
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Brendan Dwyer's primary focus is the unique behaviour of sport fans and consumers with a distinct focus on fantasy sport participation, team loyalty, and media consumption. More recently, his focus has evolved to include the irrational behaviour and organisational impacts of sport fan emotion, ticket purchasing, and rituals/superstitions. He has articles published in the *Journal of Sport Management*, *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, *Sport Management Review*, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, *Journal of Sport Behaviour*, *Marketing Management Journal*, and the *International Journal of Sport Management*.

The focus of this special issue in the *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing* is on the marketing and management of niche sports. Niche sports have been defined as those sports that are not mainstream and do not appeal to a mass audience (Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006). These sports can be found at the professional, collegiate, amateur, and even participatory levels of sport and may vary based on region or country. For instance, soccer is a niche spectator sport within North America but remains the most popular spectator sport in nearly every other part of the world.

In addition, there is much variation in the scope and attributes between and within niche sports, but the common thread among them is the consistent lack the mass appeal. Participants and supporters of these niche sports usually represent a niche demographic or sub-segment of sport consumers. As a result, strategies and theories of mainstream sport marketing and management most often do not apply to niche sports.

It is the goal of this special issue to serve as a calling for more research in the area of niche sport marketing and management. In addition, it will serve as a foundation for literature reviews, measurement options, and hopefully a resource for future inquiry. Six papers were accepted for publication based on a number of factors but mainly for topic relevance and quality of research.

In the first paper, authors Greenwell, Greenhalgh, and Stover examined the spectator expectations, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions of niche sport consumers. In particular, this study utilised samples of arena football and indoor soccer fans. The results suggest direct experiences are predictive of intentions, and familiarity with the sport and the level of competition drive spectator expectations.

The second paper was authored by researchers Warren and Brownlee, and it extended previous brand community work to niche sports. Specifically, the study examined the community integration and behavioural intentions of minor league soccer fans through online and offline media formats. The results suggest brand community integration is

stronger among online members, and higher levels of community integration yielded higher intentions to attend future games.

Researchers Hambrick, Simmons, and Mahoney authored the third article triathlete perceptions of the inter-role conflict between leisure, work, and family roles. This qualitative piece explored the financial commitments, time restraints, and gender stereotypes of 13 triathletes. The findings provide insight into the participants' use of support systems and role management strategies to overcome contemporary obstacles.

The fourth article also examined niche sport participants. In this paper, Eagleman examined attitudes toward women-only distance races and motivation and commitment differences between those who have participated such races and those who have not. The results suggest both marked differences and similarities in the attitudes toward women-only races, yet few differences in motivation, commitment, and demographics between the two groups.

Guided by Funk and James' (2001, 2006) psychological commitment model (PCM), the authors of the fifth paper, Mahoney, Hambrick, Svensson, and Zimmerman, examined the promotional use of YouTube for the following five sports: slacklining, adventure racing, cyclocross, and parkour. Niche sports often do not have the budgets to utilise traditional forms of television broadcasting; thus, these sports use online video and social media to attract and retain followers. The results of this study suggest niche sports are primarily using online platforms to build relationships with consumers, and thus, utilising the awareness and attraction phases of the PCM framework.

The sixth and final paper investigated the differences in perceptions of niche sport attributes between highly identified and lesser identified minor league baseball fans. In particular, the study examined which attributes best predicted consumption behaviour of fans. The results suggested significant differences between groups as it related to affordability, player similarity, and star power. Meanwhile, accessibility was a significant predictor of consumption for both groups.

Overall, this special issue hopes to provide a strong foundation for future research in the area of niche sport marketing and management. The literature to this point and within this special issue resoundingly indicates the importance of separate theory, strategies, and tactics for marketing and managing niche sports. Simply put, niche sports cannot borrow directly from the general sport management literature focused on mainstream sport. Whether it is with respect to sponsorship (Greenhalgh and Greenwell, 2013), fan related attributes (Greenhalgh et al., 2011), spectator expectations, or participant motives (Cohen et al., 2012), too many distinct differences have been found between mainstream and niche sports. Thus, further examination is highly suggested.

References

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