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THE USE OF MARKETING AS A TOOL FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AMONG POTENTIAL AND PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL CLUBS IN KZN, SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

Football, as the most popular sport amongst other sports, is a household name in the world and South Africa particularly. This study examines the use of marketing in improving competitive advantage among potential and professional football clubs in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Several sponsorship opportunities that could serve as an impetus to disseminate various club projects are noted to be undermined. Arguably, some of the clubs' activities are seasonal, and the applicability of marketing by football clubs in the KZN province could not be tactically emphasized. Therefore, the amount of marketing activities in clubs' seasonal operations is unidentified which poses a challenge in achieving club objectives. This paper argues that it is of importance for the club marketing managers to consider features of each specific season and corporate marketing activities for the development of appropriate marketing actions that could serve as competitive advantages. This study adopts a mixed-method research approach, and a convenient sampling technique with responses from 80 questionnaires were retrieved. Five (5) coaches, 5 club owners, 5 managers, 5 supporters, and 5 players from five football clubs each located in KwaZulu-Natal province were interviewed to extract their understanding of the use of marketing to gain competitive advantage. Findings from the study state that using marketing correctly could improve the chances of potential professional football clubs' popularity and increase financial gains. Most respondents emphasized that when clubs use a proper marketing strategy with appropriate use of marketing mix, it could position the clubs in the hearts of their supporters and public.

Keywords: Professional, Football, Marketing, Competitive Advantage, Sponsorship

1. Introduction

Service marketing is mostly centered towards a specific target market (Brandenberg, 2014) and the marketing of service is more encouraging than the marketing of a product (Van der Merwe *et al.* 2013). Arguably, selling a product that consumers can see, feel, and touch (i.e., tangible) is easier than selling an intangible service (Van der Merwe *et al.* 2013). A service can be designated as a deed, process, or performance that necessitates some sort of interaction between the consumer and the service provider (Lamb *et al.* 2010). Marketing serves as a means of connecting the products and services one has to offer to customers who want and need them (Cohen, 2011). Sports marketing business is the specific application of marketing principles and processes to sports products and the marketing of non-sports products through an association with sports (Shank and Lyberger, 2015). Marketing involves two people (i.e., the buyer and seller) that give up something of value for something else which they value such as a match for a gate ticket (Du Plessis *et al.* 2012). Any Potential Professional Football Clubs' (PPFC) that intends to succeed is expected to place the love of their community at heart, by creating a lasting relationship through community support program with their supporters.

Strategic management could be employed by a profit-organization to determine its strategic path and maintain its functioning processes (Kartakoullis *et al.* 2013). Businesses use diverse marketing principles (marketing mix) to enhance the performance of their existing product and to introduce a new product in the market. Apparently, this leads to a comprehensive concept of marketing principles used by football clubs. Currently, the use of marketing principles by professional football clubs in Europe and the United States of America (USA) have improved extensively. Professional or potential professional football clubs must identify the type of marketing principles that may help satisfy their customers' needs and build customer relationships. Football is a household name in South Africa as a whole and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) has been a major seat of football in the country. Service marketing and its concept could be a developing and significant area of concentration when considering football operations in the potential professional football clubs (PPFCs'). Attaching profit to any business is something any profit-oriented organization will want to pursue within their business operations.

This paper will be discussing the football section of sports marketing and will identify those marketing principles used by professional football clubs to attain a competitive advantage, and it is organized into six sections. The introduction section explains the aim of this study and its expected contribution. The literature review section attempts to create a connection between marketing principles and football clubs. It also offers details of the service marketing content's essential football businesses, and eventually introduces the conceptual framework. It precedes the methodology that includes the research design and sampling, data collection and analysis, validity, and reliability. Subsequently, the findings and discussion sections are presented based on the demand of each objective and research question. Then the conclusion section, within which the recommendations are included, is presented. Studies have been conducted on several aspects of football clubs and fans, football clubs and social media, use of marketing by football clubs, professional football clubs and branding, etc., but none of these above-mentioned areas have discussed the use of marketing as a tool for competitive advantage of potential professional football clubs. This paper, thus, contributes to the academic literature by informing on the way marketing can be useful to PPFCs' and how marketing mix can be utilized efficiently in sport management.

2. The use of marketing in clubs

2.1. Using marketing principles in selected European professional football clubs

Numerous principles (i.e., 7 PSs') are strategically used by the professional football clubs to position their teams in the hearts of consumers (i.e., supporters and fans). The use of social media, corporate social responsibility (CSR), Word of Mouth, customer referrals, branding, business to business (B2B), and customer relationship marketing (CRM). The Union of European Football Association's (UEFA, 2015) approach to CSR is, however, designed to create and retain long-term benefits for society through football. Fulham FC established a foundation to properly

exhibit their roles in society. In Germany, eighteen Bundesliga clubs have been impacting their society through CSR (Reichie, 2013). However, CSR could be viewed as a basis of a competitive advantage which is arguably a source of support measure for the firm to become more profitable (Deloitte, 2010). In South Africa, the Bidvest Wits football club is highly committed to CSR by reaching out to HIV/AIDS and pediatric patients through Wits Foundation (Bidvest Wits Football Club, 2020). According to Marrs (2018), word of mouth marketing is at its height by using happy customers to promote businesses. According to Leone and Christodouloupoulou (2015), Word of Mouth (WOM) helps to educate customers about the product offerings of the firm and encourage information sharing with social networks through customers' referrals. In football, one supporter attracts others by spreading information about a club to others which eventually becomes the club supporters while these supporters go on to win more supporters. On the other hand, referral marketing is another effective business strategy that could be used by PPFCS' to support WOM. Referral marketing relies on inspiring satisfied and pleased customers' as a referral base to seek current customers using referral-based marketing programs to enhance traditional promotions (Berman, 2016). Real Madrid uses RM based on football products, match services, branding, strategy, players and coaches and management, customer service e.g., sales of football products, tickets, products quality management, and improvement and community development and marketing (e.g., PFC brand, football products, empowerment program, players, website, media).

Deloitte (2019) exposed RM as the highest revenue-generating club in world football. Garcia (2011) added that RM is a leading football industry in Europe, at the top with recent innovation in terms of marketing and resources management. Garcia (2011) confirms RM as a dynamic organization with active competence, capable and proficient in enhancing its traditional business and creating innovative strategies. RM's mission statement is strategic in nature and responds effectively to the new competitive environment by inculcating the corporate strategy into a marketing strategy. Steps in the marketing plan could be universally applicable, but the degree to which each of the separate steps is formalized depends to a large extent on the size and nature of the company (McDonald and Wilson, 2016; Real Madrid, 2020). The use of a traditional marketing mix is one of the principles that RM FC applies in gaining a competitive advantage over competitors. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) express that marketing mix serves as a set of tactical marketing tools that a firm combines to produce and satisfy the needs and wants in the target market. The RM FC of Spain uses the traditional marketing mix (e.g., product, price, place, and promotion), service marketing, and branding to deliver value to their customers to achieve stated goals (Fazack, 2019). The club applies marketing mix (e.g. price- value-based, emotional, quality and differentiation; product- using Boston Matrix, relative market share and industry growth rate; place- online ticket sales, online official store, stadium's ticket office, official stores/franchises, phone line selling and international platform; promotion- no advertising, window display/stadium, social media, and mobile marketing, fan card loyalty program, sponsor and social events, international tours, RM TV channels, and players' fans activities have all been the reasons for their success.

2.2. Use of marketing principles by two top professional football clubs in South Africa

The Orlando Pirates FC is speculated as a popular professional football club in Africa that offers products and services called the "feel-good factor" to supporters all over the country and the continent. The club partnered with a clothing retail company (i.e., Pep), while Adidas designs a variety of their Heritage clothing and globally sells their priced branded merchandise to the public at affordable prices (Superbrands, 2016). The club's brands were identified by Adidas as a sustainable brand for the future although this seems not at the level of clubs such as RM, AC Milan, and MU. However, Up the Bucs television program was established to focus solely on Orlando Pirates Football Club (Superbrands, 2016). The club uses the media as a continental marketing strategy with a monthly broadcast on television to over 50 countries in Africa (Superbrands, 2016). The club CSR show your passion in Black & White campaign caters to supporters that are actively involved during the club's matches. The brand represents the people and understands the importance of sticking to its essential values. The result is visible in their leagues and cup matches whereby the stadium is always packed with their supporters. The club

is one of the most recognizable brands in South Africa, entrenched with over 22 million supporters. It is the most-watched, with a market share of 9.2 percent Superbrands (2016). Kaizers Chiefs Football Club applies various marketing strategies to enhance performance (e.g., funeral services, insurance covers, training, and supporters' gears). The team is also well connected to Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, and YouTube to network better with their supporters (Abratt and Kleyn 2012).

2.3. Marketing principles used in selected potential professional FCs' in KZN South Africa

Shooting Stars FC (2019) reveal a piece of evidence that the team uses marketing to promote the club's product and expose the club's matches to supporters and the public. Supporters can view fixtures of matches to be played, pictures of players, and previous matches played. Also, all sponsors of the club could be accessed on the web page, and their products pops-up constantly. The junior teams, academies, and affiliated clubs were also market in a column, but the website did not display CSR or any community partnership neither was there any evidence of using a marketing mix. There is no evidence of a marketing strategic plan. The website did not show any column that displayed the strategic act of marketing as an advantage with regards to the performance of the club.

Ekaya FC (2019) football operations and activities are displayed in a wellness package business on their website, which is not related to the marketing strategies for the competitive advantage of the club. Also, there are no advertised football products, names, or logos of their affiliated European teams. There is no part of the website that displays any picture, sponsorship information, and no basic or expansive marketing strategies to enhance competitive advantage even though much of CRS was practiced. The club has used social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ on previous occasions, but these were not updated. Moreover, there is virtually no evidence of any specific use of the traditional marketing mix or service marketing mix. Also, there was no information on how the club has been connecting with its consumers or the communities around it. The club's website shared two pages from the riverside sports website (i.e., the senior and junior column) which is only dedicated to the history of the football club although issues of marketing were mentioned in other columns of the sports club (Riverside Sports, 2019). The KZN Football Club uses Facebook, Twitter, Google to market their players, display league results, and inform the public about the fixtures of the league or tournaments, although other club activities were not mentioned. Using Facebook, Twitter, etc. has given the club an opportunity to connect with their supporters and the public (e.g., criticisms and praises).

The Twitter blogs show 3,092 followers, 222 followers, 2,752 Tweets, and 217 likes, and 669 posted photos and videos. On Facebook, in their community column, they have 12,544 followers and 12,242 total likes although there is no evidence of most of the marketing mix and other strategic planning to advance exposure of the club through marketing to further gain competitive advantage. The Kloof Football Club has no evidence of any marketing ideas. The Club was established as an extension of Ekaya FC and academies and it feeds from the large umbrella of Ekaya FC. The sponsorship and marketing strategies of Kloof have benefited from Ekaya community work and the team has grown and developed to a level of a divisional premier league. Information gathered physically from the owners of the Ethekewini Kingdom and Youth Association (Ekaya) state that Ekaya is a major brand name that generally promotes football in KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. The Youth Association is well known in the province and South Africa as a brand that gives birth to another brand name. The Ethekewini Kingdom and Youth Association established Ekaya FC in 2008 and the team has established several football academies in KZN province (e.g., Shooting Stars FC and academies, Kloof FC). That is why its mission statement is We create Goals on its website (Ekaya, 2019).

2. 4. Conceptual framework

2.4.1. Conceptual model

Based on the literature review of marketing principles used by European FCs', marketing principles used by South African FCs,' and marketing principles used by PFFCs' the research

model is conceptualized (see Figure 1). Then, the theorized relationships are developed. Concerning the conceptualized research model, the marketing principles of the football clubs make up the predictor variable, marketing strategies of these professional FCs' act as the mediator variable, whereas the marketing mix for the clubs' performance is the outcome variable. This model is developed to explain marketing strategies football clubs use by practicing a service marketing mix to attain a competitive advantage. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual model.

2.4.2. Recognition of the services marketing mix

Services are meant to be consumed by consumers and yet such services could still be re-packaged in a better way and delivered more acceptably. The 7P marketing mix above the 3p, have now received widespread acceptance in services marketing literature (Palmer, 2009; Kar, 2010). Most service organizations market more than one service to draw more consumers for organizational stability. This might involve deciding upon new services that need to be introduced to a specific type of target market and existing services that need to be maintained, and services that need to be eliminated. However, such services can only be performed using the services marketing mix. An overview of the service marketing mix ingredients is shown in Figure 1 and discussed below.

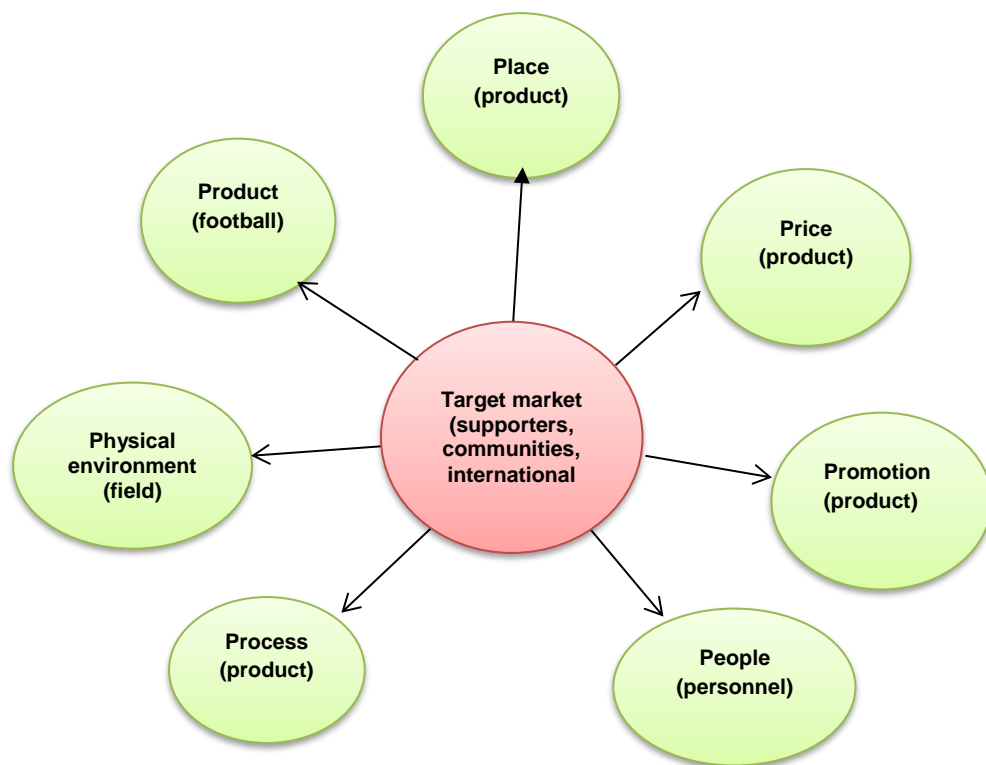


Figure 1. Services marketing mix model – 7Ps

Source: Adapted from Claessens (2018)

The services marketing mix shown in Figure 1 is called the 7Ps. It has been extended from the traditional marketing mix model of four elements to seven elements. The four basic elements are Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. These elements provide a picture of the product or price mix of an organization, combining promotional plans that could approach and serve customers based on well-considered distribution and customer contact channels (Van Vliet, 2011). The three Ps that have been added are People, Process, and Physical Evidence. All seven

elements of the services marketing mix are further discussed below.

2.4.2.1. Place

According to The Chartered Institute of Marketing (2009), 'Place' is where the product is bought and serves as a means of product distribution to a specific place (e.g., football club). It can also mean the way products are displayed to customer groups. This could be in a shop window, or via the internet (on the field of play or club websites) (Kotler and Keller, 2009). Also, the product must be available in the right place, at the right time, and in the right quantity, with reasonable storage, inventory, and distribution costs. Place designates how the product gets to the consumer (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012) through distribution choices such as warehouses, trucks, salesforce, and retail outlets where the product is sold (Strydom, 2011). There must be a distinction between the various levels of interaction concerning service providers and their customers, followed by a discussion on the options available for the service delivery as derived from the interaction (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2009). When considering the selection of a service, the key factor should be convenience (Lamb *et al.* 2013) to distribute services to end-users directly or indirectly through other firms as a supply chain of any organization (Strydom, 2011). Thus, profit marketing organizations need to take distribution systems seriously, in all spheres, to disseminate their messages and the products they are producing. However, with a PPFC, a home could mean an office structure for football administrative matters and a football stadium where football games are played (services) and where supporters and spectators can watch games. According to Lotenberg (2010), place is a powerful force in behavior change and differentiates competitors' offerings by delivering different bundles of benefits.

2.4.2.2. Product

Lamb *et al.* (2013) defined a product as everything, favorable and unfavorable, received by a person during an exchange (i.e., tangibles or intangibles). Correspondingly, Palmer *et al.* (2011) stated that products serve as the means of how organizations seek to satisfy customer's needs (i.e., type of players, jerseys, balls, coaches, manager). It is anything that the organization offers to potential customers, whether this is tangible or intangible. Services are very different from products (Kar, 2010), therefore in profit marketing, a product is not necessarily a physical offering (Weinreich, 2010). Based on commercial marketing, Kotler and Armstrong (2012) defined products and services as being anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a want or need. Products are delivered through services but there are many products associated with PPFCs that need to be improved (either tangible or intangible) when necessary (e.g., level of quality, differentiation, price, the variation of distribution, and adequate promotion).

2.4.2.3. Price

In profit marketing, price usually refers to monetary costs experienced when acquiring goods or services, but non-monetary costs are also involved. According to Thackeray and Brown (2010), price is involved in exchange for receiving a package of benefits. Weinreich (2010) argues that in setting the price, issues to be considered include that if the product is priced too low, or provided free of charge, the consumer may perceive it as being low in quality. Likewise, if the price is too high, some customers may not be able to afford it. Therefore, when profit marketers seek to balance these deliberations, they frequently end up charging at least a nominal fee to increase perceptions of quality and confer a sense of "dignity" to such transactions (gate fee). Nevertheless, numerous pricing strategies can be used by profit marketers in making the desired behavior seem to incur fewer costs and add up more benefits while making the undesired behavior appear to have less benefit and superior cost (Bromer, 2013). The task of the marketer is to ensure that the offering to the consumer (benefits) is equal to or better than what they will have to give up (costs) (Lee and Kotler, 2011).

The specific objective of a price tool is to develop and provide incentives that can be used

to increase non-monetary benefits for the desired behaviour. Pricing is relevant for the commercial marketing of products because it regulates the way that businesses can generate an income to pay all the costs incurred in the development and distribution of the product or service (Strydom, 2011). Historically, the price has been an actor that serves to influence buyers' choice, and therefore commodity production (Du Plessis *et al.* 2012). Price may, therefore, be described as the amount of money a willing buyer is ready to pay a prepared seller for a product offering at a point in time (Adebayo, 2015). Therefore, the football product and the price must be made known to consumers (spectators and supporters) for them to appreciate the quality of the product with the tagged price.

2.4.2.4. Promotion

Promotion is the base for advertising, sales promotions, personal selling, packaging, and direct marketing. Promotion could be a way used in communicating a product to consumers. Fill (2011) interprets marketing communications as being an audience-centered activity that attempts to encourage engagement between participants and provoke conversations (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Communication can be viewed as the work of persuading somebody to perform an action through speaking (Taillard, 2000). Persuasive communication, in this study, comprises various forms of marketing communications messages designed to enhance customers' impressions of the basic offer such as personal selling and WOM support (verbal and non-verbal messages). In other words, persuasive communication intends to stimulate wants by encouraging customers to imagine the benefits of the basic offer (product). It is also noted that marketers attempt to stimulate wants by supplying facts or by appealing to the customer's imagination. Regardless of the misinterpretations towards the use of marketing communication methods generally by the PFFCs' in achieving their goals, the adoption of marketing communication strategies by certain professional football clubs have become more prevalent in Europe especially regarding the traditional marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion), as well as the service marketing mix (people, physical evidence and process). Koekemoer (2010) adds that marketing communication occurs when marketers are sensitive to consumers' needs and wants and communicate with them in a responsible, respectful, and relevant way. Marketing communication is the coordination of promotion efforts to ensure the maximum informational and persuasive impact on customers. Koekemoer (2010) states that promotional inducements are substantive or extra benefits, beyond the benefits of the basic offer, intended to motivate customer actions. This study relates promotional inducement to what is commonly called sales promotion which promotes the marketer's product more aggressively.

2.4.2.5. Process

Bromer (2013) notes that the process deals with how a service is delivered, which includes measuring the success of the service, such as providing the service in a timely fashion to solve a specific need. Services should be reinforced by a clear definition and efficient process. Service providers and consumers should be aware of what to do and how to do it. Meanwhile, services, being intangible processes, become more crucial to ensure standards are met (Kar, 2010). Understanding that the service process is the way a service is delivered to the end-users and serves as a critical component wherein the company defines exactly what the process of the service product reaching the end customers should be (Bhasin, 2017). The process of providing a service and the behavior of those who deliver it are crucial to customer satisfaction. Issues such as waiting times, the information is given to customers, and the effectiveness of the staff are all vital to keeping customers pleased (The Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2009). In addition, in a service situation, customers are likely to have to queue before they can be served and the service delivery itself is likely to take a certain period of waiting time. It helps if marketers ensure that customers understand the process of acquiring services and acceptable delivery times (Kotler and Keller, 2009). The actual delivery steps that the customer experiences, or the operational flow of the service, also give customers evidence with which to judge the service (Zeithaml *et al.* 2009).

2.4.2.6. People

People are an essential ingredient in service provision. Therefore, recruiting, developing, and training the right staff is necessary to create a competitive advantage. Kar (2010) concurs that people are crucial in-service delivery and that intensive training for human resources on how to handle customers and how to deal with contingencies is crucial to business success. Besides, it becomes imperative for service organizations to find ways in which they can successfully manage to contact employees to ensure that their attitudes and behaviors are helpful to the delivery of service quality. According to Donovan and Henley (2010), customers make judgements about service provision and delivery based on the people representing such organizations. They propose three main factors relevant to all people's tasks: interpersonal skills, product knowledge skills, and process skills. They affirm that people factors are important in all organizations, whether for profit, not for profit or government departments. They state further that regardless of people's role in the organization, the staff members with whom the client interacts are generally the most important influence on attitudes towards the organization. From a service marketing point of view, people define a service. People can make or break an organization, because people create first impressions in the service industry (Shah, 2012). The practice of a football business cannot be separated from coaches and managers. As stated previously, people are crucial in-service delivery, and intensive training for human resources is crucial to business success (Kar, 2010). Thus, training employees for efficiency is one of the most important areas in the service industry (Van Vliet, 2011).

2.4.2.7. Physical evidence

According to Kotler and Keller (2012), unlike physical products, services cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard, or smelled before they are bought. A service cannot be experienced before it is delivered. Therefore, choosing to use a service can be perceived as a risky business because you are buying something intangible. The Chartered Institute of Marketing (2009) stresses that this uncertainty can be reduced by helping potential customers to 'see' what they are buying. Similarly, Palmer *et al.* (2011) agree that the intangible nature of service means that potential customers are unable to judge a service before it is consumed. However, an important element of marketing planning is to reduce this level of perceived risk by offering tangible evidence of the nature of the service. Evidence could be a brochure to describe and give pictures of important elements of the service products, the appearance of staff can give evidence, and buildings are frequently used to give evidence of a service's nature.

The appearance of the buildings, landscaping, vehicles, interior furnishings, equipment, staff members' uniforms, signs, printed materials, and other visible cues provide tangible evidence of a firm's service quality (Wirtz *et al.* 2012). Physical evidence refers to the environment in which the service is assembled and in which the seller and customer interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service (Ivy, 2008). See physical evidence as a form of communication; what a customer sees, hears, feels, or smells when entering a service environment invariably 'talks' to the customer (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2009). Physical evidence during service delivery communicates with customers and it plays a role in creating the service experience, in satisfying customers, and in enhancing customer's perception of quality. Hoffman *et al.* (2009) maintain that due to the intangibility of services, service quality is difficult for consumers to objectively evaluate. As a result, consumers often rely on the tangibles or physical evidence that surrounds the service to help them form their evaluations. Got Questions Ministries (2019) points out that physical evidence is critical in guiding customers through the purchase process and making them feel comfortable and trusting towards the service provider. Often, it is also the means through which the service is provided. That is, physical evidence can be used to convey a desirable image since it is the only tangible part of a service offering and includes facility design, equipment, signage, employee dress, reports, business cards, statements, and guarantees (Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler 2009).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and sample

The study implemented a quantitative and qualitative method (i.e. mixed-method) approach used for a better understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Venkatesh *et al.* 2013) whereby data were collected concurrently (Santos *et al.* 2017). The study was conducted between 2018 and 2020 in Durban South Africa. The method offset weaknesses and provides stronger inferences by taking advantage of the complementary strengths of the two methods to offer stronger and accurate interpretations. The study population was players, agents, club managers, sponsors, and supporters from the five selected football clubs (Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2011; Sparkes, 2015). The selection of participants was convenient and potential professionals in the field were selected through convenience sampling (non-probability sampling). The research took place in KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa where selected potential football clubs were situated. Potential professional football clubs (PPFCs) are clubs that are lower than professional football clubs aspiring to become professional clubs. The sample size of a survey most typically refers to the number of units to be chosen from the data collected. The population for this study was drawn from selected PPFCs in KwaZulu-Natal. The qualitative part of the study was achieved using interviews and focus groups used by the researcher to collect information from participants. The quantitative aspect of the research involved the distribution of questionnaires to these clubs which were completed and returned to the researcher.

3.2. Data collection analysis

The research population is comprised of players, agents, club managers, sponsors, and supporters from the five selected potential professional football clubs (PPFCs'), and a total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to the players, agents, club managers, sponsors, coaches, and supporters of the PPFC KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) region of Republic of South Africa. There are two main sources of data, namely primary and secondary. The primary data was collected through interviews and focus groups, which constitute the opinions of selected participants. While the secondary data established the core of the literature review and was induced from textbooks, journals, articles, previous research, and internet sources. The study received a positive response from 428 (85.6%) questionnaires. Detailed interviews and focus group discussions were undertaken to collect data from purposively identified respondents consisting of players, club officials, club owners, sponsors, etc. Ten participants from Durban, New Germany, Kloof, Richards Bay, and Riverside football clubs were selected for detailed interviews to understand the marketing framework used by the football clubs. Two focus groups per club, consisting of six participants in each group, were conducted among the selected football club members in the five communities. Field notes and detailed diaries were kept of every interview and post-interview, which formed part of the raw data that was analyzed. The responses were based on the business operation and marketing events currently going on with these clubs. The research used primary and secondary data to establish research validity and trustworthiness in analyzing the researched variables. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 26) were used for statistical analysis was used for quantitative analysis, while the software package NVivo 10 was used for the qualitative.

3.3. Variables and measurement

Questionnaires were designed in two different ways using a six-point Likert scale for supporters and players (qualitative) and a five-point Likert scale for club officials (quantitative). Section A of both questionnaires was designed for demographics while section B focused on the objectives of the study. Questions were asked on marketing principles, marketing concepts, and football clubs' approaches to business and use of marketing. We also ask questions about the appropriate use of the marketing mix. Responses were formulated based on the Likert Scale choosing one of the options: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree, N/A and satisfied (S); dissatisfied (DS); somewhat satisfied (SS); somewhat dissatisfied (SD); neither satisfied nor

dissatisfied (NS or DS).

4. Findings

Five football clubs were represented namely Ekaya FC, Shooting Stars FC, Kloof FC, Riverside FC, and KZN FC participated. Demographics show that Ekaya FC players (New Germany) were most represented (31%). While Shooting Stars FC and Riverside FC collaboration comprised 26%, Kloof FC 22%, and KZN FC 21%. Age and gender of players show 72 (60%) were 16-21 years of age, and 18 (40%) were 22-24 males. The age of club officials yielded two (30%) who were 30-45 years of age and three (70%) who were 25-30. Nine officials were interviewed: two from Kloof FC, three from Ekaya FC, two (30%) from KZN FC, and two from Shooting Stars FC and Riverside FC. Regarding the date of the club establishment, two clubs (50%) were established in 2010, one in 2008 (25%) and one (25%) in 2011. All the clubs represented play in Premier Durban Central and Premier Durban South.

4.1. Responses from questionnaires

In Figure 2, when asked if the respondents are satisfied with the ways your football club uses marketing to promote club activities, responses indicate that club officials were very satisfied with the ways their club uses marketing to promote club activities while some indicated that they were somewhat satisfied. Although, only a few indicated they were somewhat dissatisfied, however, every one of them signified that they were encouraged in the ways their football setting treats them.

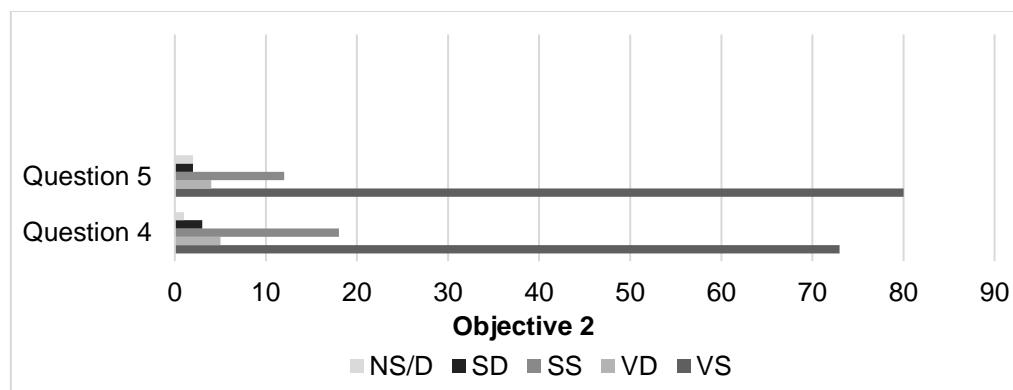


Figure 2. Responses from club officials

Note: (VS-very satisfied, VD-Very dissatisfied, SS-somewhat satisfied, SD-somewhat dissatisfied, NS/D-neither satisfied nor dissatisfied).

In Figure 3, the respondents were asked if they are satisfied with the way their football clubs meet supporter's matters. Some players disagreed with the ways their clubs were treating their supporters. Some chose to strongly disagree while the majority indicated they were neutral or were not sure whether to agree or disagree with the way supporters were treated (confused). Most of the players indicated that they strongly agreed that marketing can be applied to help influence supporters to get involved in the football club business, but a few agreed it could. All the players strongly agreed with the statement that there is no need to adopt any new marketing concepts because they all admire the marketing strategies of bigger clubs and wish their club could emulate those and get to that level.

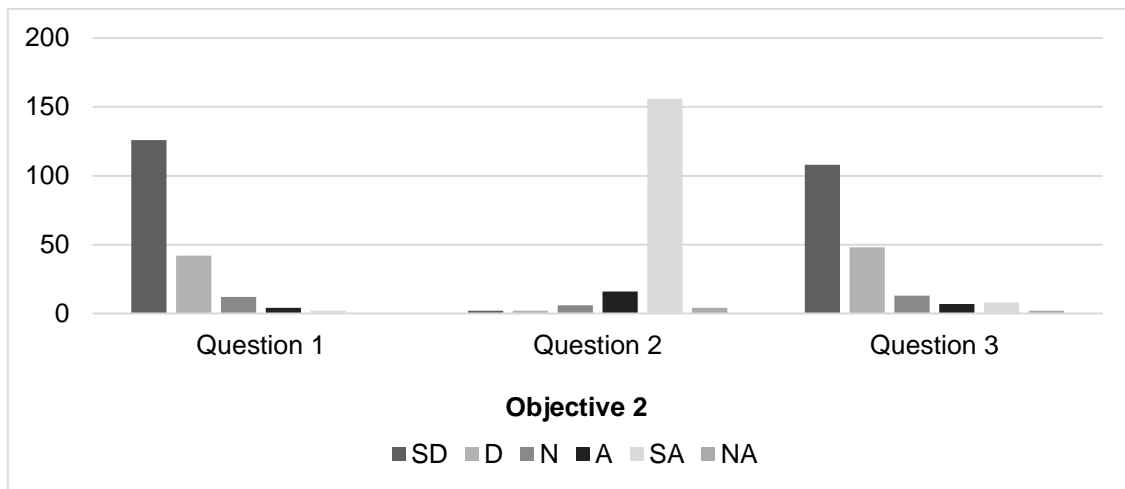


Figure 3. Responses from selected clubs' players

Note: (SD-strongly disagree, D-disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly disagree, N/A- Not available)

In Figure 4, the supporters were asked if they are satisfied with the ways the clubs meet their needs. The supporters indicate that they strongly disagreed that the clubs attend to their needs in the best way. Some plainly disagreed or were neutral (i.e., neither agreed nor disagreed) or choose they agreed to the process.

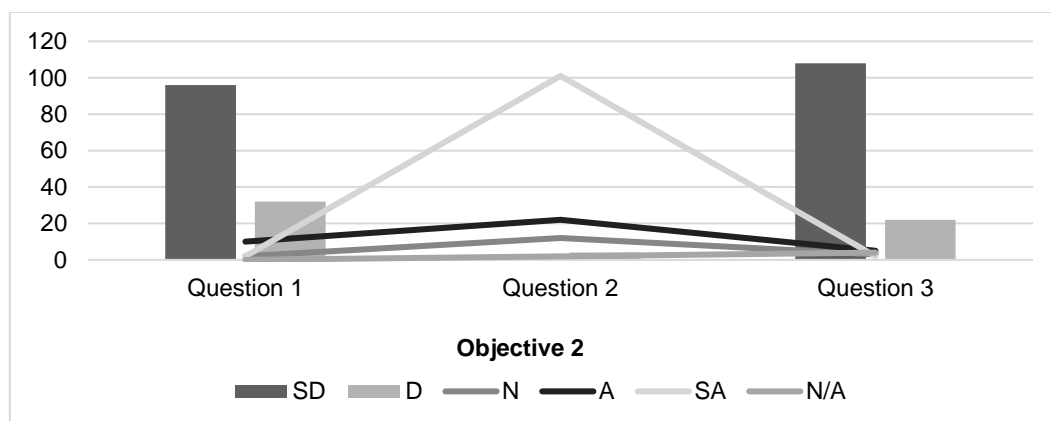


Figure 4. Responses from selected clubs' supporters

Note: (SD-strongly disagree, D-disagree, N-Neutral, A-Agree, SA-Strongly disagree, N/A- Not available)

Concerning the above objective, the discussion was connected to the research question regarding the adoption by football clubs of marketing practices e.g., ways of attracting fans, spectators, etc. Again, three questions arising from the literature were presented to draw out important information.

4.2. Responses of interview groups

Responses from officials from Riverside and Ekaya FCs' on the ways to attract fans, spectators, and supporters to watch their games, indicate that the area of attraction is where their clubs lack the most. However, the clubs try to work through the parents by encouraging them to attend, watch, and love football through their children's participation. Also, these clubs agreed that they make sure they play quality football to keep the clubs' image in the minds of the people that come to watch because they are the ones that will connect with other members of the community and be advocates for the club. It is through this advocacy that professional clubs will be interested in

the clubs and sponsors are attracted to the clubs. It is all about getting different faces of publicity through ideal marketing systems. Riverside FC also networks with old players that are involved with the team and local clubs around them to assist when they need players. Despite that, they still work through their culture in the process of recruitment. Concerning the plans used in retaining old supporters and the club attracting new ones, the Ekaya FC stated that the club does quite a bit of promotion especially on match days by offering T-shirts, the opportunity to play raffles and win gifts, branded soccer balls, caps, face towels, and even flyers for supporters to distribute to their friends. Two clubs mentioned that they are into numerous businesses and they have internal sponsors that support them. But not many sponsors from the outside are involved and they intend to keep all operations in-house to avoid interferences. Also, this helps to pay extra out of pocket expenses while not having too many hands on the table to avoid distorting the vision.

One of the interview questions was on the importance of quality players in the game of football to encourage performance. This question was directed to Kloof and Ekaya FCs officials. One of the officials said that part of their club's vision is to recruit and train quality players, and those that know the club, identify them with quality operations. The official mentioned that some of their players that they market within and outside of the country were qualified to fit the market because all professional clubs or agents want the best. The official further indicated that quality is key and there is no substitute for that, otherwise, performance suffers. Officials for the Riverside FC, KZN FC, etc. mentioned that they absolutely believe in quality, and the club is connected all over KwaZulu-Natal and beyond because the players presently have the opportunity to attend trials in Europe and the majority were lucky to sign a contract there.

4.3. Responses of focus groups

Responses from a club official on benefits offered by the football club to supporters state that the club offers publicity for the team through the marketing department. Also, the club's pictures and games are publicized on websites, in addition to the club's player of the month. Supporters are presented with a gift for the best supporter of the month, which the team visits in the community to participate in specific community work. Another club official mentioned that their football club provides membership benefits to all players (i.e., no member pays the annual membership fee). They have free tickets to watch certain games and get discounts of 25% off when they buy club products. They are given training gear with branded balls and pictures. Also, the club gives training cash allowances to help keep up with specific financial constraints.

Further, the club enjoys publicity through the website and pictures on the clubhouse wall of fame. The supporters sometimes get free tickets to watch games and souvenirs. Their pictures are displayed on the clubhouse walls and the website. Based on a question regarding the benefits of information that empowers the community to know more about football, one of the Shooting Star FC players stated that they send resources on soccer coaching from time to time and these are from reputable football coaching organizations. Another official says players benefit from coaching programs from professional development and senior teams and transfer what has been done through coaching into a way that benefits the players.

Another coach says apart from the coaching courses attended yearly; he connects with the coaching communities to understand certain factors that affect players' performance. Also, he benefits from other coaches' coaching programs and tries to create several programs through identified players' playing problems that were discovered in the game. The coach watches the game a lot to improve his sense of tactical understanding. The Riverside FC responded that sometimes the club brings in referees or top coaches who come in and discuss improvements in the game, which has helped significantly.

When asked about the promotional activities that clubs render to players and the public to position clubs love in their hearts, a player answered that they visit the communities' numerous times. Whereby the player appeared on the sponsor's newsletter page and the local newspaper pages. However, their team goes out with the club's outfits, with their names on the back and front of their clothing. Another player contributed that their club takes them out on social outings to show the players to the communities. The players are proud they are connected on Facebook and LinkedIn through the club, allowing players to meet a lot of friends and supporters, which

provides significant support.

5. Discussion

The empirical findings revealed the way fans, spectators, and supporters are attracted to watch games. Maintaining, winning and attracting new supporters to watch games are nagging issues in South African football generally, except for the few traditional professional football clubs, such as Kaizers Chiefs, Orlando Pirates, Sundowns, and Supersport that are well known in this area. Andras and Havran (2015) listed the foremost business revenues of football businesses are a consumer market (i.e., ticket and season-ticket revenues), players market (i.e., revenues on player transfers), broadcasting rights market (revenues generated from broadcasting rights), sponsorship market (i.e., revenues from commercial rights) and merchandising market (i.e., merchandising revenues). It was emphasized that a club must make money to maintain their fans, spectators, and supporters because these sets of people are different in their characteristics and should be handled accordingly.

Doyle *et al.* (2017) specified that the achievement and sustainability of professional sports organizations mainly depend on attracting and maintaining an adequate number of fans. The results from the current study reveal that selected clubs have not been equal to that task. It was evident that they were unable to keep their supporters, fans, and spectators but depended on in season responsibility towards achieving their goals. What usually happens is that they lose most of their old supporters while they gain few new ones. The revenue that clubs usually acquire during the season if the spectator stands are full, would be quite huge if they were able to maintain, retain, and pull in more of these three categories. "Clubs efficiently preserved their supporter's club as a source of revenue" (Hughson *et al.* 2017). This cannot happen in South Africa football, as any team that enacts such practices will lose their supporters completely.

Another important point as regards the plan used to retain old supporters and to attract new ones. A genuinely professional football club should always have a retention plan for old supporters and plans to attract new ones since supporters offer a great advantage through their unrelentless support in the success of the game. Social media enables direct and indirect communication between users and organizations, whereby the organization maintains social media pages and profiles for their brands, services, and products (Kenyon and Bodet, 2017). There are several ways to retain supporters. One of which is to use social media for constant communication, which shows supporters that the organization cares about their opinions, advice, and suggestions. The supporters must be given a voice in certain matters even though the club holds the power. The relationship with supporters should be a key factor because supporters connect with friends and community members to join the support club depending on team performance and the care channeled towards them.

The relationship between football supporters and their clubs should be full of love, passion, and devotion even though it occasionally involves conflict and doubt (Madsen *et al.* 2019). Therefore, it is very important to keep a healthy relationship with existing supporters and for the club to concentrate on new in-coming supporters. When fans or supporters identify with their team, it is profitable and provides opportunities for them to become members of a like-minded group that shares strong fan behavior and attitudes towards their specific team (Zhang and Pitts, 2018). These clubs should, therefore, strive to create a strong relationship between themselves and their supporters.

Another key factor is the importance of quality players in the game of football to encourage performance. A football club that knows the importance of excellence and professionalism should be able to attract quality players. High-quality football players are an avenue that draws more supporters into the club. A club is highly marketed by supporters and the advertisers when such clubs perform well regularly due to the kind of players that are involved. Highly rated recruiting programs are positively correlated with success on the field (Bergman and Logan, 2016). Quality players determine the success of the team which eventually attracts good performances and consistent winning. The information extracted from the results of the current study shows that almost all the clubs crave excellence and therefore have a professional program for recruitment. These teams are highly respected and recognized in the KwaZulu-Natal region

for their level of success and consistently high performances.

High-performance sport setting is regarded as complex, dynamic, and tempestuous, due to being unpredictable, ever-changing, highly competitive, and embedded within a high-pressure environment (Bentzen *et al.* 2017). This calls for serious-minded and competitive players that know how to reduce pressure and perform well in intense situations. Using marketing to attract players from other clubs is important in making sure the club recruiting program is recognizable and the talk of the town. The clubs used for this study displayed high quality recruiting programs, which enabled them to be promoted and sponsored.

6. Conclusion

Generally, the quantitative data revealed that the clubs are familiar with the basics of marketing, and they use it to help fulfil their team's purpose and goals; while the qualitative data also revealed that teams use marketing to promote club operations. Findings from this study reveal that all the PPFCs have similar marketing practices to interact with supporters, fans, and spectators. They run raffle competitions, visit their customers in their communities, post their pictures on Facebook, maintain LinkedIn pages, use Twitter, WOM, and the relational market as marketing practices. Clubs understand the role marketing plays in the success of a club, but they are limited in resources. Nevertheless, they are trying to make sure that the few marketing practices available are active and super functioning. On the one hand, both methods provided similar responses as regards the use of newsletters from the mother club and sponsors and occasionally trying to market through the local newspaper. On the other hand, New Germany and Durban football clubs, however, indicated that they use some branding skills to promote the club by re-designing their logos and promoting the vision and mission of the club. These statements reflect in both the qualitative and quantitative responses in this study. This study has some constraints. There were constraints of regular transportation to visit club training venue due to location. Also, club officials were not easily accessible. Future research could concentrate on how often or consistent do PPFCs' uses marketing content to recruit players and coaches? Also, future research could consider coaches understanding and use of marketing to promote system of play.

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