

Sport marketing's past, present and future; an introduction to the special issue on contemporary issues in sports marketing

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In 2015, the global sport industry was estimated to be worth US \$145 billion which accounts for over 3% of the world's economic activity (PWC, 2011). Adding to this the total estimated worth of the blooming esports industry (reported to soon reach US \$1 billion according to CNN, 2016), and the projected growth in particular markets, such as China and India, the sports industry appears to have cemented its value and potential around the world, while differentiating itself from the wider service and entertainment industries. Combining its economic impact with its socio-cultural importance in people's lives and in local and wider communities, it is of little surprise that academics have been increasingly interested in studying the sport industry, including its particular functions and peculiarities.

The origins of sport marketing

Marketing was one of the first topics to attract sport academics' attention, based on its close relationship with revenue generating activities, for example ticket and merchandise sales, and television coverage. As such sport marketing was originally viewed as a tool to increase sales and assist in the commercial activities of sport organisations and individuals. In 1979 Parkhouse and Ulrich wrote about the emerging, exciting and novel, at that time, potential cross-discipline that was in need of theoretical development and scientific inquiry, as well as of well-informed and capable professionals who would apply this new knowledge in practice. In their article sport marketing was presented next to merchandising and sales as a developing sport-related area, which is nonetheless regarded as a mere commercial promotional tool. A few years later Meenaghan (1983) flipped the discussion and suggested widening the marketing communications mix by arguing that commercial sponsorship can be considered as one of its elements. Sport marketing was no longer presented as a commercial tool, but instead as a wider umbrella of promotional elements that encapsulates aspects such as commercial sponsorship, advertising and publicity. While the words 'sport marketing' are not mentioned in his study, investigating the sponsorship of sports or the arts is the main theme of the article which is still cited as a key source for expanding the marketing communications mix and paving the way for future research on the topic. As the studies of Roberts and colleagues and Tsordia and colleagues in this issue demonstrate, sport sponsorship is a multifaceted topic with new aspects and previously uncovered implications being investigated to this day.

Also in 1983, Mullin's article unequivocally placed sports marketing in the spotlight. It is in his work that the importance of sport marketing is discussed in detail while presenting its three distinctive types; marketing to promote fan interest, marketing to promote sport participation, and marketing to promote consumption of products through sport. While research until that point had focused on the last two types of

sport marketing, Mullin argued that it was the promotion of fan interest that required additional attention and a deeper understanding of sport's psychological, social and cultural aspects in order for sport marketing to be effective. As the ample research that followed his study indicates, his suggestions were heard loud and clear within academia. From the study of the various elements of the fans' sport experience landscape, to the understanding of fan engagement and characteristics, sport marketing literature has been heavily involved in deepening our grasp and appreciation of fans' interest in, passion for and consumption of sport, as well as the role marketing plays within it. The articles of Boissel and colleagues and Kolyperas and Sparks in this issue underline that there is still more to discover on the topic.

A few years after Mullin's study and shortly after Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) started the discussion on brands, their equity and its elements, sport brands also joined the conversation. While sport brands had been used as examples in academia before, especially when discussing brand associations in sport sponsorship agreements and sport-related advertising (e.g. by Gardner, 1985), 'applying the concept of brand equity' to sports brands, such as Major League Baseball by Boone, Kochunny and Wilkins (1995) was only the beginning of researching sport branding. What has followed since is a plethora of studies that investigate sport brands, their dimensions, extensions and perceptions, that have shed light on how they are created, or co-created, and managed. More than two decades later, this discussion on sport individuals', organisations' and events' brand is still ongoing, with Kenyon and colleagues' study in this issue underlying that the management practices have yet to catch up with this discussion.

Recent developments in technology, such as the creation and adoption of new and social media have also attracted sport marketing's attention, with ample literature exploring this new hybrid element of the marketing communication mix (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Soon after social media were created and even before they were widely accepted within the sport industry, academics such as Williams and Chinn (2010) were investigating the implications, opportunities and challenges they bear for sports marketing. Sport sponsorship, fan engagement and sport brands, to name a few, were all examined through this new lens of social media use and its potential, indicating that we had yet to scratch the surface of truly appreciating sport marketing in its entirety, as Fernandes and Vale also argue in this issue. With new technological advances introduced and adopted by the sport industry almost unceasingly, the progress and study of sport marketing is not expected to decelerate in the near future.

Regrettably, the rapid development and growth of the sport industry did not come without its dark side, with a number of wrongdoing and corruption scandals in sport emerging around the world. While, as Manoli and Antonopoulos (2015) argue corruption has always been a part of sport, with the first documented case of match-fixing occurring during the Olympic Games of 338 BC, an increasing number of sport-related scandals have surfaced in recent years. From individual athletes' (mis)behaviour to organisations' intentional or unintentional wrongdoing, corruption is believed to be a growing threat for the sport industry, and one that is challenging to control, contain or conquer. The effects of this corruption in sport marketing have therefore started to attract academics attention, with Clinton and colleagues joining

the growing conversation in this issue. It can be expected that until corruption in sport is battled and its implications on sports marketing are examined, this discussion will not cease.

Almost four decades since Parkhouse and Ulrich (1979) wrote about the need for theoretical development, scientific inquiry and professionalization of sport management, sport marketing, along with the sport industry, has been developing and evolving. Expanding from a simple commercial tool to a broader and rapidly advancing discipline with unique characteristics, covering areas ranging from branding and corporate social responsibility, to service quality and fan engagement, the remarkable progress of sport marketing research is hard to ignore. As such, and due to the plethora of issues that fall under this umbrella field of research, this special issue of the Journal of Strategic Marketing, having 'Contemporary Issues in Sports Marketing' as its central theme, attempts to highlight a number of current key avenues of inquiry. More specifically, this special issue aims to enrich the sports marketing literature by addressing existing and new research issues while calling for further attention to the thriving sports industry.

Contemporary issues in sports marketing: the contributions

This special issue comprises seven selected peer-reviewed articles. First, Jerome Boissel, Veronique des Garets and Veronique Plichon explore what really adds value to a sport event, by examining the role of the stadium in the value enhancement process of a rugby union match. Based on the French Rugby Union's interest on stadium redevelopment and team relocation, the authors initiate a broader discussion on how the perceived value of a sport event can be improved, an issue more topical than ever. As recent examples have hinted, team relocation is an international phenomenon with recent examples from the UK (Wimbledon Football Club relocated to Milton Keynes in 2003) and the USA (NFL's Oakland Raiders relocating to Las Vegas in 2019) suggesting that its commercial, economic and social implications can be unpredictable. As such, the perceived proximity of the stadium and its role as an antecedent to stadium value and match value that is examined in this study can help shed some light in this understudied topic of growing importance while offering some key managerial implications.

Value creation, or better co-creation, is also examined in the second article of this issue by Dimitrios Kolyperas and Leigh Sparks. The two authors do not focus on stadia, but on 'Fan Fests', the festivals created for fans during, around and in relation to major sport events, such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. These events around the main event are organised and managed by the main organiser of the event and are very popular among fans, with FIFA for example reporting that more than five million people visited the 12 locations in each 2014 FIFA World Cup host city. Fan fest, this popular event augmentation tool is examined in detail in Kolyperas and Sparks' study as a value co-creation ecosystem, with all its social, cultural, humanitarian and economic dimensions, and associated benefits being discussed. Attention is focused on the role of the fan in this process of value creation, since, as

their study suggests, Fan Fests might be corporately organised but they are in fact consumer generated and activated.

Fans and their engagement with sport is further analysed in the third article of this special issue, in which Teresa Fernandes and Leonor Vale explore the motivations and dimensions of fans' social media behaviour and interactions with football clubs on the Facebook platform. In other words, their study investigates both why and how fans engage with football clubs on social media by focusing on the activities and the motivations of fans' interaction with clubs of one of the top European football leagues on the currently most popular social medium, Facebook. Bearing in mind the social media following of that major sport brands such as the FIFA World Cup (40,197,603 Facebook fans) and the WWE (37,872,460 Facebook fans), grasping customer engagement behaviour and motivation can deepen our understanding of fan engagement and be an indispensable tool for sport marketing practitioners. According to the authors, it is the need for information, empowerment and brand love that drive fan engagement through social media, with the importance of the interactive and collaborative nature of this engagement underlined through their study. Brand love was in fact highlighted as the main driver for engagement, providing sport marketers with valuable insight on how social media marketing strategies could be developed.

James Andrew Kenyon, Argyro Elisavet Manoli and Guillaume Bodet examine brand consistency and coherency in the fourth article of this issue¹. The authors investigate the link or lack thereof between the brand identity and the brand image of the Olympic Games in general and the London 2012 Games in particular, both pre and post the event, in order to assess whether brand consistency and coherency is in fact achieved in one of the biggest sports brands in the world. Their study suggests that even though the brand image of the Games improved in both the media and the UK population after the event, consistency and coherency between the image and the identity were in fact not achieved. As their work suggests, in an era of media proliferation and power shift between the brand owner and the audience, the need to reduce a potential polyphony and clarify what a brand actually stands for has yet to materialise in sport brand management research and practice.

The fifth article of this issue focuses on sport sponsorships and the influence they can have on brand equity and purchase behaviour of the sponsor's product. Charitomeni Tsordia, Dimitra Papadimitriou and Petros Parganas studied the sponsorship agreement between one of the most successful basketball clubs in Europe, Panathinaikos BC, and a globally popular videogame console, Microsoft's X-Box, while drawing on the concepts of brand equity and brand engagement in an attempt to explore the implications of the agreement on the fans of the club. Based on the increasing importance of sponsorship agreements in the global sport industry, with PWC (2011) reporting that sport sponsorship is one of the key and the fastest growing income stream of sports globally (estimated at US \$45 billion in 2015), their study's implications can be of outmost importance for academics and practitioners alike.

¹ The review process for this article was managed by the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, Dr Carolyn Strong.

Their research highlights that perceived quality and brand engagement are key influencing factors of brand loyalty and actual purchase behaviour for the fans in regards to the sponsor's products, while the perceived fit between the sponsor and the sponsored sport club, as well as the team identification of the fans with the club, have a significant impact on the sponsor's brand equity.

Sport sponsorship is also the theme of the sixth article of this issue, with Samantha Roberts, Simon Chadwick and Christos Anagnostopoulos, examining the topic through a different lens, the one of corruption. Their study examines the nature of corruption in sport by drawing on a large number of instances of sport corruption cases before focusing on the potential implication that such instances have on sponsorship agreements. Since corruption in sport is a growing global threat, with numerous cases of varying magnitude constantly emerging, often dealt with minimum or insufficient response (Manoli et al., 2017), the importance of understanding its wider implications on sport marketing can only help academia and the sport industry to react more efficiently. Roberts and colleagues highlight the managerial implications of the phenomenon, by discussing the potential decisions sponsors have to make in order to mitigate the effects of corruption. As it is suggested in their study, six different courses of action can be followed, ranging from withdrawing from the agreement immediately, to remaining and taking a stance against corruption, depending on the particular corruption instance under question. Each action is then followed by a diverse set of managerial challenges and risks for sport marketers that are worth exploring further.

Clinton Weeks, Sarah Kelly and Monica Chien also focus on sport scandals' implications, by centring on off-field transgressions that do not impact gameplay in the final article of this issue. In particular, the authors examine alcohol-fueled athlete violence as a scandal scenario, a problematic issue that has occurred numerous times in the Australian rugby league, in order to examine the effects it has on fans and their evaluation of sport stakeholders, such as the sport team and the sponsors. Key aspects, such as team identification (fan or rival) and frequency of occurrence (one time or repeated) are factored in this examination in order to better grasp the main facets that could lead fans to dismiss a transgression and not affect their views on the associated stakeholders. Their study suggests that even if the responsibility for the scandal lies with the specific perpetrators, attitudes towards key stakeholders might be affected following a scandal, which underlines the importance of a carefully designed course of actions in order for such affects and repercussions to be limited. With regard to sport sponsors, termination of an agreement might not be the best course of action, since, as the study suggests, fans tend to be forgiving and in fact dismissing of single scandal incidents, underlying that there is more to be grasped in this challenging area of sport marketing.

The future of sport marketing

Although, it should be mentioned, this special issue by no means exhausts the topic of contemporary issues in sport marketing; the contributions address the subject from different perspectives, add to the conceptual diversity, and offer numerous interesting

insights. Their work is influenced by the current pressures the sport industry is facing, such as sport corruption and scandals, while taking into consideration the potential opportunities that lie ahead. New practices and trends are taken into account when social media use and the augmentation of events are examined, allowing for a closer look at the ever evolving discipline of sport marketing. At the same time, and true to the discipline's roots, the examination of its core elements, sport consumption and relationship, brand and sponsorship management, does not cease to uncover previously unknown facets of sport marketing's theory and practice.

The contributors to this special issue are careful enough and, directly or indirectly, point to the fact that their work probably raises more questions than it answers. In fact, all contributors extend an invitation for more research to be conducted in sport marketing in order for these questions to be answered and even more questions to be asked. It is hoped that this special issue will act as a platform for further discussion and further research on this multifaceted, ever developing and fascinating discipline of sport marketing.

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