Factors Affecting Sports Participation at the Recreational Level

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Abstract

Background: The Sports industry is thriving in India. At this stage, we must understand the factors that affect participation in sport to understand consumers' behavior and provide them with what is missing in the industry. There are various social, economic factors that affect participation in sport by various individuals. Sports Infrastructure is another factor that can help create a culture of sports that is much needed for the country to achieve success at the elite level. The paper aimed to discover the behavior of people participating in sport, know their needs to bridge the gap between what the consumers want and what is already present in the market.

Methods: The type of research carried out in this paper is Qualitative Research. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews across different demographics – Age, Gender and Profession.

Conclusion: It is clear from the study that the future of sports will be dependent on a wide range of factors which may involve having to change the cultural and social attitudes among people, attitudes towards the structure and distribution to free time and accordingly programs must be created in a way that people feel motivated to participate in sports.

Keywords: Sports participation, Recreational sports, Social factors, Economic factors, Infrastructural Factors

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1. Introduction:

Sports is one of the major contributors to helping people lead a healthy life in terms of their mental and physical health. Nations that already have a culture of sports have more people staying fit and healthy, both physically and mentally. Sports not only benefit people in terms of their health, but it also inculcates certain values like teamwork, leadership, confidence, etc., which help individuals in their overall development. Sports here is not only considered as the conventional professional sport. However, it also extends to individual sports and other fitness-related activities as it caters to the population as a whole and does not just restrict to the elite players\textsuperscript{(1)}. Certain factors like the lack of promotion of sport or Physical Education at the school level leads to higher risks of obesity\textsuperscript{(2)}. When sports become a part of everyday life, they become a part of the culture. China in the 1900s realized the importance of sport and how it acts as a symbol to show social and economic prosperity of a country, not only helps one lead a healthy life but also inculcates other values and improves relationships of the members of the society\textsuperscript{(3)}. However, today sports activities are not just considered a mere leisure activity and are instead looked at as a cultural dimension and remarking cities with "places to play"\textsuperscript{(4)}. For it to happen, and sports to develop, and physical planning to the broader issue of public support and participation in sport is essential\textsuperscript{(5)}.

This study's objective was to highlight the factors that motivate or hinder sports participation among the people in India at the recreational level. Three major factors were be taken into consideration, i.e., Social, Infrastructure, and Economic. The second objective was to find out ways in which these factors can be used to create demand and increase participation in sport.

The factors affecting sports participation may positively or negatively affect sports participation. Alexandris and Carroll\textsuperscript{(13)} stated that most of the studies conducted before assume that the factors that affect sports participation negatively are constraints to participation. However, apart from health, lack of self-discipline which are more intrapersonal in nature, there are other
social structural factors which may promote or reduce participation. A study was conducted in Munich, Germany, where various factors were considered that contribute to people participating in sports, which were broken down at micro and macro levels. The factors were further broken down as, Micro- Income, age, and gender; Macro- Sports infrastructure and sports facilities. However, the study does not cover many other social factors like the influence of family and peers on the participation of sports. An ageing population may witness a significant drop in the participation of sports. The gender of an individual plays an important role in determining the behaviour of females, males or others towards sports participation. The profession of an individual helps determine the financial condition and stability in the individual’s life, the amount of time an individual has remaining for leisure activities. Social recognition or the interests of the peer also help determine whether one would take up sport or not. Support from parents is one of the key social factors in determining the participation in sport by an individual as they are the financial support for children till they start earning. Apart from these micro level factors, the macro level factors i.e., sports infrastructure is what determines whether a person has a place to play or not. The infrastructure must be accessible, affordable and of good quality. Sports, over the years, has not only restricted to the physical and mental health of the individuals; however, it has also taken the shape of an industry as a whole. In ancient times, Roman and Greeks would encourage sport through providing the infrastructure for their people’s recreation.

There are numerous factors that may affect the participation of sports for an individual. However, this paper was revolving around 3 broad categories-

Social Factors:
Social or micro-level factors are personal factors that include age, gender, personal preference, family, and friends. The factors based on which this study is conducted are as follows-

- Age- The age of a person helps determine the participation of sport at the various stages in a human’s life. Age, as a factor, may also affect the sport that one participates in. Henley suggested that as people grow older, they may be financially established and hence participate in luxurious sports like Golf or Tennis, however at a young age, they may indulge in football or basketball, which involves lesser investment in terms of finance. Another factor may be the amount of physical activity involved in the particular sport, which will be more for football and less for cricket. In most studies, it showed that younger people are comparatively more active than older ones. One of the major factors that may reduce participation in sports is an ageing population.

- Gender- It is another very significant factor, as in most cases, men are found to be more active than women. However, if adequate measures are taken to motivate women to participate as in the case of, gender will not make too much of a difference.

- Profession- The profession of an individual helps determine various other factors like the time amount of time remaining for leisure/other activities. The financial position of the individual to be able to support participation in a sport financially.

- Social Recognition- This is another factor as a few people do not have a social circle with people interested in sports and hence refrain from participating. However, a few others build their social circles through the medium of sport and are much more interested in sports participation as it helps them to indulge themselves in some kind of physical activity and fulfil their social needs. Social interaction holds to be one of the most important factors for sports participation.

- Parent’s Support- This is one of the most critical factors that help in generating the interest for participation in a sport by an individual. Parents are the ones initiating the interest in sports in their children.

Infrastructural Factors:
The availability/lack of infrastructure is one of the most essential factors for sports participation. Along with the social or economic factors to be in favor, one major part is the availability of sports infrastructure, distance, pricing, and quality. Sports infrastructure means giving people a place to play the sport of his/her choice. The place must have proper specifications are required in a

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particular sport. E.g., Jogging, even though it can be done on the road, people prefer to run in parks or on the grass (2).

- **Accessibility**: The most basic requirement for any sports infrastructure is its availability and accessibility to people. If the sports arena is built too far away from where people reside, they will find it challenging to participate regularly. Another problem that mainly the working class may fail is the lack of time for leisure (6).
- **Quality**: The sports infrastructure must be built with proper standards to ensure it is less prone to injury, facilitates the playing of sport, and is also maintained regularly.
- **Affordability**: The pricing of the facility is another significant factor. In India, most of the sports facilities for Golf, Squash, Tennis are present in clubs which is not accessible to non-members, and the membership fees are skyrocketing. Affordability again hinders people from participating in sports.

Economic Factors:
People in the low-income group face a few hindrances for the participation of sports. To play any sport, an investment in apparel, equipment, and a place to play is required. However, people who belong to the lower-income group find it difficult to afford to play a few sports. It is a known fact that the investment required in Golf or tennis is way more than the cost attached to playing football. Hence, in this research, the respondents were made to answer the questions relatively, i.e., at their income level, if they find it difficult to afford the sport of their choice. E.g., A person from a middle-class family may find it challenging to play Golf but easy to bear the costs attached to playing football or swimming.

2. Material & methods:

The type of research carried out in this paper is qualitative. A questionnaire was prepared and filled by 137 people of different age groups, professions and gender. From the 137 respondents, there were 60.6% (83) males and 39.4% (54) females of different age categories – Below 16, 16-30, 31-45, 46-60 and 60 and above. The professions of these individuals were school, college or above, self-employed, employee, homemaker and a few were professional sportspersons. Among the respondents, 86.1 % said that they play sports regularly, and 12.4% play occasionally, and only 1.5% said that they do not play any sport. The questions aimed at finding out the factors that affect their participation in sport.

Interviews were also conducted with the people who are at the helm of decision-making for various sports to get the industry experts' viewpoints. A total of 5 people were interviewed who are entrepreneurs and sports facility owners.

Data was collected from the various studies conducted already to find the variables needed to conduct the study and find out the factors that affect the participation of sports by individuals.

The variables considered in the study were Social, Infrastructural and Economic.

3. Results and Discussion:

The objective of this study was to identify those factors which promote or hinder participation in sport at the recreational level in India. The factors that affect their participation and the extent to which they affect are discussed below-

3.1. Social

The impact of participation in sport through social factors were found out on the basis of their age, gender, profession, social circle or recognition and the support from parents. These variables determine the interests and amount of time the subjects have to indulge in a sports activity. In the below 16 age category, all the respondents were school students, and only 16.67% of them said they do not indulge in any sports activity, which shows that at the school level, majority of the children are keen on participating in sports. In the 16-30 age category, 12% of the respondents do not play any sport or play occasionally, while 88% play regularly. In the 31-45 and 46-60 age group, all responded, saying they occasionally play a sport. The respondents are either
homemakers, employees, or self-employed and have stated that they lack time due to family responsibilities or working hours due to which they find it challenging to participate in any sport. Among the various social factors, it was found that 78.1% of them participate in any sport for the sole reason of love for sports, health and fitness was the reason for participation for 71.5% of the respondents, which comes to show the importance people give to health and fitness. Only about 9.5% of the respondents play a sport for social recognition or social interaction; 56.2% play for entertainment and leisure.

The hindrances in the participation of sport were mainly lack of time/long working hours or 65% of the respondents; 6.6% of them faced a lack of parents’ support. 5.5% of the females and 6% of the males said that their parents were not supportive of them playing any sport; these were mainly in the age category of 16-30.

3.2. Infrastructural

People go to all kinds of places to play or participate in the sport of their choice. Most people, i.e., 63% of the respondents, go to pay and play arenas or clubs to play their choice of sport. Around 29% of them have facilities in their home premise, i.e., their complex clubhouse or workout from home through online applications for fitness and yoga. Schools or colleges are other places, however, only accessible to the students. Only about 9.5% of the people avail Government Facilities as they either lack maintenance or are not accessible to all.

Only about 1% of the respondents said that the sports facilities are not accessible at all. 32% said that the facilities are very accessible, while 27% were neutral.

As low as 14.6% of the respondents said that the quality of sports facilities is average, 8% said it was terrible while the others rated it to be average.

The pricing of the facilities, 43.8%, said that the facilities are moderately priced. Only about 5.1% said they are highly-priced, and 17.5% said they were reasonable.

3.3. Economic

The study on this variable was done relatively, i.e., the person filling the questionnaire will decide whether the sport is expensive for him/her based on her choice of sport and income level. The primary question asked was whether an individual finds it difficult to support the sport he/she plays financially. For 36.5%, it was not difficult at all, and for only about 1.5%, it was tough. 24.1% were neutral, and 26.3% found it a little challenging to finance their sport.

The study results tell us what motivates or makes people want to play a sport at different age groups and genders and what hinders their participation. In the data interpreted above, a high percentage of people play a sport for their excellent health and to keep fit. Physical activity of any sort impacts an individual’s health positively. It helps reduce the risk of cardiovascular mortality, high blood pressure, control body weight, and diabetes, etc. The participation among school or college students was seen to be high in number, which comes to show the importance given to sports by the educational institutions to promote sports participation. Another important observation was that the office goers, mainly in the age group of 31-60, found it challenging to take out time to indulge themselves in sport. Increased participation increases with a decrease in working hours and time spent on other responsibilities of being a parent. However, this contradicts the earlier study that the people in the age group of 31 and above shouldn’t face much difficulty as they have more stability in terms of work and family life. It is also observed that only the people in the age group of 16-30 years old specifically face the issue of receiving support from parents. It means that the new-age parents are more encouraging when it comes to their kid’s participation in sports. As mentioned in, the role of a parent in enabling young children and introducing sports to them is crucial. In this study, 4.4% of the respondents’ said that they have never been introduced to any kind of sports and hence have not ever developed the interest for it. The respondents that use Government facilities to play sport have rated the facilities’ accessibility to be 3 (on a scale of 5), which means they are neutral about it. They have given a 2 (on a scale of 5) to the quality of the facility, 5 being excellent, which comes to show the state of the government
facilities in the country. The other common places are Clubs, Pay and Play Arenas, which are excellent in quality, accessible. However, they are not as adequately priced/affordable as the Government facilities. This shows the need of the hour is to have facilities that are accessible, affordable as well as in good condition in order to promote participation. As mentioned in \(^8\), there is a need for infrastructure from the youngest to the oldest. 27% of the respondents in this study stated that they face a problem with the accessibility of sport infrastructure. The Chinese Government adopted the policy of “Sports for All” and “National Fitness Program” and it went through significant reforms and changes to promote sport and make it accessible to the people. They realised that a healthy lifestyle will directly impact the health and hence the production and workforce of the country \(^3\). Sports clubs also play a significant role in creating and boosting participation \(^1\). They host yearly corporate and inter-club tournaments and conduct training, fitness and other sport programs which help inculcate a culture of sports among the people.

4. Conclusion:
The above study has helped find a few gaps in the market that can be taken up as an opportunity by the companies in India. Yuen said that the challenge is to provide more than just workspaces. The working class is finding issues concerning participation in sport, corporate events or tournaments may be held annually to help create a culture and develop an interest in sport among these individuals. It is clear from the study that the future of sports will be dependent on a wide range of factors which may involve having to change the cultural and social attitudes among people, attitudes towards the structure and distribution to free time and accordingly programs must be created in a way that people feel motivated to participate in sports.

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