

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM

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Bachelor thesis

Making Water Polo Big: Revisiting Marketing Strategies of Water Polo

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ABSTRACT

Water polo always has been one of the toughest sports to practice and, train. However, throughout history, the popularity and marketing success of the sport was never where the enthusiasts would like it to be. This research consists of qualitative research with interviews of marketing professionals and water polo organization or clubs' managers, to find out about their previous marketing challenges and possible solutions to enhance the current efforts. Three themes emerged from the Interviews the surface on which the sport is played, the effect of rule changes to increase the sport's popularity and the importance of youth programs to market the sport in the future. These themes helped identify the challenges the marketers faced and find new solution proposals to market water polo better and increase the sport's overall popularity.

Acknowledgment

I want to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Doron Zilbershtein, for his guidance throughout the research for this thesis. His enthusiasm and wisdom led me to write a thesis about my professional sport and my most valuable passion in life. Furthermore, he helped me to thrive in this research and be the best student I can be for the thesis.

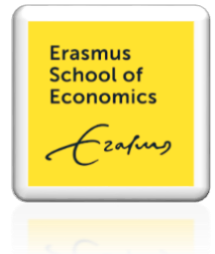
My thanks to all the participants in this qualitative research for their sincere and passionate interviews. They helped me find answers to my research question.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Even with the exciting and fast-paced nature that water polo brings to an audience, it still has yet to achieve the same popularity and, thus, revenue that many similar team sports have achieved. This general lack of interest in water polo has significant implications for the progress of the sport, its players, and its capacity to draw in sponsors and create a broader fan base.

This thesis will examine this issue, discuss existing water polo marketing challenges, define their shortcomings, and propose possible new approaches for developing water polo sports marketing.

Sedky, Kortam, and AbouAish (2020) suggest that sports media, sports publicizing, star competitors, and sports sponsorship are critical components of an integrated marketing



communication mix that can draw audiences to less popular sports. Additionally, implementing national teams can be a solid boost to attract audiences and media interest. The stimulus-response theory of learning explains this association between stimulus and response, where sports marketing serves as the stimulus, and the attraction towards less popular sports, like water polo, is the response.

Given this foundation, one opportunity for boosting water polo's visibility is to use the support for national teams during the Olympics and other major championships, such as the World and European Championships. The eagerness for national teams during these occasions can be a capable showcasing tool, allowing water polo clubs and organizations to draw in modern fans and increase revenue (Sedky et al., 2020).

The following section discusses the framework this study centers on, giving an outline of the landscape in which water polo operates. The objective is to examine the factors contributing to the sport's lower visibility and revenue streams and propose methodologies to improve its appeal to a broader audience.

Problem Statement

Water polo's limited popularity dramatically affects the sport's development and ability to sustain itself. Studies in sports marketing suggest that effective marketing strategies can attract audiences and increase revenue. (Sedky et al. 2020). However, existing academic research needs to adequately address this issue, leaving a gap in understanding the particular marketing challenges the sport faces and how those challenges should be efficiently addressed. (Bilobrck, 2020).

This thesis will investigate and discuss the marketing challenges of various European water polo clubs and organizations, recognize common issues, and propose strategies and actions to increase the sport's visibility and revenue. This study aims to improve the approach to marketing in sports for water polo while identifying the challenges that are faced.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the challenges the water polo clubs and national team federations face and to understand how they can improve their approach to marketing in order to attract a larger audience and generate more revenue. This study adopts a case study design that will focus on interviews with individuals who have been marketing water polo or were in leading positions in water polo federations.

To market and popularize a sport, you not only need innovation, but you also need to develop the resources already used (Platonov & Kuziaev, 2023). This research aims to identify these resources and necessary means by considering and examining current marketing approaches to offer proposals for improvement. The interviews and data will be collected from two different groups. The first are individuals from Germany and Turkey, covering two countries where the sport is less popular, and the second from Croatia, representing a country where the national success and popularity of the sport is much higher (Bilobrk, 2020).

Eight to ten participants will be chosen for the surveys. They will all have sufficient expertise on the topic of water polo, whether that be general sports marketing or the marketing of specific water polo organizations.

During the interviews, participants will be asked about the past and current challenges of marketing water polo and questions regarding possible solutions and ideas to market the sport more successfully.

Research Question

What are current marketing challenges for water polo and how can they be improved to change the marketing of the sport to gain more popularity?

Significance of the research

Many young people in the world sacrifice their private and educational lives for sports careers. Interestingly, one study suggests that the discipline and lessons gained from sports return to students in better grades (Ishihara et al., 2020).

As a professional water polo player for over ten years, I have experienced many of its benefits. But the fact that one sport, such as water polo, is valued less by the public than other

more popular sports is intriguing and worth investigating to give water polo an equal standing with other more popular sports.

CHAPTER 2: THE LITERATURE LANDSCAPE

To find relevant literature, I had to start researching about the topic of sports marketing. However, since many academic publications on sports marketing papers are about football or basketball, I added search words like “low-budget sports” or “non-profit sports” to my inquiries. This brought me to a study conducted in Egypt since they specifically researched how to pull audiences toward less popular sports. This paper was the one that built the foundation of my research and allowed me to see the connections of how their findings could be adopted to marketing water polo (Sedky et al., 2020).

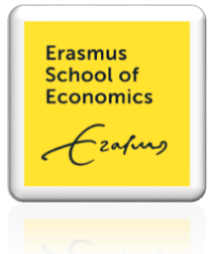
The most significant gap in the literature is research on water polo. When I researched the sport “water polo” on Google Scholar, most of the research was related to physical education and physiotherapeutic studies, except for Bilobrk (2020), who points out the financial problems the sport faces. However, thorough research on water polo marketing is lacking. The only similar research is the comparison of the handball fanbase as opposed to the football fanbase in Egypt (Sedky et al., 2020).

The main articles that inspired this paper were published from 2020 to 2024 to maintain the data's relevance until the paper's completion period, which is 2024. Publications found in my research mostly used surveys to analyze marketing in sports and utilized peer-reviewed publications. Some older articles, such as those (Berument & Yücel, 2005), support more general ideas, such as the power of sports for unification and passionate fan support.

Literature review process

I divided the research into different topics, such as sports marketing, the power of sports in society, etc., since it is difficult to find specific literature on water polo due to the research gap.

The first topic I started with was sports marketing, which has individual approaches and solution ideas for marketing other sports (Wicker, 2011). Other literature suggests that sports advertisements, star athletes, and media can help less popular sports thrive and become more popular (Sedky et al., 2020).



Another topic I used was the unification aspect of sports and finding connections to market water polo to create feelings of unity. The power of a derby is a clear example of how powerful sports can be. The game gains added value and meaning when the rivalry is legendary and has a history, such as two rival neighborhoods in one city (Pavlyk, 2024). This means that derbies that also exist in water polo should be marketed further.

This was thoroughly supported by a paper showing how strong sports influence the morale and even household income of devoted fans (Berument & Yücel, 2005). The success of a sport has enormous benefits for its fanbase. This conclusion paves the way for further research to discover how this outcome could be transferred to water polo.

The research papers used in this thesis will analyze successful marketing examples in other sports or general ideas of marketing sports. My thesis aims to adopt this gathered information to the marketing of water polo to conceptualize new marketing strategies.

Literature review

The literature review explore different papers that involve sports marketing, marketing of low budgeted sport, passion involved in sports fans and financial struggles water polo faces.

Firstly, Berument and Yucel (2005) investigated the economic impact of football on consumption and the economy. Furthermore, their research is based on passionate fans in football who are so strongly affected by the results that their economic behavior is responding accordingly. Water polo lacks the fanbase and passionate audience to make this paper applicable to the research question.

The research by Bilobrck (2020) looks into the economic sustainability of water polo in Croatia. Being one of the only papers about water polo it gives insight into the financial struggles the sports clubs and croatian water polo federation faces despite being the country where the sport is among the most popular. Mostly mentioning economic struggles such as players' and coaches' salaries, the paper lacks marketing research on water polo.

In the realm of sports marketing, Celik and Ibrahim (2023) conduct a bibliometric analysis of sports marketing research. Their study provides a comprehensive overview of the field but falls short in exploring specific marketing strategies that have proven effective for niche sports like

water polo. Given the increasing importance of targeted marketing strategies in today's digital age, how their findings can be implemented in water polo would be important for this paper.

The research Chopra (2014) delves into the role the football club FC Barcelona played in the political Catalan nationalism, analyzing how a team can influence the regional identities of fans. Since water polo lacks a fanbase big enough to influence them on regional or nationalistic identities, this paper doesn't build a bridge for niche sports to delve into those strong passions of fans.

Ishihara et al. (2020) researched how young athletes do in school. Proving how sports help students thrive and give them important values as discipline and courage. The paper could inspire this research while the importance of youth development in water polo can be advertised as also health for the development of children.

Pavlik (2024) discusses the components of football culture; in a globalized world, offering a broad overview of how cultural elements influence sports. Since this research doesn't consider other sports, especially low income generating sports like water polo, it makes it hard to bridge the findings about sports culture.

Platonov and Kuziaev (2023) examine the economic limits on sporting success, providing a detailed analysis of the challenges faced by the football industry. However, their research does not explore strategies to overcome these limits, particularly in less popular sports like water polo. This gap suggests that more research is needed to identify and test strategies that can enhance the economic success of niche sports, addressing the unique challenges they face.

Sedky, Kortam, and AbouAish (2022) investigate, the role of sports marketing in attracting audiences, with a focus on traditional marketing methods. The comparison of handball and football in Egypt makes it one of the most important papers to look into marketing of low income sports.

Lastly, Wicker (2011) explores the concept of willingness-to-pay in sports clubs, providing valuable insights into what drives this willingness among participants. However, his study does not consider factors influencing willingness-to-pay in niche sports like water polo, leaving a gap in the literature that could be addressed by future research focused on understanding these determinants in various sports contexts.

In summary, the literature review highlighted many papers that could be used in analysis of the research question however the research gap around water polo keeps making it difficult to find connections to other sports.

Gap in the literature

The analysis of the literature uncovers several significant research gaps within the setting of sports studies, especially concerning water polo. The main gap is water polo, missing any major study, particularly any study about marketing water polo.

The financial impacts of sports represent another range with notable gaps. Berument and Yucel (2005) center on the financial affect of football but fall short in exploring the long-term impacts or making comparisons to other sports, especially with water polo. Research in the future may try to discover how this passion was made within the first put, giving an insight to smaller sports like water polo to impact their gathering of people in the future.

Additionally, Bilobrk (2020) investigates the financial challenges confronted by water polo in Croatia but does not offer proposed solutions or improvement strategies. This shows a need for more research aimed at defining viable techniques for accomplishing financial maintainability in water polo or generally a better approach on how to advertise the sport better.

Additionally, within the field of sports marketing, there are significant gaps, especially within the setting of niche sports, particularly water polo having no research on showcasing of the sport. Celik and Ibrahim (2023) conduct a bibliometric analysis of sports marketing research, however they don't dig profoundly into the specific marketing methodologies that have demonstrated most successful, particularly for niche sports such as water polo. Future research ought to point and assess the foremost effective marketing approaches in water polo to fill this gap.

Another area that needs thorough investigation is the part of sports in shaping regional identity. Chopra (2014) analyzes the influence of FC Barcelona on Catalan patriotism but does not expand this analysis to other sports teams and regions, such as water polo. Being a sport that needs a big audience, the research gap of water polo would deny the capacity to move crowds to such enthusiastic emotions as patriotism. To fill this gap within the future, the connections made in this paper can be researched historically and this enthusiasm and strong feelings can be connected to water polo fans.

In terms of the relationship between sports participation and academic execution, Ishihara et al. (2020) discover a connection but don't investigate the basic components or incorporate sports such as water polo in their investigation. Future research should investigate how and why participation in water polo might influence academic performance, thus addressing an important gap in the literature.

In the realm of cultural aspects of sports, Pavlik (2024) researches the culture behind football, missing out on lower income sports including water polo. Future research could research the way the culture in football developed through history and then try to apply it to water polo.

Economic limits on sporting success and strategies to overcome these limits also represent an area where more research is needed. Platonov and Kuziaev (2023) examine the economic limits on sporting success but do not explore potential strategies to overcome these challenges, particularly in less popular sports like water polo. Identifying and testing strategies to enhance economic success in such sports could be a fruitful area for future research.

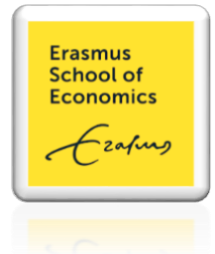
Additionally, Sedky, Kortam, and AbouAish (2022) investigate sports marketing's role in attracting audiences, while giving an insight to low budget sports difference to popular sports like football, however the gap there is once again water polo. Future studies should focus on how digital marketing strategies can attract audiences to niche sports, particularly water polo, to fill this gap.

Lastly, Wicker (2011) explores the concept of willingness-to-pay in sports clubs but doesn't look into the willingness-to-pay in sports like water polo. The gap is once again identified as water polo as in the future researchers would have to look into willingness-to-pay in water polo or other lower budget sports.

In conclusion, many gaps in literature are found in this analysis, however this paper pursued the gap of marketing challenges and approaches for water polo.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework will revolve around the marketing strategies used in water polo, exploring setbacks and previous successes through interviews conducted with experts. Furthermore, the players and federation representatives can reflect on their experience of marketing water polo, which can be used to find solutions to the marketing problem. This



framework provides a structured focal point for analyzing the wonder of marketing in a less popular sport and guides the study in interpreting and translating the information (Sedky et al., 2020).

Distinguishing the Conceptual Framework

The framework for this research is based on sports marketing and revenue generation in lesser-known sports. It is known that sports marketing, components such as media, star athletes' derbies, and sponsorships play a crucial role in attracting audiences (Pavlyk, 2024). By synthesizing relevant studies, the framework blends in with the research question, clearly understanding water polo marketing (Bilobrk, 2020).

Applying the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study consolidates insights from different sources to understand marketing in sports, with a specific focus on water polo. The research points to examine the marketing challenges and opportunities within water polo, referencing studies from broader sports settings and particular water polo cases.

Water polo has confronted critical challenges in attracting groups of onlookers and producing revenue. Sedky et al. (2020) inspected the role of sports marketing in lesser known sports, recognizing key components such as sports media, publicizing, star competitors, and sponsorship. This concept aligns with the center of this study, providing a focal point through which to understand the marketing dynamics of water polo.

The struggles and attempts to promote water polo can be related to insights from football and other sports. Berument and Yücel (2005) investigated how football can boost production, illustrating the financial affect that a popular sport can have. This point of view is important in considering how marketing techniques in water polo might benefit from a broader understanding of sports' financial impact. Additionally, Chopra (2014) highlighted how football clubs, like FC

Barcelona, play a part in forming regional identity, proposing that sports can interface with audiences at a social level.

Bilobrk (2020) talked about the financial sustainability of water polo in Croatia, uncovering that whereas the sport features a wealthy history and a successful national team, there are still critical financial challenges. This paper highlights the need for improved marketing methodologies to maintain the sport's development and draw in a larger audience. Çelik and Ibrahim (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis of sports marketing research, showing past research in this field and more thoroughly emphasizing how sports promoting has gotten to its point today.

Integrating various marketing components could be a central theme in this conceptual framework. Platonov and Kuziaev (2023) inspected the financial limits of sporting success in football, talking about how the industry can develop despite financial limitations. Their discoveries emphasize the significance of innovative marketing approaches, which is important to the study if the focus is moved to water polo.

The research also considers the role of national teams and significant events. These occasions, just like the Olympics, can serve as effective promoting tools, drawing on the victory of national teams to boost audience interest. Furthermore, this gives the opportunity for this research to investigate if success can draw attention and increase the popularity. Ishihara et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between sports interest and academic performance in teenagers, inquiring about the strong impact of sports on people's lives. This insight can help frame the importance of promoting water polo as a sport that generates revenue and contributes positively to participants' personal development.

Wicker (2011) discussed the willingness to pay in non-profit sports clubs, offering insights into how sports organizations can attract funding and support. This perspective is valuable when considering water polo's potential to draw in sponsors and generate revenue.

Integrating these references provides a comprehensive conceptual framework that guides the study. It allows the research to explore the struggles and successes in water polo marketing and propose innovative solutions to improve the sport's visibility and profitability.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The chosen research strategy for this study is qualitative. This approach adjusts well to the research question, which aims to investigate water polo marketing challenges and strategies through interviews with experts who have first-hand experience with marketing water polo. Qualitative research is fitting since it allows for an in-depth investigation of individuals' subjective experiences, insights, and perceptions with firsthand information on water polo marketing (Hammarberg et al., 2016). It is best suited for gathering rich, detailed information that can comprehensively understand the phenomenon being studied.

Other research methods were considered but eventually ruled out. A quantitative approach, which includes numerical information and statistical analysis, was rejected because this study focuses on exploring subjective insights and generating hypotheses, not testing them. Mixed-methods research, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques, was also considered but deemed pointless for the scope of this study.

Research Design

The research design chosen for this qualitative study is the case study design. This design adjusts to the research question, which seeks to understand marketing challenges and strategies in water polo by focusing on a particular bunch of individuals; water polo players and marketing experts. The case study approach permits a thorough examination of these individuals' experiences, enabling the research to capture the reality and understand the complexities of marketing water polo.

Data collection for this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews. This method allows for adaptability in gathering information while guaranteeing that subjects are covered. The semi-structured format permits open-ended questions and unconstrained follow-up questions, encouraging a more normal discussion with interviewees. (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017) Interviews were conducted with 10 members chosen for their skill in water polo promotion and

their experiences with the sport's promotional efforts. The interviews were recorded, translated, and analyzed for key subjects and designs.

The analysis followed a thematic approach to code and categorize the information. This process helped distinguish repeating topics, connections, and designs within the interview responses, following a proof of saturation. Thematic analysis may be an appropriate strategy for qualitative research because it permits adaptability in distinguishing and interpreting new subjects. (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017)

Population

The population for this study consists of water polo players, marketing professionals, and other partners who have encountered challenges in promoting the sport. This bunch was chosen because of their one-of-a-kind experiences in marketing struggles and triumphs in water polo. It is aimed that they fulfilled the current literature gap around water polo and water polo marketing.

Sampling Method

The sampling method used for this qualitative study is purposeful sampling. (Kallio et al., 2016). This approach is appropriate because it permits the choice of members who have coordinated involvement with the research topic, guaranteeing that the information collected is relevant and meaningful. Purposeful sampling may be a common strategy in qualitative research because it targets people with information or mastery related to the study. (Hammarberg et al., 2016) This study targeted people who can fill the literature gap that exists around water polo with their first-hand experience on the subject. Two different age groups are targeted, once the non-current players who are older than 30. They are individuals who have positions in federations or water polo clubs and are actively working on marketing the sport. Their insight is also valuable because it includes the water polo marketing from the past. The other group are current players. Being a sport that doesn't have access to enough funds, even active athletes are mostly part of the marketing, while also witnessing the success and weaknesses of the sports popularity themselves.

Furthermore, an ethical considerations questionnaire was filled and the thesis was found ethical.

Sample Characteristics and Size

The sample consisted of 10 participants, counting water polo players, marketing professionals, and managers with firsthand experience promoting water polo. The specific criteria for selecting participants include their involvement in marketing water polo, their involvement in water polo organizations, and their knowledge of the sport's promotional efforts. The sample size is consistent with qualitative research practices, where a smaller, focused group is chosen to gain in-depth experiences. According to Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, and Young (2018), a sample size of 10 members can be adequate for accomplishing information saturation in interview-based qualitative studies, where designs and topics start to develop reliably.

Developing interview questions

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to be more comfortable with my questions and provide a broader playground for my interviewees, in which they can move away from my questions and answer more thoroughly according to their expertise and field. (Kallio et al., 2016) Furthermore, open-ended questions will allow me to analyze different personal opinions on the subject and give the interviewees a more sincere and accessible environment where they will feel comfortable (Weller et al., 2018).

The data collection process includes a few critical steps outlined to guarantee this study's smooth and successful information gathering. The primary step is recruitment, where members are contacted through e-mail or phone with an invitation to participate in the research. This invitation incorporates a brief overview of the study's reason and what will be anticipated of participants.

Once participants agree to join, interview scheduling takes place. Interviews are organized at a time and area that's helpful for the participants, whether in person or through video conferencing platforms like Zoom. Adaptability in planning aims to satisfy participants' needs and guarantee their comfort during the interview process.

The following step is conducting the interviews, which will take after a semi-structured format. This format starts with open-ended questions but permits room for adaptability, empowering the interviewer to ask follow-up questions based on the reactions given. This approach energizes members to share their knowledge openly and in-depth. All interviews are recorded, with the participant's consent, to guarantee accuracy in translation and analysis.

After the interviews are completed, the transcription stage starts. The sound recordings are transcribed, guaranteeing that the precise words and subtleties of the members are captured. This step is pivotal for maintaining the astuteness of the information and permits a more accurate examination afterward within the process. Since the interviews will be conducted in Turkish, German, and English, the Turkish and German interviews will be first transcribed and then translated into English.

The last step is data storage. All transcriptions and other collected information are put away safely to preserve privacy and comply with data protection regulations.

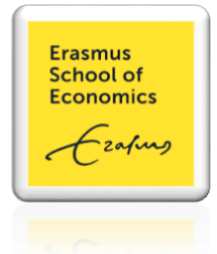
Researcher's Biases and Prevention

As a professional water polo player who has played the sport for over ten years, my views and passion for the sport may be found again in the research (Opdenakker, 2006). However, the Interviews are selected from a broad range of people who have played the sport before or stopped playing, so the non-athletes will balance out the bias of the Interviewee.

Trustworthiness

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of the research process. Concurring to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a study is dependable when its forms are steady and can



be repeated with comparable results. To guarantee the dependability of my paper I kept an audit trail journal, where I documented the steps I took including research, data collection and interview schedules.

Credibility

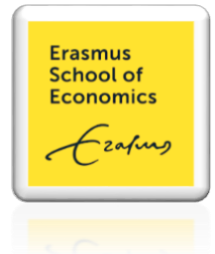
Credibility in qualitative research compares to internal validity, showing the exactness and trustworthiness of a study's findings. Shenton (2004) emphasizes credibility is accomplished through delayed engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. To set up validity in my research, I took a few measures. Through persistent observation, the information coming from the participants ended up being very sincere and accurate. Triangulation helped me compare the reactions of different interviewees, finding matching points and laying the groundwork of the first round of coding.

Transferability

Transferability alludes to the degree to which a study's discoveries can be connected to other settings or settings. Agreeing with Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is accomplished through thick proof of research. This research did just that as the transcripts and audio files that were recorded during the data collection process were kept according to the privacy rules, laying a clear pathway of the research.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which the research findings are free from bias and reflect the real encounters and viewpoints of the participants. Shenton (2004) depicts confirmability as the neutrality and objectivity of a subjective ponder. To attain confirmability in my proposition, I kept up an audit path that recorded all steps within the research process, from data collection to analysis and interpretation.



By tending to these components of trustworthiness—dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability—I ensured the quality and reliability of my research findings. I carefully examined each criterion throughout the research process, giving a solid foundation for my proposal and its conclusions.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in academic research refers to how researchers fundamentally reflect on their biases, assumptions, and influences through the research process (Finlay, 2002). It includes recognizing the part the analyst plays in forming the study's results and effectively tending to potential sources of bias. Reflexivity is crucial in qualitative research, where the researcher is profoundly included in information collection and translation.

I utilized a few procedures to ensure practical, bias-free, and relevant reflexivity in this study. Firstly, I kept a audit trail journal that accounts for the timing and steps of the research, this journal also helped me keep control of the research and not get off topic.

Audit Trail

An audit trail is a detailed record that permits readers to trace the logic and steps taken through a research study. According to Carcary (2009), the audit trail is fundamental for building up the dependability and confirmability of subjective thinking because it provides a straightforward way for others to follow and assess the researcher's choices.

The audit trail in this study includes detailed documentation of the research process, from information collection to analysis and interpretation. It will encompass the interview protocols, informed consent forms, transcription procedures, data coding strategies, and other relevant steps. This comprehensive record will ensure that the inquiry can be followed and caught on by others, permitting a more profound examination of the study's technique and conclusions.

By maintaining a clear and transparent audit trail, I aim to enhance the study's reliability and give a vigorous stage for future investigations on water polo showcasing.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are critical in any research involving human participants. In this study, I will guarantee that all moral rules are followed to protect participants' rights and confidentiality. I will conduct an informed consent process with each participant, explaining the study's reason, their part, and their right to withdraw without any negative consequences.

Participants will be given detailed information about the study, including the research objectives and how their data will be used. Informed consent forms will be signed by each participant, showing their agreement to participate. These forms will be put away safely, with a copy included in the appendix of the research proposal.

If participants wish to withdraw from the study, they can do so at any time without any repercussions. No incentives will be offered in exchange for participation, guaranteeing participation is voluntary. To ensure members' secrecy, their names, and other identifiable data will be anonymized in all data and reports. Data will be stored securely for five years in compliance with moral benchmarks and institutional requirements.

These measures ensure members' ethical protection and maintain the research process's integrity. Furthermore, an ethical considerations questionnaire was filled and the thesis was found ethical.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions in research are beliefs or statements taken to be genuine without direct evidence (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In this study, I accept that members gave fair and accurate reactions during the interviews, and their insights reflect the broader experiences of those included in water polo marketing. These assumptions are vital for the quality of the study, as they shape the premise for data collection and analysis.

Limitations

Limitations refer to a study's potential shortcomings or constraints beyond the researcher's control (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This study's restrictions include the small sample size and potential bias within the participants' reactions. The restricted number of interviews may not capture the total range of encounters, and the individual associations between analysts and members may impact the results. These restrictions affect the generalizability of the discoveries and highlight the need for careful analysis and interpretation.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries set by the researcher to define the scope of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This study's delimitations include focusing on water polo marketing and restricting the Interviewee to European countries. Being the leading Continent in water polo, Europe gives a clear analysis of the sport, however Northern American and Southern American water polo is disregarded geographically, leading to a delimitation.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Different themes emerged from thorough interviews with professionals in their fields who are trying to change the approach and motivation for marketing water polo. The following information is taken entirely from the interviews that were conducted.

Theme 1: The fact that the sport is played in water brings a lot of challenges.

Since only half or even less of the athletes' bodies are visible because they are in the water, this creates the first challenge water polo faces. People enjoy less of the sport if they can't see as much.

Additionally, the necessity of a pool to start a game, and sometimes water polo caps and swimsuits (more robust material, double knitted so it does not rip) also shows that it is not a cheap and accessible sport compared to other ball sports. (*Participant 8*) For example, in poor neighborhoods, kids can play football with plastic bottles and the doors of apartments as goals.

The question arises of whether the easy accessibility of the football example is one of the reasons why the sport reaches the masses, whereas water polo reaches smaller and more niche audiences.

Water polo lacks easy accessibility with a need for a pool, floating goals, caps with ear guards, water polo balls, and at least one referee to play a water polo game. *(Participant 8)* A possible approach to minimize this problem could be found in cities with coasts where the sea is safe and the tide is weak to allow players to still operate. For example, some cities in Croatia and Spain, where fields are built in the sea, on-lookers can enjoy beach water polo. This is a form of the sport with fewer accessories, and up to the 3rd division in Croatia, is played on these sea fields. *(Participant 6)* This idea could be expanded more in the Mediterranean, where more beach water polo fields could be built. This would not only make the sport more straightforward and monetarily accessible, but also tourists that come to enjoy the Mediterranean coast would be able to familiarize themselves with the sport. This could result in them showing interest in the sport in their home countries after being acquainted with it during their holidays.

This transitions to the following topic about the seasons in which the sport should regularly be played in. The qualitative research collected stated that in the past the sport was more famous as the games and finals were in the summer, resulting in a bigger crowd and audience. *(Participant 3)* As the sport evolved, professionalism required more games for better development of athletes, turning the sport into a classic league system similar to football, where the league starts at the end of summer or early fall, and the finals end towards late spring or early summer. *(Participant 6)* The interviewees shared the opinion that a dilemma arose with the problem of, on the one hand, having athletes that want to develop, so need more games and professionalism also during winter, and on the other hand, the marketing problem the sport faced due to losing its fun and fans during the summer. *(Participant 6)* One way to tackle this dilemma could be through better scheduling of the major tournaments, such as the LEN Champions League Or the European and World championships so they would align during the summer months. *(Participant 4)* This would also have to be done in such a way that it does not intersect with the times of other big tournaments of popular sports. *(Participant 3)*

Theme 2: The effect of rule changes to increase the sport's popularity

Is the visibility good? Is it more fun to play than to watch? Perhaps the answer is due to the length and size of the pool. International and Olympic water polo is played in a 33-meter pool.

In contrast, the NCAA (collegiate American league) plays a 25-meter field, resulting in more goals, more attacking time, and less swimming from defense to offense. (*Participant 2*) This could result in better visibility for fans. Furthermore, playing five on five, excluding goalies instead of a six on six, was also one of the rule change proposals to water polo. Having rule changes to increase the sport's visibility is common and constant rule changes and a norm within sports. For example, in the NBA, where every team votes for the new rule proposal, a late example would be the anti-flopping rule, in which when a player fakes a foul to his advantage, this is hardly punished with a flagrant foul (free throws for the opponent team and the ball possession.) (*Participant 2*)

Another example would be the changes in football rules, which were a huge part of the development of the sport. In 1992, the Danish national team won the European football competition as they received very few goals in the tournament. (*Participant 4*) It was observed that to keep the possession, the defenders passed the ball to their goalie where he picked it up with his hands, making it impossible for the attackers to gain back possession. After the tournament, FIFA recognized how the excessive passing of the ball back to the goalie resulted in a decrease in visibility and the fun aspect of the sport. This tactic was abused by the Danish team and was one of the reasons they won the tournament. This is a perfect example that shows how rule changes are necessary to either not allow teams to abuse a specific grey zone in rules or make the game uglier and unwatchable because of the abuse of specific rules. (*Participant 4*)

These examples, also analyzed by some of the interviewees, show how common it is to implement rule changes in favor of gaining visibility for the sport, and they support the claim that LEN and FINA should keep looking for ways in rule changes to improve the popularity of the game. As mentioned before, some rule changes could shorten the field to increase inactive playing time (time spent swimming from defense to offense). (*Participant 10*) This way, the tiring swimming, which is very fast for the athletes compared to ordinary people, will be reduced as it looks boring from the outside.

This can be compared to the problem F1 faces while trying to entertain its viewers. Even though the motorsport series gained significant viewers, public opinion still thinks the sport looks

like cars going in circles. In reality, the pilots endure up to 6-7G forces in turns, reaching a top speed of over 320 km/h. In order to make this understandable for viewers, F1 implements many techniques, one of which being the different camera angles to understand the speed at which the car is going. *(Participant 4)* The latest angle introduced was placed inside helmets to show how the head of the F1 driver is enduring these high G forces lap after lap. This is an example that can be studied and interpreted for water polo. There is too much time spent by water polo swimming from defense to attack and this probably loses the interest of viewers. If new camera angles could show how these athletes are swimming at high speeds and then having to fight on the other end when they arrive, it would increase the spectacle of the sport, increasing the empathy factor of the viewers. It could also increase admiration of the physical aspect of the sport which, until now, was not relatable and transparent for a general viewer. *(Participant 8)*

Theme 3: The emphasis and importance of the right youth programs.

A good sports youth program means having individuals with high knowledge of fundamentals, tactical basics, and knowledge of young athletes' psychological and physical development. Investing in their youth program would result in a more successful team, both monetarily and with a higher quality of play. *(Participant 1)* The Turkish water polo club ENKA example came up in the interviews. Their choice was an investment in bringing in two Olympic medalist athletes instead of investing in foreign coaches which could strengthen the youth program. This choice made ENKA the champions within Turkey, more than their rival Galatasaray in the last ten years but left the rest of the club weak. *(Participant 7)* This success was not sustainable as most of the club was getting worse due to the lack of expertise coaching. ENKA only spends a minor part of the budget on Turkish coaches whose knowledge is limited for the youth academies in water polo. Fundamentals, the most crucial ground of every sport, must be taught well and repeated often from a young age for the country to have a chance of Olympic success. *(Participant 7)* What should have been done was to use the available funds, used on the Olympic players, on a trainer with high fundamental knowledge from a leading country instead. These trainers could be brought to the youth academy. They would educate the next generation of players and the young prospective local Turkish coaches who would then obtain knowledge and skills to train the next generations.

This approach was successful in other fields and can be replicated in water polo. The qualitative research mentioned the Turkish women's volleyball teams as an example. (*Participant 2*) The team was crowned the Nations League and the European Champions, becoming the number 1 women's volleyball national team. They are at the Paris 2024 Olympics. A valuable interviewee stated that the reason behind this success lay in past investments. The Turkish government invested in the league and youth academies, including sponsorship income and educating young Turkish coaches. This was at the beginning of the 2000s, and the success came in after more than 20 years. This shows how the investment in youth can, in the long run, bring success and popularity. (*Participant 1*) After men's Football and basketball, women's volleyball got its place as the 3rd most watched sport in Turkey, inspiring young girls to become strong, independent women and athletes who compete against the world. Investing in the youth today will pay off in the future, with popularity and money inflow from fans.

Discussion of the Findings

Since the gap in Literature on water polo led to the questions and interviewees having mostly open questions where one would expect their answers to vary, the similarities while answering questions about changing the approach to marketing the sport were visible. These created the themes that were mentioned in the findings. The recognizable themes were only three; however, many themes had different points touched upon by different interviewees, making each theme consist of different examples from different countries and sometimes different sports, resulting in versatile but thorough answers.

The safe interview environment paid off; everyone gave professional yet sincere answers. The first theme indicates the surface the sport is played on and the problems this brings to marketing the sport successfully. The bare minimum necessary to be able to play the sport causes the accessibility to drop, especially for lower-income families. Furthermore, the scheduling of the sport was often criticized as it was a more summer-oriented sport in the past. It was stated that it had gained marketing advantages due to water polo being played in the summers. Currently, leagues follow a weekly home and away schedule with games from fall to spring, missing out on that previous advantage that summer brought as a season.

The second theme was about the effect of rule changes and how these can positively affect the viewing and popularity of the sport. Examples from other sports, such as F1 and football, were presented, and possible bridges and rule change ideas for water polo concluded that theme.

The third theme focused on the emphasis and importance of the right youth programs, including the proper usage of the available budget allocation for clubs and organizations. Furthermore, the exclamation on the importance of youth programs suggested a possible connection between future success and the sport's popularity.

Limitations of the Findings may include that every participant had some connection with water polo, making them emotionally connected to the sport and possibly in favor of the sport being marketed bitterly. This could lead to a bias in their answers that does not show the possible issues they faced. At the same time, they were previously marketing water polo since they want to approach the future of the sport rather optimistically.

Key Summaries of Key Analysis

The key analysis of this research can be found in the three themes of the findings. Since the themes emerged from different interviewees and sports examples, the exact examples might differ, but they were summarized with the themes. The surface the sport is played on, being in the water, is one of the key elements that differentiates water polo from other sports. This has different effects on the visibility of the sport for the fans and the accessibility for kids, especially for those from poorer backgrounds.

Furthermore, the important role of rule changes in improving the sport's visibility was discussed. Supported with examples in F1 and football, it is found that, rule changes are indeed necessary for any kind of sport to keep evolving and growing its fanbase, and new ways to display the sport always have a positive impact on the viewership of the given sport.

Last but not least it, was emphasized that budget allocation is crucial, while the importance of youth programs should not be overshadowed by the unstable and inconsistent success of senior teams.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings: Literature Landscape

The literature landscape was challenging and scarce due to the sport of water polo being a niche sport. The gap in literature always was a problem for this paper, so different approaches and literature themes had to be found to build towards answering the research question. Mainly the lack of finding possible solutions to marketing problems was what was missing as an important part of the literature for this paper. The approach of Sedky et al., (2020) on the marketing of low-budget sports, helped us understand the main differences on the example of handball and football in Egypt. Being one of the most important papers in the literature landscape, the paper starts to point in the right direction when it comes to trying to market low-budget sports, however with no clear solution proposals.

Berument & Yücel, (2005) had a paper supporting how sports can move people with passion and fandom, however using football as an example and having success and popularity from the past, it was only explaining the passion for sports with no possible marketing solutions for water polo.

Furthermore, (Ishihara et al., 2020) discussed the benefits of sports for young people, resulting in even better academic success, pointing out the importance of sports even before reaching professional levels. One of the only papers that included water polo was a Croatian research by (Bilobrk, 2020), pointing out how in a country where water polo is highly respected and historically successful there are still financial challenges the sport is facing. He did not include possible marketing solutions, however a thorough research on water polo in Croatia and earnings of players in the Croatian league gave insight to the financial side of the sport.

More on the financial aspect of marketing a sport to a success was explained by Platonov and Kuziaev (2023), pointing out how innovative marketing approaches are necessary, to market a sport and that this innovation is to constantly continue.

Another important finding of the literature landscape was the way sports clubs connect with its audiences on a cultural level as pointed out by Chopra (2014).

Key Findings: Current Study

The findings of this study was analyzed through three themes. These themes were built from many aspects and examples by different interviewees. The first theme being the surface the pool is played on. Clearly water polo is played in the water and this has significant impact on firstly the visibility of the sport for the fans, and secondly the accessibility for the masses to enjoy the sport non-professionally. Possible solutions for this theme was the increased implication of beach-volleyball, resulting in cheap minimalistic water polo fields, in the sea especially in Mediterranean holiday locations. This could possibly lead to the tourist getting familiar with the sport and amateurs and casuals trying the sport out for fun. Ultimately resulting in an active marketing and higher popularity of the sport. Another solution proposal was rescheduling the national leagues and international tournaments in regards to very popular football or basketball championships, possibly increasing the sports visibility and popularity due to less competition for future fans.

Another theme that emerged was the effect of rule changes on the sports popularity. It was discussed that in other sports constant rule changes were applied also historically, leading for the sports to adapt to possible grey zones in the previous rules that were exploited by coaches or athletes. One of the proposed rule changes was the shortening of the Olympic field from 33 meters to 25 meters. The American collegiate water polo league is already played on a smaller field and it was proposed that this could lower the swimming time from defense to offense and result in more goals and more active play, ultimately increasing the popularity of the sport. While discussing the rule changes the proposal of not only evolving the rules but also the way the sport is broadcasted was made. Especially during the periods where athletes are only swimming different angles could present the physical difficulty the sport has and allow the viewers to empathize with the athletes.

The final theme was the importance and effect of youth programs for the successful marketing approach of the sport. It is stated with examples that the misallocation of budgets towards the success of senior teams exists, instead of the right allocation of the budget towards better youth academies and coaches with high fundamental knowledge in the sport. A possible

solution was to prioritize the youth investments and be patient with success at Professional ages, as it pays back in the future with more stable and consistent success.

Comparison: Literature and Study Findings

Firstly, the research gap of water polo, resulted in the findings of this study being more precise solution proposals for marketing problems, whereas the papers in the literature review were rather pointing out some of the problems.

Sedky et al. (2020) pointed out how different aspects such as sports media, advertising, star athletes and sponsorships make the difference between high budgeted and low budgeted sports. The findings state that the accessibility of the sport and access for people who lack knowledge about the sport previous to the exposure, were key to market the sport. As opposed Sedky et al. (2020) the interviewee's didn't just give examples of more popular sports and how they are being marketed, but they gave specific ideas and solution proposals for water polo to help answer the research question.

Even though Bilobrk (2020) touched upon the marketing and financial issues water polo faces, his study lacked solution proposals as well. Being one of the few water polo researches it gave insight about the problems, but require much more thorough qualitative research to be applicable, which this study provided.

The strong emotions and passion people have for football as stated by Berument and Yücel (2005), was not comparable to the findings, since the marketing professionals and organization leaders in water polo didn't go into the passion of fans as their solution proposals were more systematical examples. Water polo lacked the large fan base to compare to the feelings and emotions that were mentioned in Berument and Yücel (2005) to a scale where the economy and consumption is effected according to the sport teams success.

Platonov and Kuziaev (2023) had examined the economic limits and sporting success in football. Stating that new marketing techniques need to emerge to help finance further success, this can be compared to the investment in youth program theme of the findings. The valuable Interviewee's stated that in order to market water polo the teams need to first structure their youth programs and plan for future success. In a way investing in the youth can be analyzed and regarded as a modern and creative marketing tool for the sport.

Answering the Research Question

The main research question in this study to be answered is: What are current marketing challenges for water polo and how can they be improved to change the marketing of the sport to gain more popularity?

Through the themes possible solutions and answers to the research question was filtered from many interviews. Firstly, the accessibility of the sport is deemed as one of the biggest challenges. The necessity of a pool and high maintenance of the bare minimum of accessories needed for a water polo game is high. For that, the increase of beach water polo in Mediterranean beaches in the coasts of Croatia, Italy or Spain, would be a leading advocacy vessel to introduce the sport to people from all around the world who prefer these locations as holiday locations. This could start a butterfly effect and propel the sport all across Europe and even the United States of America.

Furthermore, the competition against more famous sports and low visibility in winter due to closed pool complexes was analyzed. A rescheduling of big water polo tournaments towards the summer period would make the sport more fun for fans and at the same time result in less competition against other popular sports that are in their summer breaks, attracting sports enthusiasts who don't have anything else to watch at that time.

Another answer to the research question lies on the effect of rule changes to increase the sport's popularity and keep modernizing the sport. With many historical examples of other sports it was found that rule changes are effective and necessary to make a sport more popular and market it better. One example of a proposed rule change was decreasing the pool length to 25 meters from 33 meters, potentially increasing number of goals and decreasing the swim time of athletes resulting in better visibility and better marketing.

Last but not least, the misallocation of the existing budgets of some water polo clubs need to be reallocated. Even if it won't increase the marketing immediately, an investment in the youth academies will profit the sports popularity and marketing immensely in the long run.

Recommendations: Future Research Directions

Future research could focus on the financial aspect of water polo. Possible solutions and right approaches to finance the marketing proposals presented in this paper can be researched and a thorough investigation on sports sponsorships can be made. Furthermore, the history of the sport and the marketing approach and success in the past can be researched. By doing this the reason why the popularity was higher in some examples in the past can be researched and adjusted to today.

Recommendations: Relevance to Industries

The findings of this research are relevant for every water polo team, league and organization, that want to improve their fanbase, revenue and accessibility. This paper can be used as a guidance to see the challenges other organizations and teams faced and then be implemented as possible approaches to solve any marketing problem the water polo club or federation faces.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Literature Review Mapping

Promoting lesser-known Sports

- How less or more popular is the Sport
- What are the existing efforts
- Lesser-known sports that succeeded to market themselves before
- Finding the interest awakening factors of the niche sport

Promoting Sports

- Finding the revenue generating aspects of sports
- Classic techniques and approaches used in bigger sports industries
- Finding the reasons behind their passion

Key Elements to Market Water Polo

Finding the core of the passion people have for other sports

- Derbies and other factors that increase popularity
- Cities and hometown teams people loyally support all their life

General marketing elements

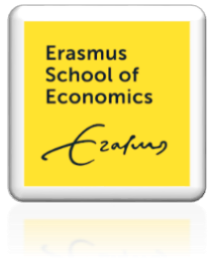
- Marketing Techniques used in entertainment industries
- Studies and models on marketing techniques

Appendix B: Literature Gap Analysis

Table 1.

Article Number	Article Topic	Author(s) + Year	Categories of Research Gap
1	Type of interview in qualitative research	Adhabi & Anozie (2017)	The study reviews different types of interviews in qualitative research but lacks a comprehensive comparison of their effectiveness in various research contexts, including sports studies like water polo. Further research is needed to determine the most effective interview type for different qualitative research scenarios in sports.
2	Production boosting effects of football	Berument & Yucel (2005)	The research highlights the economic impact of football on production but does not explore the long-term effects or compare different sports, including water polo. Future studies could focus on longitudinal impacts and cross-sport comparisons, specifically including water polo.
3	Economic sustainability of water polo in Croatia	Bilobrck (2020)	The dissertation explores the economic difficulties faced by water polo in Croatia but lacks proposed solutions or improvement strategies. More research is required to formulate practical strategies for achieving economic sustainability in water polo.
4	Bibliometric analysis of sports marketing research	Celik & Ibrahim (2023)	The current study provides a bibliometric analysis of sports marketing research; however, it does not thoroughly explore specific marketing strategies that have proven most effective, particularly for niche sports such as water polo. Future investigations should aim to pinpoint and evaluate the most successful marketing approaches in the context of water polo.
5	Role of FC Barcelona in Catalan nationalism	Chopra (2014)	This paper examines FC Barcelona's influence on Catalan nationalism but does not address the wider effects on other sports teams and regions, such as water polo. Additional research could investigate how water polo teams contribute to regional identity.
6	Qualitative research methods: when to use them and how to judge them	Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey (2016)	The paper provides guidelines on qualitative research methods but does not address the challenges researchers face in applying these methods in practice, particularly in sports research such as water polo. Future research should investigate practical solutions to common challenges in qualitative sports research.
7	Relationship of participation in specific sports to academic performance	Ishihara et al. (2020)	The study finds a relationship between sports participation and academic performance but does not explore the underlying mechanisms or include sports like water polo. Future research should investigate how and why participation in water polo influences academic performance.

Article Number	Article Topic	Author(s) + Year	Categories of Research Gap
8	Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide	Kallio et al. (2016)	The paper develops a framework for semi-structured interviews but does not test its effectiveness in different research contexts, including sports like water polo. Further research is needed to validate and refine the framework in various settings, including water polo.
9	Advantages and disadvantages of four interview techniques in qualitative research	Opdenakker (2006)	The study compares four interview techniques but lacks a detailed analysis of how these techniques perform in different research fields, including sports like water polo. Future research should explore the effectiveness of interview techniques across diverse research disciplines, particularly in water polo.
10	Football in a globalized world: On the question of the components of football culture and derby	Pavlik (2024)	The paper discusses components of football culture but does not provide empirical data to support its claims or include other sports like water polo. Future research should include empirical studies to validate the proposed components of sports culture, including in water polo.
11	The economic limit on sporting success: how can the football industry develop?	Platonov & Kuziaev (2023)	The study examines economic limits on sporting success but does not explore potential strategies to overcome these limits, especially in less popular sports like water polo. Future research should focus on identifying and testing strategies to enhance economic success in sports like water polo.
12	The role of sports marketing in attracting audiences towards less popular sports	Sedky, Kortam, & AbouAish (2022)	The paper investigates sports marketing's role in attracting audiences but does not consider the impact of digital marketing or include less popular sports like water polo. Future research should explore how digital marketing strategies can attract audiences to less popular sports, specifically water polo.
13	Open-ended interview questions and saturation	Weller et al. (2018)	The study discusses open-ended interview questions and data saturation but lacks a practical guide on achieving saturation in different contexts, including sports like water polo. Future research should develop guidelines for ensuring data saturation in qualitative sports research, particularly in water polo.
14	Willingness-to-pay in non-profit sports clubs	Wicker (2011)	The paper explores willingness-to-pay in sports clubs but overlooks the factors that influence this willingness or the inclusion of sports such as water polo. Future studies should delve into the determinants of willingness-to-pay across various sports contexts, including water polo.



Appendix C: Letter of invitation to express an interest

Personal interviews - Example Invitation letter to participants

Dear [Name of Individual],

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is Kerem Gemalmazoglu, and I am a bachelor's student at Erasmus University in The Netherlands. I am currently researching water polo marketing. Specifically, my study aims to provide insights on adapting marketing elements for water polo to improve its overall visibility and popularity in the European market.

Based on your background, you fit the criteria for participating in an interview for this research. Therefore, I am requesting your participation in my study.

If you agree to participate, I would be very grateful to conduct a semi-structured interview with you in the language of your choice. All the details and the informed consent form will be sent in advance.

Thank you so much for your consideration. Have a wonderful day!

Kind regards,

Kerem Gemalmazoglu

Appendix D: Personal Interviews - Informed Consent Form

Title of Research: Making Water Polo Big:

Revisiting Marketing Strategies of Water Polo

Principle Investigator, Affiliation, and Contact Information:

Kerem Gemalmazoglu

BSc International Economics and Business Economics, specialization in Marketing

Erasmus School of Economics, e-mail: 621363kg@eur.nl

Academic Supervisor: Dr. Doron Zilbershtein, Erasmus School of Economics, e-mail:

zilbershtein@ese.eur.nl

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

This study aims to provide insights into key marketing elements for water polo and how they can increase visibility and engagement in the European market by researching experiences, attitudes, and preferences.

Description of the Research

The study uses a qualitative research method to investigate the adaptation of marketing elements for European viewers in water polo. The research design involves a multi-case study of water polo marketing efforts, exploring the aspects that attract European audiences.

Subject Participation

This study's participants consist of individuals who were part of a federation or water polo club, actively participated in marketing efforts, and have first-hand experience with the sport and the targeted audience.

Interview Duration

The interview will take approximately 15 to 45 minutes.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

To the best of my knowledge, there are no known risks.

Potential Benefits

This study may provide essential insights to sports marketers looking to increase their reach in Europe and boost the global visibility of water polo by studying the influence different actions and solutions can have on steps that will help market the sport to success.

Confidentiality

Each interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced. Your anonymity will be maintained. Once the interview is completed, the audio file will be saved with a specific code name, and once the transcripts are completed, the audio file will be deleted. Any identifying details that may expose your identity will be removed from the transcript.

The transcripts will be archived on a separate portable hard drive for five years from the interview date to provide an Audit Trail for future researchers. By the end of the five years, the files will be discarded.

Compensation

No remuneration will be provided for participants in this study.

Withdrawal from the Study and Withdrawal of Authorization

As a participant in this study, you can withdraw your participation anytime.

Authorization and Confirmation

I authorize the audio recording of the interview.

I authorize the use of the interview results for further education, research, and publication of the findings.

Voluntary Participation and Authorization

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research program.

I understand I will be given a copy of this signed Consent Form.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Note: The principal investigator (s) must keep a copy of the signed, dated consent form and give a copy to the participant.

This interview consent form is adapted based on an example from the thesis supervisor, Dr. Zilbershtein. (ZZ Example - Appendix 3 - Informed Consent Form.docx (17.0K), 2024)

[Appendix E: Personal Interviews - Interview Protocol and Interview Questions](#)

1. Interview Protocol

Interviewer: [Kerem Gemalmazoglu]^[L]_[SEP] Participants' ID#: []^[L]_[SEP] Interview Date and Time: []

Before the Interview:

Preparation:

Choose a quiet place with a neat background to conduct a video-conference interview. At least 24 hours before the interview, send a Consent Form to the interviewee to remind them about the interview's purpose and inform them about confidentiality, anonymity, and other participation details.

Ensure the audio and video are working a few hours before and prepare a place to take notes at hand.

Before Starting the Interview:

Introduction:

Introduce myself briefly.

Thank the interviewee for their participation.

As an icebreaker, ask informally how the person feels today and where they are.

Briefly introduce the procedure.

Script:

"Good afternoon! Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research and share your experiences of water polo as a professional sport. I am eager to hear your experiences and thoughts on marketing water polo. Briefly, about the topic of my research – This study aims to give insight into how to improve marketing strategies for water polo to increase its visibility as a sport and its engagement with the fans.

I hope that my study will support the improvement of water polo's popularity and effective marketing. Such knowledge provides essential insights to sports marketers looking to increase their reach in Europe and boost water polo's global visibility by studying the influence of various marketing elements on the audience's decision to engage with water polo.

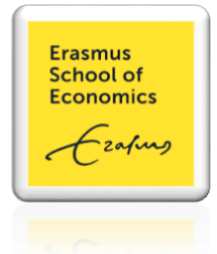
The study uses a qualitative research method to investigate the adaptation of marketing elements for European viewers in water polo. The research design involves a multi-case study of water polo marketing campaigns, exploring the aspects that attract European audiences. The sample selection is based on convenience and purposive sampling, consisting of individuals who actively participated in marketing efforts and have first-hand experience with the sport and the targeted audience. I am looking for insightful answers and will ask follow-up and clarification questions. I will transcribe the interview and send you the transcript to check if you have any modifications to make. Only then will I start analyzing the data.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding the procedure or anything else before we start. Otherwise, we can start with the first question."

During the Interview:

Recording:

Record the interview with two devices as a backup.



During the first minute of the interview, test the audio recording on the phone. Only then should the official interview.

Conducting the Interview:

Listen actively and use the participant's own words to clarify their statements.

Use probing questions.

Make notes of how much time the answers to particular questions take.

Interview Questions:

Open Introduction:

"Could you please tell me about your connection to water polo and your position in this regard?"

Open Questions:

"In your opinion, what are the current strengths and weaknesses in the marketing of water polo?"

"What marketing strategies do you think could improve the visibility and popularity of water polo in Europe?"

What experiences or ideas about engaging with water polo content online?"

"What specific elements or content do you believe attract more engagement from the audience?"

"Are there any unique aspects of water polo that you feel are currently underrepresented in marketing efforts?"

"What role do you think fan interaction and community-building play in marketing water polo?"

To End the Interview:

Turn off the recording device.

Thank the interviewee for their time and insights.

Remind them about the member-checking process.

Ask about their motivation to participate in the interview.

Ask how the findings could be helpful for them.

Ask for any suggestions.

After the Interview:

Save the recordings.

Transcribe the interviews.

Send transcripts to the participants for member checking.

This interview protocol is adapted based on an example from the thesis supervisor, Dr. Zilbershtein. (ZZ Example - Appendix 4 - Interview protocol.docx (21.3K), 2024)

Appendix F: Personal Interviews - Schedule of Interviews

Table 2.

Table 1

Participant's ID	Date of Interview	Time	Duration	Place	Participants attributes
1	Jun 15, 24	12:30	30m	In person	Marketing and management of German club
2	Jun 16, 24	14:00	49m	Zoom	Marketing professional for Basketball and Football with personal ties to Water polo
3	Jun 17, 24	10:00	17m	Zoom	Turkish Water Polo Federation Board, In Charge of marketing the sport and Tv deals
4	Jun 18, 24	16:00	20m	Zoom	Turkish Water polo club marketer and ambassador
5	Jun 19, 24	19:00	17m	In person	German National Team water polo player, Part of marketing campaigns and efforts in Germany
6	Jun 20, 24	12:45	18m	In person	Croatian national player, insights about Croatian water polo and federation
7	Jun 21, 24	10:30	16m	Zoom	Turkish national team player, was in charge of attracting young people to water polo youth academies of his former club
8	Jun 22, 24	11:00	15m	Zoom	Former Turkish national team water polo player, was in charge of his clubs social media
9	Jun 23, 24	12:30	16m	Zoom	Ukrainian national team water polo player, was part of marketing efforts in Ukraine
10	Jun 24, 24	18:00	14m	In Person	German national team player, ambassador for the coming university olympic games to promote water polo

Appendix G: Personal Interviews - Interview Transcript Example

Interviewer:

Hello. Thank you for taking the time today. First, I would like to briefly start by asking if it's okay for you that I use this audio memo for my bachelor's thesis as research. Is that alright with you?

Interviewee:

Hello? Yes, of course. No problem.

Interviewer:

Alright. Great. So, I briefly mentioned before we started the interview what my bachelor's thesis is about. And as you know, it is about the marketing of water polo in general. Broadly speaking. So, I would like to start with a simple question. Can you briefly mention your background with water polo, maybe from the beginning? What is your connection to the sport?

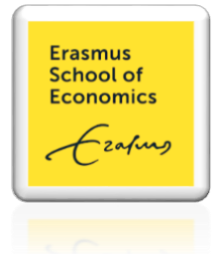
Interviewee:

No problem. I have been playing water polo for almost 15 years now, up to the German national team with the youth national teams, traveling a lot, and then I worked as an official. First as a volunteer at our club in Duisburg, and then full-time as the managing director of the club, which takes care of the concerns of the sport and water polo here and, of course, beyond that, also fits the topic of marketing around the Bundesliga team and the club.

Interviewer:

Alright, thank you very much. So, we can say that you have been very close to water polo for many years. Can I ask from your own experiences, how do you assess water polo as a sport? If we compare it to other sports, especially in terms of popularity or your own experiences when you were in the national team, which is a great honor. How do you assess it from your own experiences?

Interviewee:



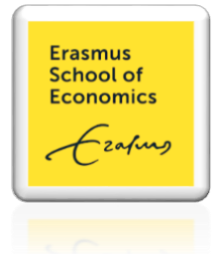
Yes, water polo is clearly seen as a fringe sport. The financial situation around the sport is not sufficient. And yes, everything around it, I would say, from the associations to the clubs, you definitely have to speak of a fringe sport.

Interviewer:

Alright, thank you very much. You said that you also worked as a managing director for ASC Duisburg. Are you still in that position? Could you tell me about your experiences? Were you part of the processes? You already mentioned at the beginning that you were part of the marketing. Can you confirm that and tell me about your experiences? What kind of things you have tried and what you are currently trying?

Interviewee:

Yes, gladly. I have to say, I was already working here at the club as a press officer since 2009 before I became the full-time managing director. As I said, one must clearly speak of a fringe sport, especially in our country, Germany. The scope of marketing is also rather limited. We do run a relatively good Instagram channel for German standards, but we have to set "good" in quotation marks. With just under 4,000 followers, we are very high in the ranking of Bundesliga clubs in Germany, but of course, we are still at the very beginning compared to other sports. In terms of general measures, we must clearly say that we hardly invest any money financially. As a managing director, I have a financial background in my work, but otherwise, we only have two people who generally take care of the content for the social media area and our club website. But only one of them is partially paid. It's a voluntary social year that the person does with us, and beyond that, there's one person who takes care of it on a voluntary basis. That's all the staff we have in the club taking care of marketing. These two people, I would estimate, invest about 20 to a maximum of 40 hours a week together in this work. But otherwise, no more. We also have a photographer in our club who is engaged for Bundesliga games or other events to at least have professional photo material. And yes, otherwise, they are rather small projects. We have often handed out free tickets back to the playoffs in the city center to the people who were in the city. We have put up posters in the surrounding shops. But yes, if you look at it again, when we became German champions in 2013, I would say that was the highest turnout of spectators, we



had a maximum of 1,500 people here. We never had more at our games. And that just shows how our sport is to be assessed compared to the popular sports.

Interviewer:

Alright, thank you for your input and the information you shared. You said that 1,500 people were at the games, but that was the maximum number. Do they pay admission? And then another question that might open up a slightly different topic. Is anything financed through this? And could you say that the players earn money here? Are they professional, or if we talk about the amount of money, are they semi-professional, or. So, the question is actually how it is paid and financed. How does this wheel keep turning, and if you don't answer the first question, is it then also a business that we can call a money-losing one?

Interviewee:

Definitely. To close the loop, we charge admission to the games. I would say, on average, we have a maximum of 200 spectators. If you want to calculate positively, the spectators pay 5 € for adults and 3 € for young people or students and so on. So very humane prices because we also know that we don't actually want to discourage any spectators. We as a club say that the entrance fees are used for youth work in water polo to be a bit better financially. But otherwise, because the players at least earn money in mini-job conditions, we definitely have a negative balance at the end of each season. Definitely. To the question of whether the players earn money, I have already said yes, they earn money. But I believe you can't even talk about semi-professional conditions because the players, with the high training effort that our sport brings, we calculate with 20 to 25 hours of pure training per week. In addition, there are trips to the games, the games themselves on weekends. And with such a high burden or such a high number of hours per week, one can definitely not say in comparison to the payment that it is even semi-professional.

Interviewer:

Alright, thank you very much. I want to move on to another topic that you just briefly mentioned, youth work. It was also an important point in previous interviews, where people said they think that if more youth work is done, it improves the first team through good work, new players, and a culture. And that, of course, is our marketing topic. I don't want to deviate much from that, but

could we say that good youth work could generally help to advance the sport because it improves the next generations? And then there's a bigger question, could we say that success follows and that through success, actually, the best marketing of the sport is achieved? Let's say a youth national team in U16 becomes European champion from Germany with four Duisburg players and five Hannover and five Berlin players. Would you say that this is an advertisement that interests people because they say our boys are the best in Europe or the world, and that also promotes the sport more broadly?

Interviewee:

I've asked a lot of questions, but the idea behind the question is very crucial and important for the overall topic. It aims precisely at what is currently crucial for us as a club and for the entire sport. Youth work is not only extremely important for the clubs from a sporting perspective because it builds the foundation for the entire club. Because you can fill the first team with your own players. Because, as you rightly said, you also create an identity with the club and don't have to bring in external players who then play in the first team in the Bundesliga. But of course, you also have to say that your own youth work is always very expensive financially because you have to have many, many players as a foundation, thus paying for many coaches, many training times, many trips, and so on. In order to get even a fraction of the players into the first team. You know, in the entire history of the sport, not everyone is talented enough, ambitious enough, can withstand the pressure in competitive sports, or you also have many dropouts due to moves, school problems, problems in the family environment, health problems. So you really have to build a large number of youth players at the bottom to reach the top in performance. Yes, exactly. The point is extremely important. Only through sporting success do you get into the media, whether in social media or traditional media like newspapers. Then you gain the attention of people and potential young, sports-minded children who can be attracted to water polo. I remember very well because we are also sitting in a room where the pictures of the Olympic participants hang. In 2004, for example, the German team was very good at the Olympic Games in Athens. A player I played with also participated. At that time, Germany finished fifth, which was a great success, to be the fifth-best team in the world. And at that time, TV stations became aware of water polo. Suddenly, water polo was on free TV. The children and potential players for the future saw water polo on TV. And suddenly, in the years that followed, many more

children came to our club and water polo clubs in general and had a great impact on the sport. Unfortunately, the exact opposite happened afterward. Many players stopped at the same time, and there was a major upheaval in German international water polo, so the team was no longer good in terms of performance. And since then, we have not been successful at all. In fact, we have only made it to the Olympics once since 2008, which is of course very harmful to the sport. Not only because the funding from the German government and many other donors, whether from sports clubs, the German Sports Federation, or sponsors, of course, depends on sporting success. And without this sporting success, we have fallen to the bottom in many areas, and thus our sport has suffered. Yes, that's why youth work is the foundation for the club and the sport itself. But one also has to say, to conclude, if you work with youth players, this automatically translates into marketing work because you involve the families, the school friends, the relatives of the children, who may later come to games to watch or may become club members and engage in other functions, become sponsors. Therefore, yes, youth work is always also marketing work in itself.

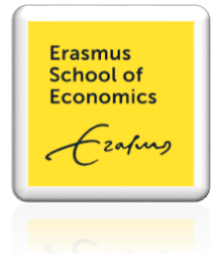
Interviewer (Speaker 1) [00:12:00]:

Thank you very much. That was very, very informative. And yes, I agree with you. This also ties into the marketing aspect. Now, a follow-up question regarding the youth work and success at the national level: do you think the media coverage is sufficient? You mentioned that it increases with success, but do you think there is still a gap or something that can be improved in media coverage to help popularize water polo more?

Interviewee:

Yes, there is definitely a gap. When I was younger, we had many more articles in local newspapers. There were also more reports on TV. This has drastically decreased. And of course, it is also up to us, the clubs and associations, to generate more media attention. But it is difficult because the sport is not as popular and the media is more focused on bigger sports like football or handball. What we need is a strategy to approach the media more proactively, maybe by creating more compelling stories around the sport and the players, and by using social media more effectively to engage with fans and the community.

Interviewer:



Alright, that makes sense. Now, you mentioned earlier about social media and how you have an Instagram channel with around 4,000 followers. Could you elaborate on your social media strategy? How do you use it to engage with your audience, and what kind of content do you post?

Interviewee:

Our social media strategy is quite basic. We primarily use Instagram to post updates about the team, match results, and player highlights. We also share behind-the-scenes content to give our followers a glimpse into the daily life of the team. We try to keep our posts engaging by including high-quality photos and videos. Additionally, we use social media to promote our events and encourage more people to attend our games. However, due to limited resources, our social media activity is not as frequent or as professional as it could be. We rely heavily on volunteers and part-time staff to manage our accounts, which limits our ability to create a more robust social media presence.

Interviewer:

Thank you for sharing that. You also mentioned earlier about the financial constraints and how the sport is not generating enough revenue. Have you explored other revenue streams, such as sponsorships or partnerships? How are you currently managing these aspects?

Interviewee:

Yes, sponsorships and partnerships are crucial for us. We have a few local sponsors who support us, but the financial contributions are relatively small. We also have partnerships with local businesses where we offer mutual support – for example, promoting their services to our members in exchange for their support. However, securing larger sponsorships is challenging due to the sport's low visibility and popularity. We are continuously looking for new opportunities and trying to make our sponsorship packages more attractive by offering more exposure through our limited media channels. Additionally, we organize events like fundraisers and community activities to generate some revenue, but it's often not enough to cover all our expenses.

Interviewer:

I see. It sounds like you're doing a lot with the resources you have. One last question: what do you think could be done at a higher level, perhaps by national associations or governing bodies, to better support water polo and help it grow in popularity?

Interviewee:

At the national level, there needs to be a more coordinated effort to promote water polo. This includes better funding for clubs and youth programs, more media coverage, and national marketing campaigns to raise awareness about the sport. The associations should also work on building a stronger infrastructure for the sport, such as better facilities and more opportunities for players to compete at higher levels. Collaboration with schools and universities to introduce water polo as part of their sports programs could also help in attracting young talent.

Additionally, organizing more high-profile events and tournaments that can draw media attention and public interest would be beneficial. In summary, a comprehensive strategy that involves all stakeholders – from clubs to national associations – is needed to elevate the sport's profile and popularity.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much for your time and insights. This has been incredibly helpful for my research. Is there anything else you would like to add that you think is important for this topic?

Interviewee:

No, I think we've covered the most important aspects. But if you have any more questions in the future, feel free to reach out. I'm happy to help.

Interviewer:

Thank you again. I really appreciate it.

Interviewee:

You're welcome. Good luck with your thesis.

Interviewer:

Thank you!

Appendix H: Proof of Saturation

Table 3.

Summary of Interviews	
Participant 1	<p>Financial problems of the sport and water polo club. Low attendance in games from fans, low revenue generation due to this. Athletes are not paid enough for the high training necessity of the sport. Extreme value and importance of youth work. No need to bring in foreign players if you have your own players. Success brings fans to the sport in the example of 2004 olympics. Usage of social media to promote the current club. Small Sponsorships due to less visibility. Collaboration with schools and universities to have more people in youth academies.</p>
Participant 2	<p>Marketed the Euroleague basketball in Turkey. Thinks Rule changes are Important for sports to develop. Misallocation of budgets for men's teams instead of youth teams. Opportunity of young people to easily access pools. Rule changes in water polo 25 meter pool instead of 33m.</p>
Participant 3	<p>Sponsors don't gain anything from supporting water polo. Sport is losing money. Social media marketing needed for modern times. Success will bring Interest, success will come from the youth</p>
Participant 4	<p>Trying to collaborate with Tv channels to market water polo. Sport needs to be rescheduled back to summer to gain popularity. Carefully schedule water polo according to big tournaments of more popular sports. Rule changes are needed to improve sports visibility. 25 meter field in water polo instead of 33 meters for faster playing. Different Camera angles to make it more interesting.</p>
Participant 5	<p>Financial problems of water polo. Success brings fans to the sport in the example of previous olympics. If there is success the success needs to be marketed. Youth investment will bring success and better marketing in the long run.</p>
Participant 6	<p>Experienced marketing water polo in big tournaments. Croatia has a bigger water polo fan base than northern European countries. Kids have access to pool and the sea from a young age, leading to better youth. Water polo shifted to a winter sport but Summer is preferred to market the sport. Timeouts and breaks can be used for shows like in American sports culture.</p>
Participant 7	<p>Social Media marketing for water polo exists but is not enough. Misallocation of budget for mens team instead of youth teams. Foreign coach investment from a leading country grows the sport.</p>
Participant 8	<p>Minimum physical requirement to play is very high. Hard accessibility of the sport due to it being played in the water. Recruited swimmers to water polo because as a team sport it was more attractive. TV promotion is needed to be expanded.</p>
Participant 9	<p>Marketing efforts in Ukraine with Tv channels. Many Cameras and better angles. Show the physical aspect of water polo better.</p>
Participant 10	<p>Financial problems of water polo. Youth investment will bring success and better marketing in the long run. Get into schools with water polo programs. Broadcast the sport in German channels.</p>

Appendix I: List of 1st and 2nd round of coding

Table 4.

Quotes	1st round	2nd Round
And without this sporting success, we have fallen to the bottom in many areas, and thus our sport has suffered.	Succes is marketing the sport	Importance of youth programs
Yes, that's why youth work is the foundation for the club and the sport itself. But one also has to say, to conclude, if you work with youth players, this automatically translates into marketing work because you involve the families, the school friends, the relatives of the children, who may later come to games to watch or may become club members and engage in other functions, become sponsors. Therefore, yes, youth work is always also marketing work in itself.	Youth work is marketing	Importance of youth programs

<p>. Youth work is not only extremely important for the clubs from a sporting perspective because it builds the foundation for the entire club. Because you can fill the first team with your own players. Because, as you rightly said, you also create an identity with the club and don't have to bring in external players who then play in the first team in the Bundesliga.</p>	<p>Youth work is marketing</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>
<p>The last Olympics also highlighted their progress. Greece's team finished second, losing to Serbia in the final. But until now, they had never won a championship at the senior national team level, including in youth categories. We're talking about a 25-30 year effort here. But I doubt they created hundreds of water polo teams; it's not a sport played by millions. However, through a proper program, they have achieved success despite limited resources.</p>	<p>Youth work is marketing</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>
<p>I'm one of those who would support the idea of shortening the field to 25 meters.</p>	<p>Shorter field</p>	<p>Rule changes</p>

water polo is a sport that should perhaps be played in the summer. In the past, when it was more of a summer sport, we didn't have enough indoor facilities for winter training.	Should be a summer sport	Surface the sport is played on
. There's great potential there, especially if the matches are held in coastal cities like Istanbul, İzmir, or Antalya during the summer.	Should be a summer sport	Surface the sport is played on
If we can start implementing some of the strategies we've talked about—focusing on nurturing young talent	Youth work is marketing	Importance of youth programs
Water polo is a demanding sport, both physically and mentally. You need to be in excellent shape, and that requires a strong work ethic.	Physical aspect of the sport	Rule changes
If you spend money on a player but don't have a marketing budget, that money is wasted.	Misallocation of Budgets	Importance of youth programs
If such institutions invested in water polo, then yes, people would want their children to play the sport, and you wouldn't need to become a world champion to create interest.	Succes is marketing the sport	Importance of youth programs

. In our time, it was a summer sport. And of course, after working throughout the winter, many tournaments would be packed into the summer, making it a more enjoyable sport to watch in open pools with better visuals.	Should be a summer sport	Surface the sport is played on
You have to create a schedule, and the number of teams, etc., might prevent it. However, to increase its popularity, I think it's essential to organize special tournaments in the summer, especially in open pools, and offer them to audiences.	Should be a summer sport	Surface the sport is played on
But in the summer, there should be national and international special tournaments, and they should be organized not only in big cities but also in smaller cities, to increase the sport's popularity and reach a broader audience.	Should be a summer sport	Surface the sport is played on

<p>It's essential not to schedule it at the same time as highly popular sports like football, basketball, volleyball, swimming, etc. But to summarize, in my opinion, and this is something I've discussed with many teammates over the years and we agree on, as I said before, the league should be spread over the winter, but special national and international tournaments should definitely be organized in the summer.</p>	<p>Should be a summer sport</p>	<p>Surface the sport is played on</p>
<p>Of course, they are. Many sports have implemented changes to improve the viewing experience. For example, I remember the 1992 European Football Championship when Denmark won by playing very defensively and frequently passing the ball back to the goalkeeper, which was legal at the time. But FIFA felt the need to change that rule afterward, and now players can't pass the ball back to the goalkeeper as easily, which increased the pace of the game.</p>	<p>Rule changes are necessary</p>	<p>Rule changes</p>

<p>So, similarly, in water polo, measures like allowing player substitutions without stopping the game have been introduced to speed up the game. There's also ongoing discussion about reducing the pool size from 33 meters to 25 meters, which has already been implemented in American college leagues. This change would increase the pace of the game, the number of attacks, and, naturally, the number of goals, which would enhance the enjoyment of watching the sport.</p>	Shorter field	Rule changes
<p>While we may have some reservations as the older generation, it's undeniable that such rule changes have made the sport more popular and enjoyable to watch. So, it's not possible to be completely opposed to them.</p>	Rule changes are necessary	Rule changes

<p>Yes, that's also a very important issue. In very popular sports like football, there are incredible camera setups, with maybe 10-15 cameras around the field, and now they even have cameras from above. They can present the action from incredible angles. While it's not possible in every sport, for example, in Formula 1, where the action is very fast, sometimes viewers can't fully follow the cars, whether on TV or at the track. But the introduction of helmet cameras added a huge new dimension because it allowed viewers to see the action from the driver's perspective, making them feel more involved. This significantly enhanced the viewing experience.</p>	Camera angles	Rule changes
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<p>Now, applying this to water polo, where most of the players' bodies are underwater, we only see their arms, the ball, and their heads above water. So, we can't see what's happening underwater. Submarine cameras would add a huge dimension to the sport. If I'm not mistaken, this was tried at the 2012 London Olympics, where the screen was split to show underwater and above-water views simultaneously, but it wasn't fully successful. Still, if we want to take the sport further, improving camera angles and trying new things could be very important.</p>	Physical aspect of the sport	Rule changes
<p>. I think that in the last 15-20 years, as Germany has not been as strong as before, everything has gone downhill, including funding, financial support, etc.</p>	Succes is marketing the sport	Importance of youth programs
<p>it would be a start. It would definitely awaken more interest among kids in the water polo community, more than there is now. I have to think for a moment... Yes, that's how it is. It would</p>	Succes is marketing the sport	Importance of youth programs

definitely spark interest,		
Well, to become successful in any sport, you have to start from a young age and properly train the kids. That all starts with youth development. You should definitely try to get more kids involved in the sport. I'd say, recruit them for water polo. I've seen in Germany that some clubs are trying—like trainers or people selected for this purpose go to schools, go to school swimming, and try to get them to know water polo.	Youth work is marketing	Importance of youth programs
The third tier is still playing in the summer in the sea. Yeah. And second tier was really popular back then, you know, every, every, every game had at least a thousand people watching for a second tier league. That's amazing for what to follow.	Should be a summer sport	Surface the sport is played on

<p>but but league was also first year. League was also played in the summer and people were enjoying watching it. Then just coming to the coastline to watch some water polo and and actually what to watch. Good, good dear. What's a good level. Watch below. And that was times when water polo was even more popular in Croatia.</p>	<p>Coast cities market water polo</p>	<p>Surface the sport is played on</p>
<p>club ENKA, had, had this vision, of bringing the best players in Europe, to play for them in Turkey. You have a limit to make only two foreigner players play. And I think I was using them at the top of this capacity. When when I was playing, when I, when I was playing as a young in the senior team, we had two great, Olympic guys. Well, one from Croatia and one from Greece. They were all, like, the best of the best. And they were teaching so much to us, to the youngsters of the senior team. But unfortunately, they are not connected with the young kids in the, in the club.</p>	<p>Misallocation of Budgets</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>

<p>So, they introduce the senior team a lot. But, for the younger ages, they don't have any effect on. And Turkish water polo isn't like the. I don't see the federation is so, determined and, eager to learn from them. So they have no affect, only at the team that are there that they are playing for, not the rest of the. It's not the Federation or rest of the water polo.</p>	<p>Misallocation of Budgets</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>
<p>the biggest investment was bringing the Olympic level quality coaches to the team. Oh, okay. They brought this guy, Igor Milanovic, who's a who's a very, talented, water polo player previously, and then, many award winning coach, they brought him to the senior team coaching. But, he also helped the younger teams, and taught his knowledge to the other coaches in the, in Galatasaray. And this way, this team got better and better by time. Also, when we take a look at the past of, this club. Right?</p>	<p>Youth work is marketing</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>

<p>They they were playing in the highest level all around, like, 2003, 2004, Champions League seasons. Again at that time, they had this, Hungarian coach, who influenced the team so much and talked so much to the coaches. And they made the team, like, great. I guess, but I used the same tactic, after 20 years to, to create a greater team. And now it seems like it's working out. It's going well for them.</p>	<p>Youth work is marketing</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>
<p>So, volleyball had this investment 20 years ago. And now everybody's watching vulnerable in Turkey because they are successful and they are, they're playing at the highest level. We are watching them in Paris playing at, for the bronze medal match.</p>	<p>Succes is marketing the sport</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>

<p>Rather than that to invest in the young teams and, to make the kids better, and then the younger ones better, and then the younger ones better and create, like a factory that is producing players, every year, a year, this will bring success, as I believe, because we saw this example twice in Galatasaray, and now we are witnessing it again with the volleyball team because they you must do this for 20 years. And I'm sure that if they follow the same path, for some years, maybe not, maybe it won't take 20 years because, well, their body is much more competitive sport because it's more played, more in the, in the old globe, in glub globe. So, maybe in multiplayer it will take less time. But for me, the team must have patience, and must have belief and for years for the success to come. And eventually it will arrive. But expecting a one year or two year championship with these Olympic players is not sustainable, is not logical.</p>	<p>Youth work is marketing</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>
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<p>Yes, there are various reasons, but the biggest one is definitely that it's played in a pool. Pools are expensive to build and maintain, and you can't just build one in a random village and expect to gather enough players. You need a pool in a city where people are interested.</p>	<p>Hard accessibility</p>	<p>Surface the sport is played on</p>
<p>Additionally, professional equipment is expensive. Even basic items like a ball and goals are costly. This isn't the only factor that holds the sport back, but it contributes to it remaining less popular because all sports are becoming more expensive. Also, in terms of physical capability, water polo requires a high level of fitness to even start playing.</p>	<p>Hard accessibility</p>	<p>Surface the sport is played on</p>
<p>The sport is very physical, and playing it on the water requires a different skill set than other sports, which is why it doesn't appeal to everyone.</p>	<p>Physical aspect of the sport</p>	<p>Rule changes</p>

<p>Yes, that's a great idea. For example, Croatia really knows how to promote the sport. Now, just to give an example, I'm on vacation in Greece right now, and if I had a small water polo ball with me that I brought from Croatia, I would probably play with it on the beach.</p>	<p>Coast cities market water polo</p>	<p>Surface the sport is played on</p>
<p>But it's hard to attract people's attention because they might be intimidated by the ball in the water.</p>	<p>Physical aspect of the sport</p>	<p>Rule changes</p>
<p>If you saw kids playing football on the street and joined them with a ball, you could quickly get a game going. But trying to gather 15 kids to play water polo in the sea is much harder.</p>	<p>Hard accessibility</p>	<p>Surface the sport is played on</p>
<p>It's like if you were trying to recruit for a football team, everyone can run, walk, or kick a ball to some extent, but not everyone can swim.</p>	<p>Physical aspect of the sport</p>	<p>Rule changes</p>
<p>. If the team has already won something, you have something to show—success to demonstrate.</p>	<p>Success is marketing the sport</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>

<p>For example, a few years ago, we played a small tournament, let's say the Third World Tournament, and it was actually brought into the news in Ukraine because we had won something. It brought a lot of interest from other channels and people who began to show interest in this sport and started watching it.</p>	<p>Success is marketing the sport</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>
<p>I think, in general, more money and effort should be invested to achieve long-term success. At the moment, many national teams are starting to naturalize foreign players to have a strong team in the short term. However, if you were to completely overhaul the system and invest more in youth, you wouldn't have immediate success like you do with naturalization, but in the long run, it would make much more sense.</p>	<p>Misallocation of Budgets</p>	<p>Importance of youth programs</p>
<p>In water polo, there have been a lot of attempts recently to change the rules to make the game faster and more exciting for spectators.</p>	<p>Rule changes are necessary</p>	<p>Rule changes</p>

Appendix J: Code frequencies

Table 5.

Code	Frequency
Camera angles	1
Coast citites market water polo	2
Hard accessibility	3
Misallocation of Budgets	4
Physical aspect of the sport	5
Rule changes are necessary	3
Shorter field	2
Should be a summer sport	7
Succes is marketing the sport	7
Youth work is marketing	8

Appendix K: Thematic Analysis Overview

Table 6.

Sub themes to final themes

Sub-Themes	Final Themes
Misallocation of Budgets	Importance of youth programs
Succes is marketing the sport	
Youth work is marketing	
Camera angles	Rule changes
Physical aspect of the sport	
Rule changes are necessary	
Shorter field	Surface the sport is played on
Coast citites market water polo	
Hard accessibility	
Should be a summer sport	

Appendix L: Audit Trail research Journal

Table 6.

Date	Description of events
May 1st - April 23rd	I conducted a literature review on my topic. Coming across several articles on sports marketing the gap of water polo as a sport made it clear to me that it could be an opportunity for my research.
April 23rd	I submitted my research proposal
April 23rd - Aug 7th	I expanded my literature review and started with my data collection process. I collected valuable opinions of participants during interviews leading to honest and bright answers that were very useful for my research. The Interview were conducted daily one day after another in a 10-day span in June, helping the researcher compare the results freshly.
Aug 7th	I submitted my thesis Proposal
Aug 16	I updated some parts of the final draft and submitted it for review

Appendix M: Ethical considerations questionnaire

Will subjects participate **without** being debriefed at the end?

Yes

No

Do you use some form of deception? This concerns, in particular, providing untrue information (to participants).

Yes

No

Does your research target vulnerable groups? Examples of vulnerable groups include the under-aged, the elderly, members of any minority and/or underprivileged groups, and people with sickness.

Yes

No

Does your research involve unusually high payment to subjects? (> €30 per hour and/or the maximum possible payment per participant exceeds €200?)

Yes

No

Does your total research budget exceed €100? (MSc thesis question)

Yes

No

Do subjects participate without verbal or written 'informed consent' whereby subjects agree to take part in your study?

Yes

No

Do you need to ask consent from someone (e.g. a parent or legal guardian) on behalf of the research subject(s) who is not legally competent to give consent (e.g. a minor (<16 years old); someone deemed legally incapable)? Please note that for children under age 12, both parents must give consent. For children between age 12 and 16, one parent and the subject must give consent.

Yes

No

Will subjects participate **without** being sufficiently informed about the nature of the experimental tasks they will be asked to perform?

Yes

No

Will subjects participate **without** being debriefed at the end?

Yes

No

Do you use some form of deception? This concerns, in particular, providing untrue information (to participants).

Yes

No

Does your research involve direct manipulation of physiological variables? This can, for instance, involve the administration of bodily hormones to your participants (e.g., testosterone, oxytocin) or administration of drugs (e.g., pain killers, nicotine, alcohol). Small quantities of such substances that may be contained in foods (e.g., a candy bar) or drinks (e.g., a can of coke) do not qualify as direct manipulations of physiological variables.

Yes

No

Does your research involve manipulations or measures that affect physiological variables in a significant way? For instance, the use of endurance tests may affect heart rate, breathing rhythm etc.

Yes

No

Does your research include biological variables?

Yes

No

Is there a possibility that participation in your research has nontrivial positive or negative consequences for subjects' physiological functioning or physical health?

Yes

No

Does your research potentially influence the wellbeing, mental health, or the legal or economic situation of your participants in significant ways? For instance, do your manipulations significantly affect participants' long term self-esteem or mood? Experiences that people would encounter during their normal course of daily life do not qualify.

Yes

No

Could the research induce nontrivial psychological stress or anxiety, or cause nontrivial harm or negative psychological consequences for the subjects?

Yes

No

Is it realistically possible that this research has nontrivial negative consequences for the subjects other than described in the preceding questions?

Yes

No

Could the research induce nontrivial psychological stress or anxiety, or cause nontrivial harm or negative consequences for the researcher(s)?

Yes

No

Does (part of) the research take place outside the Netherlands? If yes: Please realize that local ethics approval may be needed. Discuss with your supervisor.

Yes

No

Could the situation at the place where the research is conducted put the subjects at risk?

Yes

No

Could the situation at the place where the research is conducted put the researchers at risk?

Yes

No

Do you store any highly private and sensitive personal information about your participants in such a way that this information could be linked to individual participants? Examples are information about their national/ethnic background, sexual orientation, health status, financial situation or political/religious beliefs.

Yes

No

Do you advertise your study as an Erasmus study (e.g., by using the Erasmus Behavioral Lab template of Qualtrics) or use the Erasmus university/school logo in any way? Please note that it is allowed to mention you collect this data as part of your MSc thesis project at the Erasmus University, but it not allowed to use any logos.

Yes

No

Is there any other reason why you think you should have a discussion with your supervisor about the ethical aspect of your study? For example, in relation to external stakeholders who are involved; potential conflict of interest; potential misuse of research results.

Yes

No