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SPORTS MARKETING AND ROAD RACING IN BRAZIL: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SCENARIO

Mariana Helena da Silva Modesto de Abreu
Educator at UNIVALI and bachelor's degree in Physical Education from UNIASSELVI

Jonas Modesto de Abreu
PhD in Social Sciences from UFSCar and prfessor at UFCAT

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Abstract: This study, which falls under the research area of "Sports Management and Marketing," presents the marketing strategies of service providers and companies that supply sports products, especially running shoes, aimed at the consumer market of street runners, the sports activity that has grown the most in Brazil in the last decade, especially among women. The research identified five different consumer profiles, divided into two consumer groups. The first group consists of beginners and so-called "weekend runners," who are runners who have not yet entered 21- and 42-km races and who see street running as a low-cost sport that can preserve health, promote a sense of well-being, and improve aesthetics. The second group consists of regular competitors, semi-professional and professional athletes, who form an important social and consumer identity group interested in consuming services and products aimed at constantly improving athletic performance.
Keywords: Sports marketing; Consumption; Road running.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to address the marketing strategies used by service providers and sports product companies, especially tennis, aimed at street runners in Brazil, with a view to satisfying the consumption demands of practitioners of the sport that has grown the most among Brazilians in the last decade. This focus on topics such as sports marketing, sports business management, sports consumers, and the entrepreneurial process brings the research closer to the area of concentration called "Sports management and marketing."

The choice of theme relates to the fact that the rapid growth of street running in Brazil over the last decade, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, has transformed this sport into an extremely profitable and promising business activity. To get an idea of the recent growth of street running in Brazil, a survey called "Por dentro do Corre" (Inside Running), conducted last year by Olympikus and Box 1824, found that there are approximately 13 million street runners in our country.

The online survey, which interviewed 2,000 street runners from all Brazilian regions, social classes, and ethnicities, shows that today, with 12% of participants, street running is the fourth most practiced sport in Brazil, trailing only walking (39%), weight training (23%), and soccer, with 15%. The data indicates that 51% of runners live in the Southeast, 20% in the Northeast, 15% in the South, and 7% in the North and Midwest, respectively. Men account for 58% and women 42%. Women represent the fastest growing gender among street runners. According to the survey, 56% of female respondents started running less than a year ago. Most runners, 46%, are between the ages of 25 and 45, 42% are 45 or older, and only 12% are between the ages of 18 and 24. Another noteworthy finding is related to socioeconomic factors: 49% of runners have purchasing power that places them in social class "B," 36% in class "C," and 15% in class "A" ("Street running already attracts 13 million Brazilians, says survey," 2024).

In terms of the habits and lifestyles of street runners in Brazil, the survey shows that 84% of runners cover an average distance of 9.2 km per week and 23% participate in competitions. People who run to take care of their physical and mental health represent 83% of respondents ("Street running already attracts 13 million Brazilians, says survey," 2024).

At first glance, these data only represent the intention to support arguments about the growth of street running in Brazil and its potential as a business model. However, when observed more carefully, they also present possibilities for seeking specific business niches and marketing strategies aimed at selected profiles within the general group of street runners. The perception of the existence of specific identity groups within Brazilian street runners justifies considering a set of sports marketing strategies aimed at both beginners and "weekend runners" who seek comfortable sports equipment at good prices and in line with fashion trends, as well as amateur, semi-professional, and professional athletes interested in products that enable them to achieve increasingly satisfactory competitive results (ZENONE, 2023).

In this sense, it is worth asking whether there is, in fact, a market demand in Brazil for sports services and products aimed at a diverse range of street runners?

If the answer is yes, we are faced with the main objective of this article and the information base that will support it, which is to attempt to demonstrate that there are currently campaigns and marketing strategies aimed at specific profiles of consumers of products for street runners, mainly in the running shoe market, achieving very satisfactory commercial results in our country.

Thus, in addressing this specific issue, the intention is to demonstrate throughout this text that there are currently at least five consumer profiles among street runners, divided into two distinct groups: beginners and so-called "weekend runners," who make up the first group, and regular competitors, semi-professional athletes, and professionals, who make up the second.

Apparently, consumers in the first group are being satisfactorily served by products tailored to their needs for street running in our country, while the second group, more integrated into the "universe" of competitions, has more sophisticated and specific demands, including the support of a team of professionals specialized in sports health and physical training for athletes. It is in this field of demands that we see a greater variety of gaps in the services offered to street runners, especially in the field of training methodologies to achieve performance and progressive results, especially in long-distance races, a situation that opens up space for new sports marketing agendas aimed at serving runners interested in improving their performance.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In addressing the national survey sponsored by Olympikus in partnership with Box 1824, which outlined the social profile of Brazilian runners, the article in the "Sports" section of the newspaper "O Globo," published on February 2, 2025, signed by Tatiana Furtado, shows that 71% of Brazilian runners interviewed, concerned about their mental health after the isolation phase caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, started running in 2021 (FURTADO, 2025).

As Rocha and Castanharo (2019) demonstrate in their comprehensive guide for runners of all levels, street runners generally start practicing the sport for reasons related to health in various aspects, a sense of well-being, or simply for aesthetic reasons. The possibility of traveling and exploring new places was also pointed out by 19.8% of beginner runners in a survey conducted by the Ticket Sports platform last year ("Street races grew 29% in 2024 in Brazil," 2025). Thus, after overcoming this first stage and developing the daily habit of running, runners begin to venture into 5 km competitions, then, usually encouraged by other competitors and seeking new challenges, they begin to aim for 10 km races, followed by the 21 km half marathon in the intermediate category, and finally, the greatest challenge of all, the 42 km marathon.

For this reason, Furtado (2025) points out that between the 2000s and the end of the last decade, road running, initially seen as a purely amateur sport, gained prestige and relevance as a professional activity in Brazil. Races of various distances spread rapidly throughout the country, and competitive performance became a key factor.

According to a survey conducted by the Brazilian Association of Road Race Organizers (ABRAC), the national road racing market, which had been negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic at a time when it was in the midst of rapid expansion, has begun to grow again. Last year, the number of events held in the country grew by 29% compared to 2023, as shown in an article published by the sports website Máquina do Esporte on April 8, 2025 ("Road races grew 29% in 2024 in Brazil," 2025).

Data from ABRAC also show that São Paulo was the state with the highest number of road races in 2024, with 734, representing a 33.45% increase over the previous year. Maranhão, which had only one race in 2023, had seven the following year, a 600% increase. Tocantins, which had not held any road races in 2023, registered 7 races in 2024. Other states that saw notable growth were: Rio Grande do Norte, with a 120% increase, Goiás, with 76%, and Mato Grosso, with 64%. Only the states of Roraima and Amapá did not have official road races in 2023 and 2024 ("Road races grew 29% in 2024 in Brazil," 2025).

It also seems important to mention that, although the survey conducted by Olympikus in partnership with Box 1824 shows that last year female runners represented a lower percentage than male runners, 42% versus 58%, another survey, called "Profile of the Brazilian Athlete 2024," conducted by the "Ticket Sports" app, with the intention of assessing the social profile of buyers of registrations for street running events in Brazil, revealed a significant preponderance of women in the consumer market for *tickets* to participate or compete in street running events in our country. It is also important to note that road running is ranked as the fourth most practiced sport by Brazilians only when we analyze the percentages in general, because when we stratify by gender, we find that road running is the preferred sport of Brazilian women. In 2024, women accounted for 87% of purchases of registrations for road races in Brazil (KÜNSCH, 2025).

Brazilian road races have grown significantly in recent years. According to a survey conducted by a partnership between ABRAC, the São Silvestre Organizing Committee , and Ticket Sports, in 2023, approximately 150,000 road races were held in Brazil (MARINHO, 2024). Considering only marathons, according to information published on December 5, 2024, by the website Contra Relógio, 42 km races saw an increase of 10,000 runners compared to 2023. This includes only the six races used for the "Brazilian Marathon Runner Ranking": Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Curitiba, São Paulo, Brasília, and Salvador (LOURENÇO, 2024a).

In general, almost all national 42 km competitions saw an increase in participation in 2024 compared to the previous year. For a number of attractive reasons, the marathons in Florianópolis, with 115% growth compared to 2023, Jurerê Internacional, 79%, and Monumental de Brasília, 140%, among the races that do not serve as parameters for the national ranking, had growth well above the average. Last year, five new marathons were added to the national road race calendar: Ribeirão Preto, Cascavel, New Balance Porto Alegre, Londrina, and Pomerode. It is estimated that 40,000 people ran 42 km races in our country in 2024 (LOURENÇO, 2024a).

However, in addition to participating in marathons held in Brazil, many Brazilians participate in 42 km races abroad, especially athletes seeking to conquer the coveted "Mandala das Majors." As mentioned by Xavier Filho (2018), the "Majors" are the largest and best-organized marathons in the world. Until last year, there were six marathons: Boston, Chicago, New York, Berlin, Tokyo, and London. In 2025, with the inclusion of the Australian marathon in Sydney in the list of the largest, there are now seven. Runners who complete the seven most relevant international races, in addition to individual participation medals, receive, upon crossing the finish line, a mandala with the logo of each of the largest marathons.

Many marathon runners also participate in international races considered charming, such as the Paris Marathon in France and the Disney Park Marathon in the USA, as well as other very popular races in South America, such as the Buenos Aires Marathon, famous for its flat and fast course, and the Santiago Marathon, highly praised when it coincides with the coldest temperatures in Chile. According to Lourenço (2024b), around 8,000 Brazilians participated in marathons abroad last year. There were 1,608 in Berlin, 1,561 in Santiago, 1,500 in Buenos Aires, 1,400 in Paris, 829 in New York, 660 in Boston, 586 in London, 469 in Valencia, 346 in Tokyo, 250 in Amsterdam, 240 at Disney, 100 in Santiago, and approximately 500 in other international marathons.

Following the same growth dynamics experienced by road races in the post-COVID-19 pandemic phase, the demand for physical education professionals who work as coaches or directors of sports advisory services focused on preparing runners has also grown dramatically in Brazil. To cite a single case, Marinho (2024) describes the example of "Runners Club de Corrida," a consultancy in Salvador specializing in performance and high achievement in road races. Created in 2008, at the time of the report it had approximately 1,800 members, with monthly revenues of around R$ 190,000.

To understand the scale of the market potential for sports consultancies specializing in road running in Brazil, it is worth noting that the consultancy we are using as a case study is located in a city in the northeast, a region where only 20% of Brazilian runners are located, according to a survey by Olympikus in partnership with Box 1824. Thus, as demonstrated by Siqueira (2014), road running is a relevant sports marketing tool, an "open window" of opportunity for companies and professionals associated with the demands of a huge consumer market for products and services related to road running, as we will see in the second part of this article.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Although the initial intention was to base the article on the methodological technique of **bibliographic research**, using books as the main references for approaching the topic (RICHARDSON, 1999), the insignificant number of works dealing with sports marketing involving road races in Brazil led the research to use **secondary data** published in online news (OLIVEIRA, 2002). This is a set of studies conducted between 2023 and 2025, among which the following stand out: the Olympikus study in partnership with Box 1824, the "Profile of the Brazilian Athlete 2024" study, conducted by the Ticket Sports app, and the surveys conducted by the Brazilian Association of Street Race Organizers (ABRAC) and the São Silvestre Organizing Committee, among others. Thus, the methodology highlights **quantitative research** (LAKATOS and MARCONI, 1992), focused on numerical data, whose statistical references, extracted from secondary sources, with bibliographic support, will guide this investigation covering sports marketing strategies and the consumption behaviors of street runners in our country.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Addressing the central focus of this article, which approaches sports marketing from a strategic perspective, exploring both sports marketing and the use of sports as a marketing tool (MORGAN, 2007), it is possible to identify five consumer profiles among Brazilian street runners today. These profiles fall into two distinct groups of consumption potential. The first group consists of runners in the initial stages who have not yet ventured into distances equal to or greater than a half marathon, and the so-called "weekend runners," who run for reasons involving health, well-being, and aesthetics. The second group consists of regular competitors, semi-professional and professional athletes, runners who seek to improve their performance.

In one of the marketing strategy contexts described by Zenone (2023), in general terms, the members of the first group are part of a consumer market segment that, to a certain extent, still fits the popular belief that road running is a cheap, democratic sport accessible to all. The idea that all you need to run is a pair of sneakers still prevails. It is important to note that, according to a national survey sponsored by Olympikus in partnership with Box 1824, conducted in 2024, at least 84% of road runners in Brazil fit this consumer profile ("Road running already attracts 13 million Brazilians, says survey," 2024).

Given this potential for market opportunities, there are currently excellent and very effective traditional and digital sports marketing strategies aimed at the consumer profile characterized by beginner and "weekend" runners (KOTLER, KARTAJAYA, and SETIAWAN, 2017).

Although Olympikus, with 13.5%, ranks only fourth among the favorite sports brands of the public that prefers social media to search for information about the sports universe, behind Adidas, which led the ranking with 18.4%, Nike, with 17.7%, and Asics, with 16.7%, its sports marketing strategies and actions involving the sale of running shoes seem to be the most successful case in our country. In this survey conducted by ABRAC in 2024, in which brands such as Fila, Mizuno, New Balance, Track & Field, Authen, Puma, and Hoka were also mentioned, consumers who claim that social media is their main source of information about sports products are between 15 and 25 years old, an age group that in the year the data was collected corresponded to only 11% of street runners in Brazil ("Street races grew 29% in 2024 in Brazil," 2025).

According to research at the time, until 1997, the Brazilian brand Olympikus was considered a producer of ugly and poor-quality sneakers. According to data provided by Strava, Olympikus' "Corre" line of sneakers, developed especially for street runners, is now the most consumed in Brazil, thanks to a repositioning of the company's marketing strategy. Created in 2018, the "Corre" line offers comfortable, attractive, high-performance sneakers at an affordable price, making them an alternative to major international brands (KNOPLOCH, 2025).

In terms of marketing and market actions, between 2019 and 2024, Vulcabras, which in addition to holding the Olympikus license, also controls the Mizuno and Under Armour brands in Brazil, spent more than R$ 600 million on research and development of sneakers for street runners. While Olympikus takes approximately four months to produce a product and bring it to market, its international competitors have a cycle of more than one year. Between January and September 2023, of the nearly 15 million sports sneakers sold by Vulcabras, more than 50% were Olympikus ("Olympikus' strategy to become one of the leading running shoe brands," 2024).

With a strategic vision in the running shoe market, Olympikus recently entered the identity context of sports marketing. Seeking to insert itself into the inclusive context of social minorities in sports, particularly in street racing, combining running, culture, and representation, on June 28, 2025, at an event held in São Paulo, Olympikus officially joined the collective "Corre Kilombo," an identity group that reframes street running as a territory of resistance, affection, and black representation (CÂNDIDO and OLIVEIRA, 2025).

Knowing that last year women represented 42% of street runners in Brazil ("Street running already attracts 13 million Brazilians, says survey," 2024), and that the survey "Profile of the Brazilian Athlete 2024" showed that they are the fastest growing gender among practitioners of the sport, accounting for 87% of registration *tickets* for official races (KÜNSCH, 2025), it is clear that, in terms of identity, there is still a market opportunity to offer sneakers that identify with women's causes. After all, the aforementioned survey also showed that road running is the preferred sport among Brazilian women.

Taking into account that the Olympikus survey in partnership with Box 1824 showed that, in socioeconomic terms, 49% of runners have the purchasing power of social class "B," 36% of class "C," and 15% of class "A" ("Street running already attracts 13 million Brazilians, says research," 2024), it is clear that street runners in Brazil have extremely high consumption potential. Everything suggests that the market sector that has best exploited the consumption potential of female runners is sportswear, especially women's outfits that combine sportiness and elegance, consisting of shorts and tops. In this field of marketing strategies, the campaigns by "Track & Field" and "Authen," with a proposal for more sophisticated and elegant women's clothing, apparently manage to gain competitive advantages over the big brands, which are typically sports brands.

When we look at the data on the extremely high consumption of women's registrations for official Brazilian races and the aggressive marketing actions aimed at sportswear for female runners, especially outfits consisting of shorts and tops, it is clear that women are currently the mainstay of the market for products offered to street runners in Brazil.

Before delving into the issues surrounding the effectiveness of sports marketing actions aimed at the agents that make up our second consumer group, composed of regular, semi-professional, and professional competitors, it is important to mention that, in the dynamics pointed out by Ribeiro (2021) in his book "Personalidade e Pertencimento" (Personality and Belonging), everything indicates that there is a mass effect acting on the individuality of street runners: they form a very peculiar social and consumer identity group, with running, trips to compete, and products for runners being their favorite subjects.

After venturing into initial competitions involving distances of 5 and 10 km, street runners begin to set themselves greater challenges, first aiming for the 21 km half marathon, currently the most coveted race among Brazilian runners, and then the greatest challenge of all, the 42 km marathon, including international races, among which the "Majors" stand out.

When they join the select group that makes up the second list of runner profiles identified in this article, runners realize that running requires much more than just a pair of comfortable, fashionable, and affordable sneakers. This second consumer group, which represented about 23% of street runners last year ("Street running already attracts 13 million Brazilians, says survey," 2024), seeks sports equipment and services aimed exclusively at improving competitive performance.

Trying to break into the market segment targeted at these consumer profiles, after dominating the market for running shoes for beginners and "weekend runners," in the first half of 2024 Olympikus launched the "Corre Grafeno," a "technological shoe" containing a foam that combines carbon and graphene to make it lighter than the brand's other models. Its sports marketing strategy targeted a more demanding consumer audience in terms of sports performance, as well as the internationalization of the Brazilian brand, attempting to compete, in terms of price, with major international brands, among which Adidas and Nike stand out ("Olympikus' strategy to become one of the leading running shoe brands," 2024).

However, for this second identity group, which consumes almost exclusively sophisticated Garmin watches and requires the services of professionals specialized in sports health and the physical and mental preparation of athletes, the best sports marketing strategy, in terms of the high-performance shoe market, lies in the ability of major brands to promote the shoes worn by the super athletes who have climbed the podium of the seven major marathons of the year, the Majors. In this sense, Adidas' "Adizero Adios Pro 4" and Nike's "Zoom X Alphafly 3" are currently unbeatable in the purchasing preferences of Brazilians who make up the second group of consumers of sports equipment for street runners.

In the sportswear sector, where we have already highlighted the predominance of female consumption, there are no significant differences in purchasing preferences between members of the first and second groups of the . However, there are still a number of gaps in the provision of services aimed at the athletic preparation of runners interested in improving their performance in 21 and 42 km races, a fact that opens up space for future sports marketing actions, especially in the field of training methodologies (NEWSHOLME, LEECH, and DUESTER, 2006), but that would be a topic for a new study.

CONCLUSION

The research showed that women are the main consumers in the market for products aimed at street runners in Brazil. Sports marketing strategies, especially those aimed at the consumer audience that makes up the first group, have been quite satisfactory and effective. In this first group of consumer profiles, especially with regard to the running shoe market, a gap was detected in sports marketing strategies focused on female identity, with significant opportunity for new and profitable businesses. The second group consumes more expensive and sophisticated products, appropriate for runners seeking better and consistent competitive performance. This second group fits into a broader context of consumption, mainly of services related to athletic training to compete at a high level of performance, with progressive improvement. Apparently, among the members of this second group, there is significant consumer demand for training methodologies that lead to improved performance in long-distance events. However, this finding would require further scientific investigation, opening the door for new research in the future.

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