

## Sportification of drinks. A sociological analysis of the influence of sport in the market of beverages

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This enquiry focuses on sport's influence on drinking habits by posing the research question: "How has sport influenced the market of beverages?" To explore this phenomenon, a sociological analysis of market trends in the beverage industry has been performed from a sociological perspective based on Luhmann's systems theory (Luhmann, 1985). From this perspective, modern societies host different function systems with each one performing a particular function for the society and having a distinctive logic. Even if function systems are autopoietic, they are able to interact through the emergence of common forms of communication. Beverage industries are here seen not only as typical organisations of the economic system, but also as a privileged place for structural couplings between economy and sport, meaning these organisations are able to operationalise two different systemic logics: one from the economic system, "payment / non-payment" (Luhmann, 1985), and one from the sport system, "performing / non-performing" (Stichweh, 1990). This is the logical basis for the development and commercialisation of sport drinks, defined here as: "functional beverage products (...) created to help athletes and other active people hydrate before, during and after vigorous exercise" (American Beverage Association 2011). Hence, sport drinks have been created for people actively engaged in hard sport activities, a societal relevant but small market target.

To enquire into the research question, a market trends analysis has been conducted by aggregating market data from both primary and secondary sources, which involve general trends in the beverage market and in particular within the category of sport drinks. The main sources rely upon data published by the sector's most important organisations (the Coca-Cola Company and the PepsiCo) and by market research companies.

Regarding the market trends in sport drinks, the analysis shows that within the last decades the existing products on the market, the companies in the segment and especially the number of products sold have rapidly increased. In particular, the consumption of sport drinks in the U.S. in gallons/capita has increased from 1.2 in 1994 to 3.5 in 2004 (Yoffie & Slind, 2006). This explosion of sport drinks market seems not to be singularly explicable by the increase of people active in sports. Instead, this growth can more likely be explained as a particular case of "De-Sportification of Sport" (Cachay, 1990), understood as sport's loss of its distinctive aspects. In the particular case of this drink sector

we shall call it "De-Sportification of Sport Drinks". This demonstrates on the one hand the fact that the consumers of sport drinks are increasingly amateur, not involved in hard sport, or even people not active in sport. On the other hand the fact that the timing of the product's consumption is progressively less bound to sport activities and involves instead non-sportive situations.

Regarding the general trends in the beverage market, the analysis instead identified a clear manifestation of what is in sport sociology called the "Sportification of Society" (Cachay, 1990), understood as the strong influence that sport is able to exert on many different social areas. In the particular case of beverages, we call it "Sportification of Non-Sport Drinks". This involves two distinct sub-phenomena within the marketing promotion of drinks not initially created as sport drinks: firstly, they are often advertised by using sport as a marketing medium (for example the advertising campaigns of Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola and Red Bull); secondly, they are promoted by elating their true or supposed positive effects on sport performances or simply consumed for these reasons (for example Red Bull and smoothies).

In conclusion, the analysis of the influence of sport on the beverage market individuated two distinct phenomena, the "Sportification of Non-Sport Drinks" and the "De-Sportification of Sport Drinks". These show that the influence of sport on beverage constitutes a phenomenon involving increasingly broader segments of the population. However, these tendencies expose consumers to threats represented by illusory and/or false messages on the properties of the products and by the high calories contained by sport drinks, which make of them an unhealthy drink for people not active in sport.

This essay sets a first step in a novel direction within the sociological discussion on sportification, namely eating. In particular, the "sportification of eating" could represent a new sociological area, which clearly shows the need for further theoretical research and empirical analysis and entails various interesting and not yet scientifically assessed phenomena. Furthermore, the creation of a general model for the management of products' sportification as a marketing strategy could be particularly interesting in the field of applied sport marketing.

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