Multidimensional Sports Spectators Segmentation and Social Media Marketing

B. Schmid, C. Kexel, E. Djafarova

Abstract—Understanding consumers is elementary for practitioners in marketing. Consumers of sports events, the sports spectators, are a particularly complex consumer crowd. In order to identify and define their profiles different segmentation approaches can be found in literature, one of them being multidimensional segmentation. Multidimensional segmentation models correspond to the broad range of attitudes, behaviours, motivations and beliefs of sports spectators, other than earlier models. Moreover, in sports there are some well-researched disciplines (e.g. football or North American sports) where consumer profiles and marketing strategies are elaborate and others where no research at all can be found. For example, there is almost no research on athletics spectators. This paper explores the current state of research on sports spectators segmentation. An in-depth literature review provides the framework for a spectators segmentation in athletics. On this basis, additional potential consumer groups and implications for social media marketing will be explored. The findings are the basis for further research.

Keywords—Multidimensional segmentation, social media, sports marketing, sports spectators segmentation.

I. INTRODUCTION

CONSUMER typologies and profiles assist practitioners adjusting and optimizing their marketing strategies. However, sports marketing is a particular form of marketing as sports consumers differ in a multitude of aspects from consumers of other sectors of economy [1], [2]. For example, sports consumers display more emotions and loyalty towards the sports product than other consumers typically do [1]. Looking at sports consumers, in this case sports spectators, it is important to consider how complex sports crowds can be. In the course of globalisation, sports, athletes, leagues and events extensively cross historical and traditional boundaries [3]. Sports crowds become increasingly heterogenic. In order to adjust the service, offer to customers' demands it is necessary to identify the different groups which compose them, and their specific profiles, characteristics, needs and expectations [3]-[5]. Recent research on sports spectators indicates that simplistic typologies and segmentation models cannot live up to the complexity of sports crowds. Therefore, researchers increasingly apply multidimensional segmentation approaches, which correspond to the broad range of attitudes, behaviours,

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motivations and beliefs of sport spectators [3]. Multidimensional segmentation models take minimum two variables into consideration when analysing the consumer profiles. "Which variables to apply" however depends on the intended use and the characteristics of the context [4], and in sports, the context varies significantly in between the multitude of sports disciplines. To maximise the benefit of a segmentation approach, thus it is advisable to use, combine and choose frameworks, including socio-demographic and psychographic variables. There is no one best approach, different spectators will require different management practices [4]. The segmentation approach should hence pay attention to the purpose of the practitioners' strategy and fit the specific setting (e.g. sports discipline or type of sports event).

A literature review on sports spectators segmentation shall give answers to the following questions: (1) What is the current state of research in sports spectators segmentation? (2) What would be a promising segmentation approach for athletics spectators? (3) Which consumer groups offer additional potential for international athletics events? (4) What are the implications for social media marketing in sports, in particular athletics?

II. SPORTS SPECTATORS SEGMENTATION

The purpose of consumer segmentation is to assist practitioners and maximise the impact of their strategies. Traditionally consuming was viewed as structured by the properties of the consumption object. As the perspective changed, it became clearer that a consumption object is typically consumed in a variety of ways by different groups of consumers [6]. Segmentation is a way of dividing the customer base into distinct groups with similar characteristics and part of the customer insight process. Segmentation models of sports spectators allow marketers to adjust marketing activities and refine sports products and pricing strategies as well as customizing the sport experience to each segment [7].

In the past 40 years, researchers started to analyse consumer segmentation in sports with a strong focus on football, and developed a number of sport consumer typologies. For example, the dualistic fan typologies by [8]-[11] or [12] distinguish between: the old and new fan, the genuine and corporate fan, the traditional and modern fan or the irrational and rational fan. Later dualistic approaches also address consumers' identification and attachment with clubs and teams. They identify the expressive and submissive fan, the symbolic and civic fan or the die-hard and less-loyal fan [13]-[15]. However, those simplistic models lack the complexity

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for more accurate analyses [7], nevertheless they build the basis for the design of more multifaceted models of sport consumption.

In the 1990s, tiered sports spectators' typologies arose [16]-[20]. They differentiate and rank sport consumers based on their beliefs and behaviour. Tiered approaches create a continuum for multiple levels of attachment, loyalty and identification [7]. The continuum between e.g. high

identification and low identification supporters is then seen as an escalator on which consumers should be moved up aiming to increase the sport product consumption [7]. Tiered models show that spectators consume sports in different ways. However, they cannot differentiate between each tier and give only partial understanding of beliefs and motives that drive a consumer's loyalty, attachment, and sport consumption behaviour [7].

TABLE I
OVERVIEW OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL SEGMENTATION APPROACHES IN SPORTS

Researchers	Segmentation approach
McDonald & Milne [21]	Categorise sport consumers by their lifetime value to the team or club (LTV) and their relative relationship strength (RRS) into a 2 x 2 matrix
Smith & Stewart [22]	Focus more on attitudes and behaviours and identify five sport consumer types: passionate partisans, champ followers, reclusive partisans, theatregoers and aficionado
Hunt et al. [23]	Add a time and space dimension to commitment and identify five consumer types: temporary, local, devoted, fanatical and dysfunctional fans
Mahony et al. [24]	▪ Create a psychological commitment to team (PCT) scale ▪ Use commitment and attendance to measure loyalty, resulting in four types of team loyalty: true loyalty, spurious loyalty, latent loyalty and low loyalty
Funk & James [25]	▪ Develop the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) with an incremental stage metaphor ▪ Provide a framework that attempts to explain how a sport consumer can move from initial awareness, to attraction, to attachment, to eventual allegiance and in doing so shifts along the continuum
Gladden & Funk [26]	Identify sixteen brand association factors and construct the Team Association Model (TAM) for profiling sport consumers
Stewart et al. [7]	▪ Provide an overview based upon the proposed multidimensional models ▪ Describe clusters of differentiating behaviours with significance for segmentation: underlying motivations, emotional attachment, economic attachment, identity, loyalty, connective focus, overt experiences and attendance at games
Bodet & Bernache-Assollant [4]	Distinguish between: ▪ Observation-driven segmentation, which identifies visible groups and profiles within a chosen sport crowd and is based on simple typologies like in the dualistic approaches. ▪ Theory-driven segmentation builds segments using several theoretical variables (socio-demographic and psychographic) and concepts to re-construct the complex reality

The advancement of tiered models, by adding more dimensions of consumption, led to multidimensional segmentation approaches. Multidimensional segmentation began to appear in the 1990s shortly after tiered models started to be examined. Reference [6] researched multidimensional segmentation at an early stage. He examined consumption practices in sociology and developed a model from observations of baseball spectators [6]. Thereby, he brought together four dimensions that describe consuming: consuming as experience, as integration, as classification and as play. In his model consuming sports does "not only involve a forum for expressing emotional attachments to a team, but is also used to engage in strategic analysis, confirm individual identity, signify one's social position, converse with other sport consumers in a common setting, and indulge in playful exchanges" [7]. Subsequently, more researchers examined and applied multidimensional segmentation approaches. Table I provides a summary of the research conducted on multidimensional segmentation.

III. SPORTS MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

For a comprehensive marketing strategy and to create unique experiences for spectators, it is important to know the segments of a sports audience and how to address them. Reference [27] states that practitioners can improve their marketing success about 10 to 30% by knowing which activities and strategies work. Knowing which activities and strategies work, again depends on the consumer being

marketed. When the consumer is an athletic audience, what does that mean for practitioners? How would a segmentation approach then look like in order to allow for more successful and targeted marketing? And which groups of athletic spectators are most relevant for social media marketing?

A. Social Media

Digital marketing (including social media marketing) is an important and effective part of modern marketing strategies [27], [28]. The use of social media as a marketing tool is expanding [28]. Social media are an up-to-date marketing method and sports organizations and athletes turn towards it increasingly [28]. Reference [27] highlights the great effect of social media marketing, partially in comparison to traditional methods. The most common types of social media used as marketing tools are Twitter, YouTube and Facebook [29]. Twitter is a "quick source of information that does not require much effort from an individual", via YouTube videos can be shared with fans and Facebook is used to "provide information, post pictures and videos, and promote upcoming events" [29]. However, only a couple studies specifically address social media marketing in the sport industry. Table I summarizes relevant studies on social media marketing in sports.

Some of the studies in Table II on social media in sports solely survey Twitter as it is a quick and effortless tool often used in professional sports by now. Reference [29] report, that in the USA every team of the "major professional leagues […] utilizes Twitter in some manner". Hence Twitter is a new but

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promising part of marketing strategies nowadays that can help build stronger relationships between organisations and fans [29]. Nevertheless, more insights on how to best utilize it are required. In particular, more insight into social media marketing in athletics is needed [5]. Other existing streams of marketing research are also of interest. By examining social media marketing in sports, literature on tribal marketing and online (tribal) communities, which examines sports spectators' tribal behaviour or 'consumer tribes' will be complementary. Some of the recent research in this field investigates consumer behaviour against the background of tribal behaviour and its implications for sports marketing. Reference [40] examines tribalisation of society and its impact on marketing. Reference [30] looks at fandom and tribal behaviour. Reference [41] as well as [42] describe consumer tribes (which can also be seen as segments, editorial comment). Reference [43] examines fan consumption communities and [44] look at brand tribalism.

TABLE II
SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN SPORTS

Researchers	Subject of Study
Dionisio [30]	Fandom affiliation and tribal behaviour: a sports marketing application.
Drury [31]	Opinion piece: Social media: Should marketers engage and how can it be done effectively.
Santomier [32]	New Media, Branding and Global Sports Sponsorship.
Ballouli & Hutchinson [33]	Digital-branding and social-media strategies for professional athletes, sports teams, and leagues: An interview with Digital Royalty's Amy Martin
Pegoraro [34]	An exploratory study of how Twitter is affecting sports journalism.
Sheffer & Schultz [35]	Paradigm shift or passing fad? Twitter and sport journalism.
Sheffer & Schultz [36]	Look who's talking - Athletes on Twitter: A case study.
Williams & Chinn [37]	Meeting relationship-marketing goals through social media: A conceptual model for sport marketers.
Clavio, G. [38]	Social Media and the College Football Audience.
Witkemper et al. [29]	Social Media and Sports Marketing: Examining the Motivations and Constraints of Twitter Users.
Abeza et al. [39]	Relationship Marketing and Social Media in Sport.

B. Athletics

In filling the stadium, for instances of World or European Championships in athletics, lies a high commercial potential. The 15th IAAF[1] World Championships in Bejing in 2015 have been the largest world championships in athletics so far, with 1873 athletes from 207 countries attending [45]. Altogether around 700.000 spectators visited the stadium and thus athletics is, except for football, the most attended Olympic sport in a stadium for its world championships [45]. However, no research on athletic spectators segmentation has been carried out in recent years. Reference [46] and [47] conducted studies on composition and motivation of athletic spectators and [5] wrote about groups in athletics spectators, identified through his observations and by experience. Previous studies on sports spectators segmentation focus primarily on football as well as North American sports, such as American Football, baseball or ice hockey [4], [7].

Athletics face challenging times trying to remain of

significance in the sports scene compared to football or North American sports, even though international athletics events are still successful and popular [45]. The IAAF thus started adjusting their strategy and added social media activities to their marketing mix in order to attract a younger audience to athletics [45]. The IAAF implements online promotion, maintains a responsive website fitting any device (e.g. mobile phones, tablets), operates an app, a Facebook page and a Twitter account [45]. The prevailing challenge consists of utilising fan relationship management approaches and applying new technologies including social media to match young targeted consumer profiles [48]. Social media provide relationship-marketing opportunities and deliver innovative experiences and interactions in the process of globalisation [49]. A multidimensional segmentation of athletics spectators could offer insight into their consumer profiles, needs and characteristics and support marketers in identifying new potential groups of spectators that are still missing in the stadiums.

IV. METHODS AND CONCLUSION

For the purpose of this paper the focus will mainly be on the literature review of sports spectators segmentation. The literature review is a part of doctoral research which addresses the following research question: "Does a specifically developed multidimensional sports spectators segmentation model in athletics allow for more targeted and successful social media marketing?"

The goal of the literature review is answering numerous supporting questions and building the basis for further qualitative and quantitative research in the area of sports spectators segmentation. For this paper chosen supporting questions in the framework of the literature review are: (1) What is the current state of research in sports spectators segmentation? (2) What would be a promising segmentation approach for athletics spectators? (3) Which consumer groups offer additional potential for international athletics events? (4) What are the implications for social media marketing in sports, in particular athletics?

Based on the literature review the basic tenor is that multidimensional segmentation is not applied sufficiently in research [3], [4], [7]. There is a crucial need for additional empirical studies that may be used to test the respective conceptual models and to test the credibility of sport consumer types as well as establish significance and market value [3]-[5], [7]. Also segmentation research in sports focuses on a few sports only [4], [7]. Nevertheless, there are other sports with high marketing potential worth looking at [45]. Reference [5] explains that there is a need for further research of athletics spectators. Finally, there is a clear need to look more closely at for example the casual and interactive spectators [4], [7].

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