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# Guest editorial: Sport management, marketing and innovation

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## Introduction

The sports industry is highly globalized and has experienced tremendous growth in recent years (Eurostat, 2021). Innovation has become an essential element for maintaining competitiveness in this sector. Sport is a big business that constantly innovates due to economic and social pressures to incorporate new ideas and management practices (Hoerber and Hoerber, 2012). Sports customers' expectations are very changeable. The sports industry has to compete with other leisure industries, so if customer needs are met, innovation becomes vitally essential to sports management (Ball, 2005).

Sports products and services have unique attributes requiring a different management approach, combining social needs and commercial applications (Baker *et al.*, 2016). As a result, there is a need for sports managers to understand the determinants of innovation and its impact on the market (Ratten, 2016). The importance of future graduates in the sports sector having entrepreneurial skills has already been highlighted by González-Serrano *et al.* (2017). Teaching the importance of adopting an innovative mindset can help sports organizations learn about successes and failures as part of the innovation lifecycle (Ratten, 2016).

Innovation can be understood as a process combining science, technology, economics, and management, which is about achieving novelty and goes from the emergence of the idea to its commercialization in the form of production, exchange or consumption (Twiss, 1989). Innovation can also be understood as implementing new or improved ways of promoting social change (Shier and Handy, 2016). Innovation includes program, process, and socially transformative advances focused on improving the ability of an organization to promote social change (Shier and Handy, 2015).

The definition of innovation in sports management can be understood as the creation and introduction of new sports products, services or processes, or the modification or improvement of existing ones, aiming to introduce novelty in a sports entity and improve its performance. Innovations of various kinds are central to business strategy to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Varadarajan, 2018). Innovation enables sports companies to differentiate themselves from others and gain a competitive advantage (Tjørndal, 2016). Numerous studies have shown a positive relationship between the degree of innovation of firms and their subsequent performance (Clauss *et al.*, 2019; Feng *et al.*, 2020; Ramadani *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, researchers need to pay more attention to innovation management in the sports context because of the role innovation plays in the growth and survival of companies (Ratten, 2016).

In this vein, new research on sports marketing has been developed from innovative perspectives for meeting the sports customers' demands and loyalty. Analysis using new technological tools such as electroencephalograms (Alonso-Dos-Santos and Calabuig-Moreno, 2018) and eye trackers (Alonso-Dos-Santos *et al.*, 2019) to understand better the effects of sports sponsorship on consumers has been developed. Moreover, the importance of innovation and entrepreneurship in sport has been highlighted recently to cope with uncertainties and integrate new developments in society (Andersen and Ronglan, 2015). Indeed, the current pandemic of COVID-19 has made sports entities change their current market strategies to cope with the new



International Journal of Sports  
Marketing and Sponsorship  
Vol. 23 No. 5, 2022  
pp. 857-862  
© Emerald Publishing Limited  
1464-6668  
DOI 10.1108/IJSM-11-2022-243

normal (Ratten, 2021a), further highlighting the need for innovation in sports management. Therefore, sports innovation is an exciting field of research, as it combines the fitness and leisure industry with traditionally business-oriented innovation (Ratten, 2016).

Specifically, in the sports industry, innovations are shaped by exchanging and diffusion of knowledge from multiple sources (Ratten and Babiak, 2010). Sports innovation requires feedback from different entities to gain market acceptance (Ratten, 2021b). This means that sports innovation is not a single, planned event at a particular time, but develops over time, usually through collective work. The interactions of different individuals facilitate the dynamic process of innovation that evolves. However, sports management as a discipline is still in its infancy but has grown in scholarship and importance about the integral role of sports in society (Peachey *et al.*, 2015). Although innovation is considered an essential element in the sports industry and is an emerging topic, to date limited research has been performed in this area (González-Serrano *et al.*, 2019; Ferreira *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, little is known about what research has been conducted so far from the innovation management approach in this field of study, specifically from marketing. Therefore, this special issue on sport management, marketing, and innovation aims to contribute to this gap in the literature by highlighting the importance of innovation in sports management and marketing. This special issue is composed of seven literature reviews and empirical analysis papers.

### Selected articles

This special issue addresses innovation from the perspective of entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship in a theoretical manner through the article entitled “Innovation from sports’ entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship: opportunities from a systematic review,” developed by Alejandro Lara Bocanegra, Rocío Bohóquez, and Jerónimo García-Fernández. These authors analyze the current situation in the field of research on entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship in sport to identify study trends and detect future lines of research. To this end, they conducted a systematic review on the Web of Science, Scopus, PsycINFO, ERIC, SPORTDiscus, and Dialnet. The results showed four sub-themes within this field: (1) entrepreneurship precursors, (2) entrepreneurship intention/orientation, (3) different perspectives of entrepreneurship in sport and (4) social entrepreneurship in sport. In addition, they highlighted that only seven of the articles dealt with intrapreneurship in sport. The results point to the scarce literature on the precursors/background of entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial behavior. They highlight the need to formulate policies to develop these innovative behaviors.

Another article also addresses innovation from the perspective of sports entrepreneurship, but in this case, in an empirical manner. This is the article entitled “Rethinking dual careers: success factors for career transition of professional football players and the role of sport entrepreneurship” developed by Ana Sofia Ramos, Jonas Hammerschmidt, Antonio Sérgio Ribeiro, Francisco Lima and Sascha Kraus. These authors developed a longitudinal study in which they analyzed professional soccer players’ dual career and entrepreneurship experiences to discover which variables influenced the transition process from career to entrepreneurship or employment. To do so, they analyzed a Portuguese employer–employee dataset from 1991 to 2017 using the logit model. The results showed that entrepreneurial experience is essential for retired soccer players to engage in entrepreneurial activity. In addition, they showed that having a dual career and working during a sports career leads to a higher probability of continuing in the labor market as an employee. Finally, they highlighted that working in the last year of the sports career represents a promising strategy for gaining work experience alongside sport without jeopardizing sporting success.

From another perspective, innovation in non-profit sports organizations is approached empirically. The article entitled “Sport federations’ organizational innovativeness: an empirical comparison of characteristics and attitudes” was written by Joris Corthouts, Géraldine Zeimers,

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Kobe Helsen, Camille Demeulemeester, Thomas Könecke, Thierry Zintz, and Jeroen Scheerder. These authors point out the importance of innovation in non-profit sports organizations. Their objective is to compare the structural characteristics and attitudes of innovation attributes among three groups of sports federations. For this purpose, they used a self-assessment survey sent to all Belgian regional sports federations. In addition, a media analysis was also conducted to develop an organizational innovation index. The results showed that structural background characteristics are often poor indicators for categorization. In contrast, attitudes about compatibility and complexity seem to be the most critical determinants for the different groups of federations.

Innovation in sports events from a theoretical approach has also been the subject of study in this special issue. The article entitled “Sports event portfolios: an innovative tool and a new management paradigm,” developed by Jesyca Salgado-Barandela, Angel Barajas, and Patricio Sanchez-Fernandez, analyzes how the organization of several small-scale events throughout the year (event portfolios) can contribute to the development of the city’s strategy. They highlight that the organization of a set of sporting events can represent an essential innovation in the development of city marketing. To this end, they analyze the articles published on this topic in the Web of Science (WOS) and SCOPUS databases, reviewing to discover novel findings in the field of study. The results of this study present a classification of the portfolios of sporting events analyzed in science (formal vs. informal). In addition, they delineate the shortcomings and the most important aspects to be developed in managing sports event portfolios.

Social media have also been the subject of study in this special issue, through the article entitled “(Dis)Innovative digital strategy in professional sport: examining sponsor leveraging through social media” developed by Brandon Mastromartino and Michael L. Naraine. These authors analyzed the effectiveness of sports organizations’ Instagram strategies when there is an unexpected absence of relevant content. The study explored the Instagram typologies of NHL teams and measured social media content engagement. They used a mixed methods approach through a content analysis of 12 NHL team social networks. Tweet typologies were identified, and tests were conducted to examine the effectiveness of each typology in engaging consumers. The results showed that the social media strategies of the NHL teams included in the sample are a test of disinnovation with digital. They highlighted that achieving consumer engagement results and building strong relationships with fans, sponsors, and sports marketers require rethinking their current approach. If the content is inherently interactive, it must be balanced with entertainment content that requires consumer engagement.

Attention to sports brand messaging as a function of the timing of soccer matches has also been addressed empirically in this special issue. The article entitled “Game play and the effectiveness of sponsor signage: visual attention to brand messages in live sport broadcasts” was written by Felix Boronczyk, Christopher Rumpf, and Christoph Breuer. These authors investigate the impact of game-related variables on the allocation of sponsor signage. To do so, they used eye-tracking to examine the effects of variations in the scoreboard, ball position, and ball possession on soccer fans’ attention to sponsors’ messages during broadcasts. The results revealed significant game-time and interaction effects between possession and scoreboard, as well as the ball position variable. The findings highlighted that sponsors receive less attention if the attacking team controls the ball near the opponent’s goal, especially if the viewers’ preferred team has possession.

Lastly, in the line of the use of new technologies and empirical research, the article entitled “The use of fitness center apps and its relation to customer satisfaction: a UTAUT2 perspective” was developed by Helena Ferreira Barbosa Jerónimo García Fernández, Vera Pedragosa, and Gabriel Cepeda-Carrion. They analyzed the intention to use the fitness app of a gym and its relationship with the overall satisfaction of fitness consumers in Portugal. To do so, they used the extended unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT2) as a base model. The sample consisted of 1,676 consumers of fitness consumers in Portugal, and they used least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the

relationships between variables. The results demonstrate the ability of this theory to predict customers' intention to use the fitness app. Although different variables have a positive impact on behavioral intentions to use the fitness app, performance expectancy and habit have the most substantial relationships. Furthermore, they highlight that behavioral intention positively relates to fitness app usage and overall customer satisfaction.

### **Concluding remarks**

It is hoped that the articles published in this special issue will be of interest to researchers, academics and practitioners in the field of sports management and will serve as a basis for future research. The aim is to continue developing research on innovation in the field of sports management, and specifically in sports marketing, to make further progress in this field of study. As the studies presented show, innovation linked to entrepreneurship and intra-entrepreneurship is still a new and largely unexplored field. The great potential that elite athletes have, in this case, to develop their dual careers and eventually become entrepreneurs is highlighted, giving specific guidelines for this. Therefore, more empirical research about innovation within sports entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship is needed.

Likewise, the importance of small events as strategies to improve the image and generate economic and social impact in the localities is highlighted. Perhaps it is necessary to rethink whether it is more effective to organize a large event or several sporting events if the purpose is the sustainable development of a locality. Also, to encourage innovation, federations should work on developing attitudes towards compatibility and complexity and not so much on structural background characteristics. More research and studies are needed comparing innovation indicators in public and private sports entities and events.

The use of technologies to improve the sports consumer experience is also highlighted. It is analyzed how the use of social media must be done appropriately if consumer demands are to be met. In addition, it is pointed out that sports brands should be aware that their influence will depend on the moment they appear in the game. Finally, it seems that using mobile applications in gyms can also be an excellent strategy to build customer loyalty. However, more studies are needed and should be approached experimentally with eye-tracking or headphones to measure consumers' emotions if we want to advance in this field of knowledge. Besides, longitudinal studies can be instrumental in measuring customer loyalty, and some small interventions can be made using technology.

Finally, we would like to thank the *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* Editor, James J. Zhang, for allowing us to edit this special issue. It has been a long and costly process for everyone. In some cases, there have been several rounds of review. We thank the authors of the articles in this special issue and the reviewers who helped us select the articles for their work. Without all of them, this special issue would not have been possible. We have received numerous submissions, and the selection process has been rigorous to select the articles with the highest quality within the field of innovation in sports management and sports marketing. We hope that not only the findings of these articles but also the future lines of research presented in them will serve as a basis for developing a field of study that is still in its infancy but is so necessary to understand the present and future of the sports industry.

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