

Between spices, flavors and belonging: understanding consumer experiences in the regional gastronomic hub of the Caruaru fair

Entre temperos, sabores e pertencimentos: compreendendo as
experiências de consumo no polo gastronômico regional da feira
de Caruaru

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RESUMO

A feira de Caruaru, localizada no Agreste pernambucano, abriga práticas culturais coletivas e fortalece relações e trocas comerciais locais a ponto de ser um motor turístico de desenvolvimento econômico e social da cidade, sendo considerada também patrimônio cultural do Brasil. Ao utilizá-la como lócus de pesquisa, este artigo objetivou compreender as experiências do

consumo gastronômico regional à luz dos módulos experienciais descritos por Schmitt (2011). Os procedimentos metodológicos foram conduzidos conforme *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA), de modo que o corpus do estudo foi formado por textos oriundos de entrevistas realizadas com consumidores do polo gastronômico da feira de Caruaru. Os resultados evidenciaram três temas emergentes e estruturantes nessa experiência gastronômica: sabor regional, pertencimento e interação. Ao tangibilizar correlações dos comportamentos dos consumidores encontrados nas experiências mais significativas, os temas emergentes foram descritos enquanto mecanismos pautados nos módulos do marketing experiencial, oferecendo em resultado uma vivência autêntica, típica, diversa, variada e tradicionalmente diferenciada. O estudo contribui teoricamente ao utilizar a IPA enquanto procedimento de interpretação holística e processual da experiência ligada à cultura gastronômica, bem como inova ao ofertar um mapa das experiências na visão do consumidor em análise a partir dos módulos experienciais.

Palavras-chave: Consumo gastronômico, Marketing experiencial, Fenomenologia.

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ABSTRACT

The Caruaru fair, located in the Agreste region of Pernambuco, is home to collective cultural practices and strengthens local commercial relations and exchanges to the point of being a tourist engine for the city's economic and social development, and is also considered a cultural heritage site in Brazil. By using it as a research locus, this article aimed to understand the experiences of regional gastronomic consumption in the light of the experiential modules described by Schmitt (2011). The methodological procedures were conducted according to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), so that the corpus of the study was made up of texts from interviews with consumers of the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru fair. The results showed three emerging and structuring themes in this gastronomic experience: regional flavor, belonging and interaction. By making tangible correlations between consumer behaviors found in the most significant experiences, the emerging themes were



described as mechanisms based on the modules of experiential marketing, resulting in an authentic, typical, diverse, varied and traditionally differentiated experience. The study contributes theoretically by using IPA as a procedure for holistic and procedural interpretation of the experience linked to gastronomic culture, as well as innovating by offering a map of experiences from the point of view of the consumer under analysis based on the experiential modules.

Keywords: Gastronomic consumption, Experiential marketing, Phenomenology.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Caruaru Fair, located in the Wild Pernambuco is considered an important cultural heritage from Brazil, since it represents the history and the culture of the Brazilian Northeast. It grew with the city and it has become one of the main motors for social and local economic development, in addition to being one of the oldest free fairs in the country (Ferreira & Oliver, 2021) and one of the biggest popular fairs in the world (Ribeiro, 2022). It is famous for offering a wide variety of products, such as art crafts, clothing, shoes, household items and food (Silva, 2016).

Sung in verse and prose by Onildo Almeida and Luiz Gonzaga, and due to its historical and cultural importance, the Caruaru Fair was recognized as immaterial heritage by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute IPHAN in 2006, due to its “net of meanings” which it holds (Medeiros, 2008), and it has been preserved and valued as a living expression of a region, whose tradition has been keeping costumes, habits and beliefs that are part of the identity of the Northeastern population, which the market of the fair reinforces the knowledge and know-how (IPHAN, 2006). In fact, the Caruaru Fair is a space of holistic livings, of socialization and of permanent construction and exhibition of popular creativity, both in its traditional aspects as well as in its ability of creation, invention and innovation, portraying the footsteps left by time, fixing ages (Silva & Santos, 2022).

By going through the aisles of the fair, the visitors may live a true immersion in the culture and popular tradition of the Northeast, through the interaction with traders and craftspeople, the cultural presentations of the local and regional artists, and the tasting of typical food of the region (IPHAN, 2006). Such context implements the diverse experience that can be lived by consumers of the products and services that the fair offers. In such sense, it is possible to investigate the Caruaru Fair from multiple consumption experiences lived in it.



The consumption experience was introduced in the field of Marketing through the seminal study of Holbrook & Hirschman in 1982 (Carù & Cova, 2003; Scussel, Fogaça & Demo, 2021). From it, the literature started to present other theoretical lenses that could be used to deepen the knowledge on the experiences lived by the consumers, highlighting the seminal model of experience broadening (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982); the modules of experience marketing (Schmitt, 1999; 2011) and the model of experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

In face of this, many researchers have investigated the phenomenon of experience under the view of the organizational marketing, offering perspectives and advances to the literature (Kranzbühler, Kleijnen, Morgan & Teerling, 2017), from the experience marketing, by considering that the experiences which the consumers have with the brand may generate increases in the identification, fidelity, sales and, consequently, profit (Carmo, Marques & Dias, 2022).

Among such advances, the proposal of a unifying concept stands out (Scussel et al., 2021) which was based on the designs of Schmitt's (2011) experiential modules. Integrative concept not pacified. Therefore, the consumption experience is a broad term presented in multiple perspectives and allows researchers to use it in definition according to the intention of the studies (Tavares Cavalcanti, 2022).

Among the experiences lived by the consumers, we highlight the gastronomic experience. The literature signs that such experience may be: exclusive, memorable, educational, fun and/or aesthetic (Soonsan & Somkai, 2021). In fact, it may become memorable by identifying the sensorial, emotional, social, reflexive and experiential components, as well as the focus and attention during traveling (Stone, Migacz & Sthapit, 2022).

In addition, it is recognized that food is a vital need of the human being, in a way that food and the act of being fed communicate different elements



and symbolic connotations (Witt & Schneider, 2011). Therefore, we see the gastronomic market as a part of a sector in transformation in an attempt to manage experience that are better fit to the consumers and their preferences. Clients who are favorable to search for experiences, in addition to the services, are willing to pay for them (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), and we aim at exploring such field from the consumer's own view.

Hence, by understanding such modality of experience and its highly symbolic degree, this study aims at understanding the gastronomic experience in the Caruaru Fair. For such, it will adopt as theoretical lens the modules proposed by Schmitt (1999), which are called Modules of Experience Strategies (MEE), which reach five providers of experience, being them: sensorial, affective, thought, action and relation.

The studies that approach the experience in consumption are needy of solid foundation (Carù & Cova, 2003) and need clarity in the comprehension, by dealing with a broad concept (Kranzbuhler et al., 2017), with multiple interpretations. It is shown, therefore, the need of theoretical and empirical researches in an incipient field (Lipkin, 2016; Jain, Aagja & Bagdare, 2017; Scussel et al., 2021), mainly in the consumer's view (Becker, 2018).

Therefore, this study is justified in narrowing the theoretical gap that the literature points out when relating consumption experience (Jain, Aagja & Bagdare, 2017) with gastronomic consumption (Soonsan & Somkai, 2021) in a tourist location (De Oliveira Maia, Lanzarini, Brussio & Alves, 2023) from the consumer's perspective (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Advancing in the scientific field of strategic marketing and studies of gastronomic tourism consumption (Gimenes-Minasse, 2023; Minasse & Carvalho, 2023; Ramon et al.; 2018; Da Silva & Maracajá, 2023). Therefore, in valuing a local culture that is intangible heritage (IPHAN, 2006) considered a destination of national and international interest; bringing the idea of promoting sustainable tourism, which generates employment, promotes culture and local products into the 2030 development agenda (Lohmann et al., 2022; ONU BR, 2015).



Thus, we aim to contribute to the advancement of literature on consumption experience, especially related to the consumer's perspective associated with experiential modules, observing them from the experience of consuming in a regional gastronomic center in a descriptive and interpretive view of the experience, through from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Phenomenology as a methodological procedure indicated since the development of seminal studies (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), but still little adopted for the study of experience, especially from the consumer's perspective (Becker, 2018; Scussel et al., 2021).

Also, it is worth highlighting that, unlike other studies (Soonsan & Somkai, 2021; Stone et al., 2022) which propose to analyze the local gastronomic experience by separating the tourist's view from the local view, this study has united both views, in a way that the focus is on the gastronomic experience of the local, whether touristic or not. In addition, it has as originality the descriptive and interpretative analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2015) of the gastronomic experience of the Caruaru hub, on the other hand that it brings a parallel contribution that both deepens as well as gives continuity to the concepts related to the experiential phenomenon of gastronomic consumption, pointing out a three-dimensional vision of the experiences of the consumers reflected on how they think, what they feel and how they behave during the moment that they are consuming in the environment.

In addition, this article is organized in the following form: the second section presents a general view on the consumption experience, the experiential marketing modules of Schmitt (2011), which help understanding the experiences, followed by an explanation on the gastronomic experience. In the third section, the methodological procedures are presented, as in section four the results and the discussions are presented, which point the three structure themes identified in this study, as well as the map of experience. At last, the article exposes the fifth section with the conclusions which include limitations and suggestions for future studies.



2 CONSUMPTION EXPERIENCE

The term experience is broad and in general way it indicates a daily or extraordinary experienced lived by the individual, which may be from the area of knowledge, presenting several meanings, which refer to the conceptions that do not have an order (Scussel et al., 2021). In fact, the holistic and processional nature of the experience and where meaningful contact points and interactions are (Becker, 2018; Smith & Osborn, 2015) need to be described so that the consumption experience may be built in all its dimensions.

Several meanings are observed for the experience, being, to science, an experiment with objective data that may be generalized; to philosophy, a singular knowledge that transforms the individual; to sociology and to psychology, an activity that enables the development of people in cognitive and subjective form; to anthropology and ethnology, the way that people live their own culture (Carù & Cova, 2003).

Within Marketing, especially in the consumption field, and under a phenomenological perspective, experience is the state of consciousness primarily subjective involved in fantasies, feelings and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Something personally found, experienced and lived (Schmitt, 2011), once there is value both in the hedonistic elements contained in the products or services, as well as in the consumption experience itself (Schmitt & Zarattonello, 2013).

However, it is worth mentioning that there are several definitions about experiences within the field of study of consumer behavior (Tavares Cavalcanti, 2022). To Holbrook & Hirschman (1982), the experience in the perspective of information processing model is different as phenomenon of interests, being separated as environmental supplies, from the consumer, parties involved in the answers, consequences and criteria and effect of learning. They are perceptions, feelings and thoughts that the consumers have when meet and



get involved with consumption activities, as well as how they treat their memories with such experiences (Schmitt, 2011).

On the other hand, the consumption experience hits the individual's brain by processing cognitive and emotional aspects in face of the consumer's interaction with the services, produces and brands, in the following moments: pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase (Jain et al., 2017). In the view of Pinto & Lara (2011), the consumption experience is considered a process, which goes beyond the experience of purchasing, in a way that feelings do not only appear at the purchase, but from the socialization which is derived from the consumption. Despite this vision broadens the concept, a collective optic is missing. Therefore, Cova (2021) adds the cultural perspective of the experiences brought by the theory of the consumption culture allied to the co-creation.

In face of this, the literature presents a unifying concept of the consumption experience, defined as a process that allows interactions among the consumers and what is proposed as value by the organizations, in a way that is possible to promote cognitive, behavioral and emotional answers in the consumers, derived, therefore from the experiential value which, by consequence, brings benefits to the organizations as well as to the consumers (Scussel et al., 2021). And it adjusts itself to the destinations of cultural heritage providing co-creative value in the experiences in the pre, at the location and post-visitation of the tourists (Jung & Dieck, 2017).

It is verified that the consumption experience is a complex phenomenon that presents several dimensions. And by being treated accordingly with the intention of researchers in the studies, it does not have a common understanding of what it implies to be (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), we may observe in the literature several theoretical models that aim at bringing a deeper understanding about the term, as we present the three main studies in Chart 1.

Chart 01: Models and visions on consumption experience



Author/year	Model	Vision
Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982	Experiential amplification	Inputs, answer systems and outputs. The experience aggregates fantasies, feelings and fun.
Schmitt, 1999;2011	The mental modules	The experiences start to be understood through the functioning of the mental modules, such as: senses, feelings, thoughts, action and relation.
Pine & Gilmore, 1998; 2011	Experience economy	Participation of the consumer, type of connection from the consumer, moments and interactions start to be sold, products and services are only supporting.

Source: the authors (2024)

The studies listed above are the seminal basis that supports the construction of the consumer experience in application today. Thus, when using Schmitt's (2011) modules, we can understand experiences based on mental functions. A more organizational vision that supports the construction of offers in multisensoriality and complexity (Schmitt, 2011). Providing the use of modularity in strategic marketing in light of gastronomy, mainly for regional tourism, is considered a growing niche that emerges from the lived experiences of consumers (Dixty & Prayad, 2022).

2.1 Modules of Schmitt

Schmitt (1999) points out that the Experiences Strategies Modules (ESM) comprehend five experiential patterns, being them: sensorial, affective, thought, action and relation. It is important to mention that the author points



out that despite each module having its own specific principles, an interconnected and simultaneous vision should be adopted of such modules, given that the experience is holistic.

The first module of consumer's experience regards the singular and inherent part of the sensorial, which is related to the human senses (Schmitt, 1999). Many elements may be observed in this ESM, such as aroma (Flavián, Ibáñez-Sánchez & Orús, 2021), music (Dal Mas Eulálio, Cordeiro de Brito, Saquete dos Santos, Duganiero Wagner, Agüero Diaz Leon & Toledo, 2022) and color (Rathee & Rajain, 2019). The second module of experiences regards the affective function, which is related to the feelings and emotions, and in fact, it comprehends whether the consumer is receptive in living such stimulation (Schmitt, 1999). In such ESM, it should be considered the cultural specificity (Ueda & Poulain, 2021), as well as feelings and emotions derived from authentic experiences (Silva & Salazar, 2022).

The third module of experiences regards Thought, the cognitive part that is related to the intellectual level of the consumers through the creation of bonds (Schmitt, 1999). Such ESM is responsible for the learning, for the construction of memories and may be observed in the conclusive and creative thought, in the surprise, in the provocation, in the design and in the communication (Park, Lehto, & Lehto, 2021; Schmitt, 1999; Sipe, 2016). The fourth module of experiences regards the action, the way that it appeals to the lifestyle and to the consumer's behavior, which many times is related to acting in a pattern to be followed (Schmitt, 1999). In such ESM, alternative forms of acting are observed (Bertella, 2020; Schmitt, 2008) which make the consumers different in the way they react to the same stimulation.

The fifth module of experiences regards the Relation, which adds to the quoted ESM the transcendence of the consumer, data which is based on the peers and on the community and their relations of shared interests. Such module deals with the identification of the consumer and the way that the consumer him/herself wants to be seen by one's peers (Schmitt, 1999), which



may be observed in the construction of memorable moments (Oliveira Maia, Lanzarini, Brussio & Alves, 2023). It expands beyond personal and private feelings of the individual, relating it to senses, feelings and to the thought (Schmitt, 2008).

From the comprehension of the consumption experience and of the experiential modules, we describe the gastronomic experiences in the following topic.

2.2 Gastronomic experience

Gastronomy represents with relevance the cultural resources of a location. Its recognition by the United Nations for Education, Science and Culture Organization – UNESCO as immaterial heritage of the humanity gives support and credibility in fact to the development of studies (Santos, Santos & Guerreiro, 2016). Therefore, the gastronomic market belongs to a sector that has been changing its form in an attempt to manage the experience that better fit those consumers who are favorable in searching for experiences, beyond the services, willing to pay for them (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

The literature presents gastronomy as a cultural and touristic phenomenon that originates different perspectives, highlighting gastronomy as a consumption experience, merchandise, process of heritage conformation, as well as activity of local development (Ramírez-Gutiérrez, Santana-Talavera & Fernández-Betancort, 2020). Introducing the vision of experiential marketing, we may aggregate the understanding of how the consumers experience gastronomy in a way that it becomes possible the differentiation of offers in each day more competitive market (Schmitt, 2011).

It is possible to transform from the gastronomic experience as part of a context that transcends the attendance of basic needs, in a way that the client becomes a collector of experiences by impacting emotions and reaching pleasure (Seclén, Guerra, Ortiz & Huamanchumo, 2022). Therefore, it is



understood that, by consuming food, we reveal characteristics of the individual and collective identity (Melo & Araújo, 2021), in a way that the sensorial perceptions, feelings and actions from the subjectivity of the experiences create (Schmitt, 2011) long lasting experiences with the gastronomy.

In such sense, gastronomy may be delimited as regional, in a traditionally differentiated expectation of attracting the consumers who aim at living an authentic and typical gastronomic experience of a location with its own peculiarities. Location seen as servicescape by Kim & Moon (2009) when lead to positive-negative behaviors of the clients' experiences through cognitive and affective processes of a theme restaurant. For such, we will aim at exploring the meanings that the experiences, events and private states have to the consumers (Smith & Osborn, 2015) of the gastronomic hub of Caruaru fair, Pernambuco, and in what way such experiences are related to the strategic and experiential marketing (Schmitt, 2011), using in the study the perspective related to the consumer.

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Based on the purposes of this research, we have adopted the qualitative approach. To understand the phenomenon, we used at base, the guidance of the methodological procedures according to the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - IPA of Smith & Osborn (2015). It is a scientific procedure guided by the hermeneutic duo, in which it allows the identification of patterns associated to the cognitive psychology in feeling, thinking and talking about the interviewed in a way that the experience is identified as phenomenon that is in the consumer's own vision (Becker, 2018; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Phenomenology as a methodological procedure indicated since the development of seminal studies (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), but still little adopted for the study of experience, especially from the consumer's perspective (Becker, 2018; Scussel et al., 2021).



By locus of the research, the gastronomic hub of the arts and crafts fair of Caruaru/PE was chosen. World recognized fair and untitled as immaterial heritage (IPHAN, 2006) with its gastronomic hub provider of several consumption experiences to feed its clients. A space, located in the heart of May 18th Park, which encompasses six restaurants, commanded by household names in culinary of the most famous fair in Pernambuco: Aunt Bia, Sueli, Mother Blessed, Saint Joseph, Heleno and Aunt Guida (Folha PE, 2020).

As the space has 2.153,76m² of area, the equipment ensures accessibility to all spaces and a living area with interlocked floor, benches, trash cans, dungarees and a small stage for cultural presentations. On the other hand, the restaurants have a kitchen structure with capacity of industrial equipment and theme ambiance, decorated by architects of the city (Folha PE, 2020).

The corpus of the research was formed by texts derived from presential interviews performed with nine consumers of the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru fair in Pernambuco. The participants were freely selected from the location, since they had recently lived the gastronomic experience in the fair or were there at the moment of the interview, living the phenomenon of the experience. The characteristics of the respondents are presented in the chart 2 as follows.

Chart 02: Distribution of the respondents

Respondent	Gender	Age	Identification	Schooling	Frequency
01	F	42	Local	College	Frequent
02	M	23	Local	College	Eventual
03	M	25	Tourist	College	First Time
04	F	25	Local	College	Eventual
05	F	50	Local	Did not answer	Frequent
06	F	68	Tourist	Did not answer	First Time
07	M	36	Tourist	College	First Time
08	M	56	Local	High School	Frequent
09	M	27	Tourist	College	Frequent



Source: the authors (2024)

The interviews were performed in the year of 2022, being recorded with the authorization of the participants and transcribed literally posteriorly. The conversation was conducted from the phenomenological inspirations in the intention of learning the phenomenon through descriptive questions, followed by structural questions as form of clarification (Becker, 2018; Bevan, 2014).

Considered the phenomenology applied in the research, we may highlight that the conduction of the interviews followed the own flow of the respondents, in a superior amount enough indicated of six respondents established in the initial guidance study of the IPA methodology (Smith & Osborn, 2015). We emphasize that the IPA methodology used allows adaptations and the number of interviewees allowed for greater profile coverage in the collection (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

A script was defined (Chart 3) that served only as supporting base and identification of possible questions. New questions, however, could emerge from the mental flow of the interviewed or as clarifications of the raised points by the respondents themselves, as indicates the methodological procedure (Becker, 2018; Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Chart 3: Semi-structured interview script

Script of the interview:

Hi I am xxx, from Campus Agreste, in the PPGIC of UFPE. We are developing research, in the intention of describing the gastronomic consumption experience in the regional hub of the Caruaru Fair in Pernambuco. Could you talk to me for a little bit?

It is just a chat, on your experience of consumption at the fair...there is no right or wrong answer. And you can answer the way that you think it is best.

Don't worry, data is confidential and the research is exclusively for academic purposes... Do you allow me to record it?

Have you been to the gastronomic hub of the arts and crafts fair of Caruaru-PE?

Are you a local of the city or have you been to the market as a Tourist? (Develop the conversation, following the flow of the respondent.)

How did you hear about it? How did you go there?

Explain to me how you organize yourself, if you plan on going...Is there any prep?

What did draw you attention to the place? What attracted you most? (What attracts you in the food



of the Caruaru fair?) - identify stimulation in the participant

About the location. And the food? What have you felt? What have you thought? What have you done? What did you like?

Do you enjoy the food at the fair in Caruaru? Let him/her speak about the relation with food...

What do you like most when you are at the fair? What pleases you more and what upsets you in the food experience? Is there any situation which you may describe?

What are you feeling, now, having this meal? Describe this experience.

May you describe what you mean by...? (To clarify a point approached by the respondent)

What or who brings you to the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru fair?

What is your routine when you need to eat here. Does the everyday change? Do you spend more time in something related to the moment when you eat?

Do you get used or are you used to visit places like this to eat? Is this moment any different?

And what remained in the day when the experience of the meal happened? What feelings when it ended and the following day?

And is there anything to add on your gastronomic regional experience in Caruaru?

Would you like to comment/describe something about your experience that we have not mentioned.

Thank you for the interview!

Source: the authors (2024)

The analysis was performed in group and simultaneously by the researchers as a way to converge the perceptions and to reinforce the reliability through the triangulation of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Considering the preoccupation of the form and how the meanings are constructed by the individuals within a social and personal world (Smith & Osborn, 2015), the interviews were re-analyzed and reviewed more than once, and in such process of re-analysis the patterns of answers were observed that indicated the behaviors in the experiences presented in the research according to the interpretation of the researchers.

In this point, it is important to mention that the analysis was performed by researchers with different profiles in the access and knowledge of the phenomenon. Even aware that the researcher ends up by participating in the experience, as considered by the IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2015), in the research it was possible to be worked in a more holistic analysis (Becker, 2018), respecting the respondent as specialist in the experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015).



Also, simultaneously and combined, the researchers performed the codifications (Creswell & Creswell, 2021), with highlights in the most representative speeches in the description of the experiences, in a way that whether the highlights are not able to show the totality of the experience, they can identify a great part of what the experience indicated. Therefore, full answers were transcribed, adding to them the interpretation admitted by the hermeneutic of the adopted methodological procedure (Smith & Osborn, 2015) and regarding its place in the context.

In the intention of describing better the consumption experiences in the consumer's view, the analysis was deepened to identify beyond the patterns and the experiential modules (Schmitt, 2011), which types of experiences the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru fair in Pernambuco offered the participating consumers, generating a systemic view, observing the multiple interactions of the subject and the environment (Becker, 2018).

The section of the results comprehends the general analysis and the multiple of the interviews, with the interpretation of the behaviors associated to the phenomenon. Through the report of the experiences, in the consumers' view, of the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru fair – PE, the section of results comprehends the general and multiple analysis of the interviews, with the interpretation of the behaviors associated to the phenomenon. Through the relate of the experiences in the vision of the consumers, from the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru fair - PE, the description of the modules (Schmitt, 2011) was performed with the main identified experiences. Aware of the multiplicity of the experiences, emergent identified themes (Smith & Osborn, 2015) and stimulation for such, we aim at reducing those which were stronger and meaningful to the participants.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS



The analysis of the data revealed three structuring themes in the experience of the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru fair – PE; they are: regional flavor, belonging and interaction. They are discussed in the following sections.

4.1 Regional flavor

The food experience in the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru fair – PE is directly related to the regional flavor which it has. Presented by the consumers through a thought that it consists of a spicy and surprising food, having good seasoning and light flavor, which is not weak and not strong, but, yes, specific from Caruaru. It may be valued in authenticity defined as a new sensitivity of the consumer which involves perceptions of until what point are experiences, services, new products, real, original, exceptional and unique are genuine (Pine & Gilmore 2011).

This flavor comes from a comfort, delicious and singular food that is offered in variety of typical dishes as attractions that reflects the cultural diversity of the Brazilian Northeast. Among the delicious food found and quoted by the respondents in the gastronomic hub of the fair are the stew goat or roasted goat, *sarapatel*, *buchada*, *mão de vaca*, *pirão*, couscous, green beans with sun mean and bottled butter, among others. In addition, such food of regional flavor generates an idea of cost-benefit, printing and understanding of being accessible to all the public.

By tasting the food, the feeling perceived is of surprise, once that the seasoning presented by the regional flavor is specific and is not found in any other location. The flavor also emerges a feeling of satiety pleasure to the taste, as well as happiness by experiencing a flavor so delightful with a fair price. In such point, it is worth the explanation that pricing is spontaneously measured by the consumer in a private relation of cost x benefit (Seyitoğlu, 2021), in which the taster understands food as plenty and tasteful regarding the price charged. Such perceptions described by the interviewed communicate



experiences that collaborate with what Schmitt (2011) approaches by dealing with the ideal sense of providing a concept of easy identification, as novelty and freshness. It is an understanding of which stimulation are more appropriate to the sensorial impact.

I am demanding with taste, and I was surprised with the quality of the food, simple, but very good, very much, the light seasoning, it is... It does not have that amount of dry seasoning, such as cumin, uh... dried pepper, a really light seasoning. The experience was surprising to me, because I came here by indication, and then I ended up being surprised because the food is good and I had told my friend here that I am demanding. I cook, I like to cook, and I ate a simple food with a fair price (Respondent 8).

It is noticed that the behavior of such consumers in face of such tasteful, surprising and fair experience is related to a rather good experience that it is worth it to be repeated. In face of such experience of tasting the regional flavor, the experience of returning to this location is almost a conditional.

I'm like... I... it's been over 2 years that I come here every day. Directly (Respondent 4).

Then, it's like returning to childhood, it reminds me of my grandmother's house, my mother's house, we feel hugged, right, we feel really well, where we are here, right and we hope to come back (Respondent 3).

Such results corroborate other studies, which point out that the variety and the type of food offered contribute to the consumers tasting the local gastronomy, getting to know the traditions, in addition to helping in the food perception (Piramanayagam, Sud & Seal, 2020; Seyitoğlu, 2021), in a way that they present positive results (Kumar, 2019), as well as implicate in future experiences, due to the fact that the consumers become attached to the place (Hsu & Scott, 2020), in addition to aiming at the experience of sharing (Soonsan & Somkai, 2023).

4.2 Belonging

The experience of being and belonging has an observed judgment in the module of thought (Sipe, 2016; Park et al., 2021) in which people realize that certain food is original from the location, even if are not in particular. Such



judgment is extrapolated in the consumer's view and results in the sense of belonging, once that the consumers of the gastronomic hub, locals from Caruaru or tourists, have the idea that the typical food offered belong to the city, and some, even though not being, become representation of the city. It is noticed that all the offered food are typical from the Northeast region, however, in the Caruaru fair, the interviewed refer to it as local creation. (Kim & Moon, 2009).

All in my life! It is what's best, the best. The regional food, *pirão*, aaaaaa *buchada*. All what's best and the best. It is a feeling that this is my place (Respondent 4).

Figure 1 – Food from the Caruaru Fair (Buchada and Pirão)



Source: the authors (2024)

Figure 1, for example, *buchada* and *pirão* sold in gastronomic establishments of the fair are presented, characterizing the space and marking the time and the experiences (Silva & Santos, 2022). In fact, we perceived throughout the interviews, a perception of the consumer on the food associated to regional identity values (Stone et al., 2022; Maia et al., 2023) that distinguishes and portrays the affection in a particular form linked to it. Once they lived such experience of belonging, there are many good emotions being

externalized, such as pride with what comes from the earth, being regional, the affective and nostalgic memories by remembering moments lived in childhood and with relatives, more precisely at the mother's or grandmother's house, according to what respondent 2 describes.

It represents to me the roots, the essence, I am from Caruaru and to be eating, is... regional food such as: goat, pirão, to me is like returning to the childhood, is to live everything once again, mainly in this June period, right (Respondent 2).

The interpreted information in the acquired data enabled to identify the characteristics in the behavior of the people by living the gastronomic experience in the Caruaru fair. The reports made the way that consumers act emerge (Bertella, 2020) through the integration and sharing of this regional culture, being possible to visualize the common understanding that, by being in such environment, experiencing the local sharing (Soonsan & Somkai, 2023), in a way that visiting the fair becomes a behavior of being part of such context, culturally integrating themselves.

For the experience of belonging related to the gastronomy of the fair, we observed that flavor is supporting, contributing to the appearance of feelings associated to affective memories (Ueda & Poulain, 2021). It is not the flavor itself, but how it leads to good memories, of how authentic they are (Silva & Salazar, 2022), it makes the experience from the belonging.

This way, such results are associated to the literature by defending that the exercise of the intellect allows the living of cognitive experiences during the experiences among the consumers (Schmitt, 1999). And it was confirmed in studies that the cognitive answer to the experiences, mainly in tourism, has a bigger effect in the intention of visitation. Meanwhile there is also the correlation of the affective answer or attachment (Kim, Lee & Jung, 2020).

The roots expressed by the respondents show the construction of family bonds and their values that have been created throughout their food experiences and are exposed in the memories of the learning which collaborate to the formation of the cultural essence. Therefore, they



corroborate to the understanding that the gastronomic experience goes beyond the food itself, at the same time that it also expresses the perception of values (Ramírez-Gutiérrez et al., 2021), the symbolic construction of the experience (Witt & Schneider, 2011).

4.3 Interaction

The experience lived in the gastronomic fair of Caruaru-PE brings different constructions to the sense of that region, being able to present the understanding of being a proper location for a change of habit or a place of entertainment. Emotional states are valued by the environment and by the music existing in the location, where associated to the consumption suggest that the affective answers to the experiences related to tourism are consisted mainly of pleasure, emotional engagement and flow state (Kim et al., 2020).

As essential factor of interaction in the gastronomic hub where music can be enjoyed in cultural presentations of regional artists who cheer up the stage of the environment with *forró*, presented by *pé de serra* trio, *pífano* band, among other presentations of the Brazilian Northeast. We interpreted that the sound elements make people closer and provide a party and cool environment to the visitors who get together around tables of the restaurants to taste the typical dishes. In fact, the music evokes the senses indicated in the experiential marketing (Schmitt, 2011), supporting the promotion of fun, distraction and relaxation.

In all these narrative constructions, there is the common understanding that the gastronomic hub of the fair is an environment of action to share moments with family and friends, from the city or tourists. It is a place to engage, characterizing the experience as motivated and practiced from the socialization (Pinto & Lara, 2011), in which the integration in the Caruaru fair promotes the view to what the food provides beyond flavor, as a way to aggregate people around the table, in meetings with highlights that signs



comfort, cheering in a meeting and the security of being among old fellows, even when they are not.

Since we always come, then, it is like a different day for everybody, we come, always come, with the purpose to walk, bring the children, we always (Respondent 7).

In face of the explanation of the respondent 7, the different day is exposed in the sense of being off the routine, as escape of fun even to the interviewed who are more frequent in visitations. It is a form of interacting by getting to know new people in the communion that the environment indicates to promote. In such scenario, the sense of belonging is presented, of being hugged by the diverse location and by the pleasant attendance promoted by the restaurants, in addition to the trust of being in a comfortable place, clean and safe, presented in a preponderant for in the joy of having a good time sharing the moments with whom is around.

As pointed out by Ceribeli et al. (2022) that the consumption experience in a restaurant is not motivated only by the consumers' needs who are being fed, and highlights that the attendance received creates a particular atmosphere and influences the identification of the consumer in the environment and transforms many times the visitation to the restaurant in an activity of entertainment and leisure. With behavioral answers unleashed by specific stimulation in the consumer's environment (Schmitt, 2011).

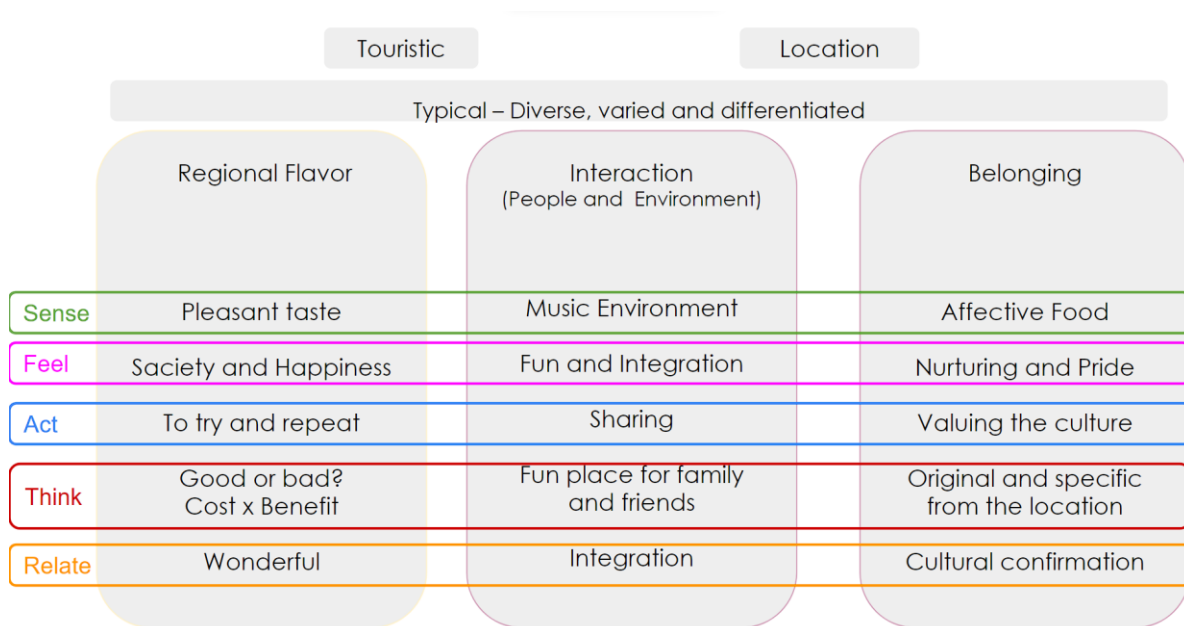
In a similar form, the interaction occurs in an intensive way, extrapolating the experience lived at the fair, reverberating the actions of incentive to other people to visit the hub from the word-to-mouth done by the consumer. Corroborating the findings of Carù & Cova (2003), by stating that the experiential perspective is not limited to the purchase experience, but it encompasses all the steps regarding the consumption, going from the utilitarian up to the hedonistic.

4.4 Map of Experiences



In the attempt of validate the correlations of the behaviors found in the most significant experiences, we developed Figure 2. In it, we present a map of experiences, lived by consumers in the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru-PE fair, according to the three approached themes and their constructions through the modules of the experiential marketing theory (Schmitt, 2011).

Figure 2 – Map of Experiences



Source: the authors (2024)

Such map represents an effort to the discussions and the reflections in face of the accessed experiences. It acts as theoretical model that may be analyzed, broadened and modified, according to future studies in this and other social and cultural context. Theoretical models contribute to the advance of the comprehension of the phenomenon and act as boosters of theories, being important results from the qualitative researches.

From the suggested map, we proposed a holistic view of the consumption experience, emphasizing the frequency of the experience (first time at the hub, etc) instead of the role of the individual as tourist or native, once there has not been found significant divergences among the interviewed by being either



tourists or local frequenters, in a way that everyone was able to experience in the gastronomic hub of the Caruaru-PE fair, a typical, varied and traditionally differentiated experience. Therefore, we reinforce with the own denominations that such experiences are: the regional flavor, the interaction and the belonging.

In the experience of Regional Flavor, the sense was the taste, enabling a pleasant experience, generating feelings of happiness and satiety, through plenty of food and accessible price. Therefore, the food was portrait as surprising, wonderful, specially by the trade-off of perceived value by the consumer, ensuring a gastronomic experience rimmed by seasoning and taste with a fair price, reinforcing the thought module. The action derived from the flavor is the proof and will and the realization of the repetition, by making or guiding the experience at the hub as continuous experience.

When the experience was of Interaction, the sense was driven to the music environment, in which the sound triggered perceptions and accompanied the feelings which involved fun and integration among the people that were in the environment. The action has always been of sharing, in the reunion, bringing thoughts linked to the purpose of socialization in the space. Therefore, such experience gives the opportunity of a change in the routine, even to the consumers frequenters of the hub, by providing new meetings, generating social bonds and narrowing them starting from the food.

The experience of Belonging was the one that presented the most unusual relations, but also indicated the same definition among tourists and local frequenters. Here, the experience is resultant from the sense of taste to the good seasoning in the affective food, valued and socially constructed by reflecting the flavors that symbolize the region, the culture and, consequently, the family affection to the fair itself. Such elements reinforce the belonging in the experience of the location where it is lived, highlighting the impacts in the consumer's identity, whether through pride in being part of the land or due to the hospitality received throughout the journey of consumption. Therefore, the



act of consuming in the gastronomic hub of the fair represents a re-affirmative action of the culture there expressed, which reflects the individuality of the space, the unity of the environment and, therefore, the recognition of the valuable experience that should be expressed to the others, leading to the positive word-to-mouth behavior.

5 Conclusion

In this study, we identified three main experiences of consumption from the regional gastronomic hub of the Caruaru-PE fair. They are: the experience of the regional flavor, the interaction and the belonging. All of them were permeated by the experiential modes of Schmitt (2011) in its five definitions, but pointed and described in very different and specific forms according to the consumer's own view.

From the findings, we proposed a map of experiences, which acts as proposition of a model do be deepened, complemented or modified from future researches and analysis of distinct scenarios. We reinforced the originality of the study from the model, resulting in the descriptive and interpretative analysis of the gastronomic experience at the Caruaru hub performed in a holistic form, using the experiential modules as comprehension lenses of the phenomenon. We also highlight the choice of the analysis of the consumption experience from the symbolic environment, considered as immaterial heritage as the Caruaru-PE fair is.

This study brings management implications, once it points out to a panorama of the three main consumption experiences of the regional gastronomic hub. Starting from the understanding that the organization needs to know the clients and attend their needs, it is essential to operate in an optimized form. Therefore, it is recommended to consider the three main experiences of consumption pointed out in the study, related to the five dimensions established in the experiential modes of Schmitt (1999) as



elementary aspect of the marketing portfolio of a company or brand of regional gastronomic products. Allied to the individualization of the specific elements from the focus of the organization or brand, having at sight that the consumer may find him/herself in distinct phases of consumption.

Regarding the contribution of the research to society, the perspective of the consumer's view is pointed out in contribution to the empiric research of the experience. Although it is impossible to outline all the complexity that the existing experiences of consumption in the regional gastronomic hub, it was possible to broaden the reflections in a way to clarify important points in the consumption relations. In such sense, the knowledge of the plural experiences in more details in the vision of the clients themselves brings important information on the affection that connects the consumer to those experiences in the intention of giving light on how better promote them.

This study also presented limitations. By being conducted in loco, as strategy to capture the essence in its most recent expression, we had the imposition of the noise of the environment that directly interfered in the hearing of the respondents and the interviewer and in the quality of the recordings, since, the interviews were performed at average during the time of the meal. In addition, there was no differentiation between restaurants, tents and menu choices that the gastronomic diversity of the hub in the Caruaru-PE fair provides.

Therefore, for future studies we suggest new investigations that allow the analysis of other experiences at the fair. More detailed investigations with the profile of the gastronomic consumers and of the fair. New transversal studies with the segmentation of the profile of the interviewed for the exploitation of new facets of what is most important for each consumer type. And the motivating points of contact of the experience of regional gastronomic consumption, whether presential or through social media. As well as indication of other researches related to the consumption in the gastronomic amplitude of the fair which is not limited to its hub.



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