

Journal of
**Business and Strategic
Management**
(JBSM)

Promotion of a Sports Culture in Kenya



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Accepted: 4th March, 2025, Received in Revised Form: 19th March, 2025, Published: 7th Apr, 2025

Abstract

Purpose: This paper reviewed conceptual literature related to the promotion of a sports culture in Kenya. The paper highlighted the benefits associated with engaging in physical exercises and it emphasized the role of health-promoting sports clubs as suitable avenues for undertaking organized physical activities.

Methodology: The paper was based on extensive review of extant conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature related to promotion mix elements, health-promoting sports clubs, and adoption of a physical activities culture.

Findings: The paper found limited use of the promotion mix elements of advertising, personal selling, sales promotions, public relations, and direct marketing in the promotion of a sports culture among academic staff of chartered public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The paper points out areas that need to be addressed by policy makers and practitioners in order to improve membership to health-promoting sports clubs, and to encourage more people to adopt a physical activities culture.

Keywords: *Promotion, Sports Culture, Health-Promoting Sports Clubs, Adoption, Integrated Marketing Communications Mix*

Introduction

Health-promoting sports clubs are expected to promote the physical, mental, and social health of the people within the communities in which they are located by encouraging more people to take part in physical activities. This is their core business, and more clients enables them to achieve their objectives. Participation in physical exercises and sports partially affects the health of people, and many governments worldwide prefer to have a healthy and productive population that spends less on medical care. While the benefits associated with physical exercises are well documented (World Health Organization (WHO), 2022), almost a third (27%) of the world's population leads a sedentary lifestyle that does not include engaging in physical exercises (Guthold *et al.*, 2018). Several arguments are presented to justify this sedentary behavior, and these include the lack of energy, time, and motivation. Roychowdhury (2020) is of the view that increased urbanization, technological developments that reduce the need for physical movement of people, and changing lifestyle habits also contribute to sedentary behavior. Yet this sedentary behavior, with time, does not augur well with the health of people.

Benefits of Physical Exercises

Engaging in physical activities like walking or jogging and playing games like rugby, football, swimming, and cycling has numerous benefits. Bullard *et al.* (2019) associate an active lifestyle with lower risks of breast and colon cancer, less expenditure on healthcare, and lower chances of contracting cardiovascular diseases like stroke and hypertension. Some physical exercises like football tend to involve a number of participants either competing or playing together, which enhances their social behavior. People with obesity challenges can shed off their excess weight by engaging in physical activities (Al-Jawaldeh & Abbass, 2022). Physical exercises can also be used to keep some people busy so that they don't engage in drugs and criminal activities, and they are also useful when rehabilitating those addicted to drugs (Kassa & Grace, 2022).

According to Mataruna-Dos-Santos *et al.* (2022), sports events like tournaments play a unifying role when they bring together people from different continents, nations, tribes, races, colors, and languages, especially during local and international competitions. For instance, the World Cup presents an opportunity for people from all continents to compete against each other, thereby enhancing unity among the continents and their people. In addition, sports events are useful tools for marketing sports clubs. Sports clubs can use sports events to promote a wide range of goods and services. Some goods like drinks and cigarettes and services like hairdressing, accommodation, shopping malls, and virtual gaming halls may not be directly related to physical activities. On the contrary, their aim is to retain members in the clubs for longer periods of time, enabling them to consider the clubs as more of their second homes, and motivating members to spend more money in the clubs.

Sports events can be local, national, or international, and they can be used by different firms to promote their goods and services. The success of these events is evaluated in terms of media coverage, ticket sales, sales of different goods and services, website hits, and revenues generated from sponsorships (Brittain, 2016). Sports events are perceived as business opportunities, and they

create employment for a large number of people. One can say that physical activities can be used for recreational, health, fitness, integration, social, educational, defense, entertainment, and economic purposes.

There are several approaches of undertaking physical exercises. One approach is to have a person exercising individually, by swimming, jogging, cycling, walking, and doing other exercises on his or her own. A second approach involves several participants performing the exercises together, like playing football or cycling. Individuals and smaller groups can exercise in private or public fields, rooms, gyms, or even roads. A third approach is to do exercises in sports clubs, which require membership, and which are concerned with either health promotion or competitions, or both (Deelen, Ettema, & Kamphuis, 2018).

Sports clubs, particularly those concerned with health promotion, have several advantages. Firstly, they have diverse members who join the clubs voluntarily, meaning that their members are more willing to receive the health information provided by the clubs (Geidne & Quenerstedt, 2021). These clubs are suitable avenues for propagating health-related information, such as providing advice on appropriate eating and drinking habits, and they also create cohesion among their members, which facilitates the social interactions of the members (Johnson *et al.*, 2019). The health-promoting sports clubs also address some of the mental, physical, and psychological issues affecting their members, leading to lower depression and stress levels, and improving self-esteem. By engaging in physical activities, elderly people create social networks and slow the effects of aging, such as having to use mobility equipment like wheelchairs (Stenner, Buckley, & Mosewich, 2020). Some health-promoting sports clubs have trainers who coach participants in different areas, which motivates members to keep participating, and which also attracts more members to the clubs.

Adoption of a Sports Culture

Innovations are products, ideas, services, knowledge, practices, or technologies that are deemed to be new by some individuals or organizations. These innovations spread to potential users at different speeds, considering the classification of people into different adopter categories like innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Rogers, 1962). For instance, while the innovators are the first to adopt something new, laggards are the last in the adoption chain. The diffusion or spread of innovations in a social system leads to different kinds of changes, especially when the innovations have positive impacts on the lives of people. A person is said to have adopted something when he or she becomes a regular user of that thing.

The benefits of a physically active lifestyle have been emphasized in this paper. It is, therefore, necessary for people not just in Kenya but all over the world to develop a favorable attitude towards physical activities. This implies the need to comprehend, preserve, and participate in physical activities and sports. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) recommends that all adults should engage in at least 75 minutes of vigorously-intense or 150 minutes of moderately-intense physical activities spread within at least three days in a week. While these recommendations are

considered the bare minimum, they offer a useful guideline into the average time adults should spend on physical activities each week.

On its part, culture is a way of life handed down from generation to generation, and it involves a wide range of issues like customs, knowledge, habits, education, institutions, laws, capabilities, arts, and beliefs that are common among members of the same group of people (Isro'iyah & Herminingsih, 2023). As the environment changes, some aspects of culture also change. Exposure to other cultures can also necessitate a cultural change, especially when ideas from the foreign culture are socially desirable and do not clash with those of the group adopting the new culture. The sports culture is prevalent in many Western countries, including Australia and the United States of America.

While sports clubs in developing countries have a long history, their level of utilization and development is low (Kokko, Green, & Kannas, 2014). In the case of Kenya, some of the sports clubs are not run commercially, while others are faced with numerous challenges that include poor management, limited financial resources, political interference, and corruption among many others (Simiyu, 2019). Unless these challenges are resolved, some clubs may be forced to close, thereby curtailing sports development in the country. In addition, non-communicable diseases will increase, leading to increased medical bills for those affected. Non-communicable diseases are associated with about 77,100 annual deaths in Kenya, which is the equivalent of roughly 23% of the premature deaths reported in Kenya annually (WHO, 2020). Globally, non-communicable diseases cause 74% of all annual deaths, which is about 41 million people, with most of the premature deaths being reported in low- and middle-income countries like Kenya (WHO, 2022).

Promotion Mix Elements for Enhancing the Adoption of a Sports Culture

The dynamism and competitiveness of the contemporary business environment requires firms to think beyond supplying customers with products sold at attractive prices. On the contrary, each firm must understand the role of communication in influencing its success (Al-Azzam, Alserhan, & Al-Assaf, 2024). Communication enables firms to interact with their customers in the process of explaining the benefits of their goods and services, and in meeting the needs of their clients.

Everything communicates, implying the breadth of the communication concept. For example, the sizes and shapes of products, colors, names, distribution channels, and prices communicate something about a firm and its goods and services. Products targeted at ladies tend to have rounded features, and high prices are often associated with quality products. Marketers should integrate all the communication elements of a firm with the marketing mix variables of product, prices, promotion, and distribution in order to present a unified message to the firm's clients (Blakeman, 2023).

The concept of marketing mix was initially formulated by Cullington (1948) but has been refined by, among many others, Borden (1964) and McCarthy (1960). Kotler, Keller, and Chernev (2021) define it as the set of controllable elements used by firms to interact with their clients. McCarthy (1960) specifically pointed out the 4Ps of product, place, promotion, and price as the main

marketing mix variables that firms could use to interact with their clients, and this 4Ps concept was widely adopted by academicians and practitioners, partially owing to its usefulness in making marketing-related decisions, simplicity in its use, and relevance when teaching units related to marketing. The 4Ps concept has become indispensable in the development of the theory and practice of marketing.

The 4Ps concept was mainly targeted at physical goods as these were more prevalent in the 1960s. However, as the services sector became more pronounced, the 4Ps concept was revised. Booms and Bitner (1981) added the elements of people, physical evidence, and processes due to their relevance in the marketing of services, thus creating the 7Ps of marketing. Except in situations where pure goods or pure services are involved, many market offerings consist of a combination of goods and services in varying proportions. Nevertheless, marketers of services emphasize the 7Ps, whose application is associated with competitive advantage for a firm. Like all other concepts, the marketing mix concept has been evolving over the years, and it will continue to evolve in the future as the marketing environment changes. For example, due to the increased role played by technology, a contemporary marketing mix should include the elements of website design, digital marketing, podcasts, and blogs, among many others.

Promotion is one of the elements of the marketing mix. There is no consensus on the number of items to include in the promotion mix element. However, Belch *et al.* (2019) advise that public relations, sales promotions, direct marketing, advertising, and personal selling can be used to interact with customers in a way that gives the firm a competitive advantage. The combination of these tools, in line with the budget of the firm, is what is often referred to as the integrated promotion mix or integrated communications mix elements (Blakeman, 2023). These elements must consider the marketing mix elements so that together, they achieve the firm's objectives.

The integrated marketing communications mix elements are relevant in a wide range of sectors, including sports and physical exercises. These elements seek to create awareness, stimulate demand, attract customers, retain loyal customers, and motivate potential customers to try the goods or services of a firm, so that the firm can increase the sales of its goods and services. As the sales and profits increase, the firm is able to achieve its other objectives, which can include market share leadership. Physical activities can be promoted using the promotion mix elements of public relations, sales promotions, direct marketing, advertising, and personal selling as well as the newer elements of digital marketing (Wenner, 2021). Each of these elements is briefly explained in the ensuing sub-sections, including how it can be used to influence the adoption of a sports culture in Kenya.

Advertising

According to Kotler, Keller, and Chernev (2021), advertising is a paid form of mass communication of an idea, service, good, or organization by an identified sponsor, who tends to be the organization paying for the advert. Advertisers use mass media tools like the radio, print, outdoor, and television (TV) to remind, reassure, inform, and convince large groups of people that certain products, ideas, services, or organizations exist. Miliopoulou (2024) advises advertisers to

use the cheapest means to convey the most persuasive possible selling message to the largest number of recipients, while Rabindranath and Singh (2024) are of the view that the TV, radio, newspapers, and internet can be considered to be the most effective mass media outlets since they reach large numbers of people globally.

Advertisers have to be aware that unless they use direct response advertising, the responses to advertisements tend to be long-term, unlike those for personal selling or digital marketing which can be immediate. Advertising enables messages to be repeated as many times as possible, which enables the recipients to recall the messages. Advertised products are considered to be more legitimate, and large scale advertising can be associated with a firm's size, popularity, and success. A firm can dramatize its goods and services using particular visuals, colors, print, and sounds, which also aids in recall. Due to changes in technology, advertisers have to embrace digital media advertising platforms that include social media (Juska, 2022).

Health-promoting sports clubs can use a wide range of tools to advertise themselves and the goods and services they offer. These include billboards placed at strategic points to maximize visibility, and transport media where motor vehicles can carry messages related to the clubs. A club can also drop leaflets, catalogs, brochures, prices lists, and other printed materials to its prospective clients. Similarly, digital marketing tools like social media can be used to reach large groups of people.

Personal Selling

Kotler, Keller, and Chernev (2021) define personal selling as communication that occurs directly between a firm's salespeople and its potential and current customers. The salespeople use a wide variety of communication tools that include social media, face-to-face conversations, short message services (SMS), and emails. The aim of personal selling is to build relationships with clients, generate sales, engage customers, provide after-sales services, and handle customer complaints, among many others (Micallef, Keränen, & Kokshagina, 2024).

Personal selling is relevant when marketing a wide range of goods and services, including physical exercises. This is partially because of its interactive nature, which enables salespeople to build beneficial sales relationships, adjust their sales messages to meet the needs of different customers, and respond appropriately to customer objections. Responses tend to be immediate, irrespective of whether they are positive or negative.

The use of salespeople has its challenges. For instance, they have to be hired, trained, motivated, and remunerated, which can be expensive especially for smaller firms. It is also more difficult to change the composition and size of a sales team, compared to changing other promotion mix elements like advertising (Alavi, Habel, & Vomberg, 2024). Nevertheless, health-promoting sports clubs can use salespeople to move from door to door recruiting potential customers. With proper targeting, salespeople can increase the clients of a health-promoting sports club, particularly when the salespeople appear like they have benefited from the services of the clubs they are representing. The marketing of services relies heavily on the type of people used to sell the services.

Sales Promotions

According to Reihani and Khatbzadeh (2021), sales promotions are short-term incentives aimed at stimulating sales of goods and services, regaining lost customers, informing customers of the existence of new products, and building customer loyalty to particular brands. Firms use sales promotions to dramatize their products, boost reducing sales, attract customer attention, and give incentives to stimulate purchase within the specified time periods. Jose (2024) advises that sales promotions are effective when exposing and drawing attention to what a firm offers.

Nevertheless, sales promotions have short-term effects, with customers purchasing the goods or services while the offers are valid, but changing to other brands on expiry of the sales promotion campaign. Among the key sales promotion tools used that can be used by marketers of sports and physical exercises include price reductions, giving out free t-shirts, and organizing competitions, contests, sweepstakes (Attia *et al.*, 2018).

Public Relations

Both publicity and public relations are used concurrently. While publicity seeks to create widespread awareness of an organization or its goods and services, public relations ensure that the communication is received positively in order to create a mutual understanding a between a firm and its stakeholders. That way, a firm is able to project and maintain a positive image to its customers, employees, media, special interest groups, distribution channel members, and the government, using tools like sponsorship for events or causes, press releases, company communications, and donations, among many others (Newton, 2021). Public relations can also be used to create awareness, change behaviors of customers, and increase comprehension of a firm and of its goods and services, further enhancing the image of the firm, leading to increased sales. The use of digital communications lowers the cost of public relations activities, achieving credibility at low costs, and countering any negative publicity against the firm.

Health promoting sports clubs can leverage public relations to their advantage. For instance, their managers can be in the forefront in giving talks at different forums, advocating the benefits associated with membership to their clubs. The clubs can also sponsor or donate to particular causes like full or partial education of some needy children.

Direct Marketing

This is a communication approach in which firms interact directly with their customers, eliminating intermediaries who add to the cost of doing business (Matviiets & Kipen, 2021). The reduced costs can be translated into other advantages like lower prices, leading to a competitive advantage for the firm. Some of the tools that can be used by a firm include telemarketing, direct mail, fliers, catalogue marketing, short-message-services (SMS), brochures, direct response marketing, leaflets, catalogue, direct selling by a firm's salespeople, and emails. Others include websites, content sharing sites, forums, blogs, podcasts, and search engines (Samur, 2021). all these tools can be used by health-promoting sports clubs to communicate directly with their current and potential customers, thereby increasing the sales of the clubs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Engaging in physical exercises and eating healthy diets has been shown to have numerous benefits that include longevity of life, better mental health, and delays in the onset of dementia, leading to less expenditure on healthcare (WHO, 2022). On this basis, this paper makes several recommendations that can enhance the development of a sports culture in Kenya.

Firstly, more individuals and organization should be encouraged to invest in sports clubs, in order to generate the associated profits, and also to change people's attitude in favour of physical exercises (Hayduk & Walker, 2018). In addition, the existing clubs should be managed more professionally, so as to make them more sustainable. For instance, professional managers can develop suitable promotional programs for attracting more clients to their clubs. Besides, the existing clubs can be re-branded to make them more appealing, and publicized both locally and internationally in order to gain wider recognition.

Secondly, different types of sports should be popularized at the different levels of the education system, beginning from the lowest levels. As children grow up, they should be made aware of the numerous benefits associated with sports, and the disadvantages of living inactive or sedentary lifestyles. The curriculum should include sports as one of the core subjects, and adequate time should be allocated to it. Each educational institution should have adequate sports facilities, and trainers for different sports. The learners can be encouraged to adopt a culture of engaging in physical activities even after completing their formal education. Where possible, firms should also have sports facilities for their employees, and they should employ trainers specialized in different areas. Moreover, employees should be encouraged to participate in physical activities inside and outside of their workplaces. Town planners should allocate more areas for different sports, perhaps in every neighborhood. Besides, road constructors should include different lanes for pedestrians and cyclists, making it possible for people to cycle or walk to different destinations.

Health-promoting sports clubs in Kenya should integrate the marketing communications mix elements more aggressively in order to gain more clients. For example, they can advertise using fliers, posters, and billboards; they can also engage in public relations activities like donating to various causes, or encouraging their executives to give talks in different forums. These activities would increase the visibility of the clubs. The clubs can also use the integrated marketing communications mix elements to gain more members, explain the benefits associated with membership to the clubs, and emphasize the essence of a physically active lifestyle. The benefits to emphasize include interacting with other people with similar interests, doing exercises guided by professional trainers, advice on drinking and eating habits given by medical practitioners, participation in local and international competitions, and linkage with other health-promoting sports clubs and government institutions that promote sports and physical activities.

In addition, health-promoting sports clubs can work together with the county governments to make sports and physical activities to be more appealing to numerous people. Several approaches can be used to attain this objective, including using prominent personalities like musicians, politicians, star athletes, and other social influencers who lead active lifestyles to advocate for social change.

These strategies can enable the clubs to advocate for more physically active lifestyles as opposed to adopting sedentary behavior.

This paper recommends that health-promoting sports clubs should provide suitable advice on drinking and eating habits, given the role of food and drinks in influencing the health of people. Similarly, the clubs should analyze the leisure activities and working patterns of their current and potential clients in order to design programs that take care of the interests of different people. By using health workers and fitness coaches, these clubs can manage the lifestyle habits of large groups of people, thereby leading to less cases of non-communicable diseases.

Given the role played by technology, health-promoting sports clubs can use digital marketing tools like email marketing, text messaging (SMS), and social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp) to attract more clients. For example, a club can create short videos capturing people doing physical exercises, and then sharing such videos through TikTok to its current and potential customers who then share with others, leading to viral marketing. As the clubs interact with people through social media, they should also obtain feedback on the relevance of their activities using online social listening tools like BrandMentions, Hootsuite, and Mentionlytics. This will enable them to meet the needs of their clients more effectively.

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