Double Jeopardy Patterns in Sport Participation

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Double Jeopardy (McPhee, 1963), an empirical marketing generalization, has been found to explain and predict consumer behavior across a wide range of industries. Double jeopardy suggests smaller market share brands receive not only fewer customers, but also lower loyalty from their customers than do larger brands (Ehrenberg, Goodhardt, & Barwise, 1990). Thus, smaller market share brands suffer in two ways: (1) fewer customers, and (2) lower loyalty. Applying double jeopardy to sport participation, theory indicates sports with relatively fewer participants also attract participants who spend less time participating in the sport and participate in a relatively more diverse set of other sport activities (Ehrenberg et al., 1990).

Addressing calls to test double jeopardy in more sport settings (Baker, McDonald, & Funk, 2016; Doyle, Filo, McDonald, & Funk, 2013), the current research examines sport participation for double jeopardy effects. The application of double jeopardy to sport participation is potentially dissimilar from most other consumer markets in a number of important ways. Sport requires specialized equipment and training, forming barriers to switching and locking consumers into higher levels of consumption of fewer sport codes. At higher levels (i.e., elite), sport is typically associated with specialization. This boosts 100% loyalty rates and may benefit niche sports that, contrary to double jeopardy patterns, still command high levels of participation frequency from those relative few who engage in them.

Data for the current study are drawn from the 2016-2017 Taking Part survey (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2018), a large-scale data collection on leisure, culture, and sport in England. For the current study, we focused on sport participation over the preceding four weeks, including both sports participated in and participation frequency in each sport. Based on responses from Q2-4 (n=6,961), we determined the market penetration and average participation frequency among participants in each sport, the two key elements in double jeopardy. Overall, a clear double jeopardy pattern emerged. Sports that drew a greater share of participants also had greater participation frequency among their participants. Across 104 different sport codes, market penetration rate and average participation frequency were significantly positively correlated (r=.512, p<.001). Despite results supporting a double jeopardy pattern, a few activities diverged and demonstrated either lower or higher participation frequency than would be expected based on market penetration. Sport activities with relatively low participation frequency relative to market penetration included hiking, pool, and ten-pin bowling. Sport activities with relatively high participation frequency relative to market penetration included weightlifting, horse riding, bowls, and martial arts. Understanding how individuals participate in sport is key to promoting greater overall sport participation – along with associated physical and mental health and societal benefits – and can inform policy decisions. One implication of double jeopardy patterns is that the best, and perhaps only, way to increase the amount of time individuals spend participating in a sport is to concurrently increase the number of individuals who participate in the sport. This has further theoretical and practical implications for sport specialization and long-term athlete development.