

IDENTITY AND VALUES OF STREET RUNNERS: A STUDY BASED ON THE MEANS-END CHAIN THEORY

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Abstract

This study emphasizes the contributions of the means-end chain theory to understanding the relationship between attributes-consequences-values (A-C-V) and the identities of individuals participating in street running, a sporting practice that has been gaining followers in Brazil. The objective is to understand how the choice of street running rather than other sporting activities influences the identity reconstruction of its practitioners through A-C-V relationships. The study is qualitative and was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the means-end chain theory, with data collected on 22 street runners analysed using the laddering technique. The results indicate that by identifying with street running, the runners mainly seek the values of pleasure and achievement. Street running is also marked by the attribute of collective (but also individual) practice. This flexibility of choice is reflected in how the runners relate attributes, consequences, and values in street-running consumption practices.

Keywords: Identity, Consumption, Values, Street running.

1 Introduction

The relationships between consumption and identity have become more significant in contemporary society. The related literature addresses themes such as lifestyles, identity reconstructions, subcultures, group and social identity, personality, extension of self, values, and other themes in their theoretical and practical interrelationships with the consumption phenomenon. Consumption is understood to be a social process that contributes to the construction of identities (Barbosa & Campbell, 2006; Santos, Fagundes, & Oliveira, 2022; Ghaffari, Rodrigo, Ekinici, & Pino, 2022).

In this context, it is relevant to understand the relationships between identities and consumer practices. This study emphasizes the contributions of the means-end chain theory (Gutman, 1982; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988) to understanding the relationship between attributes-consequences-values (A-C-V) and the identity of participants in street running, a sporting practice with an expanding market. This relationship becomes fundamental when one understands that identities are sources of meanings for the activities of individuals, and values are related to modes of behaviour.

Street running is a sporting activity that has been gaining followers in Brazil (Ladeira et al., 2012). It represents a field of interest for research on consumption particularly because the consumption of street-running equipment is increasing: “[...] the street running industry has aroused the interest of sporting goods companies” (Ladeira et al., 2012, p. 19). Thus, the sport represents a market that can be commercially exploited and accordingly is a topic related to consumption. In this context, Ladeira et al. (2012) sought to identify the perception of value of amateur runners with respect to the consumption of sporting goods and services. Examining another sport market niche, Costa, Rezende e Vilas Boas (2016) identified personal values in fitness consumers through an exploratory study using the laddering technique and a framework focused on the marketing of services and personal values.

However, which values underlie the choice of street running as a sporting activity (instead of, e.g., swimming, soccer, or volleyball), that is, how the A-C-V relationship functions as a conceptual scheme that guides the decision to participate in street running and how this relationship affects identity construction in the participants, remains unknown. Therefore, the following question is also relevant to this study: Is the choice of a sporting activity, such as street running, related to identity issues? Additionally, this study addresses an area of research in which attributes tend to be more abstract than concrete – it is concerned with a sporting activity and not material objects, such as cars, food, sneakers, clothing, and perfumes, on which various studies have already been conducted using the means-end chain theory (Livramento, Hor-Meyll, & Pessôa, 2013; Piato, Pimenta, & Fowler, 2014; Pimenta, Piato, & Vilas Boas, 2014; Ahn & Thomas, 2020; Alahakoon, Pike, & Beatson, 2021). In terms of contributions, at the theoretical level, the study seeks to broaden the discussion on the relationships between consumption, identities, and values, while at the practical level, it seeks to guide managerial strategies aimed at the street-running products consumer market that seek to create incentives to engage in the sport.

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Thus, this study seeks to understand how the choice of street running instead of other sporting activities influences the identity reconstruction of its participants, considering the A-C-V relationships. For this purpose, a qualitative study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the means-end chain theory, with data collected on 22 street runners analysed using the laddering technique.

2 Identity, consumption, and values

From the moment the concept of identity became relevant to understanding what “[...] the individual values, thinks, feels, and does in all societal spheres” (Carrieri, Paula, & Davel, 2008, p. 127), it also began to attract attention in the field of consumer research. After all, according to Barbosa and Campbell (2006), even the customization of clothes, eating and cultural habits, and consumption experiences are relevant for the construction of identities.

Of course, this approach is reminiscent of research developed in the 1980s. For example, Shepherd (1986) published the work *Music consumption and cultural self-identities: some theoretical and methodological reflections*, and Belk (1988) published *Possessions and the extended self*. The latter work became a reference in discussions on identity and consumption based on the idea of the extended self. In the 1990s, several widely cited articles on identity and consumption appeared, for example, Schouten (1991), Warde (1994), and Miller (1998).

With respect to its conceptual characteristics, this field of study presents a constitutive multidisciplinary based intellectually on the research of consumption scholars (e.g., Belk, Miller, Arnould, Holt, McCracken, Featherstone, and Campbell) and sociologists (e.g., Giddens, Bourdieu, Goffman, Hall, and Bauman) (Chen, 2006), who debate subjects such as self-identity, culture, society, modernity, and consumption. Therefore, studies on identity and consumption are influenced by different areas of the social sciences and humanities. The concept of identity itself can be viewed as interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary since it has been widely discussed in several areas of knowledge and in different scientific fields and schools of thought.

In the field of consumer research, Cherrier (2009) argued that identity is a significant category for understanding why and how individuals consume or do not consume. This view is based on the argument of Barbosa and Campbell (2006) that consumption is a social process that produces identities, whereby “[...] it is through identity that relational partners construct their self-concept, signalling who they are or ‘want to be’ for themselves and for others” (Mello & Fonsêca, 2008, p. 3).

According to Mello and Fonsêca (2008), only from an understanding of personal, social, and cultural dimensions can one understand the identity formation process. For this study, it is important to address the concept of group identity and, subsequently, values. Thus, “[...] in contemporary society, consumption is a social process that concerns multiple forms of provision of goods and services as well as different forms of access to these same goods and services [...]” (Barbosa & Campbell, 2006, p. 26). This view is consistent with that of Miller (1995), who states that the consumption process is highly significant and, through it, individuals establish relationships with the world and with their identities, while through individual consumption they also differentiate themselves (Featherstone, 1990). Thus, identity formation occurs in processes of differentiation and homogenization (Santos, 2013), in which “subjects seek (simultaneously) to insert themselves and share a common identity in a particular social group and also seek to strengthen their identity as individuals” (Rebs, 2012, p. 211).

In the search for objects of consumption, individuals redefine themselves socially and start to “occupy” certain places in society (Santos, 2013), to frequent certain spaces, to relate to certain groups of people, and to share certain values. In this manner, subjects express themselves and reconstruct their identities, and consumption provides options for this endeavour (Santos, 2013; Santos, Fagundes, & Oliveira, 2022). Barbosa and Campbell (2006) observed that consumption is a way of addressing an identity crisis. Accordingly, the view of Campbell (2001) diverges from that of Bauman (2005).

These views of and different roles assigned to consumption are also related to the emergence of inconsistencies, contradictions, and, ultimately, identity tensions, in which multiple and different identities can conflict (Woodward, 2004). In any case, consumption is a component of identities (Santos,

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2013). Therefore, in accordance with the cited studies, whether involving cooperative or conflicting multiple identities, whether as an endless quest for security (Bauman, 2005), or as a means to determine who we are and solve identity crises (Campbell, 2001), the relationship between consumption and identity is fundamental. The consumption-identity relationship occupies a critical place (Santos, 2013) and demands new research to increase our knowledge regarding how it has become a constitutive element of contemporary life.

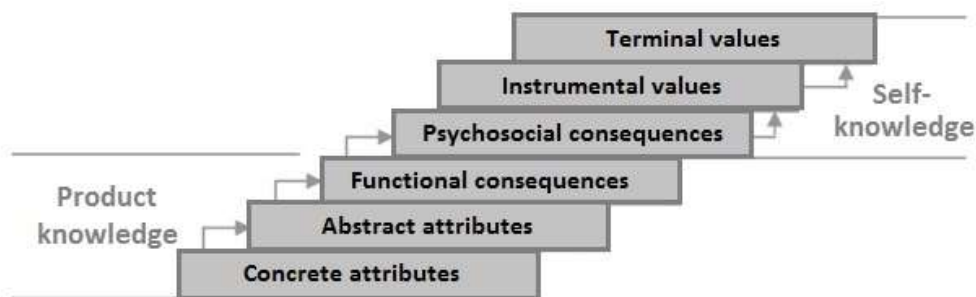
2.1 Means-end chain theory: attributes, consequences, and values

In the seminal article *A Means-End Chain Model Based on Consumer Categorization Processes*, Jonathan Gutman (1982) began by noting that values are extremely relevant for understanding individual behaviour and that this insight can be exploited to understand consumer behaviour. For the author, attempts to connect values and consumer behaviour can be based on the means-end chain model, which is defined by Gutman (1992) as a conceptual structure that connects consumer values to behaviour.

(1) that values, defined here as desirable end-states of existence, play a dominant role in guiding choice patterns, and (2) that people cope with the tremendous diversity of products that are potential satisfiers of their values by grouping them into sets or classes so as to reduce the complexity of choice. (Gutman, 1992, p. 60).

An A-C-V association is established between the following: characteristics of the product or service (attributes – A); the benefits and disadvantages of using the product (consequences – C), which are at the intermediate level of the chain; and the end and more abstract states (values – V). The attributes can be subdivided into concrete (price, colour, weight, etc.) and abstract (style, brand, quality, etc.); the consequences can be configured as functional (ease of use, comfort, etc.) or psychosocial (status, making friends, feeling good, etc.), which derive directly or indirectly from consumer behaviour; and, finally, values can be instrumental (ambition, helpfulness, etc.) or terminal (peace, self-fulfilment, happiness, etc.), which finalizes the chain (Gutman, 1992; Pimenta, Piato, & Vilas Boas, 2014; Schaefers, Ruffer, & Böhm, 2021). Figure 1 illustrates these subdivisions.

Figure 1. Connection between knowledge of the product and self-knowledge via the means-end chain



Source: Gandia et al. (20, p. 04).

Thus, “the relationship between attributes, consequences, and values is based on the consumer’s product knowledge, as well as on the self-knowledge of their value system” (Vilas Boas, Sette, & Brito, 2006, p. 6). More broadly, the relevance of this approach is that it presents conceptual schemas of consumer behaviour. Schemas are patterns that are internalized by individuals, based on which those individuals make interpretations, and they also provide motivational force (Morandin, Bagozzi, & Bergami, 2014; Schaefers, Ruffer, & Böhm, 2021). In addition, schemas provide motivational potential and the internalization of cultural models, which become goals, principles, and values for individuals. Therefore, “people have a values structure that guides their life in general” (Porto & Tamayo, 2007, p. 63).

Due to the relevance of values, a more thorough explanation of them is worthwhile, especially given that values are related to identity reconstruction processes (Castells, 2003; Hall, 2006). According

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to Ladeira et al. (2012, p. 19) a “value is based on the personal way of seeing, feeling, and reacting to the experience of use, resulting in an attitude or an emotional bond.” Values regulate human behaviour and guide attitudes, preferences, and choices (Leão & Mello, 2007; Baker, Thompson, & Engelken, 2004).

Regarding studies involving values (and several related to identity), the research of Milton Rokeach and Shalom Schwartz is relevant for the discussion of the means-end chain. Rokeach (1973) divided values into a system consisting of instrumental values (desired modes of living and acting) and a system of terminal values (desirable end states). Through an empirical study, he presented 36 values with which the Rokeach Value Survey was developed, which has the “objective of identifying the priority of each value in people’s lives” (Carmo, 2012, p. 69). Conceptually, Rokeach defined values as “[...] a lasting belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposing mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (Almeida & Sobral, 2009, p. 106). It was from Rokeach (1973) that the idea that values have a motivational function emerged. Based on this background, it is possible to begin discussing the intrinsic relationship of values with consumption practices and identity formation.

Another important values researcher is Schwartz, who understood values to be beliefs that influence decision-making given that individuals want to achieve desired states (Pimenta, Piato, & Vilas Boas, 2014). For Schwartz and Bilsky (1987, p. 551), values can be described as follows: “(a) concepts or beliefs, (b) about desirable end states or behaviours, (c) that transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behaviours and events, and (e) are ordered by relative importance.”

Schwartz found 10 classes of values: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security (Almeida & Sobral, 2009). These values are distributed in four dimensions: openness to change (favouring change) versus conservation (focused on stability and tradition); and self-transcendence (concern with other individuals) versus self-direction (self-centred). Hence, “[...] there is an incompatibility in personal values belonging to opposing domains” (Pimenta, Piato, & Vilas Boas, 2014, p. 126).

When the consumer develops a categorization, the characteristics of products gain relevance or meaning because of their association with the consequences of their use and, successively, with the attainment of the user’s personal values (Reynolds & Craddock, 1988). Therefore, with the means-end chain, it is possible to understand how attributes, consequences, and values influence the consumer’s purchasing pattern, thus enabling “the resolution of a large group of marketing problems, including new product development, brand positioning, advertising strategies, and market segmentation” (Vilas Boas, Sette, & Brito, 2006, p. 6).

The use of the means-end chain in consumer research on identity remains scarce. We highlight the studies of Morandin, Bagozzi, and Bergami (2014), Jung and Pawlowski (2014), Ho, Lin, and Huang (2014), and Barrena and Sanchez (2009). Morandin, Bagozzi, and Bergami (2014) investigated how consumers find meaning in their lives through the joint experience of a brand in a brand community. The study used the concept of social identity and brand identification. For the authors, the emerging cognitive map indicated that the sensemaking of the members was related to a strong personal involvement with the brand and its social relationships and symbolic meanings. However, the authors did not address the results found regarding identity theories (Morandin, Bagozzi & Bergami, 2014), and they only addressed the debate on identity in passing.

Jung and Pawlowski (2014) sought to understand consumption goals with a focus on virtual consumption. The means-end chain approach was used to develop the virtual identity theory, which describes the transitions between the real world of the users and virtual identities. The authors found that users strive to be socially included through a virtual appearance and therefore make their personal identity visible through desired self-images, whereby the tension between social virtual identity and personal virtual identity becomes a driver of virtual consumption.

Following the same theme of identity and consumption, Ho, Lin and Huang (2014) used the means-end chain combined with the laddering technique to examine the motivating factors associated with the experiences of backpackers, extrapolating from tangible attributes (i.e., trip characteristics) to personal values. Their results related to identity formation were particularly notable. Finally, Barrena and Sanchez

(2009) tested the effects of wine consumption on emotions according to the age of the consumer. The results revealed that wine consumers perceive an emotional benefit from drinking wine and that this perception varies according to the age of the consumer, with the degree of abstraction in the cognitive process increasing inversely with the age of the consumer. That is, older individuals report less complex decision-making processes. The authors noted that younger consumers are motivated to drink for reasons related to cultural identity and social status.

Finally, generally, there are few studies that tie the identity theory to the means-end chain (and using laddering). Often, these studies approach the subject superficially and do not present the results on the consumers' views regarding identity. This study, which focuses on consumption, values, and identity relationships using the laddering technique, represents a response to this research gap. Our research method is described in the subsequent section.

3 Research methodology

Qualitative research seeks to emphasize phenomena that can be accessed through testimonials, discourses, and the contexts in which the participants are found (Godoy, 1995; Malhotra, 2001). In accordance with the arguments of Richardson (1999), Schwandt (2006) and Flick (2009), the qualitative approach is a coherent means to study the relationships between attributes, consequences, and values in street running, whereby one seeks to understand the relatively more abstract levels of meaning that are involved in identity construction and that refer to experiences and values in the lives of street runners. Coherence is maintained when considering that the various participants in the study expressed multiple meanings (Creswell, 1997) in interviews, views that are represented in the ladders that we constructed.

In view of our objectives and the assumption of involvement with consumption of the study objects from the perspective of the means-end chain (Gutman, 1982; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988; Leão, Iatanomi, & Cavalcanti, 2015), the profile of the participants was defined a priori as follows: (a) female or male street runners, (b) at least 21 years of age, (c) a running history of at least one year and a habit of running least three times a week, and (d) participation in street-running events (at least four in the last year).

Considering the established criteria, the sample selection was non-probabilistic and by convenience (Alencar, 2007; Costa, Rezende, & Vilas Boas, 2016). The strategies for accessing the participants were as follows: (a) identification of groups in social networks and identification of running groups through key informants and (b) indication of street runners using the snowball technique (one participant indicating another). Interviews were arranged at the workplaces of the participants (e.g., university, gym, office) and their homes, following the in-depth (Flick, 2004) and one-to-one (Gutman, 1982) format, and were conducted in the municipality of Lavras, Minas Gerais, Brazil, in September and November 2017.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with the assumptions and strategies presented by Gutman (1982) and Reynolds and Gutman (1988). In total, 22 interviews with street runners were conducted, which were recorded (with the consent of the participants) and transcribed for later analysis. LadderUX® software was used for analysis.

The data were analysed using a content analysis approach (Bardin, 2011), in which the a priori categories refer to the elements of the means-end chain (Gutman, 1982), namely, attributes, consequences, and values. The analysis was performed using the laddering technique; this technique is used in marketing and related areas, where it is applied to consumer purchasing behaviour and supported by the means-end chain to reveal systems of personal meanings while accessing constructs through abstraction (Ikeda, 2006; Ikeda & Veludo-de-Oliveira, 2007).

The technique requires in-depth interviews in which respondents are confronted with products with which they are familiar. They are asked to make personal distinctions with respect to differences in perception or preference between or among competitive products. The researcher uses a series of directed probes to discover why these distinctions are personally relevant to them. The goal is to understand the links that

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connect the basic perceptual differences to the highest levels is possible. The strategist seeks to understand the personal value which represents the underlying consumer motivation component. (Reynolds & Craddock, 1988, p. 46-47).

The questions were personalized for each interviewee in such a way that the interview progressed from the basic level (attributes) and to consequences and, last, to the highest level of abstraction (values), thereby constructing individual ladders, with representative components for each interviewee (Reynolds & Craddock, 1988). This abstraction is enabled by using repeated interactive questions that start from the attributes cited by the interviewees and progress via the interviewer's standard question: "why is this (attribute or consequence) important?" until one finally arrives at personal values (Ikeda, 2006). Through the "[...] repeated interactive questions, respondents are encouraged to delve deeper into the discussion of attributes, gradually indicating consequences and values" (Ladeira et al., 2012, p. 22). In this study, the interviewers were trained beforehand to conduct the interviews. Regarding the rationalization of the answers by the interviewees, techniques such as asking questions in the third person and contextualization were used (Gutman, 1991).

After the interviews and transcription, "content analysis was performed based on the raw data generated by the interviews, which results in a set of A-C-V sequences for each respondent, which are subsequently aggregated into an implication matrix that represents all of the relationships between the elements" (Ikeda, 2006, p.13). The implication matrix enables "[...] the identification of the links among the concepts present in the means-end chain abstracted by the consumers" (Vilas Boas, Sette, & Brito, 2006, p. 10).

From the implication matrix, a hierarchical map of values is created "whose construction is the ultimate goal of the technique" (Ikeda, 2006, p. 13).

[...] that first requires a traditional content analysis of all elements elicited by the laddering procedure. Summary codes, representing the content categories output from the content analysis corresponding to the unique categories of response, are then used to summarize and codify. The second step involves scoring and summarizing the dominant connections between key content elements [...] (Reynolds & Craddock, 1988, p. 47).

The importance of the hierarchical value map (HVM) is to move from concrete explanations to the level of the abstractions, in which it is possible to understand the meaning of the underlying cognitive schemas for the individuals (Morandin, Bagozzi, & Bergami, 2014). When complete, the HVM can be integrated with theories (in this case, the discussions on identity) to enable evaluation of the market environment, development of advertising and positioning, and market segmentation strategies (Reynolds & Craddock, 1988).

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Presentation of the attributes, consequences, and values

Through the interviews, the chains of attributes, consequences, and values were identified. Table 1 shows the attributes, consequences, and values found in this study and their meanings in the context of street running.

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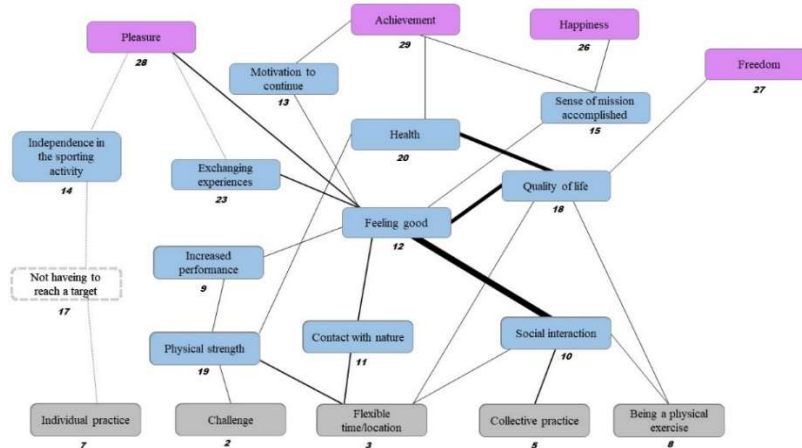
Table 1. Values, consequences, and attributes

	Category	Assigned name	Meaning
1	Attribute	Open air	Easy access to this sport in open environments and locations with pleasant landscapes and climate.
2	Attribute	Challenge	Possibility of challenging oneself in various terrains, courses, and at various times, thus enabling different training routines.
3	Attribute	Flexible time/location	No specific time or place for the sporting activity; thus, it can be adapted to the participant's agenda.
4	Attribute	Does not require physical standard	Different from other sports, street running does not require the participant to have a specific height or weight.
5	Attribute	No rules	There is no pre-established set of rules; therefore, it is possible to act in the way that best fits the profile.
6	Attribute	Collective practice	Possible to practise with other people.
7	Attribute	Individual practice	Possible to practise alone.
8	Attribute	Being a physical exercise	It is configured as a type of physical exercise.
9	Consequence	Increases performance	Increased strength, flexibility, and ability to strive.
10	Consequence	Social interaction	Possibility of meeting others, talking about different topics, and making friends.
11	Consequence	Contact with nature	It is possible to be in contact with nature while participating in the sport because of the variety of locations in which it can be practised.
12	Consequence	Feeling good	Being able to minimize the effects of stress and feel more willing to face everyday problems.
13	Consequence	Motivation to continue	The activity encourages the participant to continue with street running.
14	Consequence	Independence in the sporting activity	Practising the sport does not require one to depend on others; no influence on the outcomes of others or possibility of being influenced by them.
15	Consequence	Sense of mission accomplished	Train and achieve the time or distance determined by the participant him- or herself.
16	Consequence	Minimal likelihood of injury	Because of the absence of physical contact with other participants, the likelihood of being injured is minimal.
17	Consequence	Not having to reach a target	Can follow one's individual pace.
18	Consequence	Quality of life	Ability to perform day-to-day activities with less effort.
19	Consequence	Physical strength	Ability to bear a load for an extended period.
20	Consequence	Health	Being healthy and improving breathing and the immune system to achieve longevity.
21	Consequence	Being disciplined	Being able to achieve the tasks that one proposes for oneself.
22	Consequence	Having a family	Developing the qualities necessary to be able to form a family or to enjoy family life as much as possible.
23	Consequence	Exchanging experiences	Exchanging knowledge regarding training, routine, diet, and other running-related topics.
24	Consequence	Travelling	Possibility of travelling to participate in races or interact with other runners.
25	Value	Self-determination	Feeling that one can achieve everything one desires.
26	Value	Happiness	Feeling satisfied and good about oneself.
27	Value	Freedom	Independence and the ability to act according to one's own will.
28	Value	Pleasure	Seeking pleasure and gratification for oneself (hedonism).

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According to Table 1, eight attributes, sixteen consequences, and four values were found. The attributes, consequences, and values were aggregated via the LadderUX software, forming the HVM (Figure 2). The map shows the most representative relationships found among the elements based on a given cut-off point to represent the main relationships in the matrix (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Because of the cut-off point, not all of the attributes and consequences appear on the map. Only the most significant relationships are represented.

Figure 2. Hierarchical value map: Cut-off point of 5 (the dotted lines refer to a cut-off point of 4)



Source: Prepared by the authors.

As can be observed in the relationships shown on the map (Figure 2), the direction of the means-end chain is from the bottom to the top. The following attributes are found at the bottom of the map: challenge, flexible time/location, being a physical exercise, collective practice, and individual practice. In the central region are the consequences: physical strength, increased performance, social interaction, contact with nature, feeling good, motivation to continue, independence in the sporting activity, sense of mission accomplished, quality of life, health, and exchanging experiences. The values, i.e., freedom, achievement, happiness, and pleasure, occupy the top of the hierarchy.

An important function of the HVM is to provide information for the identification of the dominant chains, that is, those chains that have the highest number of direct and indirect relationships and are considered to be the most representative in the perceived orientations of the respondents. In this study, the dominant chains have the thicker lines on the map: the thicker that the line is, the stronger the connection between the elements of the chain, and the higher that the cut-off point is, the greater the significance level of the map (in this study, a cut-off point of 5 was used), in accordance with the cut-off point used by Gandia (2016). Reynolds and Gutman (1988) advised that the cut-off point should be defined so that the map becomes more representative, with elements that establish stable and informative relationships.

The established cut-off point (5) is high, and thus, the map contains only the most representative chains. However, we determined to represent additional elements that would otherwise have been left out of the map because of the high occurrence requirement established by the chosen cut-off point. These elements (consequences and connections) were present at the cut-off point of 4, that is, still within an acceptable limit.

We include them to contribute to the interpretation of the results without compromising the study. To facilitate the visualization of these elements, they are illustrated in dotted form. A total of five such elements were introduced: the consequence “not having to reach a target” and the connections between “individual practice” and “not having to reach a target”; between “not having to reach a target” and “sporting independence”; between “sporting independence” and “pleasure”; and, finally, between “exchanging experiences” and “pleasure”.

4.2 Dominant chains and identity formation

Based on the information contained in the HVM, several perceived orientations were identified, taking as a reference the chains that were developed. For analysis, the dominant chains were highlighted because they were considered the most important. There were five in this study, with two relevant variations. The understanding of these chains may justify the preference for street running, which is the object of study.

The relationships between “collective practice” (A), “social interaction” (C), “feeling good” (C), and “pleasure” (V) are highlighted in the map. It can be observed that this sequence (A-C-C-V) is the most representative chain and indicates that this activity — although practised by a single individual — enables contact and training with other athletes, which is considered by the interviewees to be important. Starting from this chain, it is possible to observe the variation that contains the consequence “exchanging experiences”, which is in total agreement with the attribute from which this chain is generated. Considering that identity can be understood and discovered by the subjects themselves in relation to others, as Dubar (1997) indicated, the representativeness of this chain of values confirms that the practice of street running serves as a venue for identity construction and reconstruction, given the importance of socialization for identity construction.

The possibility of performing the activity collectively results in social interaction, which seems to be fundamental for practitioners to feel good. “Feeling good” results in the value of “pleasure”, as illustrated by the following statement by one interviewee:

The team for me today is everything. (...) we go every Sunday; we arrange to meet here at the [university], at the entrance, everyone together, everyone encouraging each other, talking about training and so on, and there are also trips that the team arranges for us to go on. If it weren't for the team, I don't know. (Interviewee 1, male).

Starting from the same attribute of “collective practice”, a chain is formed that links to the consequence of “feeling good”, which in turn has as a consequence — according to the interviewees — a better “quality of life”, which in turn generates “health”, which then culminates in the value of “achievement”, thus forming a sequence (A-C-C-C-C-V) that at a higher level of abstraction indicates that the runners feel fulfilled by the quality of life and health afforded by street running. A comment by Interviewee 2 illustrates this abstraction:

I believe that in addition to doing something that gives me pleasure, I'm preventing future health problems. It has been shown by science that running is one of the best remedies [...]; it would be a personal achievement for me to be able to see my grandchildren and my children healthy, who knows, running with them one day, right?! (Interviewee 2, male).

Another prominent ladder is a sequence (A-C-C-V) that starts from “flexible time/location” (A), then leads to “contact with nature” (C), which links to “feeling good” (C), and finally to “pleasure” (V). The fact that the runners can choose the best time to train and choose different environments, such as dirt roads, hilly locations, or lowlands, and the ease of practising the sport even when they are in other cities (whether for reasons related to work, study, or leisure) means that they often come in contact with nature, e.g., with wooded environments, and different terrains. As this study indicates, this contact leads the runners to feel good, ridding them of stress and improving their disposition:

I like contact with nature, so I find it pleasant to run near a wooded area; I like this contact with nature [...]; it gives peace of mind (Interviewee 3, female).

Accordingly, this sensation provides the runners pleasure. It is important to mention that this ladder has a variation that includes the consequence “exchanging experiences”, thus forming the sequence “flexible time/location” (A), which leads to “contact with nature” (C), which links to “feeling good” (C), then to “exchanging experiences” (C), and lastly to “pleasure” (V).

Another important sequence (A-C-C-C-C-V) is the following: “flexible time/location” (A) – “contact with nature” (C) – “feeling good” (C) – “quality of life” (C) – “health” (C) – “achievement” (V). Through this sequence, it can be observed that the flexible time/location, the contact with nature, and the sensation of feeling good lead to quality of life, which, as a consequence, generates health. Health for these runners leads to the value of “achievement”, as several respondents report: “because I want to have time to achieve all my dreams” (Interviewee 4, female). That is, when participating in street running, the chance to feel fulfilled is high. The interviewees believe that from these relationships it will be possible to achieve the desired objective and that thus they will be prepared for the challenges of everyday life. Achievement (V) can be understood as the personal success obtained through attaining quality of life, health, feeling good about regularly practising the sport as a result of increased performance, frequent contact with nature, and interacting with other runners.

Additionally, “achievement” (the value indicated by the respondents at the highest level of abstraction) provides indications that reinforce how the sporting activity contributes to the identity construction process from the viewpoint of consumption related to sporting activities. For Sirgy (1982), the identity of consumers is defined by the way in which they perceive their own attributes and how they evaluate their own qualities (self-concept). This process involves the descriptions that consumers make of themselves using the defining characteristics of the social groups to which they belong. The following statement by one interviewee strongly supports this view.

(...) you take the routes that someone else did (...), and then you want to do that route better (...); I feel like I am a star [referring to being able to reduce the time to complete a route]. (...) I feel that all my effort has been rewarded. (Interviewee 5, female).

Last, it is important to highlight the ladder “individual practice” (A), “not having to reach a target” (C), “independence in the activity” (C) and “pleasure” (V). Although this ladder did not surpass the cut-off point 4, it was incorporated into the map due because of its contribution to the identity discussion. This chain of thought contrasts with the dominant chain of the map by indicating that because street running is individual street runners do not have defined targets and therefore can follow their own pace and are not required to depend on others to practice. They also neither influence the outcomes of other runners nor are influenced by them, thereby achieving the desired end state: pleasure.

5 Final considerations

In contemporary society, the relationships between consumption and identity have become more significant as individuals search for new identities in their relationships with various human practices, including consumption. Therefore, it is important to understand the relationships between identity and consumption. This study emphasized the contributions of the means-end chain theory to understanding the relationship between attributes-consequences-values and the identities of participants in street running, a sport that has been gaining followers in Brazil. The study reveals that consumption is an element of identity reconstructions and tensions and that personal values are relevant to understanding consumption behaviour.

The study also reveals that the decision to participate in street running is linked to short- and long-term views. It is a runner lifestyle (short-term importance), which involves contact with nature, social interaction, and increased performance when enjoying what this sporting activity can offer (long-term importance), which is linked to quality of life, motivation to continue, and health for attaining values such as happiness, pleasure, freedom, and achievement.

The analysis of the hierarchical value map shows that the attributes that draw most attention from runners are “flexible time/location” and “collective practice”, from which the dominant chains begin. It is worth re-emphasizing the strong relationship (the highest identified in the map) between the consequence “social interaction” and the consequence “feeling good”. It is also worth noting that this

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latter consequence is of substantial importance for street runners because it is directly or indirectly linked to all of the attributes and other consequences and indirectly leads to the most important value: achievement.

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