



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Management

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN MARKETING SPORTS ORGANISATION'

KEY WORDS:

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1. Introduction

Sports marketing refers to the marketing strategy that aims at promoting the sports event, sports products or services or to support the sports personnel with intention to promote any given sports product or brand (Karg & Funk, 2020). Cornwell (2014) argues that sports marketing is typically different from conventional marketing practices in many aspects, firstly because it deals with a typically different set of target customers closely associated with or influenced by sports ever and secondly, sports marketing serves both anthropology and commercial interests at the same time. Through sponsorship, sports marketing promotes sportsmanship and produce sports persons for the country.

It has been usually observed that the most iconic sports brands sponsor events, athletes, their training and participation as a regular sports marketing activity. At the same time, it is very difficult to build and maintain credible and widely known sports brand for even the best marketers. According to Pedersen et al. (2020), it is usually because most sports marketers face unique yet difficult challenges because effectiveness of most such sports sponsorships depend upon the success of such events or athletes. Moreover, the direct impact of such promotional activities is difficult to establish or determine. Pedersen and Thibault (2014) further points towards the role of other marketing P's (product, price and place) which continue to influence the outcome of the marketing efforts. Also, sports industry is not about sports only. It also carries entertainment and socio-sentimental value. This further complicate the challenges for marketers.

While targeting the sports fan it is fairly easy and effective for marketers to establish or position their brand and/or engage with customers if the associated players are successful and performing. However, the challenge starts for the marketers when several competing brands compete for a few selective successful players or when the associated player is not performing as well (Chanavat & Bodet, 2014). It is difficult for marketers to determine customer engagement when the players are going through tough times. Ratten (2016) argue that most marketing companies often associate themselves with more than one player to counter this situation however, this is expensive and still has certain degree of risk. Marketers need a strong and sustainable strategy to counter the marketing challenges however, little has been done to understand the situation and the challenges at hand for sports marketing organisations.

This research paper aims at determine the contemporary issues in marketing of sports organization. Accordingly, the following objectives have been decided for this paper:

- a. To determine the practices and their importance of sports marketing.
- b. To determine the challenges faced by the sports marketing organisations, and
- c. To recommend ways to counter the challenges faced by the sports organisations marketing their products.

2. Research Methodology

This research started with an aim of understanding the

challenges faced by sports marketing organisations. This research is based on thematic study of secondary literature review. Broadly speaking, this study has been developed through investigation into three core themes i.e. the practices and importance of sports marketing, challenges faced by sports marketing organisation and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of sports marketing organisations.

While conducting this research, care has been taken to choose only those articles that are relevant with the research aim and objectives and published in well-established journals like Emerald, Sage, Willey and Sons etc. To maintain their relevance with time, only those articles are chosen that are published on or after 2014 and in English language only. Articles are clubbed on the basis of their relevance with the research objectives and are studied for their agreement and disagreement with the research objectives. To maintain diversity, articles on different challenges are studied in detail. Only those that had the relevant content or findings are included.

In all, over 60 such articles have been studied while 48 of them have been mentioned and included in this research paper at different instances. In order to get some relatively relevant data, some reliable online articles like those from Deloitte and McKinsey etc. have also been studied and quoted in this research paper.

After completely scanning the articles the final findings and observations are summarised in the conclusion section. Some recommendations are also made in this paper based on the observations made during the literature review.

3. Discussion on Findings

3.1. Sports Marketing

The term sports marketing is a term used to describe the marketing activities used by the sports firms to promote their products, services or brand among their target customers. The sports marketing is different from conventional marketing activities because of the uniqueness of the target customers i.e. the sports lovers (Funk et al., 2016). This audience is typically associated with one or the other kind of sports and hence, the sports events become an ideal platform for them to display their products, to prove their performance and create customer's interest in them.

Sports marketing typically involves activities like event sponsorship, sports scholarship and endorsement from sports personality so that customer's interest and trust in the brand and its products can be generated. Sports marketing is important for sports companies because this is one of the most effective way to communicate with the target audience however, this also comes with consequences. With several big sports brands like Nike, Adidas, Puma etc. in the market, getting sports sponsorship for major sports event is a challenging and expensive task (Santos & Moreno, 2018). Moreover, multiple brands are prominently displayed at most such events limiting the brand visibility.

Mullin et al. (2014) broadly classify the sports marketing activities into three categories i.e. marketing through event or sports event sponsorship, marketing sports as a product and

conventional product marketing. Sports marketers often choose a combination of different marketing tools and strategies to effectively reach their target audience. Ideally, a sports marketer aims to promote or showcase their product by using the sports event or sports personality as their display platform or endorser.

Cornwell (2014), on the other hand, argues that sports sponsorship is more of a publicity game rather than marketing because it involves improving product display and a way for sports companies to remain in news. It is more about remaining in public eyes than about convincing customers about the performance of the product.

Cho and Chiu (2021) also points out that by sponsoring sports events, the sports marketer seems to build a sports friendly (philanthropic) image among target consumers while also displaying their product. Customers tend to associate the winning athlete or sportsperson with the brand of the product he/she uses. This helps sports marketers in creating a favourable image among customers.

3.2. Importance of Sports Marketing

Sports marketing is a uniquely different marketing strategy which aims to grab the attention of the target customers, create interest among them and to establish a strong brand image. Charumbira (2014) found in their research that customers tend to relate with products or brands associated with the winning team or participants. Hence, through event or player sponsorship, customers tend to gain confidence in the products of the sponsoring company.

At the same time, Pedersen et al. (2020) points out that the symbiotic relationship between the sports and sports marketing companies cannot be ignored. The sports, as we see it today, shall not be the same had these sports marketing organisations been not there for the event organisers or the participants. Technavio (2022) estimates the global sports sponsorship market to be nearly \$ 45 billion in 2021 to grow at an annual growth rate of 23.65% till of \$ 1 billion by 2030.



Figure 1: Global sports sponsorship overview (Source: Technavio, 2022).

It is argued that the sports marketing, although beneficial for the commercial cause, has a philanthropic effect for the society in terms that it supports and promote sports events in a way that most government agencies could not (Fetchko et al., 2018). The large sports events like Indian Premier League (IPL), World Wrestling Federation (WWF), Wimbledon Opens etc. were only made possible because of the financial support and the publicity that organisations and athletes received from sponsoring marketing organisations.

Eddy and Cork (2019) notes that sportspersons need state of the art equipment and training equipment to bring out the best in them most of which are beyond their individual financial capabilities. The sports marketers sponsor their training and aid their financial needs and hence, are constantly shaping the sports industry as we see today.

Affinaquest (2017) further notes that the sports fans are emotionally attached with their favourite sports or sports personality. They closely observe and follow their style, products they use and events they participate in. The sports endorser, therefore, becomes the stage where sports

marketers can highlight their products or brands for their target audience.

A study by Deloitte (2019) showed that sponsorship is atleast three times more likely to catch attention of the target audience. Also, an aware customer is three times more likely to buy the product or endorse the brand. Gough (2022) further argues that, given the diversity of audience watching the big sports event, sports companies are not the only sponsors. Instead, financial companies followed by the tech companies are the largest spenders on sports event sponsorship spender's list.

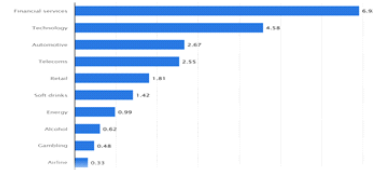


Figure 2: Sports sponsorship expenditure by industry (Source: Gough, 2022).

Shank and Lyberger (2014) notes that the players, sports clubs, leagues, teams and the sponsors operate symbiotically forming an ecosystem where each component has a unique role to play and contribution to make in the whole system.



Figure 3: Sports sponsorship ecosystem (Source: Shank & Lyberger, 2014).

Over time, this association has become so strong that any default in on part may crash the whole system. Professional sport has become a profession for many and a road to prosperity while chasing one's dreams. Different formats of sports and sponsorships have emerged over years further refining the art of sports marketing.

Fetchko et al. (2018) further describes this association as the virtuous cycle of Winning where the winning player gets rewarded the most and hence motivates others to put more effort towards improving their sports performance. With time, this has developed a healthy competitive spirit among sportsmen and sportswomen towards the sports they play and their own performance.

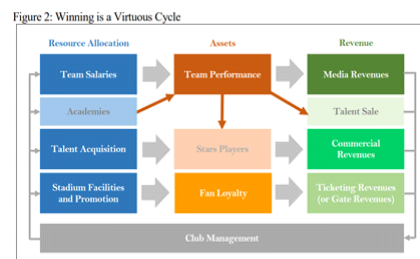


Figure 4: Virtuous cycle of winning (Source: Fetchko et al., 2018).

While the sports marketing is on an increase, there are typical challenges that sports marketers face. They need to strategise to not only be effective but also keep costs under control to justify their efforts. Chanavat and Bodet (2014) proposes a mix of different tools like sponsorship, social media marketing, conventional marketing to improve the effectiveness of sports

marketing. The next section of the research paper is dedicated to understanding the challenges faced by sports marketers while formulating or implementing their strategies.

3.3. Challenges for Sports Marketing Organisations

Sports marketing, just like it is different from conventional marketing, is also more challenging than conventional marketing in several ways, even for the most influential marketers. Dittmore and McCarthy (2014) notes that sportsmen and sportswomen undergo their ups and down phases throughout their career most of which is beyond their individual control. The sponsor's perspective towards the sportsperson changes with change in their performance and accordingly, changes the sponsorship amount and terms. This can adversely affect the sportsmanship.

Umesh (2019) further argues that sports sponsorship and brand endorsements are sometime so powerful that they influence the athletic ability of the sportsperson by diverting their attention from their core profession i.e. sports. Marketers may face criticism for their association or withdrawal of association with a given sportsperson or sports. It is challenging for the sports marketers to choose between sports and the sportspersons based on their performance or public image. Yoshida and Heere (2015) even criticised sports sponsorship as commercialisation of sports.

With several sports marketers in the field seeking sportsperson to support and promote their products, the competition among them is getting stronger and more intense. The companies need to pay high amount to book their preferred athlete. This is not only increasing the cost of advertisement but also commercializing sports in some ways (Deloitte, 2019). Events in the past have showed how athletes are driven away from their usual practice sessions to sponsor products of their respective sponsoring marketers. Jacobs et al. (2014) further points out how even the non-sports companies have entered into the sports marketing activities given the diversity of audience interested in watching the event.

Bredikhina et al. (2022) points out that, in the light of the huge amounts involved in the business of sponsorship, it is difficult for the sports marketers to justify their spend. It is mostly very difficult to estimate the commercial outcome of the sponsorship money invested. It is usually presumed that the viewers will pay attention to the brands displayed or take note of the products being used by the players. Usually, sports sponsorship is more like displaying one's products or logos at a prominent place for the target audience to see however, its impact on the consumer is little known.

Mirehie and Cho (2022) interviewed 14 high-rank sports managers to understand how Covid-19 has affected sports marketing and sports tourism. Their study showed that a significant shift has been observed in sports fan's behaviour following the increased sensitivity towards crowd, gathering and public assemblies. Fans wished to watch their favourite games in the comfort and safety of their homes or offices while new media have come up providing in-home or controlled screening of the events. The managers interviewed further hoped and anticipated that the audience will resume their previous behaviour as situations normalize but shall take atleast three to four years.

Considering this shift in the fan's behaviour, it is required that the marketers also start to change their outlook towards sports marketing. Filo et al. (2015) for instances suggested the use of social media to connect with targeted audience, engaging with them and promoting their product or brand at the same time.

A neuroscientific study conducted by Santos and Moreno

(2018) showed that for any sports marketing effort to be effective, it needs to be in congruence with not only the event being sponsored but also with the viewer's intentions. Results of their study showed that the same respondents may misinterpret the sponsor's message or the communication that the brand is trying to make should there be any incongruence. Given the diversity of the audience, it is difficult of the marketer to clearly and equivocally communicate with the target audience. Also, they suggested that the marketers need to carefully choose their marketing tool, message and the way of delivering their message to be effective among their target audience.

Jensen et al. (2015) criticised sports marketing for its ineffectiveness in planning too far ahead. They argue that sponsoring sports events involves too many factors many of which are relatively uncertain. For instance, it may happen that the team one has sponsored failed to qualify for the event foreseen as the start promoter or the event is rescheduled or the place is changed due to unforeseen circumstances. These uncertainties prevent sports marketers from planning too far ahead or make strategies to be effective. Also, a small adverse change in events can have large impact on the outcome of the entire marketing effort.

Jacobs et al. (2014) further argues that the cost allocation into sports sponsorship involves considering several factors, for instance, sponsorship fees (acquiring new sponsorship options) versus activation (renewal) fees. Marketers need to carefully examine and evaluate their impact possibly removing some of the ongoing sponsorships while acquiring the new ones. This can be very challenging task, given the risks and uncertainties involved even for the most experienced marketers. The challenge becomes more complex given the fact that companies spend a sizeable amount of money on sports marketing without accurately knowing much about its possible impact on customers (Schwarz & Hunter, 2017).

Some scholars like Tyler et al. (2017) and Koul et al. (2021) further suggest that one of the most challenging tasks for sports marketing companies is to predict the upcoming trends and marketing outcomes of the intended efforts. It is pointed out that with emergence in technology, several new sports formats (for example, twenty-twenty matches in cricket) have come up with new sports (for example, e-sports, robotics etc.) changing the way customers associate with a given sports event or a game. While new opportunities are coming up, customer's response to sports is also changing its dynamics. Marketers seem to be struggling with predicting the marketing outcomes under the light of changing environment and the emerging new formats.

Coakley (2016), at the same time, criticises sports marketing for polluting the purity of sports spirit by money. They argue that instead of promoting and supporting sports, sports sponsorship is influencing, rather controlling, sports. Its overbearing influence on the sports events and its impact on athletes has been witnessed in previous times. Athletes are known to have been corrupted or have lost their focus under the light of the huge amount of sponsorship money they received. It is argued that this is diagonally opposite to the purpose the sports sponsorship started with. Jensen et al. (2016) further argues that although interdependent, the interests of the sportsperson and the sports marketers are different. Marketers, wherever possible, exploit sportsperson's time and focus towards avenues that are not as rewarding for the sportsperson.

Yim et al. (2021) point out towards the changing customer behaviour and approach to sports events, in context of the emerging millennial generation. According to them, the millennial generation is uniquely different from their previous generations. They are more technology oriented

with a taste for new games and formats. Yim (2015) notes that millennials are comparatively harder to entice using conventional tools. The millennial generation tend to support or endorse the brands they can associate with irrespective of its price, quality or performance. The marketers need to find ways to engage and relate with them, their emotion, lifestyle etc. This is the only way marketers can gain their endorsement. Accordingly, marketers need to switchover to newer marketing tools like internet marketing, social media marketing. Some marketers are seen integrating social media marketing with conventional sports marketing tactics to improve their effectiveness however, a large-scale application of this concept is yet to be seen. Moreover, sports groups like NBA and NFL etc. have their own mobile and television networks.

Jacobs et al. (2014) argue that sports marketing is becoming more and more competitive, especially after globalisation. Several new sports companies have entered this market with even non-sports players contesting for limited sports events happening around the globe. This increased competition has not only increased the intended expenditure on sports events but also finding new ways to improve their effectiveness.

Hill et al. (2016) argue that in order to gather public attention, sports marketers are looking for controversial ways to gain quick publicity. This is adversely affecting sports fraternity, especially the budding players. Moreover, given the diversity among global customer base, marketers need to create a balance between the local and the global marketing objectives which can be pretty challenging. Also, adverse outcomes in one part of the world can adversely affect the outcomes in other parts of the world (Angosto et al., 2023).

Angosto et al. (2023) further adds how changing environmental dynamics, customer tastes and preferences etc. have been changing sports marketing paradigm. The conventional practices of sports marketing are losing their charm while marketers are struggling with finding ways to woo audience. Desbordes et al. (2019) mentioned that while sports paradigm is changing, the rigid sports contracts involving huge investments are preventing organisations from changing with the market conditions. There is a constant struggle between sponsors and sponsees to adjust with the changing needs and market conditions.

With commercialisation of sports and sportspersons, sponsorship has become a playground for buying and selling players for profit gains. Cornwell (2014) notes that unlike previous generations, the new generation customers are not as influenced by sportspersons as they do with their brand, features and sportspersons. The brands are more discussed over social media than over social or sports events. This is making it difficult for marketers to differentiate their brands from the others (Karg & Funk, 2020). Brand loyalty and customer loyalty are the things of the past (Karjaluo et al., 2016). Among so many comparable products and sports brands, marketer's struggle to remain relevant to the emerging new generation is becoming difficult.

Apparently, social media activity is far more erratic and uncontrolled compared to conventional marketing tools used in sports marketing. Sports marketers don't seem to be where most sports gossip occur while they should be a part of it (Bahrami & Kiani, 2021). Getting attention of the youth towards the ongoing sports event is becoming increasingly difficult further diluting the effectiveness of their sponsorship and marketing efforts. It is challenging for the sports marketers to maintain customer's attention.

Deloitte (2019) further points out that due the presence of bigger brands like NFL, Oppo, American Express, Coca Cola etc. there is little chance left for smaller and newer brands to make their presence felt. The smaller sports marketers hence,

need to think innovatively and creatively to make their presence felt. Newer strategies like social media marketing, offline on-site promotions etc. can be worked out to engage with customers and create interest among them. At the same time, it is observed that the sports marketing companies resort to conventional marketing methods in the absence of this creativity.

According to Santos (2014), data can play a critical role in designing, implementing and controlling effective sports marketing strategy. The sports marketing companies are sitting on a gold mine of customer data which can effectively give valuable information about their tastes and preferences and buying behaviour. This information can be valuable tool in guiding the marketing efforts. This data can also be used to monitor the performance of the marketing efforts.

But, according to DeGaris et al. (2015), sports marketers, especially small, seem clueless on how to effectively use this data to make informed sports marketing decisions. Small marketers, although interested in marketing, neither has the resources nor the skillset to practice sports marketing. More understanding and training are needed to gather the skills needed to practice sports marketing and monitor its progress.

3.4. Summary of The Findings

Challenges are plenty, but opportunities are as well. The only thing needed is to think creatively and innovatively. This research, so far, shows that the sports marketing is a unique branch of marketing that exclusively deals with promoting sports products or brands with specific target customers. Sports marketing, as we see today, is facing challenges from everywhere due to specific changes in the market conditions, structure and changes in the consumer behaviour. Marketers need to think creatively to come out with solutions and counter the increasing competitive pressure from larger sports brands.

The conventional sports marketing tools are losing their relevance in emerging scenario and this need to change. In order to do so effectively, the sports marketers need to look at the resources available and mold them according to the marketing needs.

4. Recommendations For Sports Marketing

a. Use of Online Media: Online is the in-trend these days. Trends suggest that this generation is closer and more open to emerging new technological advancements. Ecommerce is gaining popularity among young customers where they get to search for, compare and buy products online. Marketers need to target this segment using online marketing strategies. According to (), marketers can find online groups of the target customer audience over various online media and can approach them just like they did through sponsorships.

b. On-Demand Video Content: discussion above shows how sports marketers are struggling to find suitable sports sponsorship within their budget due to intensely high competition. Moreover, those that have these sponsorships find them rigid enough to prevent them from using innovatively. Online media is far more flexible in this sense. For instance, the on-demand video content is gaining popularity among youth. This content is often supported by online advertisements which can be a suitable platform for sports marketers for every size to interact with their target audience. () has noted that the online media is not only cheaper compared to the sponsorship model but is more popular and effective considering the unique taste of the millennial generation.

c. Interesting Media Content and Message: It has been noted in the previous discussion that marketers need to connect with the target customers to be effective. It is difficult

to catch customer's attention and interest in the product or the brand. This lack of interest is often associated with the dissociation between customer's taste and preference and what is delivered. Marketers need to carefully choose the media, the message and the visual in accordance with the taste and preference of the target audience.

5. Conclusion

Sports marketing refers to the set of activities with an aim of promoting the sports products, brands or services provided by the marketer among the chosen target audience. Conventionally sports marketing includes team or event sponsorship, brand promotion, product or service display or demonstration etc.

Many challenges have been identified in this paper that are being regularly faced by most sports marketers across the globe. It has been observed that the tastes and preferences of the sports marketers is changing and accordingly, they need to change with the changing circumstances.

It is recommended that the sports marketers need to use online media to advertise their product and reach their target customers, use social media to engage with target customers and design their communication message in accordance with the customer preference.

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