
SPORT PARTICIPATION AND RELATED MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

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BACKGROUND

Physical inactivity is a concerning issue, both in terms of the health implications and the impact it has on the sport industry. Sport participation offers the health benefits associated with physical activity while also contributing to the economic viability of the sport industry. Adults who are categorized as committed to organized sporting events spend at far higher levels than other physical activity, with committed sport participants' annual spending rates ranging from triathletes (\$1,600), runners (\$930), road cyclists (\$770), boxing / mixed martial arts (\$550) to adult team sports (\$470). In endurance sports, the new "mob races" (defined as mud runs, obstacle races, etc.) and traditional running events have been in a boom cycle with increasingly higher rates of participation reported for the last decade (Running USA, 2013). Thus, the economic value accrued through sport participants in the US is up to four times higher than that of sport spectators (Kim, Smith, & James, 2010). Despite the economic importance of sport participation, few studies have been conducted to examine the demographics of American adults who participate in sport other than sport specific studies. The purpose of this study was to examine the demographic characteristics of adults who report sport participation to inform marketing implications toward maintaining viability of related sport businesses.

METHODS

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is the largest survey of adults in the United States. The survey is a collaborative effort between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and each state. In 2013, 491,773 adults were surveyed (CDC, 2014a). They were asked demographic questions as well as an extensive set of questions about exercise. The initial exercise question was, "During the past month, other than your regular job, did you participate in any physical activities such as running, calisthenics, golf, gardening or walking for exercise?" (CDC, 2014b). Participants who answered

yes to this question, were then asked, “What type of physical activity or exercise did you spend the most time doing the past month?” (CDC, 2014b). This was an open-ended question. Seventy-six different activities were identified. Two researchers, one with a background in sport and one with a background in physical activity, reviewed the seventy-six different activities and independently categorized them as: sport (i.e. running, basketball, soccer), physical activity (walking, stationary bike), recreation (hunting, fishing) and other (gardening, raking the lawn). They agreed on the categories 96% of the time. The three activities that they did not agree upon were discussed and the researchers were able to come to consensus on all categorizations.

RESULTS

Seventy-two percent of the respondents reported exercising in the past month (including sport). Overall 19.3% reported participating in sport. People who participated in sport were more likely to be male (67.7% and female 32.3%). Of the four groups a higher percent of people who participated in sport were single (41.9%) and were college graduates (43.6%) while sixty-six percent had at least some college. The majority of sport participants were between the ages of 18 – 44 (76.8%) with 30.4% being age 18-24 and 27.4% being 25-34.

Participants in sport and recreation reported higher income with 39.1% of people who participated in sport making over \$75k per year and 40.7% of recreation participants making that amount. Almost seventy percent of those participating in sport were employed while fewer of the people who participated in sport were out of the labor force (retired). All of the categories had a high representation of White participants (sport 60.6%) while sport had the highest percent Hispanic participation at 19.8%.

DISCUSSION

This data informs marketing for a variety of sport related businesses. Just as parents often socialize children toward team affiliations and fandom, a relationship exists with regard to sport participation. Kids become significantly more active as parents become more active (SFIA, 2012). Active participation is critical to viability of a multitude of industry segments including apparel, footwear, facilities and events. For example, youth spending is 20% greater on event registration and facility fees than spending on apparel and footwear combined, while adults spend more money on apparel and footwear. Yet, this adult spending is not translating to more participation. Based on our analysis of this national data set, we will discuss marketing strategies to align with identified sport and physical activity participation rates among adults. We will consider how brand communities can be established to facilitate the factors linked to motivations among adults, including the need to improve and maintain health and fitness, as well as facilitate social interaction and fun.

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