



IDENTIFYING PRODUCTS OF THE SPORT INDUSTRY: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF SPORT MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts a conceptual analysis of the term 'sport marketing' as found in literature, to present an argument in favour of a modern view of sport as an industrial concern. By employing the theory of economic production, it shows the clear similarities in operational and transactional conducts between sport and other economic industries. Four research questions were answered in an attempt to accentuate the industrial status of sport within the world economy. Clear demarcation was made to distinguish products due directly to sport, from those of other industries used in sport. In the final analysis, core products of the sport industry were identified and distinguished from ancillary to sport which had hitherto been touted as products of sport.

Key words: Economic Production, Sport Marketing, Industry, Sport Equipment, Ancillary to Sport.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sport Marketing as a discipline, has come a long way since it was first mooted in 1978; by the Advertising Age (Fullerton and Mertz, 2008). The concept is now receiving full attention of professional marketers and marketing legends worldwide. This is understandable, considering the meteoric rise in fame of sport as a social phenomenon from the beginning of the twentieth century, coupled with its development into a modern-day economic industry (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2008). Sport is today treated as a sector of the economy notably in the developed world, with quantifiable contribution to national income (Fasandoz, 2016; SportScotland, 2016; European Commission, 2012; Dalziel, 2011). However, defining the concept and thereby creating a clear, distinct span of influence for would be professionals, remains an unresolved issue. A review of notable textbooks in the subject of sport marketing, revealed a near parallel view by scholars (van Heerden, 2001; Fullerton and Mertz, 2008). Sport Marketing is perceived as ambiguous in meaning and in its application among marketing practitioners. Fullerton and Mertz, (2008) observed that existing literature on the subject has inadvertently reduced its application to the sale of tickets for scheduled events, the opportunity for legal gambling, as well as avenue for the sale of products from other industries. The most common view of sport marketing as espoused by many practitioners remain that of a veritable strategy for the marketing of products other than sport itself. In the pursuit of conceptual sanctity, scholars created a dichotomy of marketing activities within the sport industry. Namely, marketing of sport and marketing of non-sport products through sport (Fullerton and Mertz, 2008; Van Heerden, 2003). With this mindset, definition of the concept in literature, tend towards the expected sale of non-sport products, using sport platforms.

While this paper did not attempt a definition of sport marketing, it provides a conceptual framework for the construct, reiterates the place of sport as an industrial concern, and by relying on theories of production, identifies in clear terms core products of the sport industry. Perhaps, a good place to start is to determine what sport really mean. In defining sport, scholars and enthusiasts alike, have stuck to the recreational and health potentials of the phenomenon and do not bother in real terms with its status as an industrial entity (Seippel, 2006; Malm, Jakobsson & Isaksson, 2019; ScienceDaily.com). To explain the term sport, one needs to take into cognisance the transitional path through which the phenomenon probably came into being. Sporting events by their nature seem to have originated, either from spontaneous play or from occupational, and ancient war time activities. These in modern time are watered down to have the effect of leisurely fun. Play are those activities other than occupation, engaged in by man in spontaneous, unplanned and disorganised fashion mainly for fun and relaxation. Where such a spontaneous play is guided by codified and formal rules, to allow for a semblance of competition; a game is produced. When the society gets involved in the development of a game, such that human and material resources are invested to allow for formal organization, control, and institutionalisation of the game, then we have sport. Sport may then be viewed, as institutionalised games, organised formally by the society, to produce controlled competition. It is pertinent to point out here, that strictly controlled competition is the hallmark of the sporting phenomenon. It is distinct from physical activities such as solo running, jogging or weightlifting engaged in to acquire physical fitness. In the same vein, a soccer match played outside the control of a sanctioning body, recognised by the society will not qualify as sport. Hughes, (2008) in proposing a conceptual framework for sport marketing, posited that activities such as dart, billiards and drinking contest cannot be called sport in the true sense of it. This assertion seems erroneous in the sense that

these activities, having been organised into controlled competitions, guided by codified rules and sanctioned by a body recognised by the society are qualified to be called sport.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the final analysis, all products are consequences of operations and processes of industries. The main function of the marketer actually lies in securing patronage for industrial products. The definition of marketing itself is a pointer to this fact. According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. The exchange of offerings as alluded to here, simply refer to the buying and selling of products and services to customers (See <http://www.marketingpower.com/AboutAMA/Pages/DefinitionofMarketing.aspx>). Philip Kotler defines marketing as “the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. In the same breath, marketing is to perform the functions of identification of needs and desires as well as definition and measurement of the size of the identified market and the profit potential. It also pinpoints the particular segments the company is capable of serving best in a bid to design and promote the appropriate products and services (See https://kotlermarketing.com/phil_questions.shtml). The design and promotion of products, as well as the offering of same to consumers is the crux of Kotler’s argument. In essence, marketing will not occur except there is an identifiable product for exchange. From the foregoing, sport marketing will become plausible only when products, real or virtual; belonging to sport are identified. This is very important if we are to avoid esoteric conjectures when discussing sport marketing as a concept. Sport marketing as a concept should therefore be viewed as the presentation of products of the sport industry to potential consumers. In defining sport marketing, the status of sport as a productive economic industry must be established. This view is in tandem with Pitts and Stotlar (2002) definition of sport marketing as “the process of designing and implementing activities for the production, pricing, promotion, and distribution of a sport product to satisfy the needs or desires of consumers and to achieve the company’s goals”.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to among other things, answer the following questions. Is sport as a social phenomenon qualified to be considered an “economic industry?” As an industrial concern, do sport engage factors of production in pursuit of productive activities? Do organised sport involve processes that yield specific products? Are products of the sport industry identifiable and distinguishable from products of other industries? The study proceeded with the following assumptions. As in conventional trade, there are core products of sport as well as products of other industries which are ancillary to sport. Sport is an industry and it produces economic goods. Economic transactions, which would have been illegal under the rule of law, take place in the sporting system. Monetary valuation and exchange of human entities for cash for example, is in essence a commoditisation of human beings in sport. Sport produce both tangible and virtual goods and services which meet the desires of various categories of consumers. This study also assume that some products of the sport industry are quite tangible and easily identifiable. Although some products of sport exist as virtual services, they are not necessarily perishable, and may be demanded in order to generate demand for products of other industries. The apparent misconception as concerning the intangibility and perishability of sport products, as alluded to, notably by Parkhouse (1996), Mullin, Hardy and Sutton (2007); stemmed from the non-industrial view of sport by these eminent scholars at the time of writing their treatise. However, products of the sport industry are not necessarily portable and exist as pseudo-

spiritual entities, leaving consumers with psychedelic utility values. The palpable excitement and near fatalistic cum fanatical believe in the supremacy of one competitor over the other, is a pointer to this fact.

This paper takes an industrial view of sport as a phenomenon, to identify goods and services that are direct consequences of the various processes constituting sport. The goods and services so identified, are classified in this paper as products of sport. All other goods and services often labelled as sport products, are viewed as ancillary to sport.

4. CONCEPT OF SPORT PRODUCTION

Although the economic intricacies surrounding demand and supply of goods and services is beyond the scope of this study, it employed the theory of production, to explain product generation in the sport industry. Production being the chief economic activity engaged in by the society, involves the employment of resources available to a named society to achieve a desired product (Zsuzsanna, 2014). The productive entities that undertake production execution are called industries operating on various scales within the economy. The essential factors of production remain land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship (MacEachern, 2007). These are materials and efforts combined in various degrees to produce goods and services otherwise called economic resources. Factors of production are scarce and are not usually readily available. For the reason of their scarcity, goods and services obtainable are also scarce. This scenario plays out exactly in the sport industry. Sport employs factors of production in various quality and quantity to engage in the production of clearly definable products peculiar to sport as a social phenomenon. Individual societies played entrepreneurial roles at the beginning of the strife for sporting supremacy. This later developed into veiled international struggle for dominance amongst nations espousing different politico-economic views and policies. Sport today plays out as a capitalist venture, thrust out into private ownership of factors of production. All major sporting nations of the world in the modern era, pursue sport policies that favour private dominance of the sporting enterprise. In the same vein, sport governing bodies no longer depend on government subscriptions for survival. Leagues, franchises, clubs and competitions now exist as limited liability companies. The labourers in the sport industry are also identifiable. Teachers, trainers, instructors and coaches and their retinue of backroom staff, form the first line of the labour force while club managers, administrators and governments perform the dual task of management and entrepreneurs. Sporting operations often need ample land space to succeed. Building of various sporting facilities require suitable land and location. Most essentially, sport is a capital-intensive industry requiring in modern time, capital outlays running into hundreds of millions of US dollars. It is pertinent therefore, to expect such companies and enterprises to have products in need of patronage.

4.1 Products of Sport Industry

By exploring the concept of economic production and resource allocation, this paper identifies the core products of the sport industry. Production, is essentially the outcome of processes. Whether it is manufacturing, theatre and arts, agriculture and agro-allied ventures; human and material inputs of prescribed qualities and quantities are employed to engineer industrial outputs of economic value via clearly defined processes. The sport industry in similar fashion, engages human and material resources, passing them through processes that yield economic products. The processes that yield these products are the meticulously planned and executed training programmes, events organisation and management, as well as media hyping. In this wise, sport is an economic industry, exhibiting all features of an industrial concern. However, products of the sport industry exhibit psychedelic utility and value, eliciting in

consumers feelings of often difficult to explain euphoria similar to the type produced in humans by psychedelic drugs. The following are core products of sport industry.

4.2 Athletic Performance

Athletic performance is the first and perhaps the most dominant product of the sport industry. It is the essence of sport competition and what is evaluated directly or indirectly to identify winners or losers in sport competitions. The purchase of tickets by fans in order to gain access to competition venues is actually in exchange for athletic performance. As obtainable in theatres and cinemas, the ticket is not the product being sought by the audience. The actual product is the athletic performance on display. Development of superhuman capacities for the execution of feats that do not occur ordinarily in human beings is an athletic phenomenon. Generation of speed that put cats to shame by humans, making horizontal and vertical jumps that defies gravity, as well as lifting weights far in excess of human endurance capacities are some examples of athletic performance. Attention grabbing athletic performance is therefore the hallmark of the sport industry. The 9.67seconds recorded by Usain Bolt as world record for the 100meters dash in athletics, represents the athletic performance that is sold to spectators at the Olympic Games and similar athletic events where he participated. The high turnout of spectators at the UEFA Champions League soccer matches is predicated upon the expectation of exceptional performances by soccer teams and individual players. Athletic performance is a capacity developed via cognitive and psychomotor training of the organism. It is made up of three interwoven domains of athletic training, namely; techniques, tactics and conditioning. These ingredients, among other things are fused seamlessly together in the production of vintage sport performance. The term fitness as loosely used in the sport industry, actually imply the reinvention of an organism such that it acquires capacities suitable for a defined role. The production firms; usually clubs and federations, engage factors of production e.g. grounds, coaches and trainers, nutritionists, masseurs etc. to activate long term development of Athletic performance (LTDAP); a process that may span decades.

4.3 The Performer/ Athlete

Athletes cannot be treated as a human resource within the sport industry. In actual fact, athletes are the products of another set of human resources. Their work is combined with financial, time and material resources to generate a product capable of measurable industrial standard. All renowned athletes entered as raw inputs of the sport production lines and are made to pass through refining processes that help to develop athletic performance in them. Athletes obviously are products of the sport industry. Athletes such as Bolt, James, Messi, Ronaldo, Hamilton, Woods, Koepka, Federer and the Williams sisters emerged from production processes within the sport industry. Apart from generating fans followership, athletes are often subjects of financial transactions within the sport industry. In some team sport such as soccer and basketball, they are actually bought and sold as commodities. The sale of shirts and other souvenir may be a veritable source of income to sport firms (clubs, associations, federations etc.), however, the same material without club insignias and name of a top performer written across the back will attract limited patronage. By selling branded shirts of a named athlete, the clubs and kits manufacturers sell the performer to the fan and gain financial reward in the process. David Beckham, bought in 2003 from Manchester United and by Real Madrid for about 40 million pounds sterling, generated more than 1 billion pounds in total revenue in his career from branded shirt and shoes sales alone (Miller, 2009). Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale, LeBron James, Rafael Nadal, Anthony Joshua, Tiger Woods represent the cream of the well-known sport performers, whose presence on the sport scene generate huge revenue for the industry.

4.4 Personalities

These include all the larger-than-life characters that sport throw up as social phenomena. Athletes, coaches, administrators, pundits, journalists and other officials who famously star as characters in the never-ending sport drama, are products of the industry. The various endorsement contracts offered by firms of other industries to athletes, could be viewed as buying into an athlete. The sale of image rights and other rights touching the body and name of an athlete, a coach etc. is a clear desire to employ the social image, outlook, temperament etc. of a person to reach target audiences. Like a vehicle purchased in order to facilitate delivery of goods and services, celebrities produced by sport, are purchased to present goods and services in good light to targeted audiences. When Nike, Adidas, Puma, Tommy Hilfiger, American Tourister and other fashion makers invested millions of US dollars in endorsement deals with Michael Jordan, David Beckham, Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Thierry Henry, LeBron James, Anthony Joshua and many others; they bought into their huge personality that have generated huge followership worldwide. Advent of the social media in recent years has made this aspect of sport production more prominent, with some athletes attracting followership in hundreds of millions. Such pool of virtual admirers is a fertile ground for product marketers and explains their choice of sport persons as postal image. This is a direct consequence of production processes within the sport industry.

4.5 Competitions

Competition is another important product of sport as an industry. When the television rights for the English soccer premiership was sold by the English FA for more than 7 billion dollars in 2015 (Ackerman, 2015), an industrial product was exchanged for cash. Sky Sports a television conglomerate that did the actual purchase, then performed the role of a sole distributor in breaking and selling in smaller fractions to sport television channels all over the world who performed the retailing function. The FIFA soccer world cup, the NBA World Series in basketball and the American NFL super bowl, the various tennis grand slams, formula one car racing are all very good example of sport competitions sold and bought by conglomerates from other industries. The 2020 Olympic Games slated for the city of Tokyo, is set to cost Japanese tax payers a whopping 12 billion US dollars; the government in Japan bought a sport product for its tourism value, and global goodwill.

4.6 Contests

One may wonder where the difference lie between contests and competitions. It is also possible to view contests as obvious subsets of a competition. Whereas, competitions in sport, strives to establish superiority over rivals of similar pedigree over time; contests are occasion specific and involves the head-to-head clashes between individual candidates. Competitions in this context, implies the various struggles for supremacy that may last many weeks or months, such as the various soccer leagues, the NFL, NBA, and FIFA world cup. Contests such as the super bowl, Der klassika, and Derby Della Madonnina are usually one match long. Floyd Mayweather fought Connor McGregor, in a crossbred contest between a boxer and a prize fighter. The resultant fight is a product bought by fans and corporate bodies for a staggering 500 million US Dollars in pay per view TV alone (Jabbar, 2019). The much-awaited unification boxing bouts between the trio of Anthony Joshua, Tyson Fury, both of the United Kingdom and Deontay Wilder of the United States is a carefully prepared and meticulously designed product of the sport industry. The goal is to produce contests of monumental status for the pleasure of boxing fans. Sport in its peculiar nature throws up extraordinary contests that sometimes outshine a named competition for which it is a subset. The attempt by American businesses to

take certain matches of the Spanish soccer top division to the United States, cannot be divorced from the desire to stage the contest between FC Barcelona and Real de Madrid in the United States. The *El Clasico*, as it is often tagged, is a separate product in high demand worldwide and as such is distinguishable from the competition *La Liga*. The potential clash between Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury, for the unification of all four titles on offer in the boxing heavy weight category is touted to generate a staggering 300 million US Dollars in revenue. This is a one-night affair, organised to be distinct from the ever-expanding competition for dominance among boxers in the heavyweight category. One good international example of a sporting contest was the cricket match between India and Pakistan staged at the Old Trafford in Manchester. The competition was the 2019 edition of the Cricket World Cup held in England. Demand for tickets reached a crazy six hundred thousand, for a match billed to hold in a stadium with less than a hundred thousand crowd capacity. The match also generated a worldwide television audience of more than a billion people. The various derbies; whether city, regional, national or international, staged essentially in team sports such as soccer, basketball, cricket, rugby, American football etc., are contests to attain bragging rights in a restricted space. The winner may not win the competition for titles on the long run.

4.7 Crowd

Spectatorship can be safely described as the lifeblood of the sport industry. As observed by Da Silva and La casa, (2017); without game-attending fans, clubs would have problems attracting sponsors. Taylor, (1992) was so effusive about the importance of the crowd, that he described them as the actual currency by which sport is purchased. Although scholars such as Cousens and Slack, (1996) and Mason, (1999) described them as a market segment; the so called “die-hard fans” are products of an industrial culture. Spectators in their thousands and millions, depending on the scope of a sport competition, are the actual target of the sport marketer. The various sponsorship offers made to sport competitions and contests, are veiled transactions made to purchase the crowd, physical and virtual generated at the venue. Since these crowds are direct consequences of the sporting process, they are qualified to be considered products of the sport industry. Coca Cola, did not make the huge financial commitment it has with the International Olympic Committee for the mere love of the Olympics. It is in obvious exchange for Coca Cola products to gain access into the minds and homes of hundreds of thousands of fans at the venues as well as billions of virtual audiences watching on television in far flung places all over the globe.

4.8 Venues

Advertising, an integral part of the marketing process relies on availability of space for visual display, in order to deliver messages that reach large audiences. Sport grounds, parks and stadia are commodious facilities which provide such spaces in no small measure. The naming rights of stadia and sports grounds bought by business conglomerates is an actual purchase of the spaces provided by these sport grounds for unfettered advert placements. Modern day sporting events are televised for worldwide viewership, allowing for worldwide reach of adverts from sport venues. Sport grounds therefore, provide ample space and opportunity for advertisers to reach potential product consumers running into several millions. Stadia used in staging the FIFA world cup, Olympic Games, basketball world series, professional boxing etc. provide such space and opportunity to advertisers. Famous sport grounds all over the world are under various naming rights contracts which sort of purchase the ownership of the grounds for a defined period of time. The Emirates Stadium, Etihad Stadium, Allianz Arena, and Rose bowl are good examples. The cities of London, Paris, Melbourne, Beijing, Dubai etc., in hosting ATP and WTA

events buy into these competitions to enable their name be on display at the venues for the live crowd at the venue, and television audience worldwide.

4.9 Clubs, Associations, Federations etc.

Although sport clubs, associations and federations have been identified as production firms earlier in this discourse; they are also products of the sporting phenomenon. This essentially, is where the concept of branding comes into sport. Sports clubs and sporting associations usually develop overtime into historical monuments similar to rare antiquities. They carry in their names and insignia, brands of nostalgic importance to fans. As in vintage wines, they grow richer with passage of time. Generations of sport fans give their support to a named club or a particular game for reason of city or ancestral affiliation. Others got caught up in a hard to explain love for a club or sport association, based on media hype. The type of revenue declared on annual basis, by associations such as FIFA, FIBA, IOC and IAAF; as well as clubs such as Real Madrid FC, FC Barcelona, Manchester United FC, Los Angeles Lakers, Dallas Cowboys and others; stemmed from unwavering patronage and diehard support for these brands by generations of sport fans. The various sponsorship deals touching names, apparels, facilities etc., of clubs and federations implies the purchase of a preferred brand among many.

4.10 E-Sports

The sport phenomenon has developed beyond strict physical exertions to embrace investment of mental energy in sedentary games. Electronic versions of most sport competitions are now available and are engaged in by professional gamers. Defined as multiplayer video gaming, sport played on electronic devices has taken a competitive turn, attracting professional gamers (Research and Markets, 2020). Although still at its rudimentary stage, esports market growth is really impressive. Revenue in 2019 stands at a healthy 1.1 billion dollars, with sponsorships contributing 667 million dollars (Research and Markets, 2020).

4.11 Ancillary to Sport

Clothing, footwear, headgears, and other equipment used by athletes, games officials or used in the execution of a named sporting event or competition are not direct products of sport in themselves, they are aids to sport. These products have other uses to which they could be put to derive utility from them, where the institution of sport does not exist. A wind cheater jacket bearing the insignia of a sport club does not necessarily belong to sport. The jacket worn by anyone on a cold winter night, will provide protection against cold winds, a utility value needed worldwide.

5.. CONCLUSION

This study was designed to explain the apparent lack of conceptual framework for sport marketing as a discipline. It holds the position that sport is an industrial entity and therefore produce identifiable economic goods. The products so identified are termed core products of sport, while products from other industries utilised in sport are termed ancillary to sport. In this respect it argues that sport marketing as a professional discipline and academic concept must take its bearing from the industrial view of sport focusing on production and product presentation to consumers. It proceeded to identify in clear terms, various definable products of the sport industry. Although numerous products from other sectors of the world economy contribute to the development and successes enjoyed by sport; they are ancillary to sport. Goods such as balls, footwear, apparels, rackets and other equipment employed in the sport industry are sine qua none; nevertheless, they are ancillary to sport.

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