

Images of sports defined: attitudes of the Dutch population regarding fifteen types of sports

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Aim of abstract

Encouraging people to become more active in specific types of sport is a challenging undertaking. Especially in The Netherlands with a relatively high level of (club)sports participation (European Commission 2010). Nonetheless most Dutch sports federations as well as commercial sport suppliers aim to increase their membership levels. Determinants of participation in sports are hard to influence, like people's attitude towards sports in general and – more specific – towards types of sport. This study makes a considerable contribution to the knowledge development regarding perceptions of different types of sport held by the general population and specific groups. The study also compares images of types of sports with empirical sports data. For example, the extent to which a sport is associated with injuries contrasts with factual injury incidence rates.

Theoretical background

The relevance of people's attitude for explaining motivational and behavioural change is explicated in the I-Change Model (De Vries et al. 1988). According to Maio & Haddock (2010) an attitude is an overall evaluation of an object that is based on cognitive, affective and behavioural information. Attitude is closely related to the concept of image. The terms image and attitude describe a similar phenomenon, but from a different perspective: an individual has a specific attitude (for example towards a certain type of sport) and an object of practice (like a type of sport) has a particular image among (certain groups) of people. An image is a collectively held picture of an object or practice (De Pelsmacker & Van Kenhove 2002).

Methodology

Data were collected by means of an online questionnaire among a random sample survey of the national ConsumerJury Panel of GfK Panelservices. This data collection project was commissioned by the Mulier Institute. The target group consists of a representative sample of the Dutch population aged 15-80. 4.200 questionnaires were completed, a response of 74%. The selected fifteen sports included both individual and team sports with different

organisational structures and with a broad variety of participation rates (among different groups): badminton, fitness, golf, running, hockey, ice skating, skiing, table tennis, gymnastics, soccer, judo and karate, volleyball, cycling and swimming. Three randomly selected types of sports were presented to every respondent. Then respondents were asked which descriptions best fit which of the three sports. The presented descriptions were: 'good for one's health', 'injury sensitive', 'difficult to learn', 'elitist', 'cozy', 'individualistic', 'a physically tough sport', 'good for perseverance', 'old-fashioned', 'a men's sport' and 'an exciting action sport'.

Results

An analysis of the data revealed that 'good for one's health' is primarily associated with swimming, 'injury sensitive' with skiing and 'difficult to learn' with gymnastics. Furthermore, 'elitist' is predominantly connected to golf, 'cozy' to volleyball and 'individualistic' to running. Judo and karate are seen as 'a physically tough sport', cycling as 'good for perseverance' and 'old-fashioned' is linked with table tennis. Additionally, soccer is associated with both 'a men's sport' and 'an exciting action sport'. It is also found that attitudes of groups diverge for some sports and are similar for other. For example, the attitude of men and women towards tennis are alike, while the attitudes of both genders regarding ice skating are dissimilar. The data also show that perceptions regarding a type of sport occasionally contrast with factual information. For example, running is not frequently associated with injuries, while injury incidence rates for running are relatively high. In my presentation more sport specific results will be integrated. The results enable sports federations and clubs to develop knowledge driven projects which focus on increasing membership levels. However, further research is required to determine whether sports federations wish to change the images presented and if so, how they would do this. And what images are likely to be associated with increased likelihood of participation, among specific groups?

References

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