
Editorial

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1 Introduction

Sports are undeniably big business. Its 2019 global revenue was over 129 billion US dollars, double what it was a decade ago (Statista, 2018), and growing much faster than the global GDP (Collignon and Sultan, 2014). It is obvious that marketing has played a central role in filling the stadia with participants and viewers, generating the licensed merchandise sales and the media rights revenue. The role of marketing in sports, however, extends far beyond the obvious, business, function.

When viewed as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value” (American Marketing Association Board of Directors, 2013), marketing can be understood as much more than a mediator of exchanging value that leads to revenue generation. It brings together people, places, organisations, and products around a wide spectrum of sporting activities to deliver societal value through, not only health and enjoyment but also by providing people and communities with one of the most commonly used bases for individual and group identity construction. Thus, it delivers value “for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (American Marketing Association Board of Directors, 2013) as it supports and enhances the socio-cultural significance of sports which is to promote a healthier life-style, to provide safe and fun activities for people, families and communities to enjoy together, to present positive role models to the youth, and to foster values such as striving for excellence, being gracious in victory as well as in defeat, team spirit, and fair play.

Marketing science supports the activities of athletes, sporting clubs, and their governing institutions by providing them with knowledge gained from other industries and contexts; models, theories, and techniques which they can apply to set and further their strategic objectives. At the same time, sports marketing scholars are in a uniquely privileged position: they study a complex mix of local and global commercial and not for profit organisations. These organisations operate in a web of relationships with places – communities, local and state authorities – local and international institutions, the press and local and global media, and large numbers of people involved with them in a variety of roles – athletes, parents and families of aspiring athletes, coaches, fans, volunteers, employees, members, donors, sponsors, and executives. Ethnicities and nationalities, politics, religions, socio-economic classes, genders, and races are also factors affecting the relationships between people and sports and they are reflected in the alliances or rivalries between clubs, fans, and communities. Complexity and the unparalleled ability

of sports to generate the strongest of emotions and the most intense forms of attachment and animosity make sports marketing, not only a fascinating field of study, but, most importantly, one that can provide valuable insights that can be generalised and extrapolated to other sectors of the economy.

It was this wide-ranging problematisation that led to the call for papers for this Special Issue of the International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing. As sports marketing are approaching its maturity as a sub-field of the marketing discipline the time is ripe to examine its current theoretical, contextual and methodological focus, to explore the latest advances in its well-established topics and uncover its emerging themes.

2 Overview of the revisited sports marketing agenda

The aim of this special issue is to explore the multifaceted nature of the socio-cultural and economic value of sports through the lenses of state-of-the-art techniques for creating, communicating, and delivering it, and to highlight the diverse methods for studying it. It is entitled ‘Sports marketing agenda revisited’ because it focuses on the theoretical and methodological advances that shape the 21st century sports marketing field. It is envisaged as a contribution towards the seamless integration of actors and actions through fresh perspectives on well-established as well as emerging themes in the field.

The papers presented in this special issue offer insights into the sport context of the most hotly debated issues in contemporary marketing thought:

- a *branding* of athletes, sports, teams, events, and places with an emphasis on the structure, content and context of the brands as held by consumers
- b *relationship marketing* with an emphasis on the characteristics, dimensions, value and longevity of the relationships between people or sponsoring corporations and sports clubs
- c aspects of *experiential marketing* such as the nature and consequences of the emotional connections between fans and their favourite teams, athletes, sports but also events and places, or the perceived mental, physical and social benefits of actively engaging in sports
- d *consumer behaviour* with an emphasis on the motives for participation and recurring participation in competitive as well as recreational sporting activities
- e *social marketing* and the effects of sport marketing on public health, patriotism and the way people relate to cities.

A variety of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods are showcased in this Special Issue, namely:

- 1 *large-scale online surveys* via a national database owned by an independent survey sampling company
- 2 *small-scale online surveys* via a convenience sample of the researchers’ Facebook friends

- 3 *traditional pen and paper questionnaires* administered to event participants or through the clubs after an initial phone contact
- 4 *focus groups* comprising participants recruited through online surveys promoted via banner advertising, social media and content marketing on popular sports sites.

The researchers whose work is featured in this special issue also demonstrate how sport marketing can be cross-fertilised by fields as disparate as biostatistics and political science by employing methodologies such as survival analysis of historical data of sponsorship agreements. Finally, the value of conceptual papers is not to be underestimated. The contributors of this special issue also push the agenda forward through *systematic literature reviews* and *critical literature analyses* enhanced with *expert judgement data* to develop conceptual frameworks which are ready to be empirically tested. So, the methodological agenda can be summarised as follows: *technology is fast changing sports marketing research without, however, replacing tried and tested methods.*

The king of sports, *football* (with its variants such as *futsal*), dominates this special issue. This is understandable, given that over 265 million people, an astounding 4% of the world's population, play the sport and another 5 million people act as referees in teams and national leagues registered with the sport's governing body the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) (PledgeSports, 2017). Its capital expenditure, reached over 235 million pounds in the UK Premier and Football League alone (Barnard et al., 2017) and showed over 5 billion pounds in revenues in 2018–2019 (Taylor and Conn, 2020). Even though the lockdowns and restrictions imposed because of the coronavirus pandemic will hit club revenues hard, football will still be contributing substantially to the otherwise struggling world economy. Regardless of the 2020 circumstances, the game remains a key marketing vehicle for all kinds of brands, some that are not even remotely related to sports as its eSports versions are the key tool for advertisers to reach the elusive 20–35 year old tech savvy consumer and its stars dominate the global attention market with Cristiano Ronaldo, “the most followed human on Instagram” (Lane, 2019) with well over 100 and close to 200 social media followers in just one of his platforms (Dawson, 2018), for example, receiving about 1 million US dollars per Instagram post.

It is not, however, the only sport of interest to the authors of this special issue. The papers also deal with *Major League Baseball* (MLB), the 9th most popular sport in the world. Formerly the most popular sport in the USA but not commonly played in other continents, *baseball* and its sister game, *softball*, have in recent years seen their popularity on the rise in Japan and over 140 other countries. Currently, there are 65 million players registered to clubs or leagues belonging to the sport's international governing body, the World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) (PledgeSports, 2017). Individual amateur sports are also represented in this issue through the increasingly popular *Semi-Marathon* events, a recreational, athletic and cultural experience. The number of such events taking place in the USA alone doubled between 2012 and 2016 (Gough, 2018) and, globally, participation in long distance running events grew by 49.43% between 2008 and 2018 with over 10,000,000 participating in a variety of day and night events through historical city-centres or iconic localities (Andersen and Nikolova, 2020).

Finally, the scope of the papers is global with contributions from the *USA, Korea, Greece, and Portugal*. Through this special issue, it is yet again confirmed that “the sports industry is going to remain one of the major and most diverse businesses in the global marketplace” (Del Giudice et al., 2018).

3 A glance at the contents of this special issue

DongHun Lee, Michael Cottingham, Shannon Powers and Leeseob Maeng offer a counterintuitive look at how fans relate to their favourite teams in their paper ‘Perceived fan associations with MLB teams: bask inspite of reflected failure versus cut off reflected success’. They explore the deviant fan tendencies of basking inspite of reflected failure (BIRF) and cutting off reflected success (CORS) which have been largely ignored in empirical studies, so far. They deconstruct team identification and offer a fresh perspective on consumer behaviour (how fans associate or dissociate with professional sporting teams) through social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and affiliation theory (Murray, 1938). They demonstrate how team identification produces salient effects on various sport consumption behaviours that explain why some teams exhibit low performance but high attendance (BIRF) whilst others exhibit high performance but low attendance (CORS). Based on their analysis of 1,419 responses from participants in two data collection sites, they recommend that sport marketers who target BIRFers or CORSers need to focus on non-performance interests of fans such as star players, levels of competition, on-field management and decision-making, or retelling team history to foster fan’s psychological connection with teams.

The way fans relate to their favourite teams is also the subject of the Carla Barbosa Vieira and Bruno Sousa paper ‘The brand attachment and consumer behaviour in sports marketing contexts: the case of football fans in Portugal’. They view the team as a brand and apply classical marketing theory to analyse how brand attachment relates to other relevant variables such as brand loyalty, brand commitment, brand satisfaction and brand trust. They also show how brand attachment results in consumer emotions and brand consumption behaviour. They test their theory on 477 Portuguese football fans. Interestingly, the Portuguese have been found to begin to feel the passion for football much earlier than any other country on the continent and are thus of particular interest to sport marketers seeking to understand how to reach, attract and retain fans. They recommend that club marketing should work on the consumers’ attachment to the team because higher attachment to the team was found to generate higher trust and brand satisfaction, but also loyalty and commitment to the team.

Young Do Kim, Yukyoum Kim, Marshall J. Magnusen and Daekwan Kim explore the financial value of the fans’ attachments to the sport club in their paper ‘Relationships as strategic assets: a sport fan equity approach’. They advocate the adoption of a customer-oriented paradigm that emphasises sport fans’ as the sport organisations’ most sustainable assets. They provide a novel conceptualisation of sport fan equity (SFE), the true asset value of the present and anticipated future contributions of a sport fan to a sport team or organisation and stress the need to view the fostering of fan – team relationships as long-term investments. Their critical literature review organises, reviews, and synthesises the extant marketing and sport literatures and enhances them with expert judgement data to propose that SFE can be conceptualised in terms of relationship investment (key predictor), three core components of SFE (i.e., financial value,

behavioural value, and psychological value), and the outcome of market performance (i.e., media, sponsorship, licensing, and public investment). They argue that the long-term relationships between clubs and their fans is one of the most significant assets for sport organisations on the basis of which they can compete in today's sports marketplace. Thus, they lay the foundations for empirical investigations of SFE that can be extended and generalised to the broader customer equity (CE) construct.

Fans are but one of the sources of revenue for sport clubs. Corporate sponsorship is fast emerging as another increasingly important one. Jonathan A. Jensen and David Head apply exchange theory (McCarville and Copeland, 1994) and utilise the survival analysis methodology to the forecasting of sponsorship revenue in their paper 'An advancement in the study of marketing partnership longevity: analysing sport sponsorship survival'. They have compiled the complete history, dating back to the first one of 1971, of all sponsorship agreements regarding naming rights of sports facilities between teams belonging to the major North American sport leagues and the five major football leagues in Europe and consumer brands, airlines, financial services firms, and automakers headquartered in countries all over the world. They analyse a total of 1,870 observations and conclude that the first eight years of the sponsorship were utilised to ascertain whether the two sides would continue the relationship. After eight years, the probability for dissolution decreased until year 15. The vast majority of partnerships that were able to extend past 15 years continued for more than 20 years. Many partnerships did end during the first critical 15 years thus suggesting that some partners did not feel an equitable exchange was taking place. Several, however, developed a mutually beneficial partnership that proved to stand the test of time, and continued for more than 20 years. So, it appears that partners utilise these first 15 years to educate one another on their capabilities and the resources that each side can contribute to the relationship and develop some level of trust. The authors recommend that sport club marketers need to focus on best servicing sponsors in the early stages of the relationship.

Further to developing strong emotions towards teams and sports, people also become attached to athletes. The paper 'The structure, content and context of achieved celebrity brands: a study of footballers in their brandscapes' by Anna Zarkada and Eugenia Tzoumaka presents exploratory research which seeks to disambiguate achieved celebrity brands through an in-depth analysis of focus groups data comprising Greek fans' storytelling concerning their recollections of both on-field behaviours and publicised private moments of truth of their favourite players and narratives of their relationship with their favourite teams. Traditional branding theory is confirmed and fully contextualised. The celebrity footballer brand comprises two distinct components proposed by Keller (1993): the professional one, which includes product related associations, further distinguished into individual, organisational and contextual associations, and the personal one, which corresponds to non-product related associations and reflects the balance of a person's perceived virtues and vices. The role of the brandscape – the team or sports club the player belongs to or has most closely associated his name with – emerges as affecting the footballer's professional and personal associations both positively and negatively. The authors recommend that once the players have attained a certain level of accomplishment, brand management should focus on enhancing the individual level professional associations by emphasising their distinctiveness, leveraging the brandscape effect by stressing the player's consistent long-term contributions to the club, and strategically placing in the media carefully

selected morsels of information as pointers of sports-related virtue and accord with the brandscape to build the personal component.

Sports fans develop an attachment to sports, teams and celebrity athletes but it is the mega sports events that familiarise them with, and often lead to the development of an attachment to places. Ilias Kapareliotis and Katerina Voutsina in their paper 'The role of patriotism in the city-brand-sport-event relationship', reviews the abundant city branding literature with an emphasis on the impact of mega sport events on it. They investigate how city branding and mega sport events contribute to patriotism and suggest that patriotic feelings of citizens are expected to further develop and intensify during a sports event hosted by their city. Moreover, the event spectators who visit the host city also develop feelings towards the city. Their systematic review of the literature culminates in a conceptual framework depicting how the feelings developed in the context of a mega sport event might have a lasting impact on the architectural design of the city itself in order to accommodate potential inhabitants who were mega sport event spectators. The authors recommend that marketing strategies could combine the enhanced patriotic feelings of the residents and those of people involved as spectators or visitors of the host city during a mega sports event to develop a city brand that attracts new residents.

People do not just watch sports, however. They also participate by playing or by coaching others how to play. This nexus is the topic of the Dina Alexandra Marques Miragaia and Francisco César Pereira Monteiro Guedes paper, 'Perceived motivation in football/futsal practice according to players and coaches approaches: a tool of strategic management'. Through a questionnaire survey given to 513 players and 206 coaches, the study plots the profile of football/futsal players relative to their motivation to play and compares it to the coaches' perceptions of the players' motivation. Their analysis demonstrates that the players market comprises five distinct segments, each requiring a different marketing approach by team marketers to attract. Each segment also needs different handling by the coaches so that the team retains players. Coaches, however, do not really seem to understand the players' motivation so, their contribution to the satisfaction of players is not optimal. This might hinder the clubs' potential to retain players. The authors highlight the clubs' social responsibility to encourage young people to maintain a regular sport activity through more efficient marketing.

Finally, the Konstantinos Koronios, Panagiotis E. Dimitropoulos, Athanasios Kriemadis, John Douvis and Andreas Papadopoulos paper 'Determinants of the intention to participate in semi-marathons events' explores the push and pull motives for an active lifestyle and recurring participation in running events through the perceptions of a random sample of 268 participants to a mountain semi-marathon which took place in Southern Greece. The knowledge gained can be used to efficiently promote a specific sport event or the sport as a way of life. Their study highlights that, despite gender differences, perceived physical, mental and emotional health as well as event characteristics such as its attractiveness and sportscape is what matters to participants. The participation intention in future running events was also positively correlated with physical and mental health, attractiveness of the event, socialising, and the sport event's destination elements. Interestingly, their findings concur with the analyses of the importance of branding that fosters consumers' attachment to the sport, the organisation, and the destination found in other papers in this special issue.

4 Conclusions

Since the conception of this Special Issue, a lot has unexpectedly changed in the world and sports are one of the most affected sectors of our socioeconomic life. Even though revenue growth of the total e-commerce sport and outdoor segment (sport clothing, shoes and equipment) is expected to decrease from 25.5% in 2018 to 18.9% in 2020 and forecasted to drop more, as a result of COVID-19, revenue will continue to grow. User penetration is calculated at 8.9% in 2020 and expected to grow to 15.4% by 2024. What is important, however, is that 36.4% of the active sport participants are in the 25–34 years old segment that is people in their most productive years, young parents and the leaders of tomorrow (Statista, 2020). Money is not all that counts, however. During the Great Lockdown of 2020, it was walking, jogging, running and hiking that kept millions of people worldwide healthy and sane. As countries are gradually coming out of the lockdown and sports are gradually restarting, it is marketing that will bring people back to the stadia and train them in the new ways of participating safely. We offer the knowledge gained through the studies in this volume as a set of state-of-the-art tools with which to deal with the new realities.

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