

# Use of Sport Promotion Mix to Increase Consumption of Services: A Case Study of El-Hawwar Sport Club in Egypt

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## Abstract

Drawing on a specific case of the El-Hawwar Sporting Club, located in El-Mansoura, Egypt, the primary intent of this study was to identify variables and key factors that contribute to an effective sport marketing promotional mix, used to enhance visibility and consumption of products and services of the sport organization. A total of 100 participants completed a questionnaire with questions using a 3-point Likert scale including demographic information to determine the effectiveness of a promotional mix to increase the service consumption of the HSC Sporting Club. The findings confirm the extraordinary value of a well-chosen promotional mix to increase the visibility and profitability of the touted goods and services. Participants provided several practical recommendations that include a call on today's sport marketers to invest sufficient time and resources in conducting a thorough market and consumer behavior analysis as a foundation for an effective promotional mix. This study found the use of promotion mixes in Egyptian clubs is still at its infancy and there is a dire need for more research on the topic in the future.

**Keywords:** sport promotional mix, consumer behavior, consumption of services

<sup>1</sup> The El-Hawwar Sporting Club (HSC) is based in El-Mansoura, Egypt. Founded in 2001, the HSC offers a wide array of social, cultural programs in addition to soccer, volleyball, handball, squash, swimming and youth development.

## Introduction

The global sports industry is one of the fastest growing economies worldwide, generating from \$400 to 620 billion in revenue from merchandise and retail sporting goods, television contracts, live sports events, as a recent A. T. Kearney study found (Collignon, Sultan, & Santander, 2011). However, Nicholson, Hoyer, and Houlihan point out rightly that: "... sport has become a cultural, social and economic clarion call, [that provides] opportunities for global recognition; [and for] sporting success...often inextricably bound to perceptions of national worth" (2011, p.1). In each country across the world, there are major drivers involved in the rapid growth of the sports industry, augmented by technological advances and influenced by the creation of global new markets such as the trend of health-conscious consumers, the growth in

disposable income, and government in the promotion of sports and active participation (Lucintel, 2015). Traditional marketing practices are no longer viable in competitive global marketplaces, as sport marketers want to use a mix of strategies to put their products on a variety of media outlets such as emails or emergent forms of communication (Gerber-nel & Strydom, 2006; Estiri et al., 2010). Cutting-edge marketing analyses and strategies are imperative to understand the sport consumers' expectations and behaviors and are critically important in individuals' determination of purchase and consumption habits, and helpful to tailoring product development, campaign management and advertising messaging strategies (Milne & McDonald, 1999). According to Bernstein (2015), efficient sports marketing evolved into a powerful and defining component of the sports industry, allowing sports marketers to apply innovative marketing techniques and strategies.

Sport marketers' mission is to raise brand awareness of the products and services available for consumers, regardless of the nature and level of sports (i.e., whether professional, collegiate, recreational or fitness sports organizations), which are all necessary to boost events attendance and generate excitement (Shilbury et al., 2003). For successful marketing, the sport marketers must first conduct a thorough consumer research analysis to learn about the target audience's needs, motivations and interests pertaining to the promoted product or service (Funk, 2008). Evidence of an effective marketing strategy is when an organization is passionate about delighting their customers and aims to create long-lasting relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders (Kotler & Keller, 2011). Traditionally, the marketing mix consists of the following four elements: product, price, place, and promotion.

## The Four P's of the Marketing Mix

The main purpose of the Four P's of the Marketing Mix, a concept that was popularized by Philip Kotler, the so-called father of modern marketing (Mahajan, 2013), is to capture interest and create awareness for a brand's image or place, its unique selling propositions or points (USPs) that sets a company apart from its competitors. Essentially, these are all variables that enable a company to sway consumer behavior in the company's favor and interest. In 2013, Kotler further added a fifth "P" to the mix, "purpose," for the following reason: "Another thing that is a huge asset to the company is its corporate culture ... A happy customer means good business and greater brand loyalty for the furniture retailer" (Anand, 2013, p. 1). Equally important, is the four P's' so-called modern version, the Four C's—consumer value, cost, convenience, and communication—as they adopt the lens of the customer's interest and needs (The Marketing Mix, 2017). Therefore, these elements can be considered as controllable variables to serve both the needs of a sport organizations' productivity and its consumers in context-specific markets (Estiri et al., 2010; Kotler et al., 2006).

### **New Sports Makes Egypt a Tourism Destination**

The development and promotion of new sports put Egypt on the world map as a new sport tourism destination. Amid steady decline of the tourism sector in Egypt since 2011, the country's Ministry of Sports and several private sports federations joined forces to revive the economy by transforming Egypt into a sport tourism destination (Samir, 2017). Once a top tourist destination in the world with its magnificent pyramids, beautiful beaches, and rich history, Egypt has been struggling with the aftermath of the huge knock-on effect of the tourism industry's collapse on the country's economy. More specifically, before the January 25 Revolution in 2011, the country attracted approximately 15 million tourists, compared to 5.3 million in 2016, as noted by Hicham al Demairi, Chairman of Egypt's Tourism Authority (Coffey, 2017). To fill such a gap in the labour market, the government and the private sector shifted their primary focus and attention to the sports industry as a savior and boost to tourism (Al-Ghitani, 2010). By organizing international championships in popular touristic areas such as El-Gouna, in addition to hosting prestigious sporting events such as the Under-19 Basketball World Cup in July, the hope is "that any addition to the sports infrastructure in Egypt will have a positive impact on the country and its economy, especially when it's done by the private sector, as the state can't afford to organise such huge events or establish sports clubs," explained Khalid Abdel-Aziz, Minister of Youth and Sports (Samir, 2017, *p. 1*). Propelled by the instant success of the El-Gouna Squash Tournament that was jointly organized by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Squash Association, the government's efforts are highly built around the concepts of youth sport programs and the idea to re-position the Arab country not only as the new squash destination, but as "Egypt's Roland-Garros of squash" (Samir, 2017, *p. 2*). Abdel-Aziz added, "We will focus on youth centres and will facilitate the private sector efforts to achieve such a target, by giving them lands needed and registering these clubs within their relevant sports association" (Samir, 2017, *p. 2*). To accomplish this ambitious objective, it is up to the sports marketers to develop and implement a far-reaching, resourceful and well-organized marketing campaign strategy. Leveraging the already well-established reputation and standing of the Squash Tournament is certainly one way to position Egypt as a sport tourist destination.

### **Sports Marketing is Paramount to Positioning Egypt in the World's Economy**

Sport marketing is critical to re-branding Egypt as the new mecca for squash and other youth sports. Yet, sports marketing as an independent industry in Egypt is still in its infancy (Alafandi & Séguin, 2008). Ironically enough, as the scholars contend, it was due to the increasing cutback of government funds towards sports federations over the last two decades that gave sports marketing a new meaning in Egypt (Alafandi & Séguin, 2008). Before that, sport marketing in Egypt had typically moved at a slow and random pace, except from some of the professional soccer clubs that generated commercial revenues through their marketing efforts (Alafandi & Séguin, 2008). Accordingly, the extant literature on sport marketing as an independent profession and industry remains very scarce (Al-Khaja, 2001). What has been found so far, however, is that Egyptian sport organizations were traditionally

largely subsidized by government agencies such as the Egyptian Sports Council, with little or no support at all from the corporate sector—a concept that has been observed in other countries (Séguin, Teed, & O'Reilly, 2005; Zaki & Fekri, 2006). As a direct consequence of the increasingly difficult economic situation in Egypt, the government progressively pulled back its financial support to the extent that sports federations were compelled to seek out external and alternate resources within Egypt's private sector (Zaki & Fekry, 2006). This act of seeking alternative resources has proven to be a difficult task. For example, Shalaby's (2004) study found the majority of companies (68 percent) preferred to sponsor football events. On top of that, the lack of awareness due to the dearth of scientific and market research on sports may have added another obstacle, preventing Egyptian sports federations from leveraging already existing marketing opportunities (Zaki & Fekri, 2006). This assumption is further backed by a recent report from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS, 2016) that indicates the expenditure for a typical Egyptian family on sports, promotional and activities and services reached 10,972 pounds (L.E.) in 2010-11, which represents 1.7 percent of the total spending of the Egyptian family compared to the fact that the Egyptian government investments in sports federations represent 2.7 percent of its total expenses (CAPMAS, 2016). Similarly, the budget of the Ministry of Youth and Sports significantly dropped from 4,163 million pounds (L.E.) at the end of 2014 to 4,068 million pounds in 2016 (Al-Jabali, 2017).

### **Components of the Marketing Promotional Mix**

Promotions in sports largely aim to capture the interest of as many consumers as possible, while increasing brand awareness (Estiri et al., 2010). Overall, the term "promotional mix" refers to a diverse and broad assortment of communication tools used by a company to brand their products and services so that it triggers an emotional connection with existing and target consumers (Kokemuller, 2017). In the sports world, promotional activities are the primary tools for organizations to build and establish a strong brand image and awareness (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). Being able to predict consumers' responses to promotional incentives and campaigns is therefore invaluable to efficiently tailor sales, branding and marketing activities, which ultimately defines the overall success of an organization's efforts to position their products and services effectively in a revenue-driven competitive sports world (Banerjee, 2009).

Selecting the appropriate promotional mix is possibly one of the most critical and yet most difficult decisions a sports marketer must make. In addition to the specific needs and features of the targeted consumers, the type and nature of the product or service need to be taken into consideration. According to some scholars who examined efficient promotion campaigns, four common components of a successful promotional mix are identified as: (a) advertising, (b) public relations, (c) sales promotion / direct marketing, and (d) personal selling (Boççe et al., 2012; Eric, 2012; Estiri et al., 2010; Kokemuller, 2017; Kotler & Keller, 2011; Mihai, 2013; Pour, Nazari, & Emami, 2013; Sunday & Bayode, 2011).

By contrast, other scholars suggest adding incentives, sponsorships, and licensing to the promotional mix, while agreeing on advertising, personal contact, as well as public relations as major

components of the promotional mix (Estiri et al., 2010; Keller, 2001; Pour et al., 2013; Schwarz & Hunter, 2008; Shilbury et al., 2003; Smith 2008). However, findings of previous research on the topic vary in what constitutes promotional mix items. Thus, a brief overview of the extent of focus in the context of the promotional mix is included in this literature review (see Table 1). Accordingly, a typical promotional mix includes methods of advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling. Next, we will briefly discuss each of these components.

**Advertising.** Advertising is essential to sport marketing as it “makes consumption a top-of mind behavior” (McMullan & Miller, 2008, p. 20). Sport marketers use advertising when aiming at large groups of customers using standardized messages or they could use personal selling strategies if face-to-face mechanisms are needed (Lee, Sridhar, & Palmatier, 2017). Sport marketers with large budgets, who are typically equipped with large sums of money to use, often consider advertising to be the most significant and efficient communication method of the promotional mix (Kokemuller, 2017). Advertising in sport depends on the utilization of images—visual and headlines—verbal to connect with consumers (Seo, Sung, & Park, 2017).

With its origins tracing back to Ancient Egypt (Hamlett, 2017), the main purpose of advertising is to produce a behavioral and emotionally-charged response from the target consumer (Shank, 2002). However, because of the steady rise of consumers’ internet use, advertising has gradually shifted away from traditional media forms towards new media forms such as social media (Shank,

2002; Smith, 2008). In modern times, most organizations rely heavily on social media channels as part of their marketing strategy, as it is the best way to handle multiple marketing campaigns simultaneously, obtain plenty of useful information about potential and existing consumers, and to connect with them on an emotional level (Tingley, 2015). Thus, social media can be considered as currently the most effective tool to supply information to, connect with, and convince the consumers to use and purchase the services and products provided by a sports organization (Abad, Lopez, & Jiménez, 2010). As such, advertisers and consumer marketers may have found in social media marketing an even more impactful approach to reach particular consumers that are desensitized by the information and advertisement overload created through the constant exposure to the 24-hour news broadcasts and commercial cycles on radio, television, and the internet (Herbig & Kramer, 1994).

In the sports world, specifically, social media has transformed the advertisement efforts from sports promoters and their teams, enabling them to forge personal and emotional-driven relationships between teams and their fans by communicating directly with them and tapping into their passion and desire to belong and play a vital role in their sport organization’s success (Clapp, 2017). Undoubtedly, direct conversations with consumers are far more valuable than any paid advertisement placement (Roesch, 2014). In the pre-social media era, direct communication with target consumers was established through methods such as flyers and posters (Abad et al., 2010). While the

Table 1 Analysis of Promotion Mix

Item Number	Items	Yes		No		Total
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Advertisement	15	100%	0	0	15
2	Public Relations	12	80%	3	20%	15
3	Sales promotion	12	80%	3	20%	15
4	Personal selling	12	80%	3	20%	15
5	Sponsorship	4	27%	11	73.3%	15
6	Brand	1	7%	14	93%	15
7	Special offerings	1	7%	14	93%	15
8	Sales management	1	7%	14	93%	15
9	Corporate	1	7%	14	93%	15
10	Publicity	2	13.3%	13	86.7%	15
11	Licensing	2	13.3%	13	86.7%	15

communication methods have been altered throughout the past decades, the intent and shared content have remained the same, with sport and advertisement enjoying a mutually-beneficial relationship. Roesch (2014) discusses the nexus between sport and advertisement, pointing out that sponsorship is necessary for sports teams and athletes to complete their financial obligations. Adding that advertisers capitalize on sport events and athletes to reach prospective consumers, “convey positive image and eventually sell their products” [with the connection made between consumers and advertisers], Roesch called this phenomenon “two-sided markets” (p. 331). Surprisingly, considering its vital role as a driving force in sport economics, the impact of advertisements and sponsorships on sport events are yet to be researched (Dewenter & Roesch, 2012; Roesch, 2014; Vardit & Stremersch, 2011). Hence, it is difficult to grasp the total value of advertising in the world of sports, particularly in developing countries. Yet, it is very clear that advertising in the sports world is a money spinner.

Recognizing sports as a source for evoking emotions, passions, and identity, consumer marketers, therefore, use a variety of advertising methods to create brand awareness, promote their products and services, and develop a connection with their consumers (Shank, 2002). However, what are the benefits of advertising compared to public relations as another essential element of the promotional mix? In evoking the old saying, “advertising is what you pay for, publicity is what you pray for,” the biggest difference between the two is the fact that advertising is paid media, while public relations is earned and the result of hard work that includes persuading news reporters to publish positive and beneficial stories about your sport organization, club or company (Wynne, 2014).

**Public Relations (PR).** The public relations area of sports is an essential business component of the industry. Organizations need public relations to remain successful and to retain a positive image with strategic communities (Lahav, 2014). Due to the often-overlapping responsibilities of PR with other communication methods, Ledingham and Bruning (2000) point out that it is an area of study characterized by content communicated through public relations campaigns. Essentially, public relations are a promotion and communication tool, encompassing media relations, works that focus on promotion and publicity, sponsorship, event management and fan relationships. The primary goal is to build solid relationships between sport organizations and its stakeholders (Serbanica & Constantinescu, 2016). According to Mikacova and Gavlakova (2014), the significance of public relations lies in its ability to enhance the value of a sport organization and branding it to the benefit of the stakeholders, its fans and the immediate community, helping preserve the image of the organization and maintain positive public perception. This requires an effective branding strategy, which should build upon a thorough assessment of the internal and external environment of the organizations’ target market.

**Brand Management.** Sport organizations strive for a competitive advantage and one way to accomplish this is through branding—place branding and brand image (Knott, Allen, & Swart, 2012). Bose, Roy and Tiwari (2016) define branding as a combination of approaches under the umbrella of marketing to promote positive advertisement of a specific place, product or

region. This type of branding allows for development of a positive image of a sport organization and promotes fan satisfaction and brand loyalty or dependability on its products. This leads to a strong brand image of a sport organization. Acknowledging the novelty of place branding, Bose, Roy and Tiwari (2016) regard it as an emerging concept: “it is very new and is still in its nascent stage” (p. 618). In reference to brand image, Knott et al (2012) explains that it concerns connections that a consumer or customer makes directly between the brand and the product, forming an experience or perceptions received indirectly from advertising. In context of brand management, it consists of analysis and planning of the target market, with the aim to develop a good relationship with the target market through tangible elements such as the product, in addition to the intangible components such as the consumer’s experience and relationship with the product (Nielsen, 2015). Thus, public relation activities are a critical element of the company’s marketing promotional mix, which is widely agreed upon among marketing scholars (Ferrell & Hartline, 2010; Smith, 2008).

**Sales Promotion.** In businesses carried out through sports organizations, sales promotion, according to DeGaris, West and Dodds (2009) is an essential tool in promotion mix. Zikiene and Kalmakhelidze (2016) further note, one critical element of sales promotion is price control, with scholars indicating that the way price promotion is used and the use of discounts and coupons are critical to understanding extent of financial gains in product purchases. From discount coupons, t-shirt giveaways, corporate incentives or contests, sales promotions are short-term marketing tactics, solely aimed to boost sales and revenues in sport organizations. As one of the most frequently used types of promotional mixes, they offer consumers an incentive or discount to not only stimulate purchasing and sales of certain sports products and services, but also to inform target consumers of new products or bring disinterested customers back to enjoy products or encourage brand loyalty, or bring back old customers” (Bhasin, 2017; Zikiene & Kalmakhelidze, 2016).

**Personal Selling.** Through one-on-one communication methods such as talking face-to-face, and communication through texting via cell phones or internet gateways and social media platforms, sport organizations strive to develop strong relationships with potential and existing customers as an implicit and subtle method to stimulate and manage the sales cycle, increase their customer retention rate, and persuade prospects. Because of the direct seller-buyer relationship, personal selling is considered to be one of the most successful ways to achieve promotional and organizational goals (Smith, 2008). As pointed out by Bhasin (2017), however, personal selling is also one of the most time-consuming and expensive elements of the promotional mix, as it requires additional staff with extraordinary interpersonal, communication and technical skills. Most importantly, choosing the platform or communication channel that is best suited to meet the specific goals and demands of an organization and its diverse customers may be the deciding factor in whether a promotional mix has the desired outcome. Therefore, it is necessary to invest in thorough consumer behavior and market research to fully understand what motivates or prevents consumers from purchasing the offered services, in addition to providing ample feedback for opportunities to learn about consumers’ complaints and suggestions that may further increase customer retention rates and help tailor better

promotional marketing and incentive campaigns. Particularly, the latter has become increasingly crucial to sports marketers (Shank, 2002). In fact, a recent Harvard Business School report found that increasing customer retention rates by five percent boost profits up to 95% (Stilwagon, 2014). Surprisingly, there has been a huge gap in research and previous literature on sports marketing in Egypt. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the use of the sports promotional mix to increase the consumption of services. The El-Hawwar Sporting Club in El-Mansoura, Egypt was chosen for this study. As the provided literature review and lack thereof has indicated, sports marketing and promotions in Egypt is still in its infancy, and so is the research upon it, which is why we opted to proffer an extensive theoretical overview of the major components of sport marketing promotional mix's impact on the consumption of the HSC Sporting Club's services.

## Methods

### Participating Sport Organization

The El-Hawwar Sporting Club (HSC) is a non-profit sport organization in El-Mansoura, Egypt (Beetel Mansoura, 2009). Founded in 2001, the HSC offers a wide array of social, cultural programs in addition to housing sport teams in soccer, volleyball, handball, squash, and swimming. With a focus on youth junior sports development, the specialized academic training is a major component of the organization's overall mission. It is, therefore, HSC's highest priority to provide professional coaches in various sports, so individuals of all ages have the opportunity to achieve their full potential regardless of whether or not they want to participate in competitions or play recreationally only. Initially founded to serve the people who live in this area, the organization further aims to provide a relaxed and leisurely environment for its members, while helping to build a community based on cultivating the spirits of sports for all. The club consists of six different administrative units: (a) Sports operations, (b) Marketing and Public Relations, (c) Memberships, (d) Security, (e) Cultural events, and (f) Dining.

**Instrumentation.** Based on a review of the extant literature, the first author developed a survey questionnaire, split into two sections each consisting of 21 questions that sought demographics such as gender, age, and socio-economic status, and the major components of a sport promotional mix. Gender distribution was almost equal (49% males; 51% females). The second part of the questionnaire asked the respondents to share their experiences and expectations on sports promotions. Each of the items consisted of a 3-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*disagree*), 2 (*maybe*), and 3 (*agree*). Although a 5-point Likert scale is the most common scale (SurveyKing, 2017), as lower scales may potentially lack reliability and validity, the researchers opted for the latter option to take into consideration the culturally-embedded context and distinctions of the participants' shared Egyptian background (Lee, Jones, Mineyama, & Zhang, 2002). As found by Lee and colleagues (2002), there are distinctive cultural differences in responses to a Likert scale. For example, the respondents from Japan responded more frequent difficulty with the scale than the Chinese respondents, who instead skipped questions. Further, construct validity of the scale tended to be better for the Chinese and the Americans when there were four response choices, while Japanese respondents favored seven choices (Lee et al., 2002).

With this in mind, the researchers distributed and collected the survey questionnaires. Cronbach's alpha was employed to determine the reliability of the instrument, and the reliability coefficient was .848, which was within the acceptable range for the interpretation of scores (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The content validity using experts was tested and the percentages of the expert agreement for the examined variables for this study were as follows: demographics = .791, advertisements = .714, public relations = .754, sales promotion = .630, and personal selling = .649. The correlation between demographics and promotions mix is significant at  $0.05 = 0.361$ .

**Procedure and data collection.** One-hundred thirty-three participants took part in the study, but 33 were dismissed because the survey questionnaires were incomplete, hence deemed ineligible for this study. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula that determined a sample size of at least 100 suffices the confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of 5% (The Research Advisors, 2006), the study met this requirement.

The data collection was completed within a span of one month (i.e., Nov. 10 through Dec. 9, 2018). Each participant was at least 26 years of age and provided verbal and written consent, after approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB). Participants were notified that the survey was anonymous, and all responses were kept completely confidential. All survey questionnaires were first written and filled out in Arabic, subsequently translated into English by the first two authors.

**Data analysis.** Based on the nature of this study and our aim to obtain a better understanding of the promotional mix's impact on the consumption of the HSC Sporting Club's services, the data analysis consisted of several tests to generate the findings. IBM SPSS Statistics 23 was used for the descriptive statistics and calculating the means (SD) and percentages for each of the two variables including the 21 survey questions regarding sport promotion usage that was used to measure the effectiveness of the HSC's sports promotional mix.

## Results

Sport consumers were targeted to discern extent of involvement and types of interest connected with the HSC Sporting Club in Egypt. Analysis of the survey questionnaires and examination of descriptive statistics yielded findings that indicate positive involvement albeit variation in age, income, and marital status. Both the analysis of the survey questionnaire and the descriptive statistics revealed that the study participants' consumer behavior towards the HSC Sporting Club was positively correlated with their income, age, and marital status. Emerging themes from this study center on demographics, the number of children per family, and social economic status. For the remainder of this paper, the researchers discuss the overarching themes of the study.

### Demographics of Participants

There was a slightly higher rate of female participation in this study than men which may indicate a greater interest in the HSC Sporting Club's services among women. This could reflect the participants' desire to get their children involved in a variety of extracurricular activities, such as sports or musical or cultural programs that are equally offered through the HSC Sporting Club.

Majority of the respondents were between 26 and 35 years of age (35%) and between 36 and 45 years (37%), of whom 82% were married.

**Number of children.** Eighty-six percent of the participants listed dependents, which may be a strong indicator that children are a persuasive element in an individuals' consumer behavior towards services and products provided by the sports club. This finding could indicate that sports marketers may need to invest more time and resources to understand better the relationship between parental style and children's consumer behavior in order to tailor their promotional efforts as best as possible. In reference to membership, 80% of the study participants indicated interest in signing up for a membership with the HSC Sporting Club, agreeing to pay a recurring annual membership fee [see Table 2 for demographic information on the participants]. It was discovered that individuals' expenditures correlated with the economic situation in Egypt. Regarding the question on "what is the total of a household's income and expenditure," the survey data revealed that the range of Egyptian families' household income was between 1,500-5,000 in Egyptian pounds (L.E.), upon a response rate of 46% respondents.

**Advertising Through Social Media.** In this study, social media appears to be the preferred method of advertising. The findings indicate participants to vastly favor social media as a form of interaction within the HSC Sporting Club. More specifically, 76% of the respondents indicated Facebook as their preferred choice for obtaining information about the organization's services, products or operational details such as opening hours, facilities and equipment. The participants also noted their appreciation for the way the club officials use their Facebook page to communicate operational updates such as weather-dependent changes to hours or events. Undoubtedly, advertising in social media channels is the leading method of the HSC Sporting Club's marketing promotional mix. As a runner-up, direct marketing tools such as flyers and pamphlets were mentioned by 63% as the most effective promotional method to reach and win them over as loyal consumers. Reflecting current societal trends that go beyond Egyptian borders, face-to-face communication came in only at third, with 59% of the participants giving them value when it comes to learning about the HSC Sporting Club's program. The latter speaks volumes to the negative impact of the increasing dominance of social media in our society and its detrimental effects on interpersonal relationships and our daily lives.

The survey results show an extremely low frequency of sport consumer participation in HSC Sporting Club's activities, with response rates being at 19%, 34%, and 53%, respectively. To boost these low numbers and ultimately increase participant's sustainable interest in consumption of the services provided by the HSC Sporting Club, sports marketers need to find better ways to reach their target consumers. In a nutshell, the lack of participation in HSC Sporting Club's activities implies the need for sports marketers to review their current promotional mix, invest time and effort to analyze the target market and consumers further, and to make appropriate adjustments so they can propel the HSC Sporting Club on the local and global map of the sports world. Nevertheless, 58% of the participants viewed the promotional mix as an informative resource about the HSC Sporting Club.

**Advertising as an informal tool.** The results of the survey indicate that 66% of the respondents consider the HSC Sporting Club's advertisements solely as an informal tool to stay updated on the club's activities, whereas 58% of the participants did acknowledge that the advertisement strategy drew their attention to the provided services. The findings further show that 52% of responders preferred ads that promote social and cultural values. The latter reiterates the individuals' desire and understanding of sport as a social platform. Also, 68% of the participants responded that they had a positive impression of the services provided by the club.

**The HSC Sporting Club's public relations efforts yielded a positive perspective from the participants.** As the data indicates, 55% of the participants praised the usefulness of recurring newsletters containing fitness tips and advice as part of the public relations efforts of the HSC Sporting Club, which essentially enhanced their positive impression about the organization. In particular, communications that were disseminated through social media channels was perceived well, with 52% expressing "yes" and 38% indicating that it effectively promotes the HSC Sporting Club's relationship with its public audience and consumers.

**Sales promotion and personal selling.** Participants seemed to prefer receiving exclusive coupons with discounts for the HSC Sporting Club's specific sporting goods or local sponsor partners. Specifically, 56% of the participants responded with a clear "yes" compared to 38% of "maybe" when asked whether such sales promotions encourage them to consider signing up for the HSC Sporting Club's activities. Perhaps, sports organizations like the HSC Sporting Club could invest more heavily in giveaways, incentives like free t-shirts that display the organization's logo to generate brand awareness at the same time, and sponsor partnerships. Due to the tight-knit community structure in Egypt, such sales promotions may prompt a domino effect, and most importantly increase family attendance. On the other hand, 35% of the participants did not see any benefit of the HSC Sporting Club's sales promotions, implying that they are more interested in the long-term physical benefits of participating in sports. Seventy percent of the participants associated sales promotions with creating a good atmosphere in the club.

Thirty-nine percent of the participants expressed concern regarding the customer service provided by the HSC Sporting Club. The organizations' representatives should optimize their current personal selling and sales guidelines to expand their reach to consumers and increase the consumption of HSC Sporting Club's activities and other similar sport organizations in Egypt.

The findings of the study indicate consumption of services rendered through El-Hawar Sporting Club to vary by gender, age, socio-economic level, and marital status. More women than men consumed HSC services, children involvement was evident, preference for social media as an outlet for advertising was apparent, and involvement in HSC activities was biased towards those from high social economic status participants. Participants preferred use of discount coupons and more improved customer service. This might elevate consumption of products and services delivered through HSC outlets.

### **Discussion**

In this study, there was a gendered composition of club members. This confirms what Khamis (2018), Director of Membership Affairs at HSC, expressed: Of 10,000 HSC members, 5,500 were female and 4,500 were male. Older participants tended to be more involved in club activities, which could support Ahmed's (2014) study who found people in this age group in today's Egyptian society tend to regard sporting events as leisure and bonding opportunities – thus more of them participate in HSC events. It could also be possible that participants wanted to introduce their children to sports activities at an early age. With reference to marital status, 8% responded yes, which confirms Osman and Girgis's (2009) study that found marriage rates in Egypt to be 70% for people in their 20s and 90% for individuals in their 30s. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the participants were married since the largest percentage of responders were 30 or older.

As a common practice in fitness and recreation sport organizations, ranging from non-profit to professional organizations (Daughter, Vowles, & Black, 2013) is collecting a recurring membership fee. In this study, members of the HSC Sporting Club were required to pay annual membership dues every year to access the club's programs. Hence, income levels influence participants' purchasing power in sport services. The average income in Egypt is 5,680 L.E. (Weeks, 2011). which could impact people's interest in the club. This is consistent with Rani's (2014) research study that found individuals with an income and savings equal or higher than 5,000 L.E. will tentatively purchase more expensive products. Conversely, people with low income and savings will purchase fewer, more inexpensive products (Rani, 2014). Anokye and colleagues (2012) observed a positive correlation between the demand and actively-pursued interest for sports and exercise with fixed prices that may include membership fees, exercise and training apparel, and sports equipment. Apparently, the amount of income available to individuals tends to be a determining factor in potential and current consumers of the HSC Sporting Club's programs. The majority of survey participants (71%) reported that their expenditures were spent on sport games, merchandise, and sporting goods, provided and hosted by the HSC Sporting Club. Oga (1998) reported that there is a correlation between the increase of sport-related expenditures and economic growth of a country.

In the current study, participants praised Facebook's easy-access communication, particularly noting the HSC Sporting Club's efforts to respond instantly to inquiries either posted publicly to their timeline or through the messaging tool. This is consistent with Boehmer and Lacy's (2014) findings who discovered respondents' interactivity through Facebook was positive. Although social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are considered good for enhancing consumer satisfaction with products delivery or consumption, the downside of social media is its tendency to gradually replace the necessity for face-to-face conversations and quality time spent in person (Tingley, 2015). However, in our convenience-driven society, social media has become the epitome of convenience, as everything can be efficiently accomplished online without any time limits attached to it. The direct outcome is that our society has become more individualized, giving rise to so-called internet trolls of hatred and bigotry while devaluing the quality and amount of face-to-face interactions (Final Inquiry

Project, 2015). Today's sports marketers' biggest challenge is, therefore, to not only understand such societal trends but also to tailor promotional efforts accordingly to create brand awareness and revenue for an organization successfully. As Pelham (2009) noted, direct and consistent communication between salespersons and consumers impacts greatly the value added of the products or services offered to the consumer. A question for Egyptian sport marketers or public relation specialists is the extent to which consumers are more likely to pay attention to advertisements and promotions when it is connected to an instant reward, short-time incentive offer, or benefit (Burns & Lutz, 2006; Smith, 2008).

### **Concluding Remarks and Recommendations**

This study explored the use of sport marketing promotional mix to increase the consumption of services provided by the El-Hawwar Sporting Club in El-Mansoura, Egypt. While sport marketing literature heavily focuses on the importance of promotional mix elements, this research attempted to particularly measure the efficiency of a promotional mix through the case study of the HSC Sporting Club. This suggests a variety of sales promotions to be positively associated with increased consumption of the pushed products and services. Hence, the sports marketers not only need to be fully aware of the components of the promotional mix but most importantly, they need to be aware of each component's usefulness and efficiency for any given state or target market. In the case of the HSC Sporting Club, marketers garnered significantly more attention through creating specific sales promotions, such as exclusive discounts, gifts, workout clothes with the club logo printed on them, and coupons that can be spent at other partnering local vendors.

To remain competitive in a fiercely-growing sports and fitness industry, it is imperative for the HSC Sporting Club and other similar sport organizations to adopt a blend of digital and traditional promotional mixes, which includes social media ads, face-to-face direct marketing, and traditional forms of advertising such as flyers and pamphlets. For this purpose, recruiting and employing experienced yet approachable salespeople is paramount, as they have a vital role in adding a personal touch to the sport organizations and communicating their message efficiently to existing and potential sport consumers (Pelham, 2009). A well-rounded public relations department is just as crucial to the survival and brand awareness of a sport organization. Public relations experts strategically need to build and establish strong relationships with the public, that not only consists of sport consumers but most importantly of media outlets and their increasing role in shaping public opinion.

In closing, the findings of this study reiterate the need for a thorough understanding of the sport consumers' motivations, needs and interests that are key in enhancing, building, and maintaining lasting and sustainable relationships between sport consumers and sports organizations. A positive reputation and strong brand image are equally significant, which is the essential goal and purpose of today's sports marketing industry in Egypt. Overall, this study has revealed the potential of a well-organized promotional mix to positively impact consumption and brand awareness, as illustrated in the case of the HSC Sporting Club. Age, marital status, number of children, income and expenditure are critical factors. Specific sales promotions emerged as the most effective elements of the

promotional mix to draw consumers’ attention to their products and services, although the usage of short-term incentives and special offers is questionable, as it may not lead to sustainable and long lasting interest in the promoted products and services.

Considering the setting in which this study was conducted, the findings may be limited by a few key factors. First, the participants shared the same socio-cultural and geographical background; hence the results may be only applicable to this organization or geographic area. Second, the survey questionnaire was conducted over a span of four weeks, and representation may reflect only this period and the specific political and economic challenges at that point. Finally, due to the first authors’ affiliation with the HSC Sporting Club, there may have been initial biases that were hopefully eliminated in the editing process.

Several practical recommendations for sports marketers in Egypt emerged from this study while indicating new avenues for future research. For example, a new study could look into factors such as gender, age or income of the participants, as it may provide different insights and trends into sport consumers’ attitudes, loyalty, and even their adherence to exercise and usefulness of gym memberships. Overall, the results of this research survey strongly suggest the need for sports marketers to invest more time, efforts and resources in thoroughly analyzing their target and consumer markets, as well as brand management to tailor their promotional mix and marketing efforts. Lastly, based on the previously mentioned discount coupons idea, we suggest that the sports marketers use a new marketing strategy called: “3\*3” (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Egyptian Culturally Responsive Marketing Strategy

(1)	(2)	(3)
<p><b>Sports organization (name):</b></p> <p>1- 2- 3- 4- 5- 6- 7- 8- 9- 10-11- 12- 13- 14- 15- 16- 17-18- 19- 20- 21- 22- 23- 24- 25- 26- 27- 28- 29- 30- 31 (days)- (months:....) — (Years:)</p>	<p><b>Name of consumer...</b></p> <p>Number of memberships:</p> <p>.....</p>	<p><b>Names of local vendors and businesses:</b></p> <p>Discounts (20-30%)</p>

**Coupons 3\*3 idea based on El-Hawwar Sporting Club (HSC)**

**Discounts on Services and Programs:**

Consumers who attend the club 10 times per month will be rewarded with discounts up to 10%.

Consumers who attend the club 20 times per month will be rewarded with discounts up to 20%.

Consumers who attend the club 30 times per month will be rewarded with discounts up to 30%.

**Discounts on Membership Renewals:**

Upon the completion of 100 visits per month, consumers will be eligible to receive discounts on membership renewals.

**Discounts with Partnering Sponsors / Vendors:**

Upon a sponsor partnership agreement, local businesses and vendors offer special discounts and incentives on their products and services for club members on a monthly basis.

These discount incentives range between 20-30%.

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