# A Typology of Runners: Implications for Marketing Strategies

**Steven Vos**, (1) Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Department of Human Kinesiology, (2) Policy Research Centre for Culture, Youth and Sport, Belgium, steven.vos@faber.kuleuven.be

**Jeroen Scheerder**, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Department of Human Kinesiology, Belgium

**Filip Boen**, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Department of Human Kinesiology, Belgium

**Jos Feys**, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Department of Human Kinesiology, Belgium

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## Abstract

Introduction

This paper presents an explorative typology of runners, based on runners' own opinions and views about running, and discusses the possible implications for the marketing of running-clubs, associations and the industry. During the last decades, running has become a popular and democratized leisure sport, which has culminated in the second wave of running [1]. At present running is the fifth most popular sports activity in Flanders [2], [3]. These evolutions have expanded the group of runners to a large extent. Hence, runners have become more heterogeneous in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, motives, etc. [4], [5]. Differentiation within this heterogeneity enables the identification of relevant consumer (runners) groups. This information would be very useful for clubs, associations and industry in order to develop more effective marketing communications approaches.

Methods

The data used in this paper were drawn from a large survey in November 2007 in Belgium (Flanders) on running. A standardized on-line questionnaire was used to collect information on sports participation (both running and other sports), characteristics of running (frequency, intensity, context, etc.), sociodemographic characteristics, opinions and views about running and sport consumption.

For this paper, a sub-dataset (N=8873) was constructed containing only those respondents that have participated in running in the last 12 months (preceding the time of survey).

Cluster analysis (Ward method of hierarchical agglomerative clustering) was used to create a typology of runners. A k-means clustering algorithm was applied to scale scores, which were derived from a principal components analysis on a set of items including opinions and views on running.

Results

Overall, the dataset consisted of runners with a considerable experience (M=10.3 years), 62% were males, 63% had a higher level of education, the <34 year-old group represented 38% of the total sample, while the >45 year-old group represented 31%. Descriptive statistics with respect to gender and age, were quite similar to other survey results for runners in Flanders [3]. However levels of education and running intensity were relatively high in our dataset.

Based on a principal component analysis on 58 items (with varimax rotation) four scales were constructed: (1) 'runner identity', (2) 'health/wellness', (3) 'social aspect of running', and (4) 'ease of individual participation'. The different scales show good reliabilities (Chronbach's alfa's between 0.79 and 0.82). The scale scores served as input for the cluster analysis. The cluster analysis revealed considerable differences among runners. Five groups could be distinguished: (1) 'traditional/generic runners' (35,2%), (2) 'social competitive runners' (14,5%), (3) 'individual fitness runners' (12,2%), (4) 'individual competitive runner' (24,9%), (5) 'companionship runners' (13,2%).

The external validity of the cluster solution could be assessed by relating it to a set of (background) variables. Differences were found between the five clusters on a number of variables: e.g. gender (?Â² = 44.61 / df = 4 / p <0.0001), average running distance (F = 14.42, p <.0001), participation in running events in last 12 months (F = 15.5, p <.0001), expenditure on running equipment (F=51.7, p<.0001). Post-hoc tests (Tuckey - p <.05 level) indicated specific differences among the five types of runners: e.g. 'individual competitive runners' spent significantly more on running equipment than the other types of runners.

## Discussion

Based on opinions and views of runners we were able to construct a typology consisting of five groups/types of runners. These results provide evidence for the heterogeneity of the population of runners. Although the design of this study is rather different, our typology shows similarities with results found by Ogles and Masters [4] and Rohm et al. [5] The constructed typology emphasizes the need for more differentiated and effective marketing communication approaches by running-clubs, associations and industry.

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