



Consumer Involvement - “ Using Zmet Technique to Construct a Mental Map for Sports Activities”

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ABSTRACT

A key aim in the behavioral sciences is to understand the mechanisms behind individuals' motivation to participate in health behaviors (Godin & Kok, 1996). This goal are important in a sports activity context in light of research supporting the physiological and psychological benefits of regular exercise in adults and young people (Gutin & Owens, 1996).

Sport consumer behavior research, suggests that sport consumer behavior represents consumer behavior relative to products and services offered in the sport and leisure industry.

Trying to understand the customer, first of all, we must understand the cognitive structures or mental models that underlie consumer involvement. Zaltman metaphor-elicitation technique (ZMET) (Zaltman, 1996) is a powerfull tool that helps researchers to build a consumer map of involvement in a product knowledge structure. As a result, qualitative research using ZMET technique will be the main instrument to develop this stady. Highly involved sportiest will be chosen for the purpose of this study because high involvement often, correlates with high product knowledge and expertise (Celsi & Olson, 1988). The results of this paper will be presented in a consumer map, which will show the most important motives of Albanian Youth Involvement in sports activities.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, Involment, Sports activities, ZMET.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to elicit albanian youth's motivations for engaging in, and remaining involved in sports activities.

Although sports activities are generally related to young ages, the Albanian youth share different approaches on sports. Hence, only 22 percent of the respondents report they practice sports often, while 44 percent of them report they practice sports only sometimes. Sports represent another activity where gender-based differences provide for different patterns of preference (Albanian Youth Raport, 2011). Given that sports are practiced mostly in sport areas, for which the respondents have to pay, there seems to be a strong correlation between the economic possibilities of the respondents and their practicing of sports. While 28 percent from rich families practice sports regularly, 42 percent of the respondents from poor families do not deal with sports at all preference (Albanian Youth 2011, Raport).

The sport consumer motivation process refers to the process that causes people to behave the way they do as consumers. People are motivated to watch or participate in a sport or sport event activity because the behaviour has certain attractive outcomes. Motivation is an internal factor that arouses and prompts goal-directed behaviour (MacInnis, Moorman, & Jaworski, 1991).

1.1. Involvement

Involvement is a psychological construct and represents a person's level of interest, desire and motivation to engage in a sport and related consumption activities (Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2002). The involvement construct has received widespread attention in the fields of marketing and consumer behaviour (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Rothschild, 1984) as well as recreation and leisure (Funk, et al., 2004; Havitz & Mannell, 2005). A three dimensional view of involvement dominates research today (Kyle & Mowen, 2005). These three dimensions are labeled pleasure, centrality, and sign;

Pleasure – the enjoyment derived from the activity.

Centrality – how central the activity is to the individual's lifestyle.

Sign – the self-expression, value, or level of symbolism of the activity.

A person's involvement level with a sport object is determined by measuring each of the three involvement facets to create an involvement profile. This can be done by asking an individual to rate their agreement with a series of involvement statements on a seven point scale where 1 _ strongly disagree and 7 _ strongly agree. Drawing upon this approach, Beaton, Funk and Alexandris created a method to split an involvement facet score into high, moderate and low.

Low classification is a mean score on a facet from 1.0 to 4.49. Medium is a mean facet score from 4.5 to 5.74. High classification is a mean score on a facet above 5.75.

This article demonstrates how a relatively new approach to understanding consumers—the Zaltman metaphor-elicitation technique or ZMET—can be used to elicit consumers' meaning about the personal relevance of a topic and then map those meanings as mental models (Zaltman, 1997).

The concept has been linked to various consumer behavior and marketing constructs and has been used to classify products and advertising messages according to the level of involvement they arouse. Thus involvement can be used to segment consumers into low, moderate and high involvement groups which can then be targeted with different promotional strategies.

1.2. Mental Model

The mental model is a specific, dynamic form of the mental representation which is constructed by outside experiences. (Johnson-Laird, 1989) thought that the mental model was an abstract, analog representation. Researchers could infer and forecast an event, and then take appropriate action. One refers to the

representation of a given object (Christensen & Olson, 2002; Zaltman, 1997), and another refers to the cluster of interconnected neurons that are fundamental to cognitive processing (Zaltman, 1997). The former is used in this article. Christensen and Olson (2002) suggested that the term *mental model* is preferred over *cognitive structure*. Mental model includes important components of consumer behavior such as attitudes, emotions, images, memories of past experiences, and beliefs.

The most important components are stored in the consumer's memory in the form of mental models (Christensen & Olson, 2002; Zaltman, 1997, 2003a).

Such a view of mental models fits both the current cognitive neuroscience that thoughts are image-based (Zaltman, 1997, 2003) and the social psychological view that thoughts and feelings are co-mixed (Kahneman, 1994; LeDoux, 1996).

A mental model includes both *structure* and *content* (Christensen & Olson, 2002). *Content* refers to the actual ideas or concepts represented by the mental model. *Structure* refers to how the meaning is organized in memory. The content and structure are closely connected. Consumption meanings are found in the linkages between the content nodes within the mental structure. Any particular node has little meaning in and of itself. Also, each concept defines its meaning through its linkage with other concepts, thereby forming a structure (Christensen & Olson, 2002). Hence, both meaning content and meaning structure should be examined to understand meanings of sport consumption. Exhaustively speaking, mental model provides broader meaning than cognitive structure.

1.3. The ZMET Technique and Mental Models

Studies indicate that ZMET is suitable for examining consumption experiences. The ZMET uses respondent-chosen pictures to enable a focused investigation of consumers' thoughts and feelings. ZMET is considered to be a

powerful tool for mapping consumers' minds because it is tailored to obtain hidden cognitive and emotive themes by applying the fundamental principles of human communication and thought formation (Zaltman, 1997, 2003; Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). To achieve these purposes, this article uses the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) to map youth' mental models. By using ZMET to map mental models both meaning content and meaning structure in Sport Activities, it is expected that a comprehensive and in-depth view of affective and cognitive constructs that give rise to meanings in sports activities can be obtained. The structure of such networks of representations is revealed only through the content and the linkages identified between concepts.

2. METHODOLOGY

Respondents for the ZMET technique, highly involved young sportists, members of Youth Flamurtari Multi Sportive Club, in Vlora City were chosen. Sportists were selected through a snowball sampling process (Zikmund, 1997). Highly involved sportists were chosen because high involvement often correlates with high product knowledge and expertise (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Christensen & Olson, 2001), highly involved respondents have complex mental models surrounding the sports activities. 20 participants completed the Involvement Questionnaire (Rothchild, 1984) where only 14 of them had high score of Involvement Score. The 14 interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed to create the data using NVIVO software.

Participants were instructed not to bring pictures or images that explicitly illustrated the topic (e.g. campus photos, advertisements, corporate logo, and the like), but represented metaphors of the sports activities. Personal interviews (requiring approximately two hours to conduct) were scheduled approximately three weeks after the participants were recruited and briefed. The interviews employed a guided conversation

approach, rather than a traditional structured or semi-structured interview. The relaxed and informal nature of the interviews was considered a key factor of low incidence of respondent fatigue. This was perhaps compounded by the

relative novelty of the ZMET method, plus the variation of tasks undertaken throughout the interview in following the ZMET interview process. Interviews followed the nine ZMET steps as outlined by Zaltman and Coulter (1995):

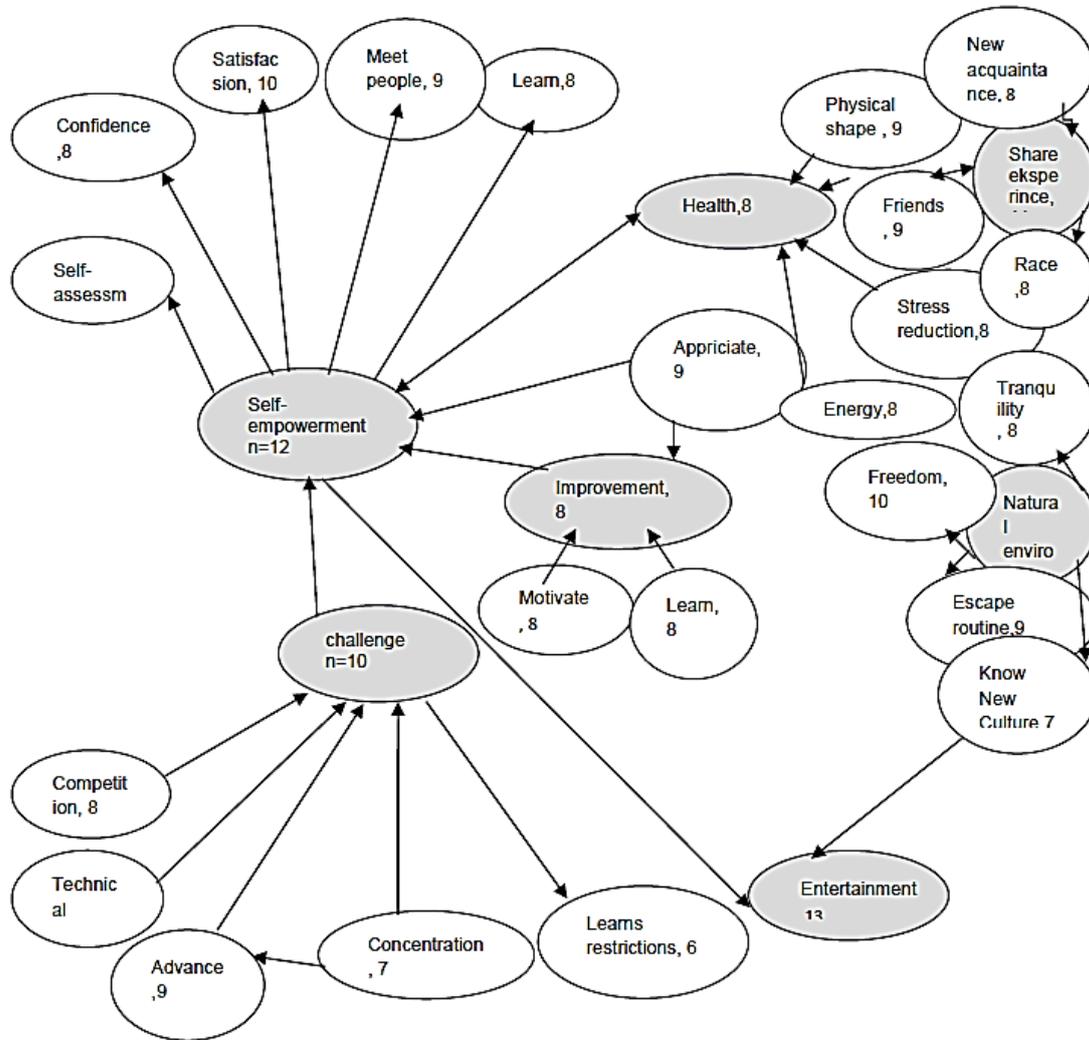


FIGURE 1: CONSUMER MENTAL MAP

- Step 1: Storytelling. Participants were asked to describe the content of each picture.
- Step 2: Missed issues and images. Participants were asked to describe any issues he/she was unable to find, to describe a picture representing the issue and explain its relevance.
- Step 3: Sorting Task. Participants were asked to sort pictures into meaningful piles and to provide a descriptive label for each pile, thereby establishing major themes.
- Step 4: Construct Elicitation.

- Step 5: Most Representative Picture. Participants were asked to select the picture most representative of the brand's image.
- Step 6: Opposite Images. Participants were asked to describe pictures that represent the opposite of the subject's image.
- Step 7: Sensory Images. Participants were asked to use other senses (touch, taste, smell, sound, colour and emotional feeling) to describe what does and does not represent the concept being explored.

- Step 8: The Mental Map. The interviewer reviewed all of the constructs discussed and asked the participants if the constructs were accurate representations of what was meant and if any important ideas were missing. Then the participants were invited to create a map or a “causal model” using the constructs that were elicited.

- Step 9: The Summary Image. Participants were asked to create a summary image or montage using his/her own images to express important issues.

As a rule of thumb, this map usually has a cutoff of about 1/4-1/3 the number of study respondents. Different cutoff levels and their resulting maps are explored in an effort to identify a consensus map that is the most meaningful and interpretable based on the research questions and goals (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).

3. RESULTS

The consumer map below, shows the results of this study which are the main motives for Albanian youth to take part in sports activity. There are several rules that can facilitate reading a consensus map.

As a consensus map, it identifies the dominant (most frequently mentioned) concepts (those connected to another concept by at least 4 of the respondents).

Find the central constructs. Search for the central, highly connected constructs (those constructs that are linked to several other constructs). For instance, Figure 1 reveals several central constructs like health, improvement etc.

Look for Missing Constructs. Another thing to look for when interpreting a consensus map is missing constructs. What ideas or concepts did you expect to be present but are not?

3.1. Central Themes

Figure 1 reveals five important motivational orientations about sportists shared among the respondents. Each thematic orientation is represented by different shadings and fill

patterns in each subsection of the consensus map in Figure 1. The central themes are challenge, sharing experiences and connecting with people; improvement, nature environment and health. Each thematic orientation of the consensus map will be discussed, with a focus on the dominant constructs in.

Challenge. The Challenge thematic orientation encompasses the most constructs nodes on the consensus map. Sport activities has important benefits for the players. They are a source of joys, and challenges, providing a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Looking for the most interconnected of those constructs, we can identify the key concepts in the challenge theme— thrill, challenge, and accomplishment.

Sharing experiences and connecting with people aspect of sport activities is one of the main motives expressed by sportists. The shared experience is the central construct in this submap. Sharing the sport experience with friends and others and connecting with others who understand and see the world as they see it, are important elements of the sports experience for.

Improvement. Sports activities are an effective means of reducing stress through two routes shown on

the map: (a) escaping into nature and (b) exercise. Stress relief is a major outcome sought by nearly all these respondents.

Nature environment. Many respondents framed getting into nature as an escape from the stresses of the modern world. Nature is perceived as an importance place free from expectations, boundaries, restrictions, constraints. But also, in the powerful, pristine environment of nature, one is free to do and be, what he want.

Health, is improved by reducing stress, achieving self empowerment, having a good physical shape etc.

4. FINAL DISCUSSIONS

It was shown that, with the use of the ZMET methods, the mental models can be mapped at

different levels of thinking, thus revealing different levels of insights into consumers' thoughts and feelings about a topic. As shown in the consensus map above, ZMET is able to go in deep into consumers' knowledge (both cognitions and affect) that lie well below the surface of everyday conscious awareness. Most of the constructs in these mental models express desired values, goals, or end states. This mental models (cognitive structures) can be seen as a goal hierarchy for highly involved sportis.

The motivational themes mark different meaning orientations toward the sport and act as alternative frames of reference that organize and guide consumers' beliefs, emotions, and behaviors .

The map presented here demonstrate that consumers' mental models contain both affective and cognitive meaning. For example, many of the respondents hold the belief that technical abilities is a challenge that can help them identify the limits of their ability. These beliefs are represented by linkages between constructs in the consensus map and capture cognitive aspects of their mental model.

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