

THE BENEFITS OF SPORT ON YOUNG GIRLS: INCREASING FEMALE SPORT
PARTICIPATION RATE THROUGH EFFECTIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR
ORGANIZED SPORT PROGRAMS

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Abstract

Sport has the power to positively impact all various populations of its participants. Especially throughout a younger generation, physical activity has the potential to positively shape an individuals' life and prepare them for a successful future. Specifically, within the youth of society, sport is known to release “neurochemicals like dopamine...Increase in dopamine and other neurochemicals produces a feeling of wellbeing and decreases risk for anxiety and depression which are two of the most common mental health disorders found in teens” (Herren Wellness, 2019). Knowing this, it is important to recognize the correlation between young individuals' health and sport participation. Throughout such a critical time in adolescence, young individuals need to adopt healthy habits and sports provide young athletes with just that, structure. Specifically, transitioning towards the young female population, it is known that, “By age 14, many girls are dropping out of sports at two times the rate of boys” (Women's Sports Foundation, n.d.). This unsettling statistic represents the disinvolvement of young women in the world of sports, which then results in them losing the ability to reap the benefits of physical activity. To change this, there are various organizations nationwide which are established in hopes to increase young female participation within sport; however, these organizations may not be getting the recognition or participation rates in which they deserve.

Introduction

In our society today, sport is a factor which unites us all, from near and far. Sport serves almost as a common language known throughout all cultures and various parts of the world, connecting us all through a mutual feeling for team, victory and dedication. This love for physical competition, and well-being not only serves as a societal benefit giving us unity, but rather also serves as a medicinal activity. Sport has the potential to impact people in such a positive way, physically altering one's senses and body, leading to a more positive and healthier mindset. According to the US National Library of Medicine, physical activity and sport provide individuals with both primary and secondary benefits. Primary benefits of sport participation include the physical exercise itself, meaning, the main point of getting moving and increasing one's heart rate results in better physical physique and health. Secondary benefits of sports, besides the obvious physical benefits, include factors such as "psychosocial and personal development" (Malm et. al., 2019). Additionally, "training and exercise improve the quality of life and coping with stress and strengthen self-esteem and social skills" (Malm et. al., 2019). Sport is such a beneficial, reliable and rewarding method of enhancing one's physical and mental state.

However, although there are numerous studies describing the benefits of sport to all generations and all ages, there can be a seen decrease in female participation. According to Women's Sports Foundation, there are many reasons as to why women have a noticeable decrease in athletic participation. A few of these reasons include: lack of access, safety and transportation issues, social stigma, decreased quality of experience, cost, and lack of positive

role models (Women's Sports Foundation, n.d.). To combat these issues, there are certain organizations which prioritize and encourage female sport participation, because females must reap the benefits of all that sports have to offer. I'm guessing you've never heard of any of these organizations, right? Well, that is why there is an increased need for enhanced marketing strategies to connect to a wider audience and spread the message that females must be represented within the world of sports.

Literature Review

Sport has the power to impact individuals in a way which mimics medicinal benefits, specifically within young girls sport shapes this demographic both emotionally and psychologically (Children's Medical Group, 2019). Derived from an article entitled, "Sports Benefits Girls in Many Ways" from the Children's Medical Group, the wide variety of benefits experienced by girls through sport are listed as: better physical health, better grades in school, better social life and more community involvement, better emotional and psychological health, career boost, and overall benefits to society (Children's Medical Group, 2019). When combined, all of these studied benefits, spanning from physical fitness to emotional stability, impact not only the young women themselves, but in turn, all of society as well.

Physical Benefit of Sport on Young Girls

To dive a bit deeper into the studied benefits experienced by women due to sport, it is necessary to first evaluate the physical benefits. As one would assume, simply getting out and moving your body would benefit any individual overall, through the burning of excess calories and the increase of blood flow and circulation throughout the body. Similarly, the effects of this physical movement can be seen throughout young women on a self-reflection platform.

Meaning, young women have the ability to reflect upon their current health state to recognize their “reported self-health”. Especially at such a young age, the ability for young girls to evaluate and assess their health status speaks wonders and instills upon these girls a sense of self-worth and success. According to Children’s Medical Group, “A higher percentage of female athletes in the Women’s Sports Foundation 2008 *Go Out and Play* study described their health as ‘excellent’ than non-athletes...three times as many female high school athletes as non-athletes (20% to 6% respectively) labeled their health as excellent” (Children’s Medical Group, 2019, p. #). Additionally, it is important to note how sport has had an incredibly big impact on the childhood obesity rate, “According to the *Go Out and Play* study eighty percent of high school girls who played on three or more athletic teams had a healthy BMI (body mass index), compared with 75% of moderately involved athletes and 60% of non-athletes”(Children’s Medical Group, 2019). Overall, there are many studied and proven benefits in relation to the positive physical impact that sport has on young women.

Psychological Benefits of Sport on Young Girls

Not only does sport and physical activity benefit young girls physically, but sport also has the ability to aid in psychological areas as well, such as improving academic grades for the young individual. “A 2004 study found that sports participation reduces the dropout rate for female students in grades eight through twelve” (Childrens Medical Group, 2019). Within the same article it can be seen how young women and individuals as a whole have better time management skills due to their involvement in sport. Time management reflects a more goal-oriented and focused mindset, which is created through sport and physical activity. From balancing practices, games, athletic needs and the academic responsibilities of homework, school and other necessities, young women have adapted their time management schedules to their

busy, rigorous lives. In terms of psychological benefits, sport can be seen with numerous positive impacts on the mental state of young women and girls. Within a time a crucial as adolescence, young girls struggle with their own self-image amidst their changing physical state. Sport instills a sense of self-confidence and a better self-image on young women (Childrens Medical Group, 2019). Connecting with peers, having the confidence to strive for excellence, and aspiring to reach their goals are a few examples of how sports positively impact young women on a psychological level.

Inequity within Sport

However, even after analyzing and comprehending the seen benefits that sport has on young women, it is still relevant that females have a significant decreased participation rate in comparison to their male peers. Our society reflects more of a biased approach to athletics in terms of gender; meaning, females tend to be underrepresented within this realm. This “inequity of sport” seen between both genders, from participation rates to media coverage and representation, is woven into our society today. In order for young girls to reap the previously discussed benefits of sport, it is necessary to uncover the reasons why females may be underrepresented within athletics. One area which may attribute to this decreased female involvement in sport may be the idea of underrepresentation in media; “The light in which women are portrayed is vastly dimmer than the one shining upon men in professional and collegiate sports, even though women’s sports are required to be as easily accessible and as equally funded as men’s in collegiate athletics due to Title IX legislation” (Hanson, 2012). This idea of less female coverage and attention within the world of sports has the ability to impact all young women, preventing them from having suitable role models to look up to.

Why Decreased Female Involvement in Sport?

According to the Womens' Sports Foundation, there are numerous reasons as to why young girls drop out of sports, some include; lack of access, safety and transportation issues, social stigma, decreased quality of experience, cost and lack of positive role models (Women's Sports Foundation, n.d.). The lack of available access to sport is a challenge to a majority of young girls. According to an article from Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, "At most levels, women's sport attracts less funding than men's...At community sport level, girls' teams tend to attract less sponsorship from local businesses because they do not have large supporter bases" (Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2009). Meaning, female sports are not as accessible as male sports, causing a major divide within the participation rates between genders within sport. Additionally, media and marketing efforts have a significant impact on young girls and women looking to participate in sport. The significant lack of positive female sport role models within media in comparison to their male counterparts is a notable point to consider when recognizing the difference in smaller participation rates within female sport.

According to an article entitled, "What Women Want: Marketing Tactics for Female Sports Fans and Female Sports Teams", the element of marketing directly to a female target audience is addressed. Here, the idea of female sports participation based on media exposure and marketing geared towards females is discussed, "One influence on female sport participation and consumption is the mass media's portrayal of sport as more appropriate for males than females (Cunningham, 2011)" (Eden, Upright & Hey, 2013). Meaning, the lack of female representation within sport media can be correlated to the female participation rate seen throughout athletics. To combat this misrepresentation of females in sport media, it is necessary to generate awareness for female success within athletics. Marketing successful female athletes has the potential to

increase overall female participation within sport, society must shift gears into a more gender inclusive mindset to alter their sports marketing techniques.

Exposure for Female-Sport Related Organizations

In order to combat all these factors which prohibit females from being appropriately represented within sport, there is a necessity for increased exposure to organizations that stand for female empowerment and success within sport. As times are now evolving, and reflections of gender inequality are now vocalized to an extreme, many sports marketers have taken the opportunity to market for successful women in sport. Having the proper marketing techniques to combat these gender inequality stereotypes are areas that many female-sport related programs face challenges. According to an article from Forbes magazine, UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School marketing professor Claudia Kubowicz Malhotra warns how, “brands have to engage female athletes in ways that ensure the credibility of the athlete as well as the brand” (Dosh, 2016). Maintaining this positive influence exposure method is critical in aiding the awareness and exposure for females within sport. While generating this exposure it is also relevant to be aware of the external climate around the established sport program and societal views.

An example of an organization that strives for the success and physical wellbeing of young girls is a non-profit organization called Girls on the Run. Here, this organization lives by their mission statement of “Girls on the Run reaches girls at a critical stage, strengthening their confidence at a time when society begins to tell them they can’t. Underscoring the important connection between physical and emotional health” (Girls on the Run, 2019). This non-profit organization prides themselves on providing young girls with the outlet and curriculum to understand the connection between physical activity and emotional wellbeing. To do this, Girls

on the Run combines both curriculum-based efforts, in addition to physical movement and exercise to allow young girls to reach their fullest potential. Although organizations similar to Girls on the Run may be so beneficial and critical to the development of young girls, they are not receiving the necessary exposure and participation rates they deserve. To combat this, it is necessary to evaluate different marketing strategies and techniques to enable young women to discover organizations like this and reach their own full potential. Exposing organizations like Girls on the Run to a broader population increases the potential of more young girls living their lives to the fullest and experiencing self-worth.

Marketing Strategies of Organized Programs like Girls on the Run

To increase participation rates and contribute to the overall wellbeing of young girls, many female sports related programs need to both be more evolved and more aware in terms of their marketing strategies. To date, Girls on the Run relies solely on their word-of-mouth relations, email chains and website promotion. In a culture like ours today, it is necessary for social media to be used frequently and effectively to cause any sort of increase in awareness for a given organization. To analyze this specific organization's marketing strategies, it is important to recognize how Girls on the Run has the potential to increase their participation rates through increased social media coverage and updates. Additionally, marketing more specific to their intended target market would be most beneficial. Within this organization, the anticipated target market tends to be mothers, who are actively involved in their child's life. When making decisions within the family, in terms of health and childcare consideration, it tends to be the mother-figure making these executive decisions. With that being said, it is important to market towards this target audience of mothers who are looking to expand their child's involvement and enhance their child's physical and mental well-being. Knowing this, Girls on the Run Exeter

could now market towards this target audience using the appropriate social media platforms which would cause most traction for this age group.

According to an article entitled, “What Women Want: Marketing Tactics for Female Sports Fans and Female Sports Teams”, the main tactics of sports marketing are discussed. “Researchers have identified both word of mouth communication and team identification as successful marketing tactics for all sports (James & Ridinger, 2002; Bush et al., 2005; Shackelford & Greenwell, 2005)” (Eden et al., 2013). Similarly, Girls on the Run utilizes this method of marketing to its consumers, serving as a beneficial and effective strategy to increase their brand exposure. This same article continues to write on strategies to market towards the female fan, and “WOM” or word of mouth, is also commonly referred to as “buzz marketing”. The main idea of generating a “buzz” throughout media or peers takes priority, and specifically within the demographic of young teenage girls, where “buzz marketing” is a main influencer to gain brand exposure throughout various social media outlets. (Eden et al., 2013). Utilizing social media platforms to increase a brand’s sphere of influence has the potential to positively impact all organizations, including Girls on the Run, to increase their participation rates for young female athletes. However, although word of mouth marketing is a positive step in the right direction for many female sports related programs, there needs to be an increased effort towards varying marketing strategies within this industry. In terms of marketing for sport related programs in today’s society, a strategic marketing plan is necessary. To begin, when marketing for any sports related program it is necessary to address both the internal and external environments (Parkhouse, Turner & Miloch, 2012). In doing so, an organization can develop the most beneficial marketing plan in relation to their internal mission statement and their external environment. With these factors now in consideration, many sports related programs then are

able to assess their various strategies which include; market penetration, market development, product development and/or diversification (Parkhouse, et. al., 2012). Market penetration involves “offering an existing product to an existing market”, meaning programs have the ability to offer their participants a unique product or service that sets them apart from their competition. These programs also have the ability to develop their market, meaning based on their consumer response and behavior programs can present their existing products strategically to appeal to a new potential consumer group (Parkhouse, et. al., 2012).

Methodology

Throughout this portion of the paper, the steps taken to gather data will be discussed, as well as the qualitative methods used to determine the impact of sport and physical activity on young women. From first connections with Girls on the Run, to the analysis of final results, female sport participation has been represented effectively throughout this study. Additionally, the marketing strategies used to increase participation among young girls will be analyzed and evaluated.

Setting: Girls on the Run Background

To begin, when first connecting with Girls on the Run, an organized sport program located in the Northeastern part of the United States, back in March of 2020, it was recognized that this organization embodied the beliefs in the positive impacts and benefits that physical activities and organized sport programs has on young girls. Girls on the Run is a non-profit, international organization which prioritizes fostering confidence, self-respect and healthy habits into the young women of society. Their mission statement reads, “We inspire girls to be joyful, healthy and confident using a fun, experience-based curriculum which creatively integrates

running” (Girls on the Run, 2019). Established in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1996, Girls on the Run then shortly later in 2000, rose to the international level (Girls on the Run, 2019). Girls anywhere ranging from grades three through eight have the ability to enroll in this program and reach their potential, in addition to how they too can reach their goals through sport. There are two main age categories of Girls on the Run, making it necessary to separate these young girls to teach and encourage different curriculums which are relevant to their lives in the moment. As described throughout Girls on the Run’s website, the curriculum for young girls grades three through five focus mainly on the “connection between physical and emotional health” (Girls on the Run, 2019). Additionally, following the completion of this course, girls are encouraged to complete a 5K race, which instills within themselves a strong goal-oriented mindset and sense of accomplishment. Similarly, Girls on the Run also provides a specific curriculum for young girls grades six through eight. Here, these girls focus mainly on “what makes them unique and provides opportunities to practice skills that foster healthy relationships” (Girls on the Run, 2019). Incorporating both a curriculum and encouraging physical activity to enhance young women’s lifestyles and outlooks are the main reasons as to why Girls on the Run is such a successful and influential organization that deserves more recognition for their positive impacts within the lives of young females.

Study Sample

To fully understand the impact of sport on young girls and women it is critical to conduct thorough research to support this argument. To specifically align with the mission and vision of this study, participants must be from within the organization at hand and of appropriate age.

Within this study, five female athletes and two female adult coaches from Girls on the Run New Hampshire, participated in this online survey. Female athletes’ participation in the Girls on the

Run program spanned anywhere from one to three seasons, ensuring responses from this survey covered a broad population of athletes and their prior experience in organized sport programs.

Obtaining a sample from two varied age groups and positions within the organization of Girls on the Run provided a more accurate depiction of how this program has impacted each participant from multiple points of view.

Gaining the cooperation of these participants was necessary to continue further within the data collection process. To do this, communication was relayed from the program director of the Girls on the Run New Hampshire location to any interested participants and coaching staff via email correspondence. Following the agreement of willing participants, it was then necessary to disclose any and all information regarding the study and information regarding the safety of each participant. Once distributed, each survey was constructed so the first question addressed the issue of privacy and confidentiality within the online survey. If agreed upon by the participant, the survey would then begin and responses would be recorded for analysis.

Qualitative Methods

In order to gain crucial insight and gather vital data, communicating directly with both the female athletes and responsible coaches was the first necessary step in this process. Firsthand communication with these specific populations ensures the validity of this data, allowing for more reliable data to be presented in relation to women and sport. The main goal in which was planned to be achieved included the idea of how these young female participants have been impacted by Girls on the Run and sport in general. Understanding the influence of organized sport programs within their target market and participant base is a critical way to evaluate the benefits and impacts of the organization overall. The data gathered within this study would be

considered qualitative, or, “describes qualities or characteristics” (Dewitt Wallace Library, 2019)

for the sake of this research project this qualitative data would be gathered to support and decipher the benefits of young women participating in sport and programs like Girls on the Run. To gather this qualitative data in relation to the benefits of physical activity and sport on young women, an online survey method of data collection was utilized.

Due to the recent Coronavirus pandemic, ensuring the safety and health of all willing participants was at the forefront of this study. Abiding to CDC guidelines and recommendations, the method of data collection within this survey transitioned from a previously-anticipated in-person focus group setting, to an online survey format. Here, data was collected through Qualtrics, an online survey platform, which ensured all health and safety measures were accounted for.

Online Survey Method of Data Collection Analysis

Based on prior research, utilizing an online survey as a method of data collection within any given study is an extremely effective method of gathering qualitative data. For example, when considering what constitutes a ‘successful’ study, an element being addressed relates to participation and validity of participants and of their responses. Furthermore, throughout this study, the idea of offering participants with an online survey to complete instilled an additional level of comfort, which in turn resulted in an increase in the validity of participant responses when answering the questions at hand. According to a previously published study, one important benefit gained through survey participation included the idea of how participants, “can freely and openly express their opinions in an online environment” (Kılınç1 & Fırat, 2017). Similarly, it is understood how the validity of these participant’s answers was more reliable when completing

the survey electronically. Pairing the comfort of an electronic method of data collection with a variety of open-ended questions ensured that survey participants had the ability to freely express their honest opinions, anonymously and with no guidance in terms of what answer is to be expected. Deciding to utilize this strategy resulted in a variety of responses, ensuring that no two answers were similar.

An additional benefit to conducting data collection through an online survey format includes the timeliness and effective nature of survey responses when gathered electronically. Here, multiple responses can both be recorded and saved in a timely manner and collected for later use. In terms of the researcher themselves, data collection and analysis can be conducted almost simultaneously, as a researcher has the ability to both analyze already given data and await the responses for future survey participants. According to an article from Oxford Academic, “responses from online surveys can be transmitted to the researcher immediately via email” (Wright, 2017). The effectiveness and collectivist approach to an online survey format of data collection is extremely beneficial when gathering data in a timely manner.

Research Design

An important step within this process of communicating and forming these focus groups include an approval from the IRB, or Institutional Review Board. Here, the integrity, privacy and safety of all participants is of the utmost concern. Questions addressed within the online survey are evaluated and need approval prior to survey distribution when conducting this qualitative research. Once IRB permission and approval is granted, the process of recruiting participants and administering the survey online can begin.

Throughout this study, acquiring the feedback from both young athletes and established coaching staff is crucial to ensure the validity of marketing requests. The first step within this study includes the establishment and compliance of the participants with the consent form that outlines the main purposes of this study, any potential risks and all necessary information needed for permission. Once a signature is provided for either through either a minor's or adult's completion, the primary step of the experiment may begin. Here, the next step within this process would be to connect and check in with the program director, providing her with a sufficient recap of the process, including a sample of questions that would be asked and coordinating an appropriate time that works best for distributing this online survey. To be most efficient with the time of the organization, its participants, volunteers and myself, the data collection's virtual aspect provides participants with the convenience of responding at any time throughout the survey's one-week duration.

Prior to connecting with leadership within Girls on the Run to ensure the possibility and distribution of this online survey, it was necessary to compose an outline of questions that would be presented within the survey itself. Additionally, it is necessary to address the idea of constructing two various surveys to capture the responses of the two different populations within this study. To do this, two separate surveys were conducted; one survey created for distribution throughout the coaching staff population, and the second survey created for distribution throughout the female athlete population. Although similar in format, both being online surveys administered through Qualtrics, there were a few differences in relation to the content included within these documents.

When generating an effective outline for questions to be administered to the Girls on the Run coaching staff, it was important to first determine what critical information needs to be

gathered in order to appropriately fulfill the information needed to resolve the main issue which the study addresses. From a coach's perspective, questions were phrased more technically in terms of addressing the marketing efforts of Girls on the Run. While on the other hand, within the young female athlete survey, questions relating to the marketing efforts of Girls on the Run were phrased more generically, asking how the young participants think they could get their own friends involved in this program. In addition to discussing what marketing suggestions Girls on the Run New Hampshire can adopt, within the coaching staff survey questions relating to how the program has impacted them were also addressed. Encapsulating the true impacts in which Girls on the Run New Hampshire has instilled within its staff only solidifies the validity and empathetic marketing approach to this organization. A few examples of the questions addressed in the survey are as follows;

1. How do you think Girls on the Run can expand their organizational message and gain more traction at a greater/national level?
2. What positive impact have you felt from participation in coaching for Girls on the Run?
3. What is the most important message that sport has taught you, which causes you to coach and advocate for more young female athletes within society? What is your role in the broader context of women in sport and society? Why are you here what is your role?
4. If you were to describe Girls on the Run in one word, what would that word be and why?

These survey questions provided the coaching staff with a more upfront approach to addressing the issues in which this study aims to combat within sport. It is worthy to note how within both

the coaching staff survey and the female participant survey that the same question of “If you were to describe Girls on the Run in one word, what would that be and why?” was asked. Here, analyzing the differences in point of view and opinions based on both age and involvement with the program provided a more well-rounded approach to capturing all of the elements which Girls on the Run New Hampshire provides for their members.

Now, when addressing the survey administered to the young athletes, it is important to note how questions were relative to more of how sports and athletics make them feel, then paired with the idea of how this program of Girls on the Run makes them feel. As mentioned above, manners in which questions were addressed to these young athletes were altered, tailoring to more emphasis on what they themselves think they can do to initiate this influx in participation, when in turn the question is relative to the marketing strategies of Girls on the Run New Hampshire. A few examples of the young athlete survey questions are as follows:

1. How does playing sports make you feel?
2. How do you think you could get more of your friends involved in programs like Girls on the Run and/or sports in general?
3. Do you participate in sports outside of Girls on the Run? If so, for how long have you been participating in sport?
4. What is your favorite part about Girls on the Run?

Presenting the two varied populations of young athletes and adult coaching staff with separate surveys provides this study with the versatility of addressing the topic from two different points of view, fully captivating the effects of organized sport programs and the perception of various populations on sport and Girls on the Run New Hampshire overall.

In roughly around a week's time, participant responses were collected and stored electronically through Qualtrics. As described previously, the online nature of this method of data collection provided an easier approach to data analysis and results. The ability to access all participant responses and analyze them using one platform added an element of ease and convenience to the process of results.

To begin, when addressing the results acquired through the Girls on the Run coaching staff survey, it was important to recognize how although there were only two coaches who participated in this study; however, despite this low participation rate, the depth and validity of their responses added a more experienced and thorough perspective to this study. Main themes which can be pulled from both coach's responses include the ideas of the nature of the program, Girls on the Run, in itself. Both coaches described this program as empowering, representing the effectiveness of its organizational message of inspiring girls "to be joyful, healthy and confident" (Girls on the Run, 2019). Additionally, in terms of the coach's responses to the issue of how can Girls on the Run New Hampshire best market for increased sport participation, they describe elements such as marketing with more emphasis on the positive mental impacts this program provides for participants, in addition to it's "team" and "community" based approach to fitness. Another important element to take note of when analyzing coaching staff responses was the emphasis on the affordability of the program, which if marketed effectively, would appeal to parents of children who can not afford the steep prices of organized sport which serves as an influential factor in the decreasing female sport participation overall.

Now, transitioning to the Girls on the Run female athlete participant responses, there was much diversity in both specificity of responses and opinions of their experience to date. For example, when addressing the question of how sports made them feel, athletes responded with the following descriptors; energetic, powerful, healthy, confident, and happy. Similarly, when comparing these qualities to Girls on the Run as an organization, female athlete participants described their feelings towards this organization as; fun, exciting, energetic, hard and caring. Furthermore, female athlete participants described how they too can help their friends become involved in the program. Ideas on how to accomplish this include one athlete stating how they could incorporate the program into their school, others describe how they could describe to their friends why they enjoy participating in Girls on the Run and why they think their friends would like it as well. Themes of leadership, confidence and energy are prevalent when analyzing the responses of the female athletes. When used effectively, this data serves as a clear representation of the positive impacts in which organized sport programs and sport have on young girls and how important programs like Girls on the Run are in increasing participation rate for females in sport.

Future Recommendations for Girls on the Run's Marketing Strategies

To aid in expanding accessibility and interest for females in sport, and to overall increase female sport participation within society it is important to use the results gathered through this study in an effective manner.

Addressing the issues discussed before, there are many obstacles when it comes to issues with female participation in sport. In hopes to combat this issue of decreasing female sport participation and encourage more females to participate in sport themselves, these survey results

and the data collected will be used to enhance the marketing strategies and efforts for Girls on the Run New Hampshire. Before introducing new approaches to the marketing of Girls on the Run, it is critical to note the previously-existing marketing strategies that this organization utilizes. Currently, Girls on the Run New Hampshire effectively uses many different social media platforms to convey their organization's mission and vision. A few of these platforms used by Girls on the Run New Hampshire include Instagram, Facebook Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. Considering the current marketing approaches shown by Girls on the Run New Hampshire, this study aims to present this organization with a more creative and data-based approach to increase their overall female athlete participation.

With that being said, based on the data gathered from both coaching staff and athlete participants via online survey format, it is appropriate to pitch the idea of a more peer-based marketing strategy. Based on the positive survey feedback from the Girls on the Run participants themselves, utilizing a peer-based approach to expanding the impact of this organization is anticipated to be seemingly effective. To support this proposal, through data analysis it is important to note how many of the female athlete responses reflected a sense of leadership and willingness to show their friends how great the Girls on the Run program is. To encapsulate this idea of participant-advocacy and a peer-based marketing strategy, it is recommended that Girls on the Run uses their various social media platforms and word-of-mouth marketing strategies to advertise a "bring a friend week" which they could call "Week of Wellness: Fitness and Friends" where a current Girls on the Run New Hampshire brings a friend to their weekly practice and teaches their peer about the program. To encourage athlete participation in this "Week of Wellness" it is encouraged to offer participants certain prizes or incentives for bringing their friend along for the week. Whether it be a specialized Girls on the Run "leader" T-shirt, or a new

pair of running shoes, this element of rewarding the participant in bringing along their friend would serve as motivation for maintaining this peer-based marketing approach.

Conclusion

Especially within society today, equality and ensuring equal representation within the athletic industry and sports in general is an advancing issue. As times are enhancing, people are adopting more progressive mindsets and are becoming more confident to stand up for themselves, but the issue of inequity when considering gender in sport is an area which still needs much advancement. To change the world for the better, this study aims to increase female participation within sport. In order to accomplish this feat, the work which needs to be done begins at the local level. Not only does change begin on a smaller scale, but prior to seeing a bigger impact the effort society puts now into the youth of society will benefit females in the future. With that being said, the use of organized sport programs in society has an integral connection when advocating for an increase in female participation rate within sports in general. To ensure the success of organized sport programs like Girls on the Run, it is critical to periodically readjust the organization's marketing approaches to best reflect the ideals and connect with their target audience. Using an evidence-backed peer-driven approach to marketing for Girls on the Run New Hampshire aims to open up a wide array of potential for new participants, which would then allow for more females to reap the important benefits in which sport provides.

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