



**MARKET RESEARCH  
METHODS IN THE  
SPORTS INDUSTRY**

**MANAGING SPORTS BRANDS**

**SECOND EDITION**

**NEVEN ŠERIĆ  
JASENKO LJUBICA**

# **Market Research Methods in the Sports Industry, 2nd Edition**

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# **Market Research Methods in the Sports Industry, 2nd Edition: Managing Sports Brands**

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*To my children, Antonia, Anea, Mia, and Ela.*

*Neven*

*To God and my family for protection and guidance, unconditional love, and  
never-ending patience.*

*Jasenko*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The interest in sport is continuously growing. Sport has, thus, transformed into a global social phenomenon (Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2019a), rendering sports and the sports industry one of the most frequent contemporary topics in daily life, business, and academia. Such developments impose the need for continuous and adequate monitoring and research of the sport industry and sports markets. Knowledge and skills related to selection and implementation of sport market research methods are, thus, imperative for the administration and execution of work tasks for sports professionals, or for gaining a deeper understanding of the sports industry for enthusiasts. Continuously increasing investments in sports corroborate and further emphasize such need, particularly as market-related information significantly influences purchase decisions (Mihčić & Šerić, 2008). Indeed, understanding the causes and effects of opinions, attitudes, and behaviors related to the purchase of sports products is but one of the aspirations of those who live of the sports and for the sports (Šerić, 2019).

Financing of sport entities, those on amateur levels in particular, represents another overwhelming challenge that repeatedly puts forth the importance of possession and adequate management (analyses and interpretation) of the relevant information to inhibit flawed decision-making in the management of sport entities. The methodology of market research, as practiced in business operations, is largely applicable in sports and the sports industry. This methodology is a prerequisite for the planning of the activities of sport entities and orderly finances. However, in accordance with the specificities of sports, it is often necessary to adapt such methodologies to obtain the necessary data, the analyses of which will provide the relevant information (Šerić & Ljubica, 2018). This fact was the impetus for the first edition of this book. In this second Edition, we revisit the elaborations of market research methods in the sports industry, this time, however, with a specific accent on the sports brand as one of the fundamental features of differentiation in the local, international, and global sport environment. Hence, both the need and our desire to elaborate approaches to market research methods to sports professionals and enthusiasts through the lenses of the sports brand(ing) represents the “spiritus movens” of this second, expanded Edition.

## 2 *Market Research Methods in the Sports Industry*

Sports results mirror sports reality. The information on sports and sport entities creates such a reality. Hence, the analyses of what sport entities present and represent to the internal (employees, players) and external (members, fans, sponsors, public) stakeholders are the prerequisites for obtaining the relevant information, critical for effective and efficient decision-making, implementation of planned annual activities, and realization of objectives in the management of the sport entities and their brand(s) (Vitner Marković & Šerić, 2011). However, the environment of sport entities, and stakeholders' perceptions, opinions, and attitudes on sport entities, thus, the perspectives on their survival, are changing. In contemporary sports industry, this is especially evident in post-transition countries where investments represent the limiting factor of sports development (Šerić, 2019). Such conditions intensify the need for market research, especially on phenomena that require deeper and more sophisticated analyses to obtain information and discover facts important for the (brand) management of sport entities (Melović et al., 2019). These entail information relate to the factors that significantly contribute to the desirable image of a sport entity (Šerić & Luković, 2011) and can provide answers to many questions critical for successful (brand) management of sport entities. Hence, on the following pages we elaborate on sports market research methods that provide answers to the questions such as (but not limited to)

- What are the fundamental identity components of the sports brand?
- What is the image of the sport entity?
- What is the image of competing sport entities?
- What experiences are useful in sports brand management?
- How is the brand of a sport entity perceived at the local level and beyond?
- What strategies are effective in sport entity's brand management?
- What are the success criteria for the sports entity's brand management?
- What information is important for the short-term (tactical) and long-term (strategic) decision-making in the (brand) management of a sport entity?

Market research provides relatively accurate answers to the above-stated and many other questions, ranging from strategic to routine, every-day operational activities and dilemmas in the management of sport entities. Familiarity with the strengths and weaknesses of each of the methods presented in this book ensures the ability to identify, select, and implement effective sports market research methods to tackle specific cases and problems. To enable readers to do so, we examined and implemented recent scientific research and paired it with selected examples and case studies from sports practice. Hence, our premier objective in this second Edition is to refresh the complete methodology of market research in the sports industry. This expanded Edition, furthermore, aids sports professionals and enthusiasts in the administration of market research methods geared toward the identification of the causes and cause-and-effect relationships of various sport phenomena, those related to the brand management of sport entities in particular. Knowledge of such methodologies enables users to identify the need and

implement changes to reduce or eliminate the negative effects on the sport entity and its activities.

In addition, sports market research also aids effectiveness assessments of the management models of sport entities, relative to the achieved sports results or performance. Because of the objectives set in this way, in this book we intertwine theory and practice. We present and elaborate relevant and actual case studies from sports practice to, both, highlight and clarify the purpose and application of various sports market research methods. In our argumentation, we use induction, deduction, abstraction, concretization, generalization, classification, description, and comparison methods. In addition to the literature, in this book we also infuse our thirty-year-long professional and volunteer experience in various professional and amateur sport entities. The established management models of these entities represent a testimony of the theoretical value and practical utility of the content we presented in this book.

During the last decade, major changes in people's behavior became evident across various domains of personal and professional life, including sports (Šerić & Jakšić Stojanović, 2020; Šerić et al., 2022). The sport management and marketing literature corroborates these notions, indicating these changes relate to the conscious and subconscious domains of human functioning in recent years (Šerić & Marušić, 2015; Šerić et al., 2022a). These facts lead to the assumption that not any single sport is sufficient, per se, to attract visitors and sponsors. This is particularly important considering the importance of sponsors in maintaining the financial health of sport entities. Recent research in international business management (e.g., Ljubica, 2022; Ljubica et al., 2022), a research area congenial to sports industry and management, provides additional support to the notions of changes in various people's perceptions, opinions, and attitudes, hence, behaviors, especially in international, that is, multicultural settings.

On the global sports scene, alterations in the selection of specific sports and sport entities that major sponsors engage in co-branding with are occurring. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, sports were adapted to various stakeholders (e.g., fans and sponsors). In the post-COVID time, changes are necessary (Šerić et al., 2022b). It is particularly necessary to keep in mind the possible changes in the perception of these stakeholders related to the image of sports disciplines. The content (essence) of a sport (sports discipline) can no longer be the exclusive guarantee of public (stakeholder) interest (Jakšić Stojanović et al., 2019; Palrão & Filipe, 2017). Alignment of the image of a particular sport with the perception of the value that the content and achieved sports results provide emphasizes the need to continuously monitor and research opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of the stakeholders and wider public.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant changes in the peoples' perception in terms of value standards (Campos & Almeida, 2022; Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić 2020; McCabe, 2020). Hence, it is critical to understand (the alterations in) the stakeholders' and public perception of added value of sports and sports products, for instance, attending sporting events, purchasing season tickets or memberships in sport entities (Šerić & Luković, 2013b). Otherwise, long-term negative consequences related to the attendance of sporting events, sponsorship contracts, and the like are not only possible but also, as attested in sports practice, almost inevitable.

#### 4 *Market Research Methods in the Sports Industry*

It is possible to predict stakeholders' and public perceptions of attractiveness in the post-COVID time by analyzing their behavioral changes at the national, international, and global levels (Šerić & Marušić, 2015; Šerić et al., 2015b). Such knowledge should be the basis for all activities of sport market research, those geared toward creation and management of sports brands in particular (Bulović & Šerić, 2021). The global pandemic inflicted radical changes in human life; hence, sport marketing requires a novel approach to the scientific analyses and practical application (Šerić et al., 2022a). The fundamental dilemmas in sports marketing should be tackled by analyzing the changed perceptions of content value, regardless of what it is about and which stakeholders and segments of the wider public are analyzed (Šerić et al., 2023c). Recent research (Hall et al., 2021; Prideaux et al., 2020) on the behavior of the sports stakeholders (fans and sponsors) indicates that their impressions of some sports and sports disciplines are changing, and that sponsors are more adept to invest in sports and sport entities they consider (more) valuable.

What are the key characteristics of a particular sport the stakeholders base their impression of added value on? Which characteristics should sport professionals prioritize when creating, re-branding, or managing sports brands? How can understanding and application of sport market research facilitate such activities? These dilemmas and our desire to provide answers to these and many other important questions served as our premier motivation to offer this new, updated, and expanded Edition. Recent findings from the research on the phenomenology of sports, indicating that the state of the art of sport market research related to the management of sport brands is obsolete and needs to be refreshed with new knowledge (Bulović & Šerić, 2021; Campos & Almeida 2022), support our endeavor.

In the "new now" of worsening global geo-political tensions, among other, new developments in the area of sport management and marketing science and practice amend the analyses of the environment of every sport entity. This is even more so given the broader social significance, in times of crisis as is, to a certain extent at least; now, sport has become one of the levers of social tensions and other social phenomena (nationalism, separatism, and others) detrimental for sports, sports industry, and its stakeholders.

Given the above stated, the focus in this new and updated Edition entails the wider repercussions of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, geo-political turmoil pointing toward a "new world order," and also the lurking social and economic recession threatening sports, sport entities, and stakeholders. What methods are adequate to measure the stakeholders' perception of a particular sport, sport entity, or sports brand? Considering the consequences of the pandemic on sports, in the post-pandemic time, it is important to identify factors that facilitate the stakeholders', particularly sponsors', and public attention and create positive publicity for sports, sport entities, or sports brands.

Due to the aforementioned changes in sport stakeholders' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions globally, the first edition of this book has been significantly modified and enhanced, supplemented with problematics related to the sport market research methodologies aiming toward sports brand creation and management. We offer guidelines related to the selection and application of sport market research methods in the post-pandemic time, as well as those related to the

exploitation of the findings thereof in management and decision-making of the sport entities and sports brands.

Insights from sports market research play an important role in maintaining the popularity of a particular sport and attracting new fans, followers, and sponsors even in times of (global) crises. How to adapt the management of a sports brand to these new conditions is, thus, another goal amounting to our motivation to deliver this second Edition.

Are the sport market research methods, as practiced before the global pandemic, also suitable for the post-COVID time? Do the brand's core associations and sporting features contribute to its appeal in the same way as in previous decades? Recent research conducted before, during, and after the pandemic indicates changes in stakeholders' brand perception (Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2021; Šerić et al. 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2023b). These and other findings further indicate that, in the post-pandemic time, efforts are necessary to prevent the stakeholders' perception of the brand resulting in the impression of changes in features previously recognized as the traditional values of the sport entity the brand represents. Starting from such reflections, in this book we open the following dilemmas:

- Should any market research method in the sports industry have priority in the post-COVID time and, if yes, which and why?
- Are some market research methods in the sports industry better suitable for the creation, re-branding, and managing sports brands, in the post-COVID time?

In an applied context, our case studies will be useful to sports professionals when selecting and applying sport market research methods in the post-pandemic time, in particular when assessing the need for re-branding or other alterations and adaptations in the practice of sports brand management. In the scientific context, we build the findings of the recent research in sports management and marketing upon those conducted earlier, interweaving contemporary scientific developments in our elaborations.

In this book, we present and explain modifications of some of the sport market research methods presented in the first edition, as well as of effective modalities of data collection facilitating effective sports brand management, all based on sport stakeholders' perception of sports brand value. The importance and contribution of sports to the quality of life and life–work balance in the post-pandemic time is growing, hence, we do hope this book will stimulate new research.

Over the past decades, the public perception of sports has changed. These alterations stem from varying characteristics of the public and stakeholders, and also according to the perception of the social value and benefits a particular sport connotes. The consequences of the pandemic and trends with negative repercussions on the economy have caused variations in sponsor expectations. The disparity between sport entities in need of financial support and economic entities providing such support imposes the need for more creative and intensive marketing communication. In order for this to result in new sponsorship arrangements, accurate information is of critical importance. In earlier decades, the promotion of individual sports and sport

entities was based on global popularity, that is, sport results. In the post-pandemic time, the perception of individual sports much depends on the impression of its repercussions on social environment and the brands of globally recognized representatives (professional players) of the sport. Additionally, in this case social benefit is sought after.

Long-term loyalty of fans and sponsors in the post-pandemic time is a matter of survival on the sports market. This implies a systematic approach to all marketing activities, including activities of market research in the sports industry, as well as sports brand management activities. Improvisations due to insufficient information and knowledge can result in reduced income and hamper or halt the implementation of the planned annual activities of sport entities. For this reason, the importance of adequate education is imperative for sports professionals and enthusiasts alike (Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2019c; Pranić & Šerić, 2011). Communication with the target audience also requires adaptations (Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2021). Legal regulations, including those related to the sports industry, are changing rapidly, as sport is also susceptible to corruption and other criminal and immoral activities. This necessitates different approaches in the management of sport entities, including methods of sports market research as it provides deep insights on the behavior of sport stakeholders (Šerić et al., 2023a). This, for instance, connotes modifications of the standards of qualitative research methods to gain deeper insights into the changes of various cognitions and behaviors of sport entities and stakeholders.

In the post-pandemic time, globally, less interest for some sports induces a decrease of sponsor interest, for instance that for co-branding. On the other hand, modified variants of the existing sports appear, resulting in varying reactions of the public. This necessitates a prompt recognition of the facts that contribute to the public and stakeholders', particularly sponsors', impressions of the added value of sports, i.e., sport entities (Boyer et al., 2011; Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2019a). In the post-pandemic time, the public interest in sports that have not been systematically developed, as well as in sports that have been significantly affected (e. g. annual programs and competitions) by the pandemic, is weakening. Such sports require repositioning in the minds of the public and sponsors. The selection of an adequate sport market research method aimed at investigating the causes of the decreased interest is a prerequisite for successful repositioning. Reduced budgets for market research activities amount to the negative repercussions on the image of sport entities, and on the decline of interest in sports, sport disciplines, and sporting events (Copley, 2004).

The consequences of the pandemic have had negative repercussions on the marketing budgets of most sport entities. This fact emphasizes the need for a greater share of own marketing relative to the share of intermediaries, to achieve greater visibility and attractiveness of the sport entity and the specific sport, even with a modest marketing budget. This, further, requires adequate education and training of sport professionals in all marketing activities, including the methodology of sports market research.

Lack of systematicity of marketing activities in the sports industry weakens the image and attractiveness of the sport entity (Askegaard et al., 2009; Buhler & Nufer, 2010; Šerić et al., 2020). Congruently, the lack of information about the

causes thereof will have detrimental consequences on the planned activities of sport entities and, indirectly, on their sports performance (Bulović & Šerić, 2021). Such recent findings lead us to reflect on the first edition of this book. Awareness of changes in the cognition and behavior of sport stakeholders occurring during the pandemic and recurring in the post-pandemic time, furthermore, encouraged us to conduct new research (e.g., Šerić et al., 2022b, 2023b), corroborating the need for the revisions of the first edition. Occurrences of environmental turmoil of large magnitude put forth the analyses of, both, the environment and consequent alterations of stakeholders' and public opinions and behaviors related to various social phenomena (Ljubica et al., 2023, 2024; Šerić et al., 2020). Given the global rise in significance and transformation into a global social phenomenon, this includes sports and the sport industry. Political circumstances, those in post-transition countries in particular, are also changing. Global geo-political turmoil affects energy prices, increasing costs for sports, sport entities, and stakeholders. Altered social, geo-political, technological, and other relevant circumstances put forth the need for different communication of the characteristics of sport entities to the stakeholders and the public. Can sport, that is, a sport entity that was not in the primary stakeholder or public focus in the pre-pandemic period, be positioned differently? Sports, particularly sport marketing professionals, should highlight new features of sports and sport entities that can stimulate additional interest from sponsors and fans by strengthening the attractiveness and visibility of sports and sport entities (Anderson & Kerr, 2002; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012). This requires collection and analyses of data related to the opinions, attitudes, and preferences of stakeholders (Jakšić Stojanović et al., 2019a). The organizational and management complexity of a sport entity significantly influences the selection of its market research methods, which, in post-pandemic time, gains on importance (Šerić & Ljubica, 2018). Knowledge on stakeholders' perceptions and opinions regarding the added value of sports and sport entities is, thus, a prerequisite for effective marketing communication of a sports entity. Accordingly, the following characteristics can additionally contribute to the impression of the attractiveness of a sport entity:

- Perception of the sport entity's originality and uniqueness.
- Associations with other entities, perceived attractiveness by the stakeholders due to some characteristics and their activities.
- Supplementary activities, i.e., positive repercussions thereof to the changed environment in the post-pandemic time.
- Market differentiation activities and operations of sport entities.
- All activities of sport entities that strengthen the stakeholders' and public loyalty to a particular sport.

Hence, on the following pages, we elaborate these and other problematics we highlighted in this prologue. We hope that you, dear readers, will share our enthusiasm upon reading this refreshed and improved Edition.

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