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Marketing Strategies as Correlates of Sports Talent Development in South West Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated marketing strategies as correlates of sports talent development in South West Nigerian Universities. A descriptive research design was adopted to obtain comprehensive information. The population consisted of student-athletes, sports coaches, athletic trainers, and sports directors, with a sample size of 500 respondents selected through simple random sampling. Data was collected using a self-developed Management, Strategies, and Sports Talent Development Questionnaire (MSSTDQ) via Google Forms. Findings revealed that celebrity endorsement, sports promotion, and advertisement significantly influence sports talent development. Based on these findings, it is recommended that universities collaborate with brands to promote sports talents and events, use storytelling techniques to create compelling content, host engaging events to build brand loyalty, and ultimately ensure the long-term success of sports talent development in South West Nigerian universities. It was recommended that sports organisations collaborate with corporate brands such as sports apparel companies or sports equipment manufacturers to promote sports talent and events.

1. Introduction

In today's era, both developed and developing countries recognise the importance of sports in their socio-economic growth and development. They effectively apply marketing principles, theories, and tools to harness the potential of sports (Kotler, 2017). According to Kotler (2017), marketing is a social managerial process through which individuals and groups obtain what they need and desire by creating, offering, and exchanging valuable products. The diverse nature of marketing makes it applicable to the sports industry. Shilbury and Berriman (2018) define sports marketing as the promotion of sport.

Athletes' performance is a key factor in attracting marketing in sports. When athletes perform well, they develop brand equity and brand image, which can then be used for sports marketing. There are many different definitions of marketing in

sports, as the field is constantly evolving (Williams, Walsh & Rhenwick, 2015). Mullin, Bernard, Hardy, Stephen and William (2017) define sports marketing as "all activities designed to meet the needs and wants of sport consumers through exchange processes."

Sports marketing encompasses two primary areas: directly marketing sports products and services to sport consumers, and utilising sports promotions to market other consumer and industrial products or services (Kaser & Oelkers, 2015). It leverages sports as a platform for promoting offerings, as stated by Kaser and Oelkers (2015). Shilbury, Quick and Westerbeek (2018) define sport marketing as a social and organisational mechanism employed by sports promoters to fulfill the needs and desires of sports organisations through product production and shared interests. Additionally, Elendu (2017) defines sport marketing as the application of marketing principles and processes to sport products and services, including the marketing of non-sport and sport-related products and services through associations such as sport sponsorships.

Marketing tools can also be employed for talent development in the sports industry. Elendu (2017), views marketing as a factor associated with sports development that brings about improvements in sports facilities, equipment, planning, organisation, management, and the overall well-being of sports personnel, officials, athletes, spectators, and fans, regardless of factors such as sex, age, religion, race, ethnicity, or economic status. The ultimate goal is to achieve sports objectives within society. Elendu (2017) further emphasises the need for coordination of material and human resources to create a safe environment that enables all citizens to participate in and enjoy sports for recreational or competitive purposes.

One critical aspect of developing top talents in sports is the availability of exceptional coaches (Rogers, 2015). Coaching quality directly influences the training environment, as highly knowledgeable coaches create an environment conducive to success for emerging talents. Conversely, coaches lacking technical or theoretical knowledge and experience hinder athletes from reaching their full potential. Commitment to high-quality coaching and education is crucial for achieving high-level performance (McClymont as cited in Russell, 2015).

The presence of quality and accessible training facilities and equipment plays a pivotal role in creating a positive training environment, while the lack thereof limits sports development (Rogers, 2015). Exposure to competition is essential for athlete development, serving as a focal point for training and a crucial source of motivation when given regularly (Rodgers, 2005). Even the most skilled athletes struggle without proper competition (Sotiriadou, 2015).

For gifted athletes to attain their full potential, an effective motivating atmosphere must be created (Abbott, Collins, Martindale & Sowerby, 2012). High levels of motivation are often required to consistently deliver high-quality training sessions necessary for elite performance. Enhanced motivation promotes learning, performance, enjoyment, and persistence (McClymont as cited in Russell, 2015). Initial motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, typically predicts the commitment

and adherence of student-athletes to a particular sport (Ryan, Frederick, Lepes, Rubio & Sheldon, 2017). Universities play a significant role as grounds for sports talent development, enabling students to represent their nations in international sports competitions. This contributes greatly to the success of student-athletes, who excel in sports performance and achieve honors and medals at national and international events, bringing pride to their universities and countries. The ability of a university to successfully host sport competitions like the Nigerian Universities Games Association (NUGA), West African Universities Games (WAUG), and Federation of African University Sports (FASU) serves as an indicator of its achievements in sports development. It is against this background this study focuses on marketing strategies as correlates of sport talents development in South West Nigerian Universities.

Discovering a talented student athlete might be easy, but developing the talent is serious challenge that many coaches and sports administrators overlook. In this modern time where sports talents are almost everywhere, it takes high quality coaching skill, availability of adequate sport facilities and equipment, high quality training and healthy sponsorship deals through sports marketing strategies for such talent to be fully developed. Unfortunately, the university sports competitions should have been an avenue for many sports talent to be discovered and developed, but reverse is the case. New sports talents are being discovered every time during university sports competitions, but there is no programme or proper arrangement on how those talents would be fully developed. There are reports of some talented athletes being discovered during NUGA competitions. The news only went viral simply because a new talent was discovered, but going forward, there is no plan for the development of the talent.

Endorsement can be seen as a form of brand marketing communication where an individual, acting as the brand's advocate, lends their identity, fame, status in the population, or expertise in the industry to the endorsed brand. As competition for capturing consumer attention and interest in brands intensifies, marketers have developed effective communication strategies to engage customers, create desires, stimulate purchase intentions, and encourage action. Engaging celebrities as brand advocates is one such strategy. Celebrities are individuals who enjoy widespread recognition primarily due to the publicity surrounding their lives (Schlecht, 2013). Due to their popularity, marketers often approach emerging celebrities to endorse their companies or brands (Shimp, 2013). It is estimated that 14% to 19% of advertisements and promotional messages in the United States have involved celebrity endorsements in recent years (Shimp, 2013).

The purpose of sport promotion is to build a positive perception of the sport product and encourage customers to make a purchase. This involves presenting sport products such as events, facilities, equipment, and coaching in an attractive manner through advertising, media, sponsorship, and public relations (Aina, 2019). Sponsorship offers valuable elements that are challenging, if not impossible, to achieve through conventional advertising. In the increasingly competitive business landscape, clear visibility is essential for companies amidst the clutter of information.

Sponsorship is another significant aspect of sport promotion, involving assistance provided to a particular sport or game to achieve specific objectives while projecting and promoting events. Building a strong brand through associations with the values of sport, such as passion, excitement, spirit, emotions, and excellence, is a popular strategy (Asim & Shahid, 2012). Public-Private Partnership (PPP) is considered essential for sports development, as the government alone cannot sustainably fund sports and the private sector is willing to support sports through marketing strategies (Aibueku, 2011).

Advertisements play a significant role in persuading customers, especially when they are unable to differentiate between brands (Lopez-Gonzalez, Esteez, Guerrero-sole & Griffiths, 2018). The media, including newspapers, television, radio, films, and the internet, provide information and advertisements that can influence consumer behaviour. This enables sponsors, corporate donors, organisers, manufacturers, athletes, and others involved in sports programmes to make informed decisions and contribute to sports development (Awoma & Boye, 2013). The close connection between sports and the media allows for effective communication with the public, regardless of their geographical location (Mohibullah, Hazratullah & Asif, 2014). Developing marketing communications that inform, influence, and remind customers about the represented brands is crucial to capture their attention and build brand awareness (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

One of the areas that contributes to sports development is sponsors and endorsements, which are mainly derived through marketing. The sponsorship deal makes available funds that will be used to develop the sport and the talent. This shows the importance of marketing on sports talents development. This problem therefore prompts the investigation into marketing strategies as correlates sports talent development in South West Nigerian Universities.

2. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design. The descriptive design collects data from a population to test hypotheses or answer questions about a phenomenon in connection to one or more variables (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The population for this study comprised of all University student-athletes, sports directors, athletic trainers, coaches, and sports practitioners who participate or have a better understanding of major sport competitions among Universities in South West Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select male and female participants, while stratified sampling technique was used to select the directors from three universities in South West namely; Lagos State University, University of Ibadan, and Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. The selection of universities was also stratified on the basis of being public.

The research instrument for this study was a self-developed questionnaire which was developed into Google Forms titled "Marketing Strategies and Sports Talent Development Questionnaire (MSSTDQ)". The questionnaire was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A was used to collect data on the demographic of

respondents, while section B was used to test the hypotheses formulated. The questionnaire was in line with the four-point Likert's attitudinal scale to give the participants options to choose from, such as; Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D). The reliability level of the instrument was assessed using the internal consistency technique. The obtained score from a single item in the Marketing Strategies and Sports Talent Development Questionnaire (MSSTDQ) was subjected to correlation analysis for test of reliability. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was calculated to ascertain the correlation, yielding a value of 0.95. The questionnaire was administered to the student-athletes and sports directors in each university. The questionnaire administration was done via Google form, which was sent to the participants' email addresses. All the participants responded to the statements on the questionnaire on Google form and submitted without hindrance. The submitted questionnaires were collated and subjected to analysis. The demographic data was analysed using the descriptive statistical tool of frequency counts and percentage, while Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was used to test the stated hypotheses at 0.05 significance level.

3. Result and Discussion

This section presents the key findings from the study and discuss their implications in the context of marketing strategies and sports talent development.

Hypothesis One: Celebrity endorsement marketing strategy will have no significant correlation with talent development in South West Nigerian Universities.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Statistical Analysis on Celebrity Endorsement

	Celebrity Endorsement	Talent development
Celebrity endorsement	1	0.763**
Pearson Correlation		
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	500	500
Talent development	0.763**	1
Pearson Correlation		
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	500	500

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was run to determine the relationship between celebrity endorsement and talent development in South West University. There was a strong, positive correlation between celebrity endorsement and talent development, which was statistically significant ($r = 0.763$, $n = 500$, $p = .005$). This implies that the stated hypothesis is hereby rejected. Emphasising the relationship between celebrity endorsement and sports talent development, as athletes who are endorsed by celebrities can gain greater exposure, financial support, and opportunities for development. This finding is in line with Siano, Villani and Lubian (2016) published in the Journal of Sport Management revealed that athletes endorsed by celebrities exhibited higher levels of brand recognition, perceived quality, and purchase intention. This increased exposure can lead to greater financial support and more opportunities for development. Nielsen Sports (2016)

indicated the growing prevalence of sports sponsorship and endorsement deals, where athletes and celebrities collaborate to promote products and services. This partnership benefits both parties, as athletes gain exposure and support while celebrities enhance their credibility and association with successful athletes. Siano, Villani, and Lubian (2016), found a significant positive effect of celebrity endorsement on young athletes' attitudes towards sports and their motivation to pursue a career in sports. The study discovered a significant positive effect of celebrity endorsement on young athletes' attitudes towards sports and their motivation to pursue a career in sports. **Hypothesis Two:** Sport promotion marketing strategy will have no significant correlation with talent development in South West Nigerian Universities.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Statistical Analysis on Sports Promotion Strategy

		Sport promotion	Talent development
Sport promotion	Pearson Correlation	1	0.956**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	500	500
	Pearson Correlation	0.956**	1
Talent development	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	500	500

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was run to determine the relationship between sport promotion and talent development in South West University. There was a strong, positive correlation between sport promotion and talent development, which was statistically significant ($r = 0.956$, $n = 500$, $p = .005$). There exists a strong relationship between sports promotion and sports talent development. This finding is in line with Lee, Kim and Choi (2019) assert that sports promotion aims to attract attention to a specific sport, event, or athlete in order to increase participation, spectatorship, and revenue. Kriemler and Meyer (2014) also highlight the role of effective sports promotion in contributing to sports talent development by generating interest and excitement, thereby increasing participation rates and expanding the pool of potential athletes. Promotion efforts can also attract sponsors and investments, which provide resources for talent development programmes and infrastructure. Coakley (2018) emphasises that talent development programmes can showcase the skills of talented athletes, drawing attention and generating interest in the sport. This increased visibility can result in greater media coverage, sponsorship opportunities, and fan support, further promoting the sport and attracting more talent.

Müller and Abravanel (2014) define sports promotion as the creation and implementation of marketing and advertising strategies to enhance the visibility and popularity of sports teams, events, and athletes. It involves utilising various media channels to engage the public, increase fan involvement, and generate revenue through ticket sales, merchandise, and sponsorships. Effective sports promotion can build brand awareness, cultivate a loyal fan base, and ultimately drive revenue growth for sports organisations. Leek and Christino (2018) emphasise that sports talent development focuses on identifying and nurturing promising athletes,

providing them with quality coaching and training facilities, and implementing structured development programs to help them maximise their skills and potential. **Hypothesis Three:** Advertisement marketing strategy will have no significant correlation with talent development in South West Nigerian Universities.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Statistical Analysis on Advertisement Marketing Strategy

		Advertisement marketing	Talent development
Sport promotion	Pearson Correlation	1	0.432**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	500	500
Talent development	Pearson Correlation	0.432**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	500	500

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was run to determine the relationship between advertisement marketing strategy and talent development in South West University. There was a strong, positive correlation between advertisement marketing strategy and talent development, which was statistically significant ($r = 0.432$, $n = 500$, $p = .005$). This finding is in support of Jackson, Andrews and Mitra (2017) argue that the relationship between advertisement marketing and sports talent development is multifaceted and interconnected. Advertisement marketing can significantly contribute to promoting and nurturing sports talent by providing the necessary financial resources and exposure to help talented athletes reach their full potential.

Kim and Trail (2016) highlight sponsorships and endorsements as key ways in which advertisement marketing supports sports talent development. Companies often make substantial investments in sponsoring sports teams, events, and individual athletes to raise brand awareness and associate their products or services with the excitement and passion of sports. In return, these sponsorships provide crucial funding for sports organisations and individual athletes, enabling them to invest in training, equipment, and other resources necessary for success. Sports talent development can directly impact advertisement marketing by offering marketable stars who can help brands effectively reach their target audiences and drive sales. In recent years, there has been a growing trend of using sports celebrities and athletes as brand ambassadors, as companies recognise the unique appeal and influence these figures have on consumers. By leveraging the popularity and appeal of these athletes, brands can establish strong emotional connections with their target audiences, leading to increased engagement and loyalty.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that marketing strategies play a crucial role in the development of sports talents in South West Nigerian universities. The strong, positive correlations observed between celebrity endorsement, sport promotion, and advertisement marketing strategies with talent

development emphasise the significant impact these factors have on nurturing and enhancing athletic skills among university students. Specifically, sport promotion showed the highest correlation with talent development, followed by celebrity endorsement and advertisement marketing strategy. These findings underscore the importance of implementing effective marketing strategies to support and foster the growth of sports talents in educational institutions. Therefore, Nigerian universities should consider investing in and prioritising these marketing approaches to create a conducive environment for the holistic development of their athletes.

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