

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

Passion as a Determinant in Sport Consumption: the Case of Amateur Cyclists

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Abstract

This paper analyses sport passion as a possible determinant for sport consumption. The purpose of this research, after defining the concept of passion for cycling, is to understand the existing relations between the latter and the costs incurred to practice this sport at an amateur level. This research is exploratory in nature and uses a qualitative mix-method approach. Given the need to isolate individual dynamics of cyclists from socio-cultural influences, the interviewees were selected from a restricted and homogeneous geographical area: the Umbria Region (Italy). The study is structured in two phases: in the first phase 22 in-depth interviews were carried out; in the second phase a group interview was preferred. In order to guarantee transparency e verifiability of the results, the answers were handled with the help of a word processing software (NVIVO). The results of this research suggest that cyclists' consumption models are instrumentally influenced by the passion for cycling, more than other characteristics previously studied in sport management literature. This study provides useful indications on how to develop new forms of market segmentation. It also offers an approach for the operationalization of the level of passion for cycling, which enriches the current equipment of sports management researchers, who can also use the work in other contexts of free time consumption. This work highlights the key role of passion as a determinant for sport consumption and represents an original connection between psychological studies on sport passion and economic studies on sport consumption.

Keywords: *cycling, passion, sport expenses, sport consumption; mix-method approach*

Introduction

Cycling is the fourteenth most popular sport in the world, it ranks in the top ten in Europe and the top five in Italy, France and Spain. Amateur cycling, which is practiced for fun, health and tourism reasons is one of the most popular sports in Europe (Thibaut, Vos, Lagae, Puyenbroeck & Scheerder, 2016; Scheerder, Vos, & Taks, 2011).

In Italy, according to the Italian National Institute of Statistics data (ISTAT, 2017), 8.2% of individuals who practice sports carry out a cycling activity (about 1.935.000 people). In addition to direct consumption, cycling also generates a significant tourist and recreational (events) induced. According to Italian National Tourist Research Institute (ISNART) data, in 2018 bicycle tourism, in its narrow sense, recorded a presence of 21.9 million tourists (2.4% of the Italian tourist movement). On an European level, the European Cycling

Federation (2018) estimates 2.3 billion bicycle touring trips per year.

In the face of a growing industry and a significant economic impact for European economy as a whole, management literature on cycling is still limited. A growing interest for cycle tourism (Perić, Wise, & Dragičević, 2017) and for the analysis of its impact on tourist destinations (Han, Meng, & Kim, 2017) can be observed, while still few studies focus on the spending patterns of cyclists (Thibaut et al., 2016). Specifically, little attention is given to individual passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) as instrumental for sport expenditure.

Given the importance of knowing consumer behavior in practicing sports for both public institutions and businesses and the need to explore these issues with regards to specific behaviours per category of expenditure and per specific sports (Thibaut, Eakins, Vos, & Scheerder, 2017; Wicker,



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Breuer, & Pawlowski, 2010) the purpose of this study is to analyse the dimension of passion for cycling in order to understand if passion is determinant in amateur cyclists' spending patterns.

Individual passion instrumental in sport consumption

The traditional approach used in the analysis of the participation and expenditure models in sports activities has neoclassical roots and its theories are based on: consumer rationality; utility maximisation given the constraints of time and money; stability of preferences; market balance (Thibaut et al., 2016; Pawlowski & Breuer, 2011; Downward & Rasciute, 2011; Downward, 2007). These approaches are based on Becker's (1965) "theory of household production" which stated that the economic decisions of individuals are determined by their available income and the amount of time dedicated to sports (Breuer, Hallmann, & Wicker, 2011; Pawlowski & Breuer, 2011; Wicker et al., 2010).

Some authors (Thibaut et al., 2016; Scheerder et al., 2011; Lera-López & Rapún-Gárate, 2005) have, however, noted how consumers' behavior in sport does not appear to be completely rational. According to these authors, economic agents have limited rationality and, consequently, both psychological and social factors are fundamental in determining consumption behavior (Hallmann & Wicker, 2015; Lera-López & Rapún-Gárate, 2011; Scheerder et al., 2011; Downward & Rasciute, 2011).

In more recent literature (Thibaut et al., 2017; Wicker, Prinz, & Weimar, 2013; Wicker et al., 2010), these perspectives seem to be converging. While keeping the basis of Becker's theory, sport management researchers recognize the importance of "human capital" (Thibaut et al., 2017), characterised by socio-demographic dimensions and "sport-specific consumption capital" (Wicker et al., 2013, 2010).

With regard to the determinants of cyclists' spending, the only available work is Thibaut et al.'s (2016) where, in addition to socio-demographic determinants, the authors have also tested specific determinants related to cycling as: Cycling intensity, Cycling capital and AIOs (Attitudes, Interests, Opinions). Research conducted on about 6.000 cyclists enabled Thibaut et al. (2016) to reach the conclusion that cycling expenditure is more influenced by "sports intensity variables" and "AIOs variables" rather than "classic orthodox socio-economic and socio-demographic variables".

Despite these arguments, there are no studies in sport management literature which specifically analyse sport passion as determinant in sport consumption behaviour, whereas there are a number of works which describe how sport passion holds affective, cognitive and behavioral implications for individuals (Choi, 2019; Wakefield, 2016; Vallerand et al., 2008, 2006; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), with references to the passion for cycling (Luth, Flinchbaugh, & Ross, 2017).

Under this perspective, passion is defined "as a strong inclination towards an activity that individuals like (or even love), that they value (and thus find important), and in which they invest time and energy" (Vallerand et al., 2008). In their work, these authors have provided an analysis of the behavioural consequences from leisure activities (including sports), proving that, if internalised in one's personal identity, they tend to grow, thus, generating passion. In some individuals this process is so strong that the object of their

passion becomes a central feature in their personal identity. These authors describe the aforementioned phenomenon as the Dualistic Model of Passion and distinguish between two different ways of experiencing passion: obsessive and harmonious. In obsessive passion the individual feels an uncontrollable impulse to commit wholeheartedly and morbidly to the activity he loves, so much so as to suffer from negative consequences to his other social activities (personal and work-related). On the other hand, in harmonious passion, the strong urge to commit to the sport activity is under full control. Passion experienced in the latter way does not harm social life but improves both social and work performance.

By analyzing the scale used by Vallerand et al. (2003) to differentiate between harmonious and obsessive passion on one hand, and Thibaut et al. (2016) entries in the Cycling intensity and AIOs categories on the other, it is possible to notice several similar elements so as to consider the latter ones as possible proxy variables of passion, rather than determinants in their own rights. Therefore, it is deemed useful to explore this connection, since also consumer models and job satisfaction (Luth et al., 2017) could vary depending on the type of passion for cycling. Accordingly, the first proposition to be proven is the following:

PR1: passion is a relevant phenomenon of amateur sport activities which manifests itself with different levels of intensity and must be measured using multiple dimensions.

The different types of expenses in sport consumption

In sport management literature, there are different scientific contributions which define behavior and types of sport expenditure. Wicker et al. (2010, 2013), have identified different types of expenditure which are directly linked to sport activities, whereas Lera-López and Rapún-Gárate (2011) have widened their approach to indirect expenditures, suggesting the sub-division in two macro-groups: participation-related sport consumption and attendance-related sport consumption. The latter approach has also been used by Thibaut et al. (2017) who, in a transversal work on different types of sports, have subdivided the total expenditures in nine categories of direct expenditures and three indirect ones.

The only study available with regards to cycling is Thibaut et al. (2016), where the authors considered both direct and indirect expenditures, deeming more reasonable to classify them in costs incurred for the purchase of non-durable and durable goods. This approach is considered especially suitable for the current work, under a management point of view, both for the sport discipline analysed and for the resulting implications on consumers' spending patterns.

Experiential expenses (Pencarelli & Forlani, 2018; Chanavat & Bodet, 2014), such as bicycle tourism events and bicycle tourism experiences (Han et al., 2017) are of a different nature (more emotional) and are usually not carried out in the place of residence, and therefore they were separated from the other types of expenditure.

For the purposes of this paper, expenditures for amateur cycling activities are divided into four categories: consumption expenditures, long-term or multiannual expenditures, participation in cycling events expenditures, holiday or tourist experience expenditures.

All of the contributions above, despite being detailed and thorough, do not, however, consider the role that passion plays in determining the amount and type of sport expen-

diture. For this reason, our second proposition is as follows:

PR2: passion is a determinant element which positively influences costs incurred for amateur cycling activities.

Method

Given that the purpose of this work is to explore the existing relationship between passion and costs incurred for cycling, isolating the former from possible local behavioural and cultural influences, it was decided to study amateur cyclists coming from the same geographical and cultural context. Thus, the Umbria Region was chosen for its limited dimension (880,285 people on 01/01/2020), for its geographical position (the Centre of Italy) and for its high number of cycling enthusiasts and cycling clubs (75).

From a methodological point of view, taking into account the explorative nature of this work, a qualitative-type of research design was chosen (McGinley, Wei, Zhang, & Zheng, 2021) and, in order to explore both the results of a personal reflection and the ones resulting from the social interaction of the studied subjects, a mixed method approach (QUAL+QUAL) was used. Studies on mix method approaches argue that the combination of different approaches allows for a triangulation of data and a better understanding of research issues and complex phenomena (Molina-Azorín & Font, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

This research was conducted in two phases, using two qualitative instruments: a semi-structured qualitative interview and a group interview. During the first phase (May 2019), 22 face-to-face in-depth interviews were carried out on 22 amateur cyclists residing in different municipalities of the Umbria Region who practice different cycling specialties (road and mountain bike), with different age, sex, studies background and employment, who belong or not to an amateur cycling club. The same 18 open-ended questions were asked to each of the 22 interviewees.

The number of interviews was widely within the standards of qualitative studies (12-15), reaching, after the twentieth interview, a saturation of the obtainable information (McGinley et al., 2021). Each interview was 75 minutes long.

All interviews were recorded and, subsequently, transcribed in full.

During the second phase, in order to evaluate the information obtained from the in-depth interviews, and on the basis of the dynamics which emerge from the interactions between amateur cyclists, a group interview was organised with the participation of 8 randomly selected individuals from the 22 interviewed ones. The group interview was 90 minutes long, it was duly recorded and subsequently transcribed.

The information obtain was treated according to the “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” principles which, as highlighted by McGinley et al. (2021), are requisites to define rigour in a qualitative research. In the first stage, two of the authors conducted, separately, an analysis of the texts by using the Nvivo (Release 1.3) software. The results were then discussed, both in terms of the numbers and types of nodes identified and in terms of existing relationships, with a high rate of agreement (over 80%).

Following to the discussion above, the results were submitted to the third author who has a personal knowledge of the studied phenomenon (being a practicing amateur cyclist) in order to highlight any inconsistencies or lack of data. At the end of this process an unanimous view on the soundness and completeness of the information set was reached by the authors. Lastly, associations for a cross-referenced check of the data were made, identifying the main existing relationships.

Results

The dimensions of sport passion

Using the Vallerand et al. (2003) metrics, it is possible to identify the nature of sport passion as an individual emotional commitment. The survey identified two groups of individuals: 1) those who declare to practice cycling in a balanced manner with regards to other leisure activities, in search of physical wellbeing, being outdoors and socialising and having fun (10/22); 2) those who experience a totalising passion for cycling, regarding this sport as a crucial experience in their existence (12/22).

Table 1. Definition and types of passion

N.	Balanced passion								Totalizing passion						Verbatim	Type
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
1										X					It is result-driven	TOT
2									X						If I could, I would go 8 days a week	TOT
3										X					I could define my passion for cycling with a number: 100%	TOT
4									X						It's an ardent passion, from the heart	TOT
5					X										It allows me to keep in touch with nature and it helps me to relax	BAL
6													X		I've been without a bicycle for a while but I was less profitable	TOT
7												X			A sort of reason for living	TOT
8		X													For me it is just for fun	BAL
9										X					I have a bit of an addiction to this passion	TOT
10					X										I give it a fair amount of free time, it allows me to do other things too	BAL
11									X						It has become more serious and more continuous.	TOT

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N.	Balanced passion							Totalizing passion							Verbatim	Type
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
12					X										It is thought-out and not all-encompassing	BAL
13	X														It allows me to combine nature and sport.	BAL
14	X														It's fun and helps me relieve everyday stress.	BAL
15									X						Now it's indispensable, I couldn't do without it.	TOT
16					X										Practising it, even if sometimes it is hard, makes me feel good.	BAL
17	X														I enjoy being among other people or out in the nature.	BAL
18					X										It's a healthy activity and it makes me feel good.	BAL
19	X														For me it's fun, being with people and taking my mind off things.	BAL
20									X						Forces you to go to the limit and not give up	TOT
21									X						For me it is a rejuvenating passion because I feel the need to do it.	TOT
22									X						It's extreme but it makes me feel good.	TOT

With regards to the characteristics of passion for cycling and its measuring metrics (proposition 1), amateur cyclists are almost unanimous (21/22) in regarding free time spent cycling

as the most representative element of sport passion. Free time spent can, in turn, be expressed as a percentage of the available free time and/or the number of outings per week.

Table 2. Dimensions of passion

Dimensions	Balanced passion	Totalizing passion
Free time	Free time as the most representative aspect of passion Free time dedicated to cycling as a minor (less than 30% 5/10) or proportionate (between 30% and 60% 5/10) part of available free time	Free time as the most representative aspect of passion A lot of free time dedicated to cycling, in many cases (7/12) over 70% of available free time
Weekly outings	Small number (once or twice weekly) or medium number (three or four times a week) of weekly outings (5/10 and 4/10)	In the majority of cases (7/12), a high number of weekly outings (5 times and more)
Km per year	In the majority of cases (7/10), low number of km per year (up to 5 thousand)	In the majority of cases (10/12), high number of km per year (over 10 thousand)
Spent income	Low percentage (up to 20%) of income spent on sport activity	For some (6/12) low percentage of income spent on sport activity (up to 20%) while for others (3/12) spent resources make up more than 50% of available income
Type of cyclist	Amateur who defines himself in most cases (6/10) as cycle-sportive	Amateur who defines himself as cycle-professional (10/12)
Competitive nature	Competitiveness in most cases with oneself (6/10) and, in a few cases (2/10) lack of competitive nature at all	Competitiveness in some cases with the others (4/12) and in other cases both with oneself and the others (4/12)
Type of outings	Coexistence of individual and group outings with preference given to the latter for socializing purposes	Complementarity between individual training outings and group outings of a recreational and competitive nature.

A further significant variable to measure the level of passion is the total number of kilometres covered yearly, calibrated, however, with the characteristics of the various cycling disciplines (e.g. road vs. mountain bike) and the physical aspects of the individual (age, physical fitness, etc.)

The competitive dimension is also significant, not necessarily with regards to official competitions but expressed during habitual outings in relation to one's own personal best or in relation to peers' performance. Individuals with a more totalizing passion define themselves as bicycle-professionals and are characterized by a higher level of competitiveness

(with others and with themselves) as opposed to cyclists with a more balanced passion who tend to define themselves as bicycle-sportive.

For the definition of the level of passion, economic resources for cycling activities and the outing methods, seem to be less significant.

The evidence gathered from the individual interviews was confirmed by the group interview. After being asked again, the interviewees confirmed the importance of free time spent as an expression of passion and the need for a multidimensional measurement.

The impact of passion on sport expenditure

The spending and consumer behaviour of amateur cyclists differs according to the type of passion.

With regards to long-term expenditure, cyclists who have a totalising passion for this sport are the ones who invest the

most: they have a higher number of bicycles and higher annual long-term costs. On the other hand, cyclists with a balanced passion show, on average, a lower level of expenditure.

The second type of the expenditure, the consumption one, is also strongly associated to the concept of passion, as the

Table 3. Sport consumption

Type of expenditure	Balanced passion	Totalizing passion
Bicycles	In the majority of cases (7/10), ownership of a single bike with low expenditure (up to three thousand euros)	Ownership of more bicycles (6/12 have two bicycles and 4/12 have three and more bicycles) with a rather high expenditure (4/12 spent between three and six thousand euros and 5/12 spent more than ten thousand euros)
Long-term expenditure	Expenditure generally on an annual basis and with a lower average value (€ 550 per year). Purchasing behaviour predominantly collectivistic, with support (7/10) or total delegation (3/10) to relational networks.	Expenditure generally on an annual basis and with a higher average value (about € 900 per year). Heterogeneous purchasing behaviour, either individualistic (5/12) or attributed, in some cases (5/12), to relational networks
Consumption expenditure	Extremely low expenditure (just over €300 per year). For clothing products, heterogeneity of behaviour based on personal ideas (2/10), affordability of products (2/10), image conveyed (2/10) and suggestions from friends (4/10). For food products, existence of a balance between personal evaluations (4/10) and the influence of relational networks (2/10).	Higher expenses (about € 1.00 per year). For clothing products, more attention to the image conveyed (8/12). For food products, predominantly individualistic purchasing behaviour (7/12), based on personal research and consumer testing.
Event expenditure	Very low average expenses (less than € 200 per year) for participation in non-competitive events (rallies) that often take place in the local context	Higher average expenditure (more than € 1,000 per year) for participation in competitive events (Gran Fondo) considered important in the national context (7/12).
Tourist expenditure	Reduced tourist experiences (2/10) with a significant propensity to carry them out in the future (5/10)	A large proportion have already had tourist experiences (5/12) or attempts to carve out sporting space within traditional holidays (2/12). Some show no inclination to do so in the future (3/12).

greater the involvement and intensity of practice, the greater the wear on certain technical components (tires, brakes, etc.), on clothing products and a greater consumption of dedicated food and beverages (supplements, energy bars, etc.).

As to the third category of expenditures, referring to participation in sporting events, two distinct behaviors have been observed. Amateur cyclists with a totalizing passion favor events with a competitive nature which take place on a national level and require a rather significant economic commitment. Balanced amateur cyclists, on the other hand, have a tendency to participate in non-competitive events (rallies) which often take place in a local context with the purpose of a gathering and which require a lower level of expense.

Lastly, expenditures for tourist cycling experiences that are not linked to any sporting event, follow a different dynamic. This type of expenditure does not seem to be important for the interviewed individuals. Only 7 cyclists stated to have had this type of experience in the past and, only 3 out of these 7 have actually stayed in places outside of the region. The difference in behavior between the two groups does not seem as evident as in the previous categories. It can be, in fact, underlined that for this method of bicycle use, the social dimension represents an instrumental factor, since, besides sharing the passion, an intimacy of a relationship, friendship which goes beyond cycling, must necessarily exist.

The group interview confirmed the results of the in-depth interviews, also with regards to the expenditure patterns and

the influence of the level of passion on sport expenses and has underlined how passion is contaminated by the social dimension.

Discussion

According to the classical models (Becker, 1965) those who practice sports allocate their free time and their income on the basis of a trade-off between these two dimensions (Thibaut et al., 2016; Downward & Rasciute, 2011). If, however, we assume that consumption is guided by passion, both rational and irrational, hedonistic and experiential, important aspects emerge on sport consumption which have been overlooked in previous literature. Under this perspective, free time and available income represent necessary but not sufficient conditions (one may have high resources that are not necessarily used for sport activities). Passion, therefore, represents and is the activator of sport practice and, consequently, sport spending patterns. The results of this research confirm this approach and state: 1) the role of passion as determinant for amateur cycling; 2) the existence of the dynamics of activity, expenditure and consumption which grow as the passion for sports increases.

Incurred cost does not saturate itself, as increased sporting activity and improved performance produce a desire for new activity to achieve ever new goals with regards to one self (competing with one self) and with regards to other members of the community (competing with the others).

This cycle, with different intensity as the passion varies,

was encountered in three of the four categories: greater long-term expenditures (periodic up-grading of technical equipment with a tendency to accumulate them), current expenditure (greater consumption due to wear connected to greater activity), cycling events (participating in increasingly challenging competitive events).

A different dynamic seems to take place with regards to consumption connected with cycle-tourist experiences which are more related to a social dimension.

From a theoretical point of view this study offers distinct implications: 1) it represents, from a marketing perspective, the link between scientific literature on sporting passion which takes a predominantly psychological value, and scientific literature on sports consumption with an economic intake and with the aim of adopting appropriate policies; 2) it provides useful indications on how to develop new forms of segmen-

tation of the market for businesses in the sector; 3) it offers indications for the operationalization of the level of passion in amateur cycling by identifying a number of variables: percentage of free time spent; number of weekly outings; Km completed per year; performance level (km per outing, average speed, altitude level covered, etc.); level of competitiveness; economic resources used.

Due to its explorative nature, this study does not allow any generalizations. The variables can be verified in different socio-cultural dimensions and further tested with qualitative or quantitative techniques in order to identify and measure cause-and-effect relationships in representative samples of the targeted universe.

Lastly, this research lays out considerable scope for development to test the role and influence of passion in other sports and consumer contexts (e.g. cinema, museums, theatres, etc.).

Acknowledgements

There are no acknowledgements.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

Received: 25 February 2021 | **Accepted:** 11 April 2021 | **Published:** 01 February 2022

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