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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# From Fundamentals to Innovation in the Sport Marketing Mix Across Platforms for United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being

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### KEYWORDS

*Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sport Marketing Mix, Spectator Sport, Marketing Cross-Platforms, Well-being.*

### ABSTRACT

**Background.** Implementing branding and marketing strategies is crucial for survival in the competitive contemporary sports market. Thus, marketing catalyzes growth and development within the sports industry and its broader context. Cross-platform marketing as a tool to promote well-being through the 7Ps highlights how coordinated strategies can strengthen sport organisations while advancing broader societal goals. **Objectives.** This integrative review aims to propose a framework for understanding the sport marketing mix and identify contemporary spectator sports marketing trends. It provides a synopsis of the literature to identify contemporary trends, such as cross-platform marketing, that align with SDGs relevant to the sports context. The framework also outlines the key features of the seven elements in the sport marketing mix, namely Product, Price, Promotion, Place, People, Physical Evidence, and Process, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, Good Health and Well Being. In addition, it highlights contemporary trends identified in the review, including the extensive use of social media, e-sports, and the growth of women's sports, facilitated by cross-platform marketing. **Methods.** The method entailed an integrative review, which is broader and more flexible in scope than a systematic review. The researchers combined empirical and conceptual studies as well as selected cases to facilitate a synthesis of diverse methodologies and perspectives. The resultant summary of the literature identified a gap that was subsequently addressed by a proposed framework, which integrates insights across the disciplines of sport, marketing, and well-being. **Contributions.** Understanding the 7Ps and their distinct characteristics is essential for achieving marketing success. To this end, an extended framework of the 7Ps in sport includes cross-platform marketing that aligns with key SDGs related to inclusion, education, well-being, and impactful partnerships. Additionally, recognising contemporary trends can enable practitioners to address evolving consumer expectations and inform future research.

### INTRODUCTION

Creating awareness through marketing can ensure that sports teams remain visible and attractive to their athletes, sponsors, fans, and

spectators (1, 2). Furthermore, sports marketing offers unique opportunities to promote endemic sports products and services, advertise non-sport-

related products that are not directly linked to sport, and use sports events for exposure (3). In addition, contemporary sport marketing extends beyond promotion; it requires a strategic understanding of core principles and tools to effectively position relevant organisations in the sports arena (4). Thus, sport marketing is vital in strengthening a sport organisation's brand equity within the broader sports business context (5). Sports marketing extends beyond event promotion and ticket sales, functioning as a platform for fan engagement while supporting broader societal goals, as highlighted in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This paper addresses a crucial gap in academic literature and practical application by reviewing extant studies on the Sport Marketing Mix across platforms, specifically focusing on its alignment with UN SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. While past studies acknowledged that elements of the 7Ps play a central role in shaping engagement and loyalty across sport contexts, the potential of cross-platform strategies to expand the reach and influence, and the connection between marketing activities and well-being outcomes, remains underexplored. To address this gap, the present study entails a three-step integrative review process and a novel framework that draws on insights across the disciplines of sport, marketing, and well-being, as explained in the following sections.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method applied in this paper was an integrative review, which is broader and more flexible in scope than a systematic review. The researchers combined empirical and conceptual studies as well as selected cases to facilitate a synthesis of diverse methodologies and perspectives. The aim was not to summarise past findings but to generate a new framework that integrates insights across disciplines of sport, marketing, and well-being. This method was employed in response to the fragmented and evolving nature of sport marketing, particularly in the context of digital transformation and inclusivity. The integrative review proceeded according to the steps outlined below.

**Step 1: Define the Topic Review.** The topic of this review is the sport marketing mix, examined through the 7Ps framework, focusing on contemporary trends in cross-platform marketing

and its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While sport marketing extends to promoting sport-related and non-sport-related products, the present study focuses exclusively on the sport marketing mix as it applies to spectator sport products. The promotion of participation sport products and non-sport-related products is therefore not addressed in this paper.

**Step 2: Detail the Contribution to the Theory and Research Questions/Objectives.** The cross-disciplinary nature of this topic and the resultant framework provide valuable guidance for developing sports products that align with contemporary spectator needs and ensure a quality experience beyond purchasing a ticket. In addition, this review contributes to theory by integrating the 7Ps in the marketing mix with broader societal goals, particularly through the alignment with SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. In doing so, it links sport marketing theory with cross-platform applications that foster inclusivity that align with broader social objectives.

The present paper also aims to create awareness of and educate practitioners and scholars on the potential role of sports in advancing broader societal objectives such as health, inclusivity, and sustainable development. Furthermore, the key contemporary trends in sports marketing outlined in this review can assist practitioners in remaining informed to address challenges, utilise opportunities, and guide future research in several promising areas. A detailed discussion of the topic is reviewed after the research methodology section.

**Step 3: Synthesise the Diverse Sources to Address the Research Questions.** A purposive and systematic search was conducted to synthesize literature on the 7Ps sport marketing mix, the cross-platforms, and SDGs. Multiple academic databases and publisher-specific platforms were utilised in this search. Primary sources included Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, supported by journal-specific repositories. In addition, this approach was adopted to ensure coverage across mainstream and region-specific publications and include empirical work that is often excluded from commercial indexing services. The search terms included the keywords "7Ps", "sport marketing", "marketing mix", "fan engagement", "inclusivity", "United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)", and "cross-platform strategy", to ensure thematic alignment with the topic of the review. Where appropriate, publisher portals such as Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and Taylor &

Francis Online were accessed directly to locate recent or in-press articles.

Furthermore, articles were included if they (i) made explicit use of the 7Ps marketing mix framework; (ii) focused specifically on sport contexts such as events, clubs, fan engagement, or professional sport marketing strategies; and (iii) were published in English between 2019 and 2025. Only full-text articles with structured empirical or conceptual content were retained for use. Therefore, studies that fell outside the scope of the sport sector, those lacking methodological clarity (e.g., abstracts or editorials), or those using frameworks unrelated to the 7Ps were excluded. From an initial pool of 56 articles, ten were selected through an iterative screening process and analysed using a thematic matrix method. The final selected ten articles were deemed sufficient for present purposes because they combine diverse methodologies and geographies with an analytical focus, allowing for a detailed yet representative mapping of the integration of digital transformation, inclusivity, and SDG-aligned values within the sport marketing mix framework. [Table 1](#) reflects the diversity in methodology, geography, cross-platforms, and well-being (SDG-aligned) values within the existing body of knowledge.

The synthesis of the literature revealed the following key themes across contexts, disciplines, and methodologies:

- **The Evolution and Application of the Sport Marketing Mix:** The concept of the sport marketing mix derives from the traditional marketing mix concept, which was initially proposed in the 1960s (6). However, the traditional marketing mix, consisting of four basic elements (Product, Price, Promotion, and Place), was extended by adding three additional elements: People, Physical Evidence, and Process (7, 8). Scholars such as Palmer (2014) and Shabani et al. (2018) have examined and verified the significance and applicability of the seven P's framework in sport marketing (9, 10). This thorough approach enables sport managers to ensure that sport offerings align with consumer needs and expectations, enhancing their marketing effectiveness (5, 11).

This sport marketing mix has been widely used to study sport marketing, as seen in [Table 1](#).

Across this body of work, the marketing mix elements are consistently recognised, driving loyalty and engagement (12–21).

- **Limited Application in Digital and Cross-Platform Contexts:** Cross-platform marketing involves channels like email, websites, streaming

platforms, mobile apps, live events, and social media, ensuring personalised and consistent brand message delivery (22). Cross-platform marketing includes social media campaigns, cross-promotions with other stakeholders, email marketing, social media and search engine integrations, and Search Engine Optimisation (SEOs). By adopting cross-platform marketing, brand visibility and engagement are maximised, which could ultimately lead to customer loyalty (23). Within the sporting landscape, cross-platform marketing effectively expands market visibility and enhances fan engagement through multiple channel interaction (24).

However, the few studies that acknowledge cross-platform strategies tend to emphasise only a subset of the Ps, most often Promotion and Process, and are typically confined to specific lineages or sport types (13, 18). There is little insight into how the full 7Ps can be leveraged across platforms to contribute to improved support for health and well-being outcomes.

- **Underexplored Potential for Advancing SDG 3:** With respect to the alignment of sport with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a limited number of studies address issues of inclusion or equity, and even then, these are treated as secondary concerns. For example, Korooki (2025) highlights equity in student sport, Moyo and Banda (2022) emphasize the role of the local community, Obeng and Tetteh (2022) examine cultural inclusion, and Zarei et al. (2021) focus on gender (14, 16, 17, 21). However, the broader potential of sport marketing strategies to actively promote health and well-being outcomes remains unexplored, mainly representing a significant literature gap.

This is also a critical gap because sports marketing today is expected to achieve commercial success and contribute to public health by encouraging physical activity and promoting healthy lifestyles. However, despite this potential, a limited understanding remains of how these tools can be deliberately leveraged to enhance well-being. Applying the 7Ps to advance SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being offers practical guidance for sports organisations and a valuable contribution to academic discourse.

- **Sport Marketing as a Tool for Social Transformation:** Increasing attention is being paid to the role of sport marketing in advancing health and sustainability agendas. While challenges remain — particularly concerning equitable

access and the persistence of socioeconomic and gender barriers—sport remains a powerful tool for addressing public health priorities, promoting inclusion, and contributing to sustainable

development. Addressing these limitations and pursuing new research directions is crucial for maximising the potential of sport in the future (25).

**Table 1. Synthesis of literature application of the Sport Marketing mix.**

Authors (Year)	Rn	Study	Focus Area	Methodology	Key Findings	7Ps Covered	Cross-Platform	Well-being / SDG Alignment
Ahmed & Cho (2020)	12	Mega sports event marketing effectiveness	Evaluating 7Ps for global events	Comparative case study	Promotion and Physical Evidence drive global fan engagement	Yes	✗	✗
Kim & Seo (2024)	13	Digitalisation and 7Ps integration in the K-League	Marketing mix in pro football	Mixed methods	7Ps must be digitally transformed (esp. Promotion and Process)	Yes	Yes	✗
Korooki (2025)	14	7Ps in student sport development	Sport marketing mix in student sports	Qualitative, thematic analysis	Promotion, Process, and People are most critical	Yes	✗	Partial (student equity)
Lin et al. (2021)	15	Sport marketing mix and brand equity	Influence of 7Ps on brand equity	Survey + factor analysis	Product and People are core to building brand value	Yes	✗	✗
Moyo & Banda (2022)	16	Optimising place and process in community sport	Community sport centres and 7Ps	Field interviews and observation	Place and Process must be localised for equity	Yes	✗	Partial (local equity)
Obeng & Tetteh (2022)	17	Inclusive sport marketing in emerging economies	Inclusive marketing in Ghana	Thematic coding of interviews	Inclusivity affects People, Place, Physical Evidence	Yes	✗	Yes (cultural inclusion)
Pandita & Vapiwala (2024)	18	Waving the flames of fan engagement	Fan engagement via social media	Survey-based, SEM	Personalisation, mobile apps, digital focus	Partial (Promotion, Process)	Partial (social & mobile)	✗
Ruiz et al. (2019)	19	7Ps and spectator satisfaction in collegiate sport	Spectator satisfaction modeling	SEM analysis	Price fairness, service Process influence satisfaction most	Yes	✗	✗
Saputra et al. (2023)	20	Sport marketing mix in Indonesian badminton	7Ps model in elite national badminton	Quantitative (questionnaire)	“Product” and “People” are the most influential on loyalty	Yes	✗	✗
Zarei et al. (2021)	21	Marketing strategies in Iranian women’s sport	Application of 7Ps to women’s futsal	Survey, path analysis	Physical Evidence and Process significantly drive participation	Yes	✗	Partial (gender)

Rn: Reference numbers

Sport is widely understood to play a salient role in a country's economic growth; therefore, understanding marketing and the marketing mix within this context is crucial. Marketing is a powerful instrument for confronting, creating awareness, and educating the public about social challenges identified in the United Nations Agenda 2030. Leveraging sport within this transformative framework is essential, providing a dynamic platform to engage communities, inspire action, and drive meaningful change (26).

In conclusion, the integrative review demonstrated the relevance of the 7Ps in sport marketing and their potential to support cross-platform strategies. However, few studies explicitly explore how these elements can be leveraged to advance SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. To address this, a novel framework will be proposed. This framework will guide marketers and sports managers to ensure that sport offerings align with consumer needs and expectations by applying the 7Ps model. It will enable sport marketers to design compelling offerings and use cross-platform strategies to engage diverse audiences, respond to evolving preferences, and promote well-being. Ultimately, this approach positions sport as an entertainment product and a vehicle for social impact, supporting healthier and more sustainable communities.

### **A FRAMEWORK FOR THE SPORT MARKETING MIX ACROSS PLATFORMS FOR UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 3 (GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING)**

The proposed framework for appreciating the sport marketing mix and its key components is illustrated in [Figure 1](#). In this review, a discussion on each of the 7Ps elements in the framework is presented, along with suggestions on how these can be refined for cross-marketing platforms that deliver on the UN SDGs.

**Sport Products.** In sport marketing, a sport product refers to goods, services, or any combination of the two that are produced or offered to satisfy the needs of sport consumers, such as spectators and participants (27). Sport spectators, for example, gain intangible benefits such as excitement and pleasure from watching live sporting events (28). Furthermore, participants in participatory sport also gain

intangible benefits such as improved health and fitness when engaging in an event as either a player or a spectator. Mullin et al. (2014) define a sport product as any bundle or combination of qualities, processes, and capabilities that consumers expect with a view to achieving desired satisfaction (29). Dees et al. (2022) propose that sport products entail specific key characteristics that make them unique; thus, these products require marketing strategies that differ from tangible products (11). The key characteristics of sports products are discussed below.

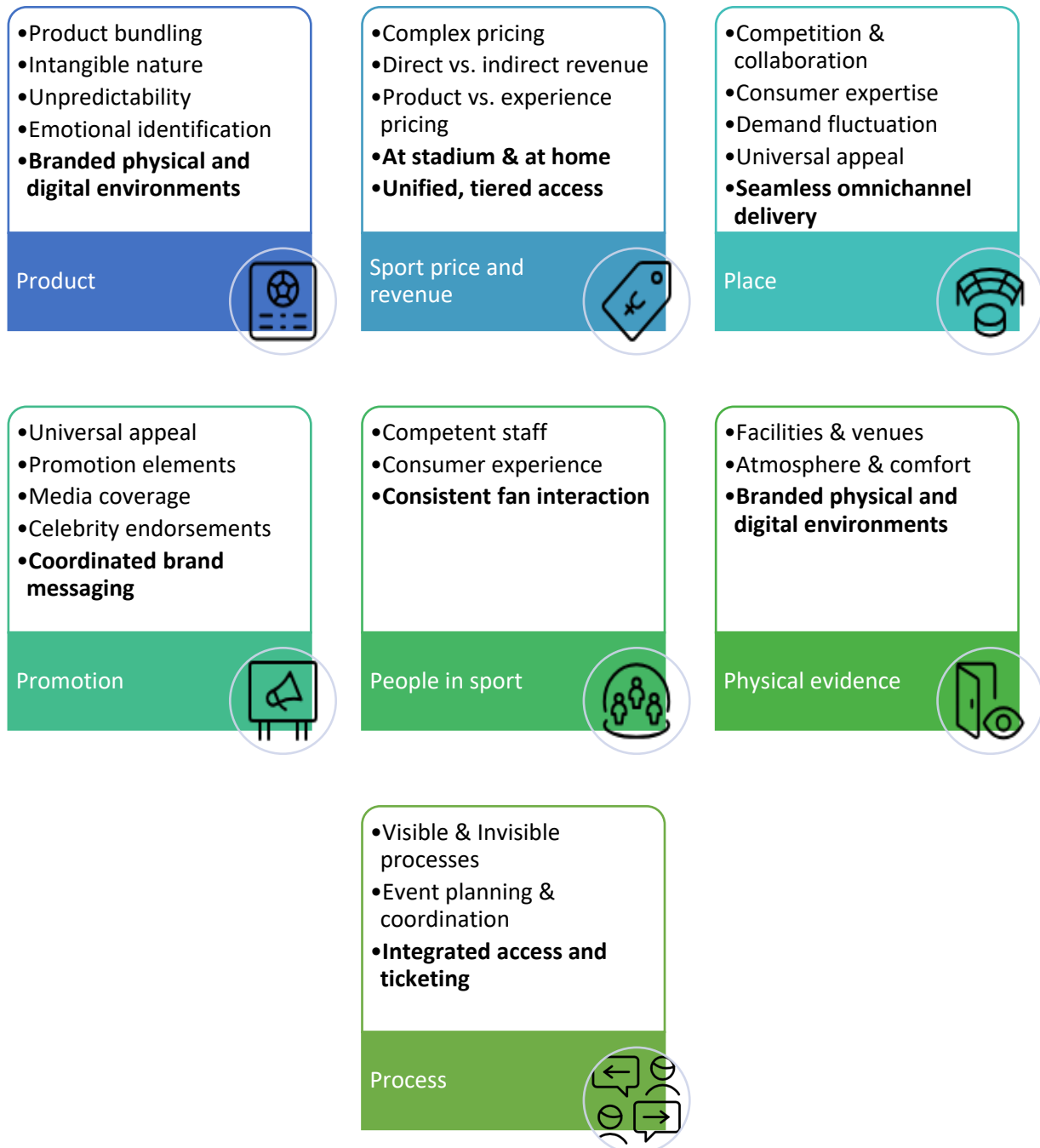
- **The unusual bundling of the sports product:** This sports product comprises physical prowess and training, playful competition between individuals or teams, regulation through special rules, and specialised facilities and equipment needed (11). A football game, for example, involves two teams of eleven players each, with four match officials: a head referee, two linesmen, and a fourth official. In contrast, a netball game consists of two teams of seven players, officiated by two referees and two scorekeepers or timekeepers.

- **Intangible, experiential, and subjective nature:** A sports product is regarded as a service due to its intangible nature, including entertainment, relaxation, and exercise. Thus, it is perceived differently from one consumer to the next, especially when assessing the sporting experience (29). A sports product comprises engaging, memorable experiences valued by passionate and loyal fans who strongly identify with their team and its players (30). Sport marketers, therefore, use star players to attract spectators to sporting events; however, they must avoid creating overly high expectations by over-promising exceptional performances from star players during the match (31, 32).

- **Inconsistent and unpredictable:** The outcomes of sporting events are unstable and unpredictable due to their complexity and the influence of external factors such as injuries, weather conditions, the game's momentum, and how the sport is played and consumed (33). A football match, for example, is produced and consumed simultaneously; it is highly inconsistent, and it is impossible to predict the outcome, nor can one control the quality of the game (34). Sport marketers, therefore, sell the anticipated performance and projected potential without guaranteeing the outcome (35).

• Strong personal and emotional identification: Some spectators are incredibly enthusiastic about a particular sports team (33). These spectators, also known as fanatics, are emotionally attached to their favourite team, and often buy licensed merchandise featuring the team logo to show how strongly they identify with the team, a specific player, or players, and/or the

coach (11). Fanatics remain loyal to a team, even when unsatisfied with the team's on-field performance (36). In contrast, regarding consumer products, any poor product performance experienced by the consumer may lead to brand switching, as a more limited emotional connection with the product or brand exists (37).



**Figure 1.** A framework for the sport marketing mix across platforms for United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good health and well-being).

- **Cross-platform formats:** Sport organisations can offer services, experiences, or content (e.g., live matches, merchandise, digital content). These offerings can be integrated across physical and digital spaces, with formats tailored for both live venues (e.g., hybrid content, AR-enhanced viewing). Some global examples include park runs, which demonstrate how cross-platform delivery promotes physical well-being and social cohesion through community-based runs supported by digital engagement. Walk for Life, an NGO, is South Africa's leading fitness and wellness weight loss programme, and is open to all people of all fitness levels. Walk for Life illustrates how structured cross-platform participation can broaden access, encourage an active lifestyle, and facilitate participation.

**Sport Price and Revenue Generation.** In marketing, pricing reflects the value consumers attach to a product and their willingness to pay. Price is the most flexible marketing mix element, and is easily adjustable as needed (38). In sport, one part of the value exchange is the price consumers are willing to pay to access or own a sporting good (39). Ticket prices at sports events may be reduced to attract new spectators or increase attendance (2). Lowering ticket prices can also attract spectators to less popular events, offering them opportunities for entertainment and relaxation (40). In spectator sport, perceived value for money is influenced by entertainment, skilled players, and regional connection (41). To maintain this value, teams must strike a balance between price and value, as well as offering enjoyable experiences (37). Financial aspects also include securing funds to support operations beyond revenue generation (33, 42).

- **Complex pricing in the sports industry:** Determining fixed and operating costs is challenging for sport marketers, complicating ticket pricing decisions (29). High expenses such as professional players' salaries, technical support, and performance investments also influence ticket prices (42). Cost factors, including stadium rental and event security, contribute to the overall expenditure (43), while value factors such as secure parking, pre- and post-event activities, and event attractiveness, enhance the overall fan experience (43-45). Effective expense management involves balancing cost and value factors to deliver a valuable experience for attendees (46).

- **Indirect revenues versus direct revenue:** The income generated from a sports event's ticket sales is insufficient to cover all expenses of producing the actual sports product and experience (29). In professional sports, media rights and sponsorships are the primary sources of direct revenue that help clubs and unions to cover the costs of hiring high-quality sports facilities and other expenditures, such as hiring trained security personnel to ensure the safety of all attendees (47). Therefore, the success of a sports product depends on the marketer's knowledge of consumers' demands, the type of sports event, and its requirements (33).

- **Pricing the sports product versus the sports experience:** The consumer pays the hidden additional costs of a sports product, which does not correlate with the actual sports experience itself (29). These extra costs include travel expenses, a parking ticket, food, beverages, and other non-sport-related merchandise, which may constitute only one-third of the overall cost (11). The ticket price for a seat in a sports arena is also determined by the seat's location in the event venue, as the better the visibility and access to the game, the higher the price (48).

- **Extending beyond the stadium:** Spectators do not expect access to sport in person, but they expect access online. Pricing models must therefore extend beyond stadium tickets to include subscriptions, pay-per-view, or free access. For example, the broadcaster SuperSport offers free-to-air sports coverage in Kenya, enabling broad community access and motivating active lifestyles.

- **Unified, tiered access:** Sports organisations should move towards unified, cross-platform pricing models to create fair, scalable, and sustainable pricing. These would cover live events, replays, and streaming across devices (stadium, online, mobile), while offering tiered access levels. The German Bundesliga, for example, demonstrates this principle with capped ticket prices that allow for broad access to games, thus strengthening sports culture and participation.

**Sport: The Element of Place.** The place element of the marketing mix refers to the location where products or services are purchased or consumed (49). In sport marketing, place refers to the stadium, arena, or various media platforms where consumers can access or watch the event (33). When deciding on the location for the event,

several key aspects must be considered, including accessibility, convenience, time of day, and the season (5, 50). The key distinguishing features in this regard are as follows:

- **Competition and collaboration:** In the sports domain, sports organisations and other external stakeholders often collaborate to produce events, making it challenging to create a successful event (11).

- **Consumer perceptions and expertise:** Fans or spectators often develop such a passion for the sport that they perceive themselves as experts in player selection and the general implementation of game tactics. Consequently, managers and coaches may face criticism from spectators, especially on social media platforms, regarding how they can improve the team's gameplay (11, 33).

- **Demand fluctuation:** The support level for a sports team or league fluctuates throughout the gameplay season due to spectators' level of interest and attendance (11). Several factors, including poor performance, the level of the tournaments, home versus away games, increases in ticket prices, unfavourable weather conditions, and the live broadcasting of other matches on television, have been found to have an impact on the level of live match attendance at stadiums (51, 52).

- **Universal appeal:** Sport is often described as a universal language transcending age, culture, religion, and social status, making it accessible and appealing to a diverse global audience (11). By bringing together individuals with a common passion, sport offers marketers a broad and diverse pool of potential consumers (35). These consumers are particularly valuable because their positive experiences at sporting events can lead to repeated attendance and enthusiastic word-of-mouth promotion among their peers (53). Customer satisfaction within the sports business has been proven to be a crucial factor influencing repeat attendance and generating positive word-of-mouth, which can significantly enhance sporting events' overall reputation and success (54).

- **Seamless omnichannel delivery:** Place, also in terms of how offerings are delivered and accessed, can be expanded from physical locations (stadia) to seamless delivery across physical venues using streaming websites, social media, and mobile apps for cohesive fan journeys. The NBA League Pass outreach programme

brings basketball to communities through mobile activations, providing access to facilities and opportunities for those who would otherwise not have them. Similarly, Rwanda Development Board's (RDB) streaming in schools allows learners to access and engage with sport, exposing them to physical activity and the experience of watching sports. In addition, the national South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Sports' free digital broadcasts enable the broader South African audience to engage with sport, motivating them to adopt more active lifestyles.

**Sport Promotion.** Sport promotion, or marketing communication, involves activities designed to create awareness, interest in, and loyalty to sports products (2, 36). Its primary purpose is influencing consumer behavior and boosting sales through advertising, personal selling, promotions, sponsorship, and public relations (55). Effective promotion increases visibility, generates interest, and builds positive associations with sponsors, enhancing brand equity (1, 2, 56). In professional sport, promotional messages reach vast audiences through in-person events, broadcasts, and social media platforms (57), aiming to create favourable perceptions and lasting positive associations. The key characteristics of sport promotion are discussed below.

- **Unique application of sport promotion elements:** Sport promotion involves unique elements that enhance visibility, create brand awareness, and foster consumer loyalty. These are outlined below.

Advertising is paid, impersonal communication where the sponsor or company is clearly identified (58). Smith and Stewart (2010) define sport advertising similarly as paid, non-personal messages disseminated through various media channels (30). Advertising effectively reaches broad audiences despite high costs. Marketers generate awareness and interest through sports event advertising by capturing spectators' attention and encouraging attendance (59). It is one of the most effective methods for sponsors to promote brands and products (60). Advertising opportunities include billboards, field banners, logos on clothing, and halftime announcements, providing sponsors with extensive visibility.

Sponsorship refers to a partnership between a sports organisation, an event, an athlete, and/or a corporate entity (33), allowing the relevant parties

to reach mass audiences while simultaneously building and enhancing their brand identity (5, 58). In the context of sport, sponsorship serves as a promotional tool that involves promoting non-sport products through associations with the sport organisation (39). For example, all teams participating in competitions must typically have the logos of their primary sponsors printed on their official sporting apparel. This strategy ensures consistent visibility for sponsors and strengthens their association with the event and its participants.

Publicity refers to any non-paid form of beneficial exposure that is within the control and influence of the player or sponsor (29). According to Schwarz and Hunter (2018), publicity encompasses various techniques and activities designed to create and promote awareness by disseminating information across multiple media platforms (5). In the past, sports organisations relied heavily on free publicity to promote their activities and products (61); however, modern marketers increasingly utilise digital platforms to convey sport-related messages to a broad audience quickly and effectively (62).

Sales promotion involves giveaways, coupons, product samples, cash refunds, contests, raffles, and other brand activations to stimulate immediate consumer action (33, 38). In the sports industry, sales promotions are frequently implemented as short-term marketing strategies to attract and encourage spectators and non-spectators to attend events or try new sports products, often through discounted tickets or special offers (11). Promotional strategies may

include offering discounted tickets for early purchases, conducting social media competitions where participants can win free event passes, or organising raffles and giveaways during major sporting events to enhance audience engagement and drive attendance.

- **Widespread media coverage:** Media coverage refers to the widespread exposure of a sports product through multiple media channels such as the Internet (mainly social media), newspapers, radio, and television (27). The media coverage that sports products receive from various sources reduces the need for and costs associated with conventional mass media usage by creating brand awareness and increasing sales on Internet platforms (11).

- **Athlete endorsers and sport celebrities created via media and sponsorships:** In sports marketing, successful athletes often become sports celebrities through major sponsorships. They are admired for their physical abilities and skills, which enable them to achieve wealth and success (63). Sport celebrities are valuable assets for sponsors due to their extensive social media followings and broad exposure. Higher transfer fees, competitive salaries, lucrative endorsements, and the ability to attract sponsors make this marketing tool appealing (64). Top athletes now leverage their social media presence to build personal brands and secure profitable endorsement deals (65). High visibility—on the field or online—consistently attracts sponsorships for athletes and their teams. The top five globally highest-endorsed sport celebrities and their sponsors are listed in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. The top five globally highest-endorsed sports celebrities.**

Sport celebrities	Top brands	Endorsement value
<b>1. Conor McGregor (MMA fighter)</b>	Burger King, DraftKings, Dystopia Video Game, Twelve, Reebok	US\$180 million
<b>2. Lionel Messi (soccer)</b>	OrCam, Budweiser, Adidas, Pepsi, The World Health Organisation	US\$130 million
<b>3. Cristiano Ronaldo (soccer)</b>	HerbalLife, Armani, Clear Shampoo, Unilever, KFC, Shopee, Crunch Fitness	US\$120 million
<b>4. Dak Prescott (American football)</b>	Nike, Air Jordan	US\$108 million
<b>5. Lebron James (basketball)</b>	Nike, Coca-Cola, Upper Deck, McDonald's, Samsung, Microsoft	US\$96.5 million

Source: Author's compilation based on publicly available endorsement rankings (Forbes, Statista, ESPN).

- **Coordinated brand messaging:** Communication strategies to inform and persuade fans, whether through advertising, sponsorships, influencers, or traditional and digital media, should be aligned to ensure brand consistency

across channels. For example, in tennis, Wimbledon's "Come Play" campaign has encouraged widespread participation in the sport as a healthy activity. Similarly, Ghana's "Let's Get Active" campaign motivates and promotes

physical activity and wellness among youth. In South Africa, Netball South Africa's "She Conquers" campaign emphasises how participating in netball improves a woman's well-being and highlights the broader social value of active lifestyles.

**People in Sport.** In the sphere of sport, people are a vital element of the marketing mix and significantly impact the quality of service delivered to customers (8). The effectiveness of personnel in sport marketing plays a critical role in ensuring successful events and enhancing spectator satisfaction.

The key distinguishing features of people in sport are as follows:

- **Developing competent and motivated staff:** Hiring committed, efficient, and motivated staff offers a competitive advantage for any organisation, because their performance influences customers' overall perception of the business (66). Thus, sports organizations must hire qualified staff with the necessary skills and experience to provide high-quality service to event spectators (60, 67). Personnel with relevant skills have been proven to enhance the success of a sporting event, since they are better equipped to interact, engage, and understand the needs of spectators and stakeholders (1). Thus, effective personnel management ensures positive customer experiences and event success for sport marketers.
- **Enhancing consumer experience through sports personnel:** To enhance the spectator experience, sports organisations must hire passionate and knowledgeable staff who understand spectators' needs. Well-trained personnel directly contribute to marketing success and spectator satisfaction. Additionally, intangible resources such as reputation and strong organisational skills are crucial for providing high-quality service and ensuring the success of events (68).
- **Consistent fan interaction:** Individuals and professionals who create and deliver the experience, such as athletes, staff, influencers, and fans, interact constantly across on-site experiences and digital platforms (e.g., chats, fan forums, live Q&A). One example of fan interaction that broadens access is the LaLiga legacy projects in Spain. These outreach programmes send former professional players to disadvantaged communities to promote active participation and healthy lifestyles. In Africa, CAF's African Schools Football Programme

promotes health and well-being through football school-based projects. Another example is the South African rugby player Siya Kolisi's Foundation, which raises awareness and provides physical and mental health education through its community sport programmes.

**Physical Evidence.** Physical evidence refers to the tangible cues that shape the look and feel of a service environment, significantly contributing to the overall customer experience. These tangible elements are essential for conveying messages about the business, its target market, and its service quality (49). The key characteristics of physical evidence are discussed below.

- **Sport facilities and venue quality:** In the context of sport, physical evidence encompasses various components such as sport facilities, scoreboards, equipment, apparel, seating, tickets, and other visible elements designed to enhance the overall spectator experience (1). Well-maintained and modern facilities are associated with higher spectator attendance compared to venues that are poorly maintained or outdated (69).
- **Atmosphere and spectator comfort:** Spectators prefer attending events where the stadium offers a visually appealing atmosphere, comfortable seating, affordable refreshments, and engaging entertainment during breaks (70).
- **Branded physical and digital environments:** Physical evidence also includes the tangible cues and environments that support the sport experience, including stadium design and digital visuals. Branded physical and digital environments—such as VR stadiums that mirror real ones—enhance fan immersion and extend the sense of place beyond physical attendance. To encourage more people to attend sporting events and support mental well-being, Tottenham Hotspur Stadium incorporates inclusive design features that make the venue accessible and welcoming. Kasarani Stadium in Kenya has also been renovated to provide facilities promoting safe and inclusive physical activity for all. In South Africa, the Moses Mabhida Stadium allows for an inclusive experience for people of all abilities to attend and participate in sport.

**Process.** In the context of sport, the concept of process refers to the activities or tasks undertaken to produce or deliver benefits and value to sport consumers (7). The key distinguishing features of process are as follows:

- **Visible and invisible processes:** Activities in the sport process can be either visible or invisible to consumers (37). Sport consumers typically only experience the visible aspects of an event, such as the match itself, entertainment during breaks, and the overall atmosphere. However, many behind-the-scenes activities, such as event planning, logistics, marketing, and coordination, remain invisible to them.

- **Event planning and coordination:** Specific objectives and the overall scope of the sporting event primarily drive the planning process. Essential factors, such as the date, venue, time, and the needs of sports consumers, must be carefully considered to ensure successful execution (33). Therefore, the process element is crucial in service design and delivery, influencing the sequence of actions and methods implemented before and during the sport event (8). A well-defined process ensures a seamless experience for consumers, enhancing their overall satisfaction and engagement with the event.

- **Integrated access and ticketing:** The transformation to online processes will require procedures and systems that enable sound service delivery, including ticketing systems, content scheduling, and real-time updates. Integrated systems that ensure smooth ticketing, access, and communication across all platforms, such as one-stop portals, are central to delivering seamless experiences. In South Africa, Ticketpro's mobile ticketing and Vitality's zero-rated running apps make participation in and access to wellness programmes more accessible, lowering barriers to engagement. In Senegal, the Sport for All programme tailors the delivery of sport based on the different needs of people, motivating them to join and be active.

## CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN SPORT MARKETING AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Trends in marketing refer to emerging directions, patterns, and market dynamics influenced by macro-environmental factors and consumer behaviour. Such trends can foster new growth opportunities and drive business transformation (71). Furthermore, marketing trends can provide sports teams with valuable opportunities to establish meaningful relationships with spectators and attract potential sponsors.

Research by previous studies highlights that the increasing interest in marketing trends signifies a shift towards a desire to implement innovative

strategies in sport marketing (72, 73). This evolution pushes sport marketing practices to new levels of sophistication and effectiveness. Newly identified trends include the extensive use of social media and a growing emphasis on promoting women's roles in sport. The following sections discuss contemporary trends in sport marketing and conclude with an outline of future research areas related to these trends.

**Leveraging Social Media for Enhanced Fan Engagement and Brand Loyalty.** Social media's extensive use and significant value as a digital communication tool are notable across numerous business sectors, including the sphere of sport (74-76). Pedersen and Thibault (2022) advise that social media usage in sport is an influential platform for sports organisations to interact with spectators and share information, opinions, and experiences (33). Sport managers can analyse spectators' social media engagements to research the positive aspects and concerns posted during and after games (74, 77). Paying careful attention to spectators' needs and opinions can give marketers new ideas and strategies to attract new potential spectators to sporting events and enhance overall fan engagement (78).

Existing research studies have found that using social media as a digital communication tool in sport is convenient for increasing interaction and engagement between teams and spectators (79-81). Furthermore, it has been highlighted that social media is highly effective and suitable for sports teams or leagues that want to reach a large audience with a low budget (78, 82). However, marketers of professional sport leagues increasingly employ chatbot tactics (automatic replies) to provide fans with specific and up-to-date player and event updates (83). Anagnostopoulos et al. (2018) emphasise that through social media, marketers can create brand awareness and build positive associations with the team and the brand, ultimately enhancing spectator value (84).

**The Growth of eSport and Its Integration into Traditional Sport Marketing Strategies.** eSports can be defined as organised virtual professional online sports competitions between individual players or teams (85).

Unlike conventional sports, eSport participation requires minimal equipment and involves no physical contact between participants (33). The popularity of eSports surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, as severe restrictions and lockdowns limited physical interaction and

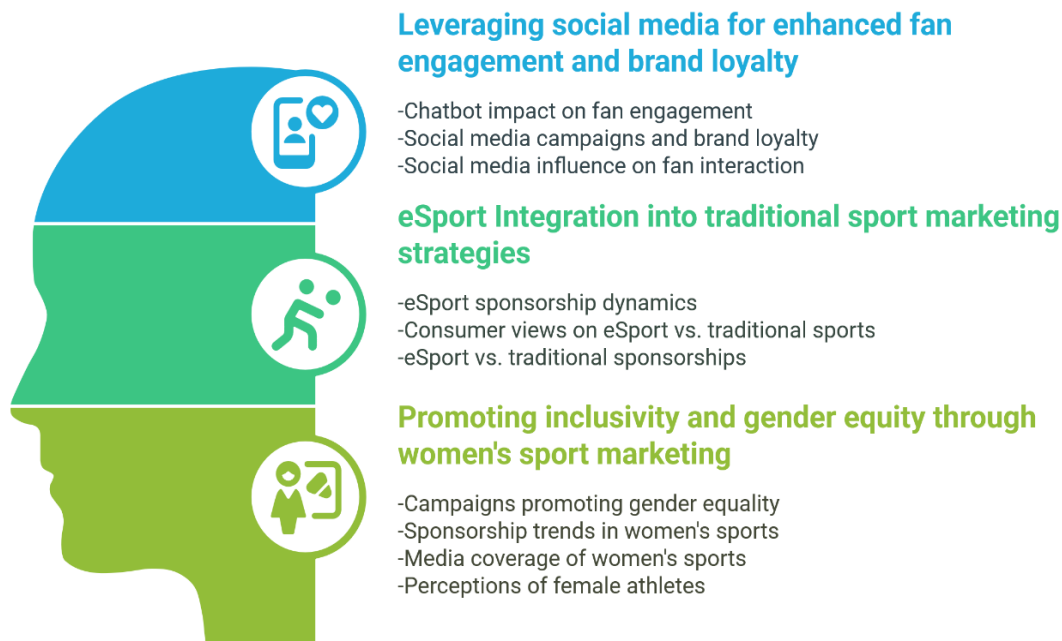
traditional sports events, allowing participants to enjoy virtual competitions from the comfort of their homes (86). The rapid growth of the eSports industry following the pandemic has resulted in the emergence of new revenue streams and sponsorship opportunities. This expansion highlights the growing commercial potential of eSports as a viable component of the broader sports industry.

**Promoting Inclusivity and Gender Equity through Women's Sport Marketing.** In Australia and various European countries, women's sport leagues and teams were initially introduced as extensions of well-established men's teams (87). In this regard, it is notable that media coverage has historically favoured male-dominated sports such as soccer and rugby, with women's sport receiving significantly less attention (88-90). Over the years, however, the participation of women in sport has grown considerably, challenging what was once a predominantly male-dominated industry (91, 92). This growth has been accompanied by a notable

increase in sponsorship for women's sport, primarily due to a broader societal shift towards inclusivity and equality (87).

As the focus on inclusivity expands, sports organisations must adapt their marketing strategies to promote women's sport effectively. By embracing this market segment, organisations can establish new revenue streams and foster stronger connections with spectators who value inclusivity (71, 93).

Figure 2 outlines some potential future research areas related to contemporary trends in sports marketing. The first is how social media can engage fans and build brand loyalty, since platforms and tools like chatbots change how fans interact with sport. The second is how eSports can be integrated into traditional sport marketing, primarily through sponsorships and consumer perceptions, while the third is how marketing can promote inclusivity and gender equity in women's sports by addressing visibility, sponsorship, and public perceptions of female athletes.



**Figure 2.** Potential future research areas related to contemporary trends in sports marketing.

## CONCLUSION

The present review has developed a proposed framework for examining the sport marketing mix across various platforms, aligning with UN SDG 3, and identifying emerging trends within the field.

Understanding the seven components of the sport marketing mix across platforms, Product,

Price, Promotion, Place, People, Physical Evidence, and Process, provided valuable insights for developing effective marketing strategies. It also created awareness about the potential role of sports in advancing broader societal objectives such as health, inclusivity, and sustainable development.

Contemporary trends in sport marketing, such as the drastic increase in social media adoption, eSports integration, and promoting inclusivity in women's sport marketing, offer novel prospects and challenges to address for sport marketers. Recognising these trends and their implications will help practitioners address evolving consumer expectations, enhance strategic positioning, and inform future research.

### APPLICABLE REMARKS

- Understanding the 7Ps and their distinct characteristics is essential for achieving marketing success.
- An extended framework of the 7Ps in sport includes cross-platform marketing that aligns with key SDGs related to inclusion, education, well-being, and impactful partnerships.
- Recognising contemporary trends can enable practitioners to address evolving consumer expectations and inform future research.

### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Study concept and design: Ryan Lesetja Mathaba. Drafting the manuscript: Ryan Lesetja Mathaba, Amarentia Thérèse Roux, Elizma Magdalena Wannenburg, Pamela Serra. Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Amarentia Thérèse Roux.

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