the perspective of the consumer public to understand the effects of humanization of brands in the marketplace. The definitions and characteristics of the mascots as a marketing tool were researched, as well as the perceptions of consumers in today's world facing the Olympic prototypes. The semi-structured interviews allowed for data collection. Thus, the research follows an exploratory qualitative method, focusing on a theoretical review. The content analysis technique was applied to the data, thanks to the ATLAS.ti 9 software. The results indicate that the Olympic mascots affect consumers, transmitting several feelings, allowing the realization of broader studies on the different types of humanized characters. Moreover, the positive meanings associated with the Olympic mascots can be strategically used in branding actions and in the social interactions of companies, considering that there is a trend in the creation of humanized characters, intensifying the connection with people in the digital market.



Keywords: Brand humanization, Olympic Mascots, Humanized Characters, Consumer Perception.

INTRODUCTION

The symbology of mascots is complex and subjective to understand the influence on people. The current literature, despite being few explored, shows that a mascot is an expressive character capable of identifying a brand, a company, an event, without the need of further reference. They may increase the power of purchase of products and services when used in marketing actions about the brand.

The mascots may link the brand to the consumer when are presented as a humanized being (Perez, 2011) or, as special symbols of the brand (Perez, 2016). According to Perez (2011; 2016), they may be considered ludic creatures with human characters that represent the various meanings present in the brands (Silva & Perez, 2012).

Schmitt (1999) reinforces the idea of the symbolic character and the several consumption experiences that the market resources provide to the consumers, such as: brands, products, characters/mascots, wrappings, among others. As such, the humanization of mascots may be considered an effective mean to construct the corporate identity and is able to generate several types of favorable perception to a bond created by the stimulation of the brand (Bharucha, 2018; Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009).

The Olympic mascot is an example of character of a brand that may be used for such study. They are ambassadors, representative of the Olympic brand, human and connected to the meaning of the host country, generating experiences in the public (Silva & Perez, 2012). To use a universal symbol may favor the results, once, the Olympic mascots from 1972 to 2016 were relevant and may transmit several sensations, thoughts and feelings to the public, mainly to those who have had unforgettable experiences in the Olympic Games.



Likewise, the study is striking by the purpose of understanding the more humanized brand, enabling that the companies increase the connection to their clients in a changing and innovative market, which requires transparency, ethics and interaction of the corporations (Covaleski & Costa, 2014). According to Negri (2022), the “new consumer” has been shown to be more aware to the subjective aspects of the products and services, such as ethical values, economy efficiency, environmental preservation and social equity, principles of the sustainability. This way, should the campaigns be more human in their marketing actions, in a way to create a stronger emotional bond in the current world, and the mascot may be the perfect tool for this.

The data gathering for this research was performed by semi-structured interviews, individual, which, according to Martino (2018), provides to the interviewed the opportunity to add elements that were not previously defined. The research is qualitative, exploratory and theoretical. The content analysis of Bardin (2016) was chosen as method of data treatment, with the support of the *software* ATLAS.ti 9.

In 20 years, several national and international academic studies have explored how the organizations use the mascots to influence the individual preferences, thus, yet it has not been verified studies in the same proportion which investigate the relation between the human character of the mascots and the perception of the “new consumer”. This way, the purpose of this article is to analyze the Olympic mascots from 1972 to 2016 under the perspective of the consumer public, in order to understand the effects of the humanization of the brands in the market. To reach such goal, it was necessary to research the definitions and the characteristics of the mascots as marketing tool, as well as to understand the perception of the consumers in face of each Olympic prototype.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Contemporary definitions of the mascots



The character of the brand has been already used by companies for several decades as a way to communicate with their clients. Santos (2019) points out that with the diffusion of the communication means through the transmission of images in televisions, the characters have become big attractions from the market by presenting movements and animation.

The characters have evolved and mascots have appears, symbols that represent the brand and humanize them through recurrent characteristics (Madruga&Nicolau, 2022). Some elements of its composition may represent different perspectives and, this way, to arise the interest of the clients in the brand, products or services. However, a special attention to mascots should occur, since they “constitute a group with great diversity of shape, design, strategy and positioning”. (Perez, 2011, p. 90).

The progress of mascots has converted into a systematization aiming at contributing to the management and to the production of sense in brands, products and organizations (Gomes, 2018). Such structure may direct the marketing strategies, interacting with the people and making them closer to the brand, products or events.

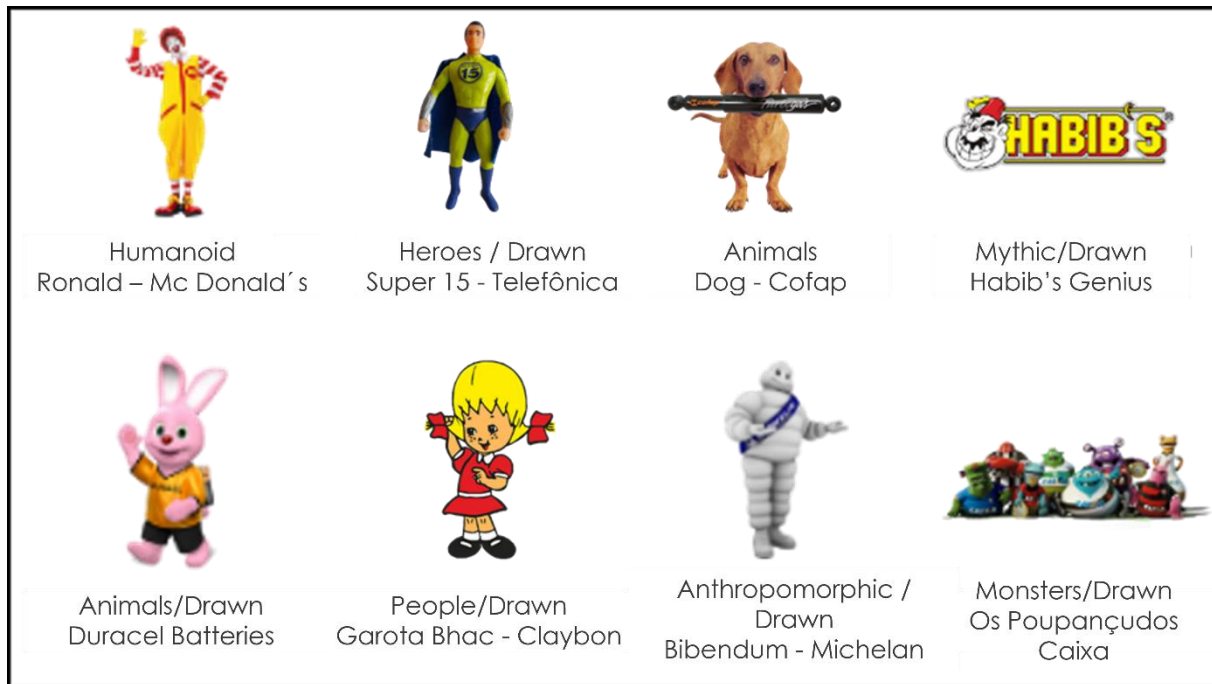
According to Perez (2011, p. 78):

The motivations to the creating of the mascots are countless, just as the possible strategies. It is common the adoption of typical animals from the fauna, from the countries for historical or sports events, for instance. The anthropomorphism of objects, letters from the alphabet and numbers, nature phenomena, such as the sun, a cloud, the moon, in addition to animations of human figures. (Perez, 2011, p. 78).

For a better understanding, it is necessary to clear a more detailed segmentation in the taxonomy of Perez (2008), present in Figure 1. It is worth mentioning that all of them have in common the manifestation of daily facts. All show vitality and strong bond to the brands. (PEREZ, 2011).

Figure 1. Systematization of the mascots of the brands





Source: Adapted from Perez (2008)

The humanoid mascots are rare and present themselves as human beings, although, most of the times, are trans-vested. The hero mascots have superpowers inspired in the mythology of the super-heroes. By observing the animal mascots, it is perceived that the brand is incorporated to a non-anthropomorphize being. The mythical figures are created from the mythology and navigate through a world of dreams and through magic. Animal mascots or people drawn are animated anthropomorphize cartoons, generally of domestic animals or ludic human figures with great dynamism. Monsters mascots are deformed figures of beings with 'life', but with no human or animal characteristics (Perez, 2008).

In the contemporary organizations, the anthropomorphize mascots are used as a tactic of persuasion (Perez, 2008). The majority of the prototypes used are inanimate, bringing meanings, being able to assume life, consequently, having a great impact on social interaction and on the direct relationship of the brand with the consumer.

Therefore, the mascots are fictitious beings that present human traces and the ability to understand and to transmit several meanings to the universe

(Perez, 2011). They may transmit to the clients the cultural and organizational values, or from the social environment, strengthening the identity of the brand.

In addition, the brand is the first factor that awakens the attention of the consumer (Leão & Marques, 2021). Thus, from the marketing techniques, the brands create their own identity and develop their products according to the needs and motivations of the clients (Basília & Gustavo, 2021). Hence, the identity of the brand includes the values, the positioning, the attributes and the benefits, in addition to the target-public (Leão & Marques, 2021).

Therefore, one of the main goals of the marketing strategies from the companies nowadays is to make the brand more human (Perez, 2011). Thus, the mascots are generally beings (real or imaginary, drawn) with an independent 'life', present feelings and are part of the human daily life (Perez, 2016). Nowadays, "the clients search for brands that are different from their competition, which have an own identity and close to their values, that provide positive social interactions and unique and memorable experiences" (Basília & Gustavo, 2021, p. 201).

With the technological revolution changing the market, the brands need to innovate, have new attractions and to differentiate to adapt themselves to a business scenery that is going from the analogical to the digital era (Rogers, 2018). The "digital marketing refers to a group of marketing strategies applied to the internet and to the consumer online, with the purpose to obtain coherent and effective actions that enable a permanent contact between the company and the clients" (Tonini, Lavandoski, Pereira & Annoni, 2022, p. 2). It is noticeable that such changes boost a more active commerce, linked to a different consumer, connected, dynamic and, above all, heterogeneous (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017).

Tonini et al. (2022) highlight that the use of the internet may help increase the value of a certain product and mostly, of the brand. In the case of the mascots, the co-creation of the value to the consumer may occur through the



human characteristics that they assume, through the marketing strategies of the company.

Therefore, the organizations have the need to create marketing strategies to remain in a 'new' automatized, computer-based and shared environment (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017).

Among all the 'news' from the present, however, the 'new' consumer embodies the element that shows to be clearer and more influential in the scenery that currently unravels. It shines through the more notable change by giving space to the activity or, in many cases, to the activism instead of the chronic passivity that characterizes it, more specifically in the last decades of the 20th. century, when the pro-consumption speech, mediatically imposed by companies over products, services and brands – with gentle obedience and no contestant. (Negri, 2022, p. 15).

As once said, the exaggerated consumption, boosted by the industrial revolutions, globalization and technological advances, starts to assume new forms, generating more critical and demanding individuals in their choices (Caufield, 2012). In face of this, it is evident that, above all, to create affective bonds is to nurture a long lasting and faithful bond in the current scenery.

Hence, we should understand the meanings linked to the mascots, which are essential in the relations between the brands and the consumers. This is because the inclusion of the meanings present in the resources of the market may be essential to the attraction of people. It is, therefore, interesting to state that to create a mascot may be the way to construct a strong corporate identity, to win the public's attention and to maintain long lasting relations (Caufield, 2012).

This way, the characteristics present in the mascots may be the central point for the elaboration of this research, since, they are able, through the meanings that they represent, to awaken in the people sensations, thoughts and feelings. It is worth highlighting that today's consumer is more demanding and conscious, and searches for such kind of satisfaction through the



acquisition of an item, concentrating, this way, all of an expectation and a reward after the purchase. (Madruga&Nicolau, 2022).

As Argenti (2006) highlights, one of the main physical elements of the brand, that is visually manifested, is the mascot. The mascots help the target-public to identify, to remember and to understand the brand (Yadav, Bisoyi & Chakrabarti, 2015), which means, they help the brand in proceeding an emotional attraction and to boost the characteristics attributed to their personality (Delbaere, McQuarrie & Phillips, 2011).

There are evidences that the mascot may be the central element for marketing and for contemporary publicity, being able to seduce people. In a similar way, the Olympic mascots establish a direct communication with the biggest sports event in the world and the social-cultural aspects of the host-city, attracting the public (Silva & Perez, 2012).

Therefore, the symbology of the Olympic mascot may be the focus to, through people's subjectivity, understand the experiences lived by the consumers. This is due to the fact that the Olympic mascot is the main element of visual identification of the Olympic Games. It arises several experiences in people when it appears representing the Olympic Games (Delgado-Ballester, Fernández-Sabiote, & Honrubia-Pardo, 2013).

It is possible to notice the influence of the experiences in such process, mainly, when a broader perspective is considered regarding the symbolic characteristics of the mascots and the important world of enchantment of people and to establish long lasting bonds. In addition, the current consumer does not search for only a product, but for a universe that involves it (Martins, 2006).

Thus, the brand is not only represented by the logo, name, visual identity or slogan, but by the group and by the actions that involves it, and, mainly by the deep knowledge of language and by the public's behavior, to have more sales, reputation and results (Mizael, Castro & Leme, 2021). According to the



authors, by analyzing the approach of the brand, different factors influence the tributes, the benefits, the price and the image at the eye of the consumer. This way, it is possible to conclude that the mascots create such bond, by creating personality to the brand from the humanization, motivating actions that may generate several perceptions in the consumers.

Perceptions of the consumers

The Olympic mascots represent the Games and are able to transmit in a ludic way the meanings of the Olympic world to the public. They reveal an X-ray of the world when the games are held, and bring to the light the cultural and social aspects that are present in the certain time-space (Silva & Perez, 2012).

This way, the mascot may transmit dynamic cultural meanings that are constantly in evolution in the world, until reaching the consumer, where one will conclude one's journey. The theory of the post-modern consumer is constructed by the production of meanings with instruments of transference that may bring new discoveries (Perez, 2020).

Gentile, Spiler & Noci (2007) support such vision, writing that the consumption experience is an evolution of the concept of the relationship between the company and the consumer. According to the authors, the perception is personal and involves the consumer at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial and spiritual). Therefore, it is possible to notice that the experience of consumption is formed by elements that are peculiar in each one and that influence the preferences and decide what to purchase.

Arnould & Price (1993) state that people are focused on having experiences which are relevant for their self-definition, development and change. They give meaning to the histories of the consumers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the meanings learned in the mascots, in group with the recurrent characteristics, may influence the decision of people.



Schmitt (1999) sustains that clients should be considered beings with a body and a mind that generate perceptions, ideas and emotions. Hence, the consumption experiences appear as a series of interactions between the brand and clients. The ideal is that the marketing professionals create integrated situations, to simultaneously, perceive, feel, think and action and relate well.

People's perception on Olympic mascots from 1972 to 2016 may generate new *insights* to the brands. This way, the figure of the Olympic mascots may transmit, through their image, emotional messages in constant change in the current world.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This chapter reveals the definition of the methodology applied to such study and specifies the procedures used in each step of this study. This way, in such chapter, it is initially presented the type of research performed to justify the chosen methodology. After this, the method of data gathering and the order of the steps will determine the number of interviews to be applied in a coherent way with the type of research chosen.

Regarding the technical aspects, it is an exploratory research of qualitative nature, that, according to Martino (2018), is more focused on the meaning of the human actions, with the main goal of analyzing them and not of explaining them.

A field study was performed, since it included semi-structured interviews. This way, the study was conducted through individual interviews. The actors were characterized as people who had been, or are still involved presentially or through the internet, with the Olympic Games.

The interviewed were questioned about the Olympic mascots in face of the following perspectives: 1. What is the feeling that you have by perceiving the Olympic mascots? 2. Which characteristics present in the Olympic mascots



that arise interest? 3. What is the importance of the mascot to the brand of the Olympic Games? 4. What behaviors present in the mascots represent them well as ambassadors of the Olympic Games?

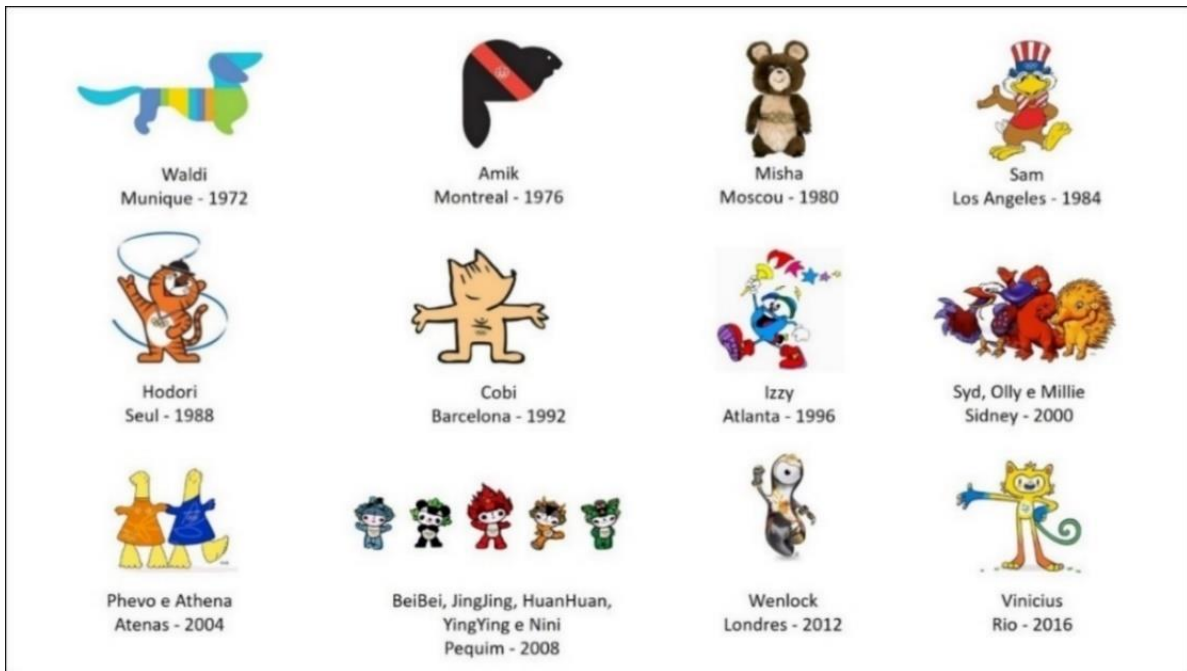
The net system was chosen, since according to Bott (1976) it is a choice of social units (individuals or groups) that a certain individual or group maintain contact.

The selection of the Olympic mascots from 1972 to 2016 is based on the association of the different aspects of each edition of the Olympic Games, to the transformation power and the evolution of the prototypes throughout the time that may interfere in a distinct way in the people's point of view, arising new discoveries.

The first official mascot of the Olympic history, according to the International Olympic Committee (2020), was 'Waldi', created in 1972 for the games of Munich, in Germany. In Munich, the mascot was made official as the official ambassador of the Olympic Games, and participated in all editions of the Olympic Games, from 1972 to 2016, according to what is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Anthropomorphize drawings of the Olympic mascots from 1972 to 2016





Sources. Images downloaded by the authors from the IOC website (2022)

This study is composed by 21 transcriptions of 21 semi-structured interviews performed with inhabitants of the city of Salvador/Bahia and the metropolitan region. The average duration of the interviews was of one hour and a half, being performed between September and December 2020.

After the interview phase, the researcher transcribed the material and analyzed the information using the technique of Content Analysis, proposed by Bardin (2016). Posteriorly, the preparation of the material and the fluctuate reading followed: initially, the document and the transcript of the interviews were performed. As follows, the identification of the documents such as the source, data of the gathering, and other characteristics. After, the edition of the documents in the software ATLAS.ti 9, and the inclusion of the codes of the interviews. The fluctuate reading was finally performed, when the contact with the documents, the knowledge of the text and the first impressions and orientations were performed.

The amount of the interviews was determined by the criteria of the saturation, which is when new groups do not add information to the research,

being the moment when the researcher analysis and finishes the process of data gathering, according to Bauer & Gaskell (2015).

After the previous step, all data were imported to the ATLAS.ti 9, where the proper codifications were performed, which means, the selection and the cuts in the produced material. "The codification is a process by which the raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units, which allow an extra description of the characteristics inherent in the content" (Bardin, 2016, p. 132).

A broad process of investigation was initiated, where the quantitative analysis was used by the frequency of the occurrence of the words to better explore the quality in the definition of the categorization, using the mutual exclusion, the homogeneity, the pertinence, the objectivity and the depth (Bardin, 2016). This way some discoveries in such phase were essential for the prognosis of the research.

By using an Olympic purpose, the Olympic mascots were presented to the interviewed, which resulted in differences, proximity and, sometimes, summaries. This way, the data were collected, analyzes and interpreted, producing the results of the research.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The foundation on which the literature is supported, where the analysis was enlightening for the formation of the theoretical pillar of such research, the data seemed to be favorable to understand, subjectively, the consumer's opinion regarding the figure that represents the mascot. This way, the worries studied in the interviews required greater attention to compose the result of the research.

The interviews were performed both in person as well as from distance (using Skype). The guide of the questions was elaborated during an informal conversation, without interruptions, in order to obtain greater honesty and spontaneously in the answers. Some interventions were necessary to maintain



seduction and sympathy, perceived in the answer of 33.33% of the respondents, seven of the interviewed.

The word creativity, which expresses cognitive experiences, was quoted by the interviewed P08 who stated: "I see the mascots as creative dolls that always represent a powerful brand, therefore, I see creativity!"

To better understand the experiences generated in the consumers, Schmitt (1999) proposes a modular concept of experience presenting five strategic modules: sense experiences (to sense); affective experiences (to feel); creative cognitive experiences (to think); physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyle (act); and experiences of social identity resultant from the relationship with a group of reference or culture (to relate).

Table 1. The conception of the mascots in face of the modules of experiences

Initial conception of the mascots	Module of Experience	Quantity
• Animation	Affective	4 times
• Joy	Affective	3 times
• Happiness	Affective	2 times
• Beauty	Sense	2 times
• Charisma	Affective	2 times
• Nurturing	Affective	1 time
• Attraction	Sense	1 time
• Creativity	Cognitive	1 time
• Fun	Affective	1 time
• Enchantment	Sense	1 time
• Fantasy	Sense	1 time
• Seduction	Sense	1 time
• Sympathy	Sense	1 time

Source: Adapted by the authors of Schmitt (1999).

Joy, animation, fun and happiness were quoted by ten interviewed, confirming the affectiveness of the mascots. With the announced results, it was concluded that the humanization of the brands is one of the several marketing techniques to get close to the client, creating a bond through affective stimulation.

According to Gentile, Spiller & Noci (2007) and Schmitt (1999), the production of affection is essential to deliver with success extraordinary



experiences. For the desired affective answers, the provided emotions should be perceived as genuine and spontaneous, in addition to the reactions of the environment, to the activities and to the social interactions (Arnould & Price, 1993).

Therefore, it is possible to notice that the mascots are peculiar symbols of the brand, which transmit meaningful incentive and provide experiences of consumption that interfere in human behavior. Hence, an accessible and humanized brand. This enables to interact, share preoccupations and complaints. The bureaucracy is ignored to show attention in all steps of the marketing actions, including after the purchase.

Perception of the characteristics presents in the Olympic mascots

The foundation to study the subjectivity of the consumer was to organize the codes from the depositions to allow understanding the relevant characteristics of the Olympic mascots that arise the interest of the people. To understand the symbolic characteristics of the Olympic mascots, we analyzed the most commented words in the relates of the knowledge: Which are the characteristics of the Olympic mascots that most drawn your attention?

A relevant data is that the proposed raise of data to confirm the characteristics of the mascots by the experiences generated in the consumers. It is worth mentioning that, by analyzing quantitatively the frequencies of the occurrences of the words, one may also better explore the quality in the definition of good categories (Bardin, 2016).

Table 2 shows the most pronounced words by the interviewed in the answers to such questioning. It is relevant to highlight that the analysis leads to the investigation of the main characteristics of the mascots regarding the perception of the consumer.

Table 2. Frequency of the occurrence of the words in the relates of the interviewed

Most pronounced words			
Joy	24 times	Brand	16 times



Public	21 times	Publicity	16 times
World	20 times	Culture	15 times
Life	19 times	Image	15 times
Attraction	18 times	Emotions	15 times
To disclosure	17 times	Involvement	15 times
Sports	17 times	Fantasy	14 times
Country	17 times	Identity	14 times
City	16 times	Meanings	13 times

Source: Elaborated by the authors from the analysis of the data.

One of the most important occurrences in the results is related to the word “joy”, quoted by all the interviewed and, generally, is accompanied by other words that express affective bond. This way, it is clear in the deposition as follows, where the interviewed tells what the Olympic mascots represents for them. It is noticed, therefore, the use of vocabulary which expresses tender, sensations and thoughts.

P05. [...] therefore, it is a thing I noticed is that every mascot needs to have its characteristics adapted to what it is representing, right? Thus, [...] whether is color, or shape, the mascots have to translate a complete scenery that involves them. But, like that... the joy is a unique meaning in the mascots and this is why I think they are so attractive, right? They say that a person's smile is... It says it all about that person, and I think in the mascots it is not behind from this, right? So, this is it, with this joy, sympathy, spontaneously is that they are able to transmit several emotions that affect our mood [...].

Participant P14 confirms the several sensations, thoughts and feelings that the mascots cause in the consumers and reinforces the importance of the mascots for the marketing of the organizations whether they are sports organizations or not.

P14. [...]. For me, it is, is all mascots that is important for the marketing for any event of any company, right? Because it interferes yes, in people's life, [...], socializing and attracting the people for their sparkle, and for the appeal in their colors, shapes, charisma and joy which exhales from its constitution. [...].



As follows, the interviewed makes it clear that joy is an important characteristic from the Olympic mascots. This, many times, makes the public close to the brand, since the lived experience is pleasure and transmits well-being to the people.

P12. [...] I understand that this little dolls are interesting to a healthy life of the brands in current days, yes, making a difference in the life of people that make a more fun communication, full of joy and many times explore the pleasure and well-being [...]. This is called seduction, which interferes in people's choice.

The word 'life' appears quoted 19 times in the relates of the interviewed. The presence of 'life' which is rated in the anthropomorphism of the mascots, appears when the human aspects present in their forms are noticed. The anthropomorphic forms are generalization of the living beings, with human presence (Gomes, 2018). But not only from the animals and vegetables we may draw anthropomorphic mascots; this may come from any object from the daily life (Gomes, 2018; Perez, 2011).

Therefore, it is notorious the anthropomorphism of the Olympic mascots, once, since its appearance, it suffered an evolution of the anthropomorphism of the animals, which gave place to the creation of the original, dynamic and fetishism characteristics, intensifying its already inherent ambiguity (Silva & Perez, 2012). The interviewed P10 perceives the evolution of the Olympic mascots by comparing the mascots from the Olympics of 2016 in Rio with the mascots of 1972 of the Munich Olympics.

[...] Look, if we stop to analyze one by one, we perceive such evolution of the Olympic mascots, right? Look, they start with a colored dog, static, without much production, created in 1972, right, to a mascot full of 'life', full of colors, of movement, of creativity such as Vinicius and Tom, of the Olympics in Rio in 2016 [...] (P10).

This way, the mascots have several functions in the world of brands, one of the main is to humanize them, which means, to create a bond of affection which goes way beyond the simple fantasy of an imaginary world (Gomes,



2018). This way, the mascots arise several feelings in people, such as sensorial, affective, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle and relationship experiences (Gentile; Spiller & Noci, 2007). In this sense, P08 is quite emphatic when talks about some mascots that represent the brands and have made them more human.

Therefore, I have great sympathy for a mouse. Ah! I don't know if there, is, or it's about a mascot, but, but the Topogigio, I won in an event. It is, a mouse created out of the paper, right? What do I want to say with this? The same way happens witht the mascot from Toddy and from Sadia, Look: they are created, generated an unreal 'life' that humanizes anyway the brand and with its power of involvement, makes that happens, with what arises and attraction of the individual with the mascot and, also, with the brand (P08).

Within such context, there is a relation between the mascot, the myth and the publicity, in which Perez (2011) states the need to create, in post-modernity, brands with an own identity, as a lifestyle. Being as such, it is needed a human character to the brands, giving them a principle of 'life', a spirit, a personality.

To understand the process of anthropomorphism helps to understand all inherent characteristics of the Olympic mascots. This is an important condition to make us able to analyze the existing meanings in each mascot and whether such factor really interferes in the consumption relations.

However, as shown in the relates in Table 3, it is possible to notice the existence of 'life' is related to the main characteristics of the mascots, confirming the symbolic power expressed by human traces and the strength in the marketing actions of the companies.

Table 3. Sign characteristics present in the mascots

Minimum units	Relates
Fetishism 'Attraction and fetishism in the mascots'	P10. [...], it is, I repeat again, which is a trend of the mascots, it is an evolution in this new digital world to become more 'human' as Lú from Magalú, or the Baianinho from Casas Bahia, Nat from Natura among others. It can be perceived that the mascot Vinicius has presented more 'human', right?
Life 'The so-called existence of 'life' / humanization'	P10. [...] Look, if we stop to analyze one by one, we perceive such evolution of the Olympic mascots, right? Look, they start with a colored dog, static, without much production, created in 1972, right, to a mascot full of 'life', full of colors, of movement, of creativity such as Vinicius and Tom, of the Olympics in Rio [...].
Icons	P01. [...] and, and, so I see such mascots in their formations,



'Fantasy and the imaginary of the mascots'	therefore, as specials, differentiated and some come to be surreal, such as strange animals as Amik and Wenlock, but that, even so, transmit great energy, joy, friendship, 'life', capable of changing our spirit.
Identity 'Visual identity'	P07. [...] I think that, that there is a side in the Olympic mascots that work exclusively to represent the own event, the local culture, the aspects of the society, of the social elements that may be involved in a world cause. [...]. Therefore, for such reason I think that the Olympic mascots, attract such side of the personality, is representative with 'life' and creates identity with all the event, right?
Image 'Omnipresent image'	P19. [...], in true, for real, these, the Mascots, have become stars of the Olympics, right? They represent, everything, the universe of the games, the event, the city, the country, the culture, the people, anyway, are present in all places at the same time, representing 'life', the sports, the people [...].
Meanings 'Hipersigns'	P06. [...] for me, look, such mascots have an essential role in consolidating as Olympic representations transmitted by their characteristics the culture of the city, of the country, the beliefs of the population, the meanings of the sports. Therefore, they represent the Olympic world and are desired for the public to well represent the aspects of 'life'.
Public 'Emblems of the mass culture'	P04. I understand that, that the mascots are created within the original characteristics to attract the public worldwide, right? So, I think that, the mascots, [...], they are meaningful, 'human', however, ludic and elaborated to really attract the public. And they do attract, see?

Source: Adapted by the authors of Perez (2011)

Table 3 shows that the interviewed perceive well the aspects of the Olympic mascots. This way, the deposition present interpretations that dialogue with the inherent characteristics of the mascots according to the theory. The humanized mascot is a figure full of meanings, a symbol of mass culture, is present in all the places, is imaginary, and represents well the identity of the brand, in addition it is an object of desire and attracts all types of public, specially from the digital market.

The importance of the mascots for the Olympics

The interviewed when being questioned about the importance of the mascots for the Olympics, appear several depositions that may be relevant in the disclosure of those as instrument of publicity, promoting and making the consumer close to the brand, to the Olympic games, to the products and services they represent.



Several depositions questioned the importance of the mascots to the Olympic brand. Such depositions may be relevant to their disclosure as instrument of publicity, once they promote and make the consumer closer, specially when the mascots suffer anthropomorphism and gain 'life'.

Interviewed P04, influenced by the efficient advertisements of the Olympic mascots, compare them to the promotional figure of the steel sponge Assolan, which gains 'life' and directly acts at the selling point, promoting an interaction with the customer.

P04. I think it's interesting the way how the Olympic mascots act. I will give you a comparative example of another mascot outside of the Olympics: one day I went to the grocery store and ran upon the Assolan doll making a big fuss with the kids, adults, elderly that were there at the grocery store. And... The coolest thing is that there was a blowing bag, since it was the Carnival time. I thought that was really cool, that 'real' doll in the shape of the product distributing joy. And what? I may say that [...] that on that day the doll gained my heart and by the desire that arose I bought the product. The Olympic mascots act the same way... Like, it is a fountain of wishes activate by their strong representativeness and warm presence on the stadiums and in publicity in general.

It can be perceived that the mascot is a marketing tool which represents a great potential in promotion, however, it is necessary that the professionals in the marketing and communication become aligned with the construction of its image regarding the brand's proposal. The visual representation of the reality of the organization as expressed through the name, logo, purpose, products, services, installations, material of disclosure and all the other pieces may be either shown or communicated to many audiences through humanization. Everything that the brand does, since the logo, source, speech, tone of voice, values, jingles and elements that represent it, help constructing the identity of the brand to the consumer.

Within such context, emerges the importance of the management of the brand in an efficient form, also known as *branding* in the literature. Martins (2006) conceptualizes the branding as a group of actions focused on the management of the brands. They are actions that, when decided with



consciousness and ability, makes the brand surpasses its economy nature, being part of the culture and influencing people's lives (MARTINS, 2006). Therefore, one can state that to practice branding is to evoke sensations to establish connections that make the client choose one's brand.

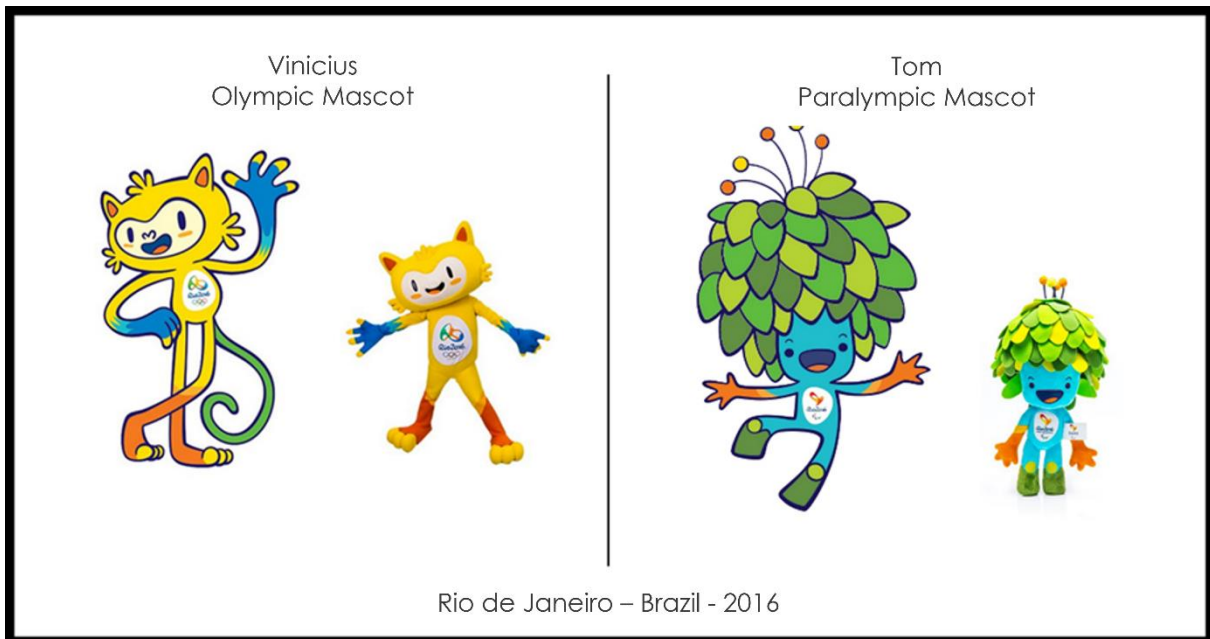
In the deposition as follows, the interviewed shows the consciousness regarding the actions of brands and understands that the current publicity reflects a scenery where the consumer needs to have access to all the information and what the publicity figure is representing. This way, the Olympic mascots have in their components the possibilities to ease the social interaction, portrayed in the formatting of the prototypes.

P26. Look, it's like that, the mascots still remain being an excellent marketing and promotion tool, some mascots already live another reality in a new digital market, like, opened to the public. They are companies that need a more direct, real and transparent relationship between the brand and the consumer, and I have the impression that the Olympic mascots translate the scenery of the event by their legitimacy and the preponderant characteristics they present in their formatting.

The mascots are symbols of the brand, since, the way they are, they are able to ensure moral values. It is quite common that the mascots play a social role in an advertisement, allowing the public to become part of a community. They allow a bond with the local community, through their personality and their unique characteristics. A good representation are the Olympic mascots of Rio 2016, Vinicius and Tom, as it is possible to observe in Figure 4. They were the most mentioned figures and the most known by the interviewed.

Figure 4. Images of the mascots from Rio 2016.





Source. Images downloaded by the authors from the IOC website (2022)

Therefore, it is possible to notice that the ludic, imaginary elements and all those meanings attributed to the mascots may be achieved, causing different sensations in people. As follows, there are some depositions of some people who express the opinion about the mascots that represent, majestically, the Olympics, being able to be visualized and transmitted as ludic beings.

[...] Ahhh... so perceive the swing present in the image of these two naughty [...]. The carioca has samba on its feet, the Carnival, the samba school [...] They have the profile of the carioca, who is loose, ahhh... and happy, that's how I see Tom and Vinicius [...] The tourists loves all about it, loves Brazil and such peculiarities, this may be transmitted to the people by the souvenirs, right?. (P22).

Samba is noticeable in Tom and Vinícius and connects them with the essence of Brazil and of Rio. Such relate emphasizes the cultural tourism characterized by events and popular practices that differentiate the Brazilian society, such as the samba, the Carnival, and even soccer making the mascots humanized.

[...] Tom is the most complete mascot, which brings a reality that exists in Brazil, which is a discussed subject around the world, [...] the preservation of our forests, mainly the Amazon Forrest. Wow! This is very strong, right, and Tom brings that really well, not to mention its configuration, with this

bush on its head. It is complete and brings a joy, a sympathy and aligns well with our reality (P22).

[...] Vinicius. I think it has much of the joy, I think it has representativeness of the local culture, right? National identity, right? And I don't know... I think it has a little of the Christ Redeemer, the curves of the Rio's relief, you know? Something like that... A... A... It's like he has invited people to something, right? Like, come to Rio 2016, Come to the Olympics 2016, it's what I think, you know,? (P07).

The depositions mentioned express an understanding of the space that encompasses the relation of the man with the environment, but also arise the representation of the typical urbanity from Rio de Janeiro, where the city and the nature are close, whether by the seafront whether by the hills. In this case, the mascots follow the natural curvature that Rio de Janeiro presents in its relief.

[...] Look, I notice much connection with the cultural manifestations present in the country [...] I notice that the colors, shapes, faces, posture... And even the own way of the Olympic sports person, right? Or Paralympics? Wow! Brings lightness when put on a shirt, a hat... [...] Ah... I speak of the culture since Brazil is like that, diverse, mixed and those mascots show that mixture, right? That air of diversity, joy and exuberance [...]. (P10)

[...] visually speaking they are multi-colored and that motivates a lot The Brazilian cultural diversity is very heterogeneous and the mascots Tom and Vinicius brings that joy and sympathy of a welcoming people and well represent that cultural side of our musicality through the names that refer to great icons of our bossa nova: Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes. (P06).

In face of what was presented, the depositions regard the biological and social diversity existing in Brazil, which means, to the different shapes of a society composed by several races in various aspects, such as: clothing, food, religion, traditions and others. It is worth mentioning that Brazil, by having a large territory, also presents climate, economy, social and cultural differences between its regions.

Next, interviewed P12, a businessman specialized in mattresses and owner of a luxury brand, makes a relevant consideration about the limitation of the



mascot to act in publicity of the luxury market. It is understandable that the recurrent characteristics of the Olympic mascots contrast with the profile of the consumers of luxury products.

Interviewer: Role? But what is the role of the Olympic mascots?

Participant 12: [...]. For example, I see the Olympic mascots as elements of publicity that yes, have the capacity to attract a public by the outgoing way that they present themselves, right? Of course that in general it is necessary that... That an analysis is performed to understand what it will bring in its constitution [...]. [...] this is quite complex, and for me, who am quite skeptical, I see that mascots like the Olympic mascots, have restrictions to work in certain markets, like the luxury mascot, understand?

Interviewer: Can you explain better?

Participant 12: Hum! Like this. In my understanding, the Olympic mascot is something focused on the children's side, you see? I see that they, they do not match to attract a more selected, special public, from AA class. For what I know of this market, it is... the creation of a mascot like those may be to shoot yourself in the foot, and do not bring results. Imagine a mascot like that, colorful, full of forms, of contrasts, right side by side to my brand, which represents a differentiated market, full of exclusivity and individual concepts? No! I understand that it would not really have result.

According to the report, the mascots do not match with the luxury environment, despite that, in the literature, they are a resource able to represent the organizational world to the market.

In an informal conversation, an interviewed who works with advertisement makes an interesting observation, which might ignite debates, once it is able to involve completely the actions of the Olympic mascots on the online market. Actions involving fetishism, the humanization, the imaginary and the omnipresence that search for social interaction out of the private state, referring to several cultures, subcultures, individuals, references groups and communities.

P10. [...] currently, the own Lú from Magazine Luíza is a striking example lived online with a character like that type. When I see a post from her against homophobia, a post of protest against some case of national



repercussion, I see her interactions, [...]. She makes a series of stories the other day saying that she would answer any question asked by the followers. And then, someone asked: - Lú do you exist? And she would answer: - I am virtual. And she continues to interact with the people. She also can be hard. She positions herself, as a woman, as a citizen, so she is an evolution of such process, but it is a way that the brand positions itself, right, through a character, but the brand is there positioning it. Who knows whether the Olympic mascots gain another clothing in the future?

By analyzing the report, it can be noticed that the mascots evolve according to the progress of the digital market. In addition, they provide the creation of more human, more current characters, and they are more present in the social interactions, absorbing the pains of the people and saying what they need to hear. The mascot, however, becomes the voice of the company.

The creation of fictitious figures, like the Lú from Magalu, Baianinho/Casas Bahia, Nat/Natura, helps the people under any circumstance to help, in addition, to making the people closer to the brand. This way, the process of humanization of the mascots encompasses several concepts and directs the brands to the online interaction, characterizing the future of the main representations of the brands, the mascots.

The results suggest that the symbolic characteristics represented by the Olympic mascots generate several affective/emotional sensorial and cognitive experiences on the consumers and allow broader studies on the several categories of the brands and the different markets of acting. This way, it can be stated that the mascots are a powerful tool of marketing and, theoretically, they may have several meanings, without being limited to the market they act.

The characteristics of the Olympic mascots that emerge on the reports show an agreement with the theory. This way, the common characteristics in the mascots have several meanings, showing their importance to the current market. This is consequence of the potential of the characters in creating experiences to the public and a differential that the marketing professionals may use for the branding actions. In addition, the positive meanings tied to the



Olympic mascots may be strategically used by the organization in the social interactions.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The debates regarding the mascots have shown that the symbolic characteristics presents in the Olympic prototypes are recurrent in the literature and may influence people. This way, the selected subject allowed an analysis of the humanization of the brands by the mascots from people's sensations, thoughts and feelings.

Being a marketing trick, first the influence that the publicity figures exert on people and, posteriorly, the recurrent characteristics were verified according to the perception of the public. This way, it was stated that happiness is an intrinsic characteristic to all mascots, regardless the market in which they act. Hence, the representative figures exert a direct influence on people's emotions.

A relevant issue is that the Olympic mascots present expressive symbols of the host city from each Olympic games. From such perspective, it is possible to reveal the social-cultural and environmental elements of the local universe by characteristics that repeat themselves, such as fetishism, the hyper-sign, the anthropomorphism and the humanization. To humanize the figures that represent brands is to provide a good experience to the clients, who wish to satisfy their needs by consuming a brand that is close, showing attention, ethics and affection on the market.

An important aspect pointed out by the study was the evolution of the figures of the Olympic mascots, probably due to the technological progress that enables the creation of more humanized characters, intensifying the connection between people. This way, the mascots are ideal to live in an open and shared environment, accessible to mass culture, providing opportunities for broader studies on the humanization of the brands through the mascots and the characteristics that influence people when applied on the digital market.



The study pointed out the relevance of using characters in actions of marketing, like branding, since they arise emotions and create conscious and unconscious bonds, essential to the choice of the brand at the moment of the consumer's decision. Consequently, this study offers the scenario for the analysis of the theme and leaves the possibility for the marketing academics, mostly the ones who dedicate themselves to the study of client's behavior, to be able to continue with the research.

The results revealed affective, sensorial and cognitive experiences provoked by the Olympic mascots. The current texts tend to discussions on the modern online consumer behavior, aiming at keeping a humanized digital connection, exploring experiences of behavior (action) or that result in a relationship with a certain reference group or culture (to relate themselves).

The study limited itself to interviewing locals from Salvador/Ba., aging from 30 to 65 years. The study showed that everyone, without distinction of age, may relate to the mascots, specially the children. Therefore, a broader analysis may reveal other important aspects to the study, specially, when mascots create affective bonds with the children's public.

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