

A PARTICIPATION TYPOLOGY FOR THE CONSUMPTION OF LIFESTYLE SPORTS IN VARIED SETTINGS

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Abstract

Since the late eighties and the early nineties, there has been an increase of new sport activities such as skydiving, rock climbing and snowboarding. The increased scientific attention for these 'lifestyle sports' has caused the production and publication of a rather homogenous picture of lifestyle sport participants: lifestyle sport participants are predominantly portrayed as young, white, Western men with a tendency towards sensational and unregulated activities, a 'go for it attitude' and a desire to conquer or battle against nature (e.g. Booth & Thorpe, 2007; Wheaton, 2004).

Nevertheless, recent developments might produce a different picture. As Breivik (2010) argued, four major developments in lifestyle sports are changing the culture of these activities. Firstly, lifestyle sports are becoming more organised. Secondly, performances and media visibility are increasingly important. Thirdly, there seems to develop more green versions of lifestyle sports. And fourthly, the demographic composition in lifestyle sports is broadening.

A prime example which comprises these trends and leads to a shift in the perspective on lifestyle sports is called 'the indoorisation of outdoor sports' (Van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010). During the last twenty years, typical outdoor lifestyle sports like surfing, snowboarding, skydiving and rock climbing, which used to be exclusively practiced in natural environments, are being offered for consumption in safe, predictable and controlled artificial settings such as snowdomes and indoor climbing halls.

In this study the relationships between lifestyle sport participants and the natural or artificial settings in which they are active are conceptualized, and it is questioned in which way Dutch participants of artificial (or: non-natural) environments and natural (or: outdoor) environments differ in their consumption of lifestyle sports.

The sociocultural approach of consumer behaviour in specific settings for lifestyle sports is in this research

based on a multimethod investigation of consumption, including both quantitative and qualitative methods. The first step has been the use of a web based survey, examining demographics, psychographics and participant behaviour of Dutch lifestyle sports participants in non-natural and natural settings. While an online survey is a good way to reach the individual, geographical spread lifestyle sport participants, coverage and sample errors may have occurred: the survey is in fact a volunteer sample because respondents are self-selected and results may not be representative of a larger population. Therefore, the results from the survey are, in a second stage, enriched with in-depth interviews with Dutch lifestyle sport participants in order to understand deeper concepts and meanings.

The analysis, based on the online survey and the in-depth interviews, reveals three types of lifestyle sport practitioners. Regarding preferences for settings for lifestyle sports and motivation, the groups 'Exercisers', 'Exceeders' and 'Experiencers' can be distinguished:

I) The Exercisers are predominantly active in artificial settings, and aspects such as physical fitness and getting in shape are important for this group.

II) The Experiencers prefer a natural, outdoor setting for lifestyle sports, and fun/enjoyment is the most important motivation for their participation.

III) The Exceeders combine both worlds: the ease and efficiency of artificial settings and the nature and sensations from outdoors. They are significantly more motivated by achievement, self-esteem and aesthetic factors.

With the introduction of this participation typology for lifestyle sports, the view that lifestyle sport consumption can be reduced to a narrow set of homogenous traits is challenged. The findings could be used to generate managerial implications, a topic mostly neglected in research about lifestyle sports. Managers are advised to consider lifestyle sport participants as a number of smaller homogenous markets with similar needs and motivations, to improve the understanding of the needs of the variety of participants. In artificial settings for lifestyle sports, the segmentation and positioning of the lifestyle sport participants by identifying their characteristics and preferences have consequences for the organization of preference- and experience based groups.

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