

MARKETING FACTORS ENCOURAGING GIRLS TO BE MORE ENGAGED IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

TAL ALONI ROZEN

*Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași
Iași, Romania
talsaloni@gmail.com*

Abstract

This paper aims to gain deeper insight of the marketing factors that impact the frequency of physical activity among girls aged 6-12 in Israel. It is based on the understanding that regular engagement in physical activity is essential for both mental and physical health, and that starting at a young age is recommended. The research instrument is a semi-structured interview, designed to explore marketing factors that can encourage greater involvement of Israeli girls and young female adolescents in physical activity. The interviews have been conducted between July 2021 and March 2022 with a diverse range of individuals. The participants are girls involved in competitive sports, parents of competitive girls, women who have previously been active players, and decision-makers in academia and sports management positions. The research findings indicate three main themes obtained from the interviews regarding marketing. These themes highlight the importance of: 1. Branding physical activity as a culture of routine; 2. Promoting physical activity as a local culture; 3. Branding physical activity as a health promoter. It is widely acknowledged that sports play a crucial role in promoting a healthy lifestyle, especially when introduced to children at an early age for the purpose of cultivating lifelong healthy habits. This paper aims to provide insights into effective marketing techniques that can be applied on the state and local levels to promote an overall healthy lifestyle.

Keywords: *frequency of physical activity of girls; girls' sports; marketing and advertising; behavioral change; Athena project in Israel.*

JEL Classification: Z20, Z200, Z220.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to explore the marketing factors that affect the frequency of physical activity among girls aged 6-12 in Israel. It is widely acknowledged that regular physical activity is essential for both mental and physical health, and starting at a young age is highly recommended. This is accomplished by examining the impact of marketing and advertising, specifically through the Athena Project as a case study.

This research aims to obtain insights that could have meaningful implications for Israel's future as a healthy and productive society, both nationally and internationally. The focus is on understanding how marketing strategies can help

in lowering barriers and promoting participation in sports activities among female adolescents, girls, and women in the Israeli society.

2. ATHENA PROJECT AS A CASE STUDY IN ISRAEL

Athena - the national Israeli Project for the Advancement of Women in Sports, has been implemented for over ten years under the supervision of the Israeli Ministry of Culture and Sport as part of a multi-year plan. The Public Council for the Advancement of Girls, Adolescents, and Women in Sports has operated since 2005, pursuant to the Israeli Government Decision 3416. The Council serves as an advisory body to the government, the Ministry of Culture and Sport, and the minister in charge, with respect of the promotion and development of women's sports in Israel.

Athena offers girls, adolescents, and women opportunities in sports through targeted programs in a variety of sport activities, sports organizations, projects at sports clubs, programs involving local authorities, and programs promoting female leadership in sports. Its activities involve girls and women of all ages in popular and competitive sports. Athena functions to identify, retain, promote, and support girls and women in all branches of sports, from girls in primary school and up to female athletes about to be included in Israel's Olympic delegation. "To Bring about Social and Gender Change in Israeli Sporting Culture, Ensuring Full and Equal Participation for Girls, Adolescents and Women in all Sports and at all Levels" (Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, 2007).

Historically, women's sports activities have been at a disadvantage in terms of their number, status, and social standing in Israel and around the world. The number of girls and female adolescents steered toward sports, the number of competitive athletes, the budgetary allocations to women's sports over the years - all of these need improvement, if gender equality is to be achieved. Engaging in sports is a social, ethical, and educational tool. It impacts all social circles, beginning with the individual, through to the community and, finally, to society at large. It makes all those involved more equal and just, women becoming equal partners in the sporting arena.

Despite the Athena project in Israel in the last decade, the marketing activity, and the awareness of and sympathy for the Athena brand, there has been no considerable change in the number of Israeli girls and female adolescents who engage in sports. Their percentage has never exceeded 22%, although there has been an increase in the total number of female athletes and male athletes in Israel as well. Hence, the total number of female athletes has not dramatically grown (25,311), constituting 21.2% of the total female athletes and male athletes in Israel. The unexplained gap between the number of competitive female athletes at a young age and that of female athletes reaching an Olympic level, is unclear. Thus, the level of government policy has been promoted regarding the way of working for a more egalitarian society also in the field of sports.

The research aim of this study is: “What are the marketing factors that affect the frequency of physical activity of girls aged 6-12, while the research question is: “What marketing factors affect the frequency of physical activity of girls aged 6-12?”

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The contribution of regular exercise at young age

Regular exercise has been shown to have essential benefits for adolescents' health. Engaging in physical activity helps in strengthening the body and improving physical well-being by reducing fat, enhancing metabolic processes, and increasing bone density. Additionally, exercise plays a crucial role in promoting the adolescents' mental health. Research findings show that exercises reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, boost self-esteem, and improve the quality of relationships with spouses and family members. Moreover, research suggests that physical activity can have positive effects on cognitive functioning and academic attainments (Hallal *et al.*, 2006).

In a broader context, the promotion of gender equality and increased opportunities for women have been linked to various positive outcomes. Studies illustrate that greater gender equality in corporate settings can lead to increased profitability (Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle and Yee, 2018), improved team intelligence (Woolley *et al.*, 2010), and enhanced scientific impact of intellectual collaborations (Joshi, 2014). Furthermore, findings show that strengthening gender equality can contribute to the overall economic growth of entire countries (Inglehart, Norris and Roland, 2003). These observations underscore the diverse benefits of regular exercising and the significance of promoting gender equality, not just for personal well-being but also for broader societal and economic development.

Studies conducted in Israel shed light on the way competitive sports accentuate gender disparities that favor men (Lissitsa, Galily and Chachashvili-Bololotin, 2010). Gender disparities become more pronounced when examining media coverage, the underrepresentation of women in news articles, and the absence of women in sports association management positions (Lissitsa, Galily, and Chachashvili-Bololotin, 2010). These factors reinforce social perceptions that portray sports as a predominantly male domain (Shoval, Shachaf, Ramati-Dvir and Shulruf, 2021; Seigelshifer, 2012).

Moreover, a study conducted in 2010 showed contrasting effects of engaging in competitive sports on the education of boys and girls. While girls who participated in competitive sports demonstrated higher educational attainments, boys involved in such sports exhibited lower academic performance. This disparity may be attributed to the socio-cultural context of Israeli youth and the differing levels of legitimacy attributed to boys and girls in their participation in competitive sports (Tamir and Galily, 2010).

These findings underscore the need for addressing and challenging the gender biases and inequalities prevalent within the realm of competitive sports in Israel. We have to exert efforts to promote equal opportunities, representation, and support for both men and women in sports, fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian sporting environment.

3.2 The stages of behavioral change

The integration of various components is a key aspect of the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) for behavior change. This model draws on multiple theories and constructs from different psychological frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of behavior change processes.

One of the key components integrated into the TTM is the concept of stages of change, which originated from the work of Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross (1992). The stages of change theory acknowledges that individuals undergo distinct phases when altering their behavior, ranging from precontemplation to maintenance.

Another crucial element incorporated into the TTM is the construct of self-efficacy, which stems from the social cognitive theory, conceived by Bandura (1977). Self-efficacy refers to the individuals' belief in their ability to successfully execute the behaviors required for behavior change. It plays an essential role in affecting motivation and perseverance throughout the different stages of change.

Decisional balance, derived from the cognitive-behavioral model (Marlatt and Gordon, 1985), is another component integrated into the TTM. Decisional balance involves weighing the pros and cons of changing behavior, considering both the benefits and drawbacks associated with the desired change. This construct helps individuals at the contemplation stage in assessing costs and benefits of behavior change and making informed decisions.

Furthermore, the TTM encompasses processes of change, which are grounded in various psychotherapy approaches (Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross, 1992). These processes represent the strategies individuals implement while progressing through the stages of change and overcoming barriers. Examples of processes of change include consciousness raising, self-re-assessment, and social liberation. By integrating these diverse components, the TTM provides a comprehensive framework for understanding behavior change and tailoring interventions to individuals' specific needs at different stages of change.

Behavior change is a complex process affected by various factors, including marketing activities. Johnson and Brown (2018) conducted a study that explored the impact of social marketing on smoking cessation. The researchers found that carefully crafted messages, combined with effective distribution channels, positively affected individuals' motivation to quit smoking. The study indicated that marketing efforts can play a crucial role in promoting behavior change,

particularly in the context of health-related behaviors. Chen, Williams and Davis (2019) examined the impact of marketing interventions on sustainable consumption behavior. The researchers investigated the effectiveness of eco-friendly product marketing in encouraging consumers to make environmentally conscious choices. The findings indicated a dramatic increase in the adoption of sustainable behaviors, such as recycling and reducing energy consumption, as a result of targeted marketing efforts.

4. METHODOLOGY

This article presents the findings of the initial phase of a qualitative study that is part of a larger research project conducted for doctoral studies. The aim of this study was to examine the marketing factors that could have an impact on Israeli girls and young female adolescents to increase their participation in physical activity. The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between July 2021 and March 2022.

The participants in the interviews included girls involved in competitive sports, parents of competitive girls, and women who had previously been active players, as well as decision-makers in academia and sports management. The twelve interviewees, both women and men, were carefully chosen, ensuring their connection to the world of sports in Israel and their meaningful roles in the Israeli national sports scene. The semi-structured interviews followed a questionnaire format with predetermined questions. However, the order of the questions and the inclusion of additional follow-up questions varied, depending on the progression of each interview.

All the participants gave their informed consent, after receiving an explanation of the research aim and the use of the interview data. The interviews were transcribed and content analyzed, resulting in the identification of two main themes and twelve related categories. This article specifically focuses on the first theme, which explores the marketing factors that influence girls and young female adolescents to engage in physical activity.

5. FINDINGS

The findings gave rise to marketing factors themes and related categories.

5.1 Branding physical activity as a culture of routine

"I have really liked sports, since I was young, I have always loved doing sports" (Interviewee 2)

"I say it's a tool for life, Sports as a matter of routine". (Interviewee 1)

"In Kiryat Ono, in the past, most children underwent a certain stage of their lives where they either learned swimming or played water ball since that was the primary option available. As a society, if we want children to understand the importance of sports and continue engaging in physical activities, it would be

beneficial to provide them with these frameworks throughout their journey until the age of 18. This would further emphasize how crucial sports is and prevent it from being remembered, at best, as a requirement solely before the military service". (Interviewee 9)

"I would create a comprehensive program related to the community, values, and cohesion. I may not have specific details to share with you, but I would connect the community and the neighborhood to the values of sports through various activities".

"I have just returned from a trip to Madrid, where I experienced this in an extreme way, but you know it can be quite oppressive. All the clubs there are within the district, within the neighborhood, with a multi-purpose facility, several pools, several fields, and several dojos for judo and taekwondo. All the girls and boys in that neighborhood are connected on a school level to the club".

"Comfort is an important factor as well. Everyone wants the activities to be right beneath their homes. So that it doesn't require transportation, so that it doesn't require a bus, so that there's no need for organization around it" (Interviewee 11).

5.2 Promoting physical activity as a local social culture

"The second aspect that is almost nonexistent in our sports field is the involvement of public figures in municipal authorities. In our organization, we have been focusing much more on community engagement for the past five years. We invest millions in community sports, which has brought about exceptional values".

"The municipality, in my opinion, just like it takes care of any other service, also needs to take care of sports. While the government manages the country, it is the local authorities that are responsible for sports. They should build the facilities, create clubs, and foster sports. They cultivate the community because they want to be directly elected by their residents, and it's important that the money coming from the residents returns to them. In Copenhagen, it is the dominion, the regime, the municipality that drives sports". (Interviewee 12)

"During the COVID-19 crisis, when there was a lockdown, but basically there was no training, so I went to practice on the basketball courts, me and my girlfriends, we went together to practice and play". (Interviewee 3)

"People who are closer to you affect you more". (Interviewee 3)

"In practice what brings girls to classes are two things, either parents or friends". (Interviewee 4)

5.3 Branding physical activity as a health promoter

"I struggle to get my middle daughter to engage in sports because I believe it is beneficial for both her physical and mental well-being. I am convinced that sports culture is crucial for the body, mind, and overall health". (Interviewee 8)

"It is not just an interest of the Ministry of Sports, but an interest of the entire country that people engage in sports. It helps prevent obesity, reduces stress, and is something that the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education should address together. With more people participating in sports, there is greater understanding and awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and physical activity. As my brother once said, "I insist that Ella (my niece) joins a sports club - she must be active".

There is a growing awareness towards more sports and a healthy lifestyle, but it is more prevalent among adult women and less so among girls, in my opinion. The same is prevalent in Arab society, but it is still limited and not properly organized". (Interviewee 9)

"The body is so important, and sport is so good for it, and I prefer that sports be my refuge". (Interview 2)

"We also hear more and more recommendations from doctors. Does your back hurt? did you gain some weight? You should go for a swim, or you need to go for a walk for at least half an hour".

"And Athena's true slogan is 'When you engage in sports you always win' ". (Interviewee 1).

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate the presence of three prominent themes that emerged from the interviews, highlighting the importance of effective marketing strategies in the promotion of physical activity among Israeli girls and young female adolescents. These themes revolve around branding physical activity as a culture of routine, enhancing it as a local culture, and emphasizing its role as a health promoter.

Firstly, the interviews underscored the meaningfulness of branding physical activity as a habitual culture. By emphasizing the importance of integrating regular exercise into daily routines, girls were motivated to engage consistently in physical activity.

Secondly, promoting physical activity as a local culture emerged as a crucial factor in encouraging girls to participate. By highlighting local events, community initiatives, and role models who embody an active lifestyle, girls felt a sense of belonging and were more likely to embrace physical activity as part of their identity.

Lastly, the interviews demonstrated the importance of branding physical activity as a promoter of health. By emphasizing the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of engaging in regular exercise, girls were inspired to adopt an active lifestyle and prioritize their overall well-being.

By incorporating evidence-based marketing strategies, organizations and policy-makers can contribute to the promotion of healthier and more sustainable behaviors within communities.

The aim of this paper is to provide valuable insights into effective marketing strategies that can be implemented on both the state and local levels for the purpose of enhancing a healthy lifestyle among girls aged 6-12. By understanding and utilizing these marketing factors, policy-makers, educators, and health professionals can tailor their efforts to increase girls' participation in physical activity and foster lifelong healthy habits.

Overall, this study highlights the essential meaning of effective marketing in shaping girls' attitudes and behaviors towards physical activity. By implementing targeted strategies that are in line with the identified themes, it is hoped that positive changes can promote a culture of active living among Israeli girls and young female adolescents.

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