

First time versus repeat triathlon participants at Ironman South Africa

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Abstract

Triathlon organisers and marketers must attempt to achieve a balance between first-time and repeat participants, but should be aware of the attributes that differentiate these participants. This study was carried out to segment participants of the Ironman South Africa event based on the frequency of participation and distinguish between first-time participants and repeat participants via an empirical analysis. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed during Ironman South Africa at the Boardwalk Convention Centre and Spa during the registration period (11 to 13 April 2013). A convenience sample was used to conduct the destination-based survey. Fieldworkers collected a total of 425 questionnaires and the analyses comprised two different stages: a factor analysis, and an analysis of differences based on the number of years participants at Ironman South Africa have previously participated in the event. The results showed significant differences between first-time and repeat triathletes competing in Ironman South Africa based on their demographic profile, behaviour and motives to participate. The key contributions of this research were: First, differentiation based on frequency of participation was found to be a useful segmentation tool. Second, the results revealed distinct attributes that have not previously been identified in previous research, especially with regard to the motives and behavioural patterns of participants. Third, four distinct clusters namely, the *Bronze, Silver, Gold* and *Platinum segments* were identified. Fourth, loyalty programme and cards was successfully applied for the first time as a retention tool for endurance sport participants. Fifth, this study also challenged existing sport theory. Lastly, the research contributes to existing sport literature, seeing that this is original research done in South Africa regarding triathlons and understanding the distinct characteristics of triathletes. These contributions emphasise that understanding endurance sport participants, in this case triathletes, will help to expand the sport in South Africa and contribute to making the country a premier endurance sport destination.

Keywords: Market segmentation, first-time triathletes, repeat triathletes, Ironman South Africa.

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Introduction

First time and repeat sport participants can form two different market segments for sport and destination marketers (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2012). Um, Chon and Ro (2006) define first time visitors (in this instance sport participants) as the “new” market and represents participants that compete in a sport event for the

first time. Therefore, repeat visitors are seen as the established consumer base that had already taken part in a specific sport event (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Um et al., 2006). According to Saayman and Kruger (2012) sport event organisers should attempt to achieve a balance between first time and repeat participants, but should be aware of the attributes that differentiate these participants. Marketers should firstly attract new participants through highlighting the attributes of the event to potential participants. Secondly, they need to continue the existing participant base by keeping them content with all aspects of the event in an efficient and effective manner (Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005). Hence, marketers should follow a two-pronged market segmentation approach, where both groups of participants are considered to ensure the sustainability of the sport event (Kruger, Saayman & Ellis, 2010).

If sport managers and marketers focus only on one group it could lead to a misinterpretation of the market and head to ineffective allocation of resources such as human capital, income and sponsorships (Jang & Feng, 2007). But, if sport managers and marketers understand both markets it will assist them with better direction and knowledge to adapt to a changing marketplace for sport events (Li, Chang, Kim & Petrick, 2008; Chiang, Wang & Chen, 2010). According to Harrison-Hill and Chalip (2005), understanding the consumer (in this case participants), their needs, wants and the benefits that they are continuously seeking from the product or service, (the participating in a sport event) will be the only way to adapt to the changing sport market. Despite calls for research, limited studies had been done on how first time participants differ from repeat participants at sport events (e.g. Filo, Funk & O'Brien, 2008; Wood, Snelgrove & Danylchuk, 2010). Correia, Oliveria and Butler (2008) also emphasise that research is needed for sport event organisers to distinguish between marketing strategies for first time participants and repeat participants, respectively.

Although a great deal of thought has been given to sport events in general, there is still a lack of research focusing on multi-discipline sport events comprising a variety of elements like the triathlon (Arnott, 2008). Triathlons are typically prearranged in one of three formats namely sprint, Olympic and ultra-distance. Ironman is currently the most popular type of ultra-distance triathlon in the United States (Frimmel, 2012). An Ironman triathlon is regarded as the world's most challenging multi-sport endurance event (Infront Sports & Media, 2013). Ironman is also seen as the number one user based sport brand and the most recognised triathlon and endurance series worldwide (Infront Sports & Media, 2013). In fact, according to Frimmel (2012) about 17% of all triathletes (approximately 23000 individuals) participate in Ironman races. According to USA Triathlon regulations, an Ironman triathlon must consist of a 3.8 kilometre swim, a 180 kilometre cycle and a 42.2 kilometre run. The race can take up to an

average of eight to 17 hours to finish (USA Triathlon, 2010). It is not surprising therefore, that Ironman triathletes need to be in top physical condition. However, the differentiating factor remains the mental preparation that these athletes undergo (Frimmel, 2012). Triathletes are some of the fittest and most committed athletes, dedicating a vast amount of time to training and health conscious lifestyles (Lovett, 2011). These endurance athletes must also alter their schedules for work, family and other social engagements in order to be prepared for a triathlon (Croft, Gray & Duncan, 2007). Race performance in a triathlon is also largely self-determined and relatively independent of the performance level of one's opponent (as for tennis) or one's team (as for football). This gives triathletes greater control over their performance and allows their personality to have a greater effect on their performance (Stoeber, Uphill & Hotham, 2009).

The aforementioned points emphasise the importance of defining first time and repeat triathletes as well as to distinguish them from other athletes on their unique mind-set to successfully undergo and complete extensive training and lifestyle changes. With all these in mind, the aim of this research is to segment participants of the Spec-savers Ironman South Africa (the only Ironman triathlon event on the African continent) (hereafter referred to as Ironman South Africa). The segmentation is based on the frequency of participation as this would differentiate first time and repeat participants.

Literature has confirmed that the typical average triathlete is a well-educated, affluent male in his mid-thirties (Case & Branch, 2001; Chang & Johnson 1995; Clingman & Hilliard, 1987; Tribe Group, 2009; Devine, Bolan & Bevine, 2010; Martin & Pancoska, 2010). Furthermore, the average number of years that athletes participate in triathlons is reported as 7.4 years (Case & Branch, 2001). When considering the average age of triathlon participants (namely 39 years), it is evident that athletes that compete in other endurance races are younger. Thus, a triathlon presents mature adults with the potential for longer-term participation (Tribe Group, 2009; Lovett, 2011). Then it is also important to take note of other studies' observations that endurance sport participants like triathletes, vary in their behaviour and motives to participate according to their age, level of competition and previous experience (Ogles, Masters & Richardson, 1995; Ogles & Masters, 2000, 2003; Lachausse, 2006). At present, triathletes are presented as a homogenous demographic group. This suggests that the potential exists for the extension into other demographics (Tribe Group, 2009). This can be achieved through concentrated marketing efforts and market segmentation to attract both first time and repeat triathlon participants (Tribe Group, 2009).

According to Wedel and Kamakura (2000:83), Dolnicar (2002:3) and Liu, Kiang and Brusco (2012:10293) market segmentation can be defined as "the process of defining and sub dividing a large homogenous market into clearly identifiable segments having similar needs, wants or demand characteristics. Its objective is

to design a marketing mix that precisely matches the expectations of customers in the targeted segment". Getz (1998) adds that there are different variables against which a market can be segmented including demographical, geographical, psychographic, socio-economic and behavioural features. Likewise, athletes' status as first time or repeat participants can be considered as a market segmentation variable for sport participant studies (Formica & Uysal, 1995; Lau & McKercher, 2004). Saayman and Kruger (2012) indicate that it is beneficial to use the frequency of participation as a market segmentation variable. The other benefits include firstly, that it is clear for repeat participants to be content with a sport event and form the backbone of the event (Getz, 1998; Li et al., 2008; Bouchet, Bodet, Bernache-Assolland & Kada, 2010). A second benefit is the cost-effectiveness of attracting an established market (Oppermann, 2000). Thirdly, it is evident that repeat participants demonstrate loyalty towards the event that they have participated in and will become ambassadors for the event if they are treated appropriately (Tang & Turco, 2001; Caneen, 2004). Lastly, repeat participants can also help to promote the event through verbal recommendations (Kotler, 1994; Dick & Basu, 1994; Schoemaker & Lewis, 1999).

Petrack (2004) argues that event organisers should not assume that repeat participants represent the desired market. First time participants are also a viable market. Firstly, they lead to event development. They also have a role in predicting the success of a campaign's marketing effort. Secondly, studying first time participants will bring about an understanding of their consumer behaviour, which can lead to increased market share that ensures a sustainable and profitable event (Anderson, Fornell & Lehmann, 1994; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Seabra, Abrantes & Lages, 2007; Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Lovett, 2011). Finally, event organisers and marketers should be familiar with the profile of first time participants as they can become committed participants. Subsequently, the committed participants could establish an increase in expenditure that will result in a greater economic impact of the event (Kuenzel & Yassim, 2007). Analysing first time participants will also help to provide insight into the motives that encourage participants to take part in a new event, in this case the triathlon (Lovett, 2011). Tribe Group (2009) reveal that the volume of new triathletes suggests that the sport's appeal is expanding and becoming attractive to a larger proportion of athletes. First time and repeat participants are thus significant segments to be investigated in more detail. Table 1 highlights the differences between first and repeat athletes at various sport events including triathlons.

Table 1: Differences between first time and repeat sport participants

Variables	Main findings	Author(s)
Demographic variables		
Age	Triathlon performance will weaken with age. However, experience form an important variable with regards to performance in sports and especially in vital events. First time triathlon athletes’s start their participation at an older age. In terms of the socio-demographic differences, first timers are younger compared to repeaters.	Villaroel and González-Parra (2011) Tribe Group (2009) Gitelson and Crompton (1984), Lau and McKercher (2004) and Li <i>et al.</i> (2008)
Gender	Male first-time triathletes outnumber female triathletes, were with repeat triathletes the margin is higher of males outnumbering the females.	Tribe Group (2009)
Level of income	The average household income for both first time and repeat triathletes is higher than the national average income. Repeat triathlon participants have higher household income in comparison with first time participants. The main factor determining the participation for both first time and repeat triathletes in an event is its proximity to athletes’ hometown.	Tribe Group (2009) Tribe Group (2009) Tribe Group (2009)
Behavioural variables		
Expenditure	Repeat triathlon participants whom are loyal to the event are more likely to maintain and grow their spending for and on the event. Repeat participants will remain receptive to essential products, but will take longer to purchase them. First time participants tend to spend more money for and on the event compared to repeaters.	Tribe Group (2009) Tribe Group (2009) Saayman and Kruger (2012)
Activities sought and behaviour	Repeat athletes visit more attractions in the event area. Both first time and repeat triathletes also show serious participation in other sports, especially outdoor sports.	Saayman and Kruger (2012) Tribe Group (2009)
Perceived risk	Based on previous performance, repeat athletes are more selective regarding the event route/track as it allows them to measure their level of fitness at that point in time. This assists them in selecting the events to participate in or not. Repeat participants have more concerns about safety than first time participants.	Arnott (2008) Tribe Group (2009)
Information sources	Websites and word of mouth are main information sources. Repeaters heard about the race through the television, magazines and run clubs. Both first time and repeat triathletes have high level of interest in magazines related to triathlons and sports in general. Repeat participants tend to more frequently access and browse triathlon-related websites.	Saayman and Kruger (2012) Tribe Group (2009) Tribe Group (2009)
Intention to revisit and satisfaction	First time athletes indicated uncertainty towards returning to the same event again. Overall satisfaction of the event was significantly related to participation history	Saayman and Kruger (2012) Taylor and Shanka (2008)

<i>Level of experience</i>	Repeat participants had higher mean scores than first time participants for their intention to attend similar events in the next year.	Kaplanidou and Gibson (2012)
	The previous experience of repeat participants as well as their knowledge of what to expect prove to be their sources of confidence and mental preparedness.	Frimmel (2012)
	Adult swimming athletes were significantly affected by their past experience at swimming events and the number of swim competitions they participate in a year.	Hastings, Kurth, Schloder and Cyr (1995); Hritz and Ramos (2008)
<i>Other</i>	Repeat participants take part in the most challenging triathlon events, thus as their experience grows, their desire to participate progressively more.	Tribe Group (2009)
	Repeat participants are more likely to use a coach regularly.	Tribe Group (2009)
	Repeat triathletes are in better shape (concerning weight) than first time participants.	Tribe Group (2009)
Motives to participate		
<i>Travel motives</i>	Having fun, being physically fit, making friends and seeking achievement are important motives for participation in swimming events, but they change over time or are dependent on age, gender, ability and skill level.	Kruger, Saayman and Ellis (2011)
	Intrinsic achievement and escape and relaxation were the most important motives to participate for both first time and repeat marathon runners.	Saayman and Kruger (2012)
	First time charity sport participants were motivated by achievement, while repeat participants were motivated by involvement, status and socialisation.	Taylor and Shanka (2008)
	First time triathletes had lower weight concern scores than triathletes which had completed one to five sprint triathlons.	Lovett (2011)
	Older runners had greater weight concerns and general health orientation motives than their younger counterparts.	Ogles and Masters (2000)
	Triathletes participating in their first triathlon had lower competition scores than those triathletes who had competed in more than six sprint triathlons.	Lovett (2011)
	Athletes participating in their first triathlon had lower personal goal achievement scores than those who participated in one to five triathlons.	Lovett (2011)

It is clear from Table 1 that significant differences exist between the first time and repeat participants as two separate market segments. Sport event organisers and marketers must therefore develop different programmes to focus specifically on the two market segments. It is evident that each sport event is unique as well as the type of participants it attracts. Hence, one cannot assume that these two sport participant segments are homogenous in terms of their profiles, motives, preferences and behaviour (Kruger, Saayman & Hermann, 2012). This emphasises the importance of understanding the profiles, needs, behaviour and

preferences of first time and repeat participants especially at a multi-disciplinary event such as Ironman South Africa. Currently, only one previous study (Saayman & Kruger, 2012) was found in the literature which focussed on the differences between first time and repeat marathon runners in South Africa.

The benefits of such research for event marketers and organisers that operate within the triathlon industry (Tribe Group, 2009) include:

- Better understanding of triathletes in the sport market (Lovett, 2011);
- When triathletes' (first time and repeat) needs are met, triathlon event organisers and marketers are able to create an increase in the demand for their product or services (the event itself) leading to an increased market share (Hawkins, Mothersbaugh & Best, 2007);
- Incorporating research findings into Ironman South Africa's advertising and promotional activities can increase efficiency (Lovett, 2011); create more specific market segments (Lovett, 2011; Saayman & Kruger, 2012); contribute to an overall increase in participation in triathlon events through effective marketing messages (Lovett, 2011) and lastly help create specific marketing programmes that meet specific sport event market needs (Vogt, Stewart & Fesenmaier, 1998; Wang, 2004; Regan; Carlso & Rosenberger, 2009);
- The appropriate management and marketing of both first time and repeat participants (as a combined market) would ultimately contribute to greater sustainability of the Ironman South Africa event (Gill & Williams, 2008; Kruger, Botha & Saayman, 2012);
- Doherty and Murray (2007) add that attracting both first time and repeat participants will help the event to attract sponsorship which is vital for sport organisations, due to decline of public funding. The Independent Evaluation group (IEG) highlights the importance of sponsorships in its statement that more than two-thirds of sponsorships worldwide be directed to sport (cited in Doherty & Murray, 2008), but due to increased competition in sport sponsorships, corporate sponsorship turn out to be more occasional (Taylor & Shanka, 2008).

With these benefits in mind and due to the dearth of research in South Africa regarding first time and repeat triathletes, the study will contribute to sport literature in South Africa, especially with regard to triathlons.

Methodology

A quantitative approach was applied to collect data through the distribution and collection of a structured questionnaire.

Focus of study

The Ironman South Africa triathlon is Africa's premier ultimate one-day endurance race event. This is a multi-discipline event integrating a 3.8km swim, followed by a 180km cycle and lastly a 42.2km run (Ironman South Africa, 2013). Ironman South Africa attracts approximately 2000 triathletes from 50 nationalities to Nelson Mandela Bay, Port Elizabeth each year (Ironman South Africa, 2013). The 2013 Ironman triathlon, which was the 9th Ironman event in South Africa, attracted nearly 50 professional competing athletes and 426 registered international participating athletes (Ironman South Africa, 2013).

The questionnaire design

For the purpose of the specific event and research objectives, the questionnaire used to survey the participants at Ironman South Africa, 2013 was adapted from the works of Streicher and Saayman (2010), Kruger, Saayman and Ellis (2011), Lamont and Kennelly (2012), Lovett (2011), McCarville (2007), Smith (2010) and Wicker et al. (2012). The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A captured demographic details (gender, home language, age, gross annual income, home province, country of origin, level of education, marital status, mode of transport) and spending behaviour (number of people in travelling group, number of participants/spectators paid for and expenditure). Section B depicted motivational factors, measuring 24 items on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = not at all important; 2 = slightly important; 3 = important; 4 = very important; 5 = extremely important. Section B also gathered information specific to participants' behaviour before and during the event (entry details, previous participation in Ironman South Africa or internationally, number of sport events participated in annually, primary category, age when first exposed to the event, person who exposed them to the sport, other sporting events previously competed in, upcoming sport events to be participated in 2013, initiator of participation, and information sources used to be updated and notified on the event).

Survey procedure

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed at the Boardwalk Convention Centre and Spa throughout the registration period (11 to 13 April 2013). A destination-based survey was implemented. Seven field workers were trained to

ensure that they understood the aim of the study as well as the questionnaire content and design. The field workers were grouped in pairs and each group had to work a two-hour shift each of the three days of data collection. The field workers approached participants from different genders, ages and nationalities to ensure a representative sample. This was done after participants have registered for the event in order to brief them on the purpose of the survey. This was done to ensure that the registered event participants contribute willingly to the survey.

Sampling method

Data were collected from a convenience sample to which 450 questionnaires were distributed over a period of three days. The 2012 participation statistics were used to determine the estimated population size (N). Approximately 1 744 triathletes participated in the 2012 Ironman South Africa event (Ironman South Africa, 2013). Applying Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula a total sample of 313 respondents was recruited from a population of 1 744 triathletes. To address concerns of inaccurate and half completed questionnaires, the sample size was enlarged to 450 questionnaires. Overall field workers gathered a total of 425 fully completed questionnaires which represents more than the targeted sample of 313.

Statistical analysis

Microsoft Excel was used for data capturing while SPSS (SPSS Inc, 2013) was utilised to analyse the data. The analysis comprised two different stages, namely a factor analysis and the analysis of differences based on the number of years athletes have participated in Ironman South Africa.

First, a principal axis factor analysis, using an Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalisation was performed on the 24 motivation items to explain the variance-covariance structure of a set of variables through a few linear combinations of these variables. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was used to determine whether the covariance matrix was suitable for factor analysis. Kaiser's criteria for the extraction of all factors with eigen values larger than one used because they were considered to explain a significant amount of variation in the data. All items with a factor loading greater than 0.3 were considered as contributing to a factor, and all items with loadings less than 0.3 as not correlating significantly with this factor (Steyn, 2000). Any item that cross-loaded on two factors with both loadings greater than 0.3, was categorised as relating to the factor with best interpretation. A reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was computed for each factor to estimate its internal consistency. All factors with a reliability coefficient above 0.6 were considered as acceptable. The average inter-item correlations were also computed as

another measure of reliability; these according to Clark and Watson (1995) should lie between 0.15 and 0.55.

Secondly, participants were analysed based on the number of years of participation in Ironman South Africa. Two-way frequency tables and Chi-square tests as well as analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Tukey's multiple comparison test were employed to investigate any significant differences between first-time and repeat participants. The study applied demographic and behavioural variables as well as motivational factors to examine whether statistically significant differences existed among the different groups. Effect sizes were used to further identify any significant differences between the participant groups. The purpose of effect size was to establish whether any differences existed between first time and repeat participants. Furthermore, it determined in which combination the averages of the socio-demographic and behavioural variables had the smallest or largest effect. Cohen (1988) as well as Ellis and Steyn (2003) offer the following guidelines for the interpretation of the effect sizes namely small effect: $d = 0.2$, medium effect: $d = 0.5$ and large effect: $d = 0.8$.

Results

Factor analysis

The pattern matrix of the principal axis factor analysis using an Oblimin rotation with Kaiser Normalization identified seven factors (motives) for participation. These factors accounted for 67% of the total variance. All the factors had high reliability coefficients, ranging from 0.68 (the lowest) to 0.89 (the highest). The average inter-item correlation coefficients with values between 0.35 and 0.80 also implied internal consistency for all factors. Moreover, all items loaded on a factor with a loading greater than 0.3. The relatively high factor loadings indicated a reasonably high correlation between the factors and their component items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measures of sampling adequacy of 0.87 also indicated that patterns of correlation were relatively compact and yielded distinct and reliable factors (Field, 2005). Bartlett's test of sphericity also reached statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix (Pallant, 2007).

The motives to participate in Ironman South Africa were identified as *Challenge* with the highest mean value (4.10) (competing is a personal challenge; to test my skills against nature, others and myself; it is a major challenge; because it is stimulating and exciting). The second highest score was for *Inner vie* (3.80) (to push myself; to improve my time and speed; to compete with myself or with others). *Health and fitness* (3.77) ranked three out of seven motives (to improve

my health; to improve my fitness) followed by *Intrinsic achievement and control* (3.63) (to feel proud of myself and have a sense of achievement, to improve my self-esteem, to mentally control my body). *Event novelty* scored 3.57 (I do it annually, it is an international event, because the event is well organised, Ironman tests my level of fitness and endurance; for the adventure of it) followed by *Group affiliation and socialisation* with a mean score of 3.02 (to share group identity with other triathletes; to socialise with others). The lowest mean value was for *Respect and risk* (2.71) (to earn respect from peers, because of the risk involved, to make friends and family proud of me, to escape).

First time versus repeat participants at the Ironman South Africa

As is evident from the literature review, one can divide participants at a sport event into different segments based on different variables. Loyalty programmes are widely used in the tourism and hospitality industry as well as airlines and car hire agencies to help them to learn specific details about their target market's buying patterns and behaviour (Gillies, Kitimura & Yokota-Landou, 2005). The frequent flyer programme is a good example of an incentive programme operated by an airline to reward customers for their sustained loyalty and convince them to become lifetime customers (Canster, 2013). Airlines use different colour cards (bronze, silver, gold and platinum) to indicate distinct benefits for the different card holders (Canstar, 2013). The cards also have a hierarchy where customers can receive a different colour card if they are more involved (fly more), thus the higher the level of loyalty card the more benefits will be presented to the card holder (Canstar, 2013). This strategy can also be applied to the sport market, specifically for the Ironman South Africa event. In this study, four segments were identified based on the number of times athletes have previously participated in the Ironman South Africa event. Then, applying the frequent flyer concept, the four participant segments were divided in different loyalty segments. Firstly, the *Bronze segment* (see Table 2 below) represents first time triathletes that have not participated in any Ironman South Africa event previously. This group consisted of the second highest number of participants (107 triathletes). The second segment is the *Silver Segment* made up of 28% of all the triathletes. These triathletes reported repeating their involvement and have participated in one Ironman South Africa event previously. The third group is the *Gold segment*, which were represented by triathletes that have previously participated in two or three Ironman South Africa events. Most of the triathletes that participated in the 2013 Ironman South Africa were in this segment (120 triathletes, 35%). The fourth segment is the *Platinum segment* and triathletes in this group have previously participated in at least four or more Ironman South Africa events. This segment represented the lowest number of triathletes (N=59), which was 17% of the sample.

Table 2: Segmentation of triathletes at Ironman South Africa based on frequency of participation

Number of times participated	Count	Percent
0 (Bronze segment)	107	31%
Once before (Silver segment)	95	28%
2-3 times (Gold segment)	120	35%
4+ (Platinum segment)	59	17%

Results of ANOVA and Tukey's post hoc multiple comparisons

A series of ANOVA were applied to determine the differences between first time and repeat participants at the 2013 Ironman South Africa and based on socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics as well as motivational factors. As shown in Table 3, there are statistically significant differences between the four segments based on age ($p<0.001$), nights spent at destination ($p<0.035$), number of times participated in Ironman South Africa ($p<0.001$) number of times in which Ironman South Africa was completed ($p<0.001$) and Event novelty ($p<0.001$) as motives to participate in the event.

Table 3: Results of ANOVA and Tukey's post hoc multiple comparisons for participant characteristics between first timers and repeaters

Characteristics	Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 3		Cluster 4		F-ratio	Sig. level	Effect sizes**			
	Bronze segment (n=107)	Silver segment (n=95)	Gold segment (n=120)	Platinum segment (n=49)	Cluster 1 and 2	Cluster 1 and 3	Cluster 1 and 4	Cluster 2 and 3			Cluster 2 and 4	Cluster 3 and 4		
Age	36.91 ^a	38.91 ^a	40.37 ^b	44.43	9.540	0.001*	0.21**	0.39**	0.89****	0.15	0.57****	0.46**		
Group size	2.55	2.69	2.76	3.09	0.831	0.478	0.07	0.09	0.24**	0.03	0.17	0.14		
Number of people paid for (participants)	1.17	1.16	1.23	1.41	1.378	0.249	0.01	0.08	0.24**	0.10	0.24**	0.17		
Nights in area	5.35 ^a	5.69 ^a	4.43 ^b	5.25 ^a	2.896	0.035*	0.10	0.33**	0.04	0.39**	0.13	0.30**		
Total spending	R31325.28	R17797.47	R20409.52	R17526.27	1.590	0.192	0.16	0.13	0.16	0.12	0.01	0.13		
Spending per person (paid for participants)	R22620.80	R16814.86	R16414.23	R15375.74	1.745	0.158	0.17	0.18	0.21**	0.02	0.08	0.07		
Times participated	0.00 ^a	1.00 ^b	2.36 ^c	5.93 ^d	0.716	0.001*	-	4.89****	2.98****	2.82****	2.48****	1.79****		
Times finished	0.00 ^a	0.60 ^b	1.85 ^c	5.39 ^d	471.062	0.001*	1.17****	2.24****	3.05****	1.54****	2.72****	2.01****		
Times Internationally finished	1.33	2.40	1.14	1.49	0.741	0.21**	0.21**	0.06	0.05	0.24**	0.18	0.11		
Triathlon events per year	4.06	5.50	5.43	3.71	1.185	0.316	0.17	0.13	0.11	0.01	0.21**	0.16		
Cycling events per year	3.07	3.44	3.87	3.25	0.416	0.742	0.06	0.18	0.05	0.07	0.03	0.14		
Running events per year	5.46	6.15	7.44	5.94	0.892	0.446	0.09	0.22**	0.06	0.14	0.03	0.17		
Swimming events per year	0.93	1.13	1.05	1.29	0.551	0.648	0.10	0.07	0.21**	0.04	0.08	0.14		
Age first exposed to triathlons	29.85	30.39	31.25	33.41	1.838	0.140	0.05	0.14	0.35**	0.09	0.29**	0.21**		
Motives														
Event novelty	3.27 ^a	3.58 ^b	3.70 ^b	3.99 ^{b,c}	9.966	0.001*	0.33**	0.53****	0.87****	0.13	0.44**	0.35**		
Respect and risk	2.69	2.76	2.61	2.77	0.397	0.755	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.14	0.01	0.16		
Inner life	3.71	3.81	3.81	3.93	0.974	0.405	0.13	0.13	0.25**	0.00	0.13	0.13		
Intrinsic achievement and control	3.60	3.62	3.65	3.75	0.327	0.806	0.02	0.05	0.15	0.03	0.14	0.11		
Group affiliation and socialisation	2.89	3.02	3.07	3.08	0.581	0.628	0.12	0.16	0.17	0.05	0.06	0.00		
Health and fitness	3.59	3.80	3.88	3.91	2.022	0.111	0.22**	0.29**	0.32**	0.08	0.11	0.03		
Challenge	4.11	4.16	4.10	4.13	0.163	0.922	0.07	0.02	0.03	0.10	0.05	0.04		

°Expenditure per person, calculated through the sum of the respondents' spending on the various components and dividing the total by the number of people for whom respondents (participants and spectators) indicated they were financially responsible.

* Statistically significant difference: $p \leq 0.05$

^a Group differs significantly from type (in row) where ^{b,c} is indicated.

Effect sizes: small effect: ** $d=0.2$, (b) medium effect: *** $d=0.5$ and (c) large effect: **** $d=0.8$

- **Age:** Considering age, there were significant differences between all four of the frequency segments. The *bronze segment* differed statistically from the

silver, gold and platinum segment. To the same extent the *silver segment* differed from the *platinum segments*, but not from the *gold segment*. There were also significant differences between triathletes from the *gold segment* and *platinum segment* according to age. *Bronze Ironman* triathletes were the youngest with an average age of 36.91 years, while the *platinum segment* represented the oldest athletes with an average age of 44.43 years, much older than the *bronze segment* participants. The *silver* and *gold segments* had similar ages namely 38.91 and 40.37 years respectively.

- **Group size:** There were no statistically significant differences between the different triathlete groups based on group size, although effect sizes showed a small difference in group size of *bronze segment* participants when compared to *platinum segment* participants. It is evident from the results that *platinum segment* triathletes travelled with more people (an average of 3.09) than *bronze segment* participants (an average of 2.55 people).
- **Number of participants paid for:** There were no statistical differences in the number of people paid for in the different triathlete segments. However effect sizes showed that there were small differences between the *bronze segment* and *silver segment* that paid for an average of 1.17 and 1.16 participants respectively compared to the *platinum segment* that paid for an average of 1.41 participants.
- **Length of stay:** Results showed that statistically significant differences existed between the different triathlete segments. According to the effect sizes, there were small differences between the *gold, bronze* and *silver segment* participants. Small differences were evident between triathletes from the *silver* and the *platinum segment*. With regards to participants visiting the Port Elizabeth area, the *silver segment* triathletes stayed most nights (5.69 nights), followed by the *bronze segment* triathletes (5.53 nights), while the *gold segment* stayed for the shortest period of time with an average of 4.43 nights.
- **Expenditure in total:** Although no significant differences were evident, the different triathlete groups exceeded the average expenditure as it ranged from R31 325 (*bronze segment*) to R17 526 (*platinum segment*). It is thus clear that the *bronze segment* had spent the largest amount of money during the Ironman South Africa event in 2013, followed by the *gold, silver* and lastly, the *platinum segment*.
- **Expenditure per person:** No significant differences were found for expenditure per person, although effect sizes confirmed a small difference between the *bronze* and the *platinum segments*. The average spending per

participant proved to be very high. Results confirmed that the *bronze segment* participants showed the highest spending average (R22620.80), followed by the *silver segment* (R16814.86) and then the *gold segment* (R16414.23). The *platinum segment* triathletes had the lowest average on expenditure per person (R15375.74).

- **Previous times participated in Ironman South Africa:** Significant differences ($p=0.001$) were found in the number of times participants took part in Ironman South Africa. Effect sizes proved noteworthy differences between all four of the participant groups. On average the *platinum segment* participants had previously competed in an average of 5.93 races, followed by the *gold segment* triathletes with an average of 2.36 former events. The *silver segment* participants had competed in only one preceding race while the *bronze segment* participants had no history of participation in a race, thus 2013 Ironman was their first Ironman event.
- **Ironman South Africa, previous times finished:** Both statistical ($p=0.001$) and effect sizes confirmed significant differences between the various triathlete groups for the number of times participants finished an Ironman South Africa race. The *platinum segment* triathletes completed the most number of races with an average of 5.39 times and differed radically from all the three other groups. The *gold segment* finished on average 1.85 races followed by the *silver segment* that completed the race 0.60 times (the average proved less than one race, as not all triathletes from the *silver segment* could finish their first Ironman South African race). The 2013 event was the first Ironman South Africa triathlon for the *bronze segment*.
- **Ironman International previous times finished:** There were no significant differences for the number of times triathletes had finished International Ironman triathlons. However, effect sizes showed small differences between the *bronze* (1.33 times) and *silver* (2.40 times) segments. The *silver segment* triathletes finished the most international Ironman events, more than the *gold* (1.14 times) and the *platinum* (1.49 times) segment triathletes.
- **Number of triathlon events per year:** The four triathlete groups participated on average in at least three triathlon events. The *silver segment* participated in the most triathlon events (an average of 5.50) per year, followed by the *gold segment* (on average 5.43), the *bronze segment* (4.06) and then the *platinum segment* with the least triathlon event participation in 2013.

- **Number of cycling events per year:** There were no significant differences between the triathlete groups, although on average the triathletes participated in three cycling events throughout the year. The *gold segment* participated in the most cycling events with an average of 3.87 races.
- **Number of running events per year:** All four triathlete groups reported to have participated mostly in running events compared to the other two disciplines a triathlon includes. On average the triathletes competed in at least five running events per year. In addition, effect sizes confirmed a small difference between the *bronze segment* and *gold segments*. Moreover, the *bronze segment* competed in cycling events (average 5.46) and the *gold segment* participated in roughly two more running events (7.44).
- **Number of swimming events per year:** No triathlete group participated in many swimming galas through out the year (on average one gala per year). There were also no significant differences, but effect sizes reported a small difference between the *bronze* and *platinum segments*. The *bronze segment* had an average partaking in at least 0.93 galas while the maximum participation involved the *platinum segment* (1.29 swimming galas per year).
- **Motives to participate:** Only one motive yielded significant differences between the participant groups, namely *event novelty*. The *bronze segment* differed significantly from the *silver*, *gold* and *platinum segments*, while the *platinum segment* also differed from the *silver* and *gold segments*. Event novelty was a very important motive for the *platinum segment* triathletes (3.99) and less important for triathletes from the *bronze segment* (3.27). The other six motives showed no statistically significant differences between the four participant groups. However, based on effect sizes, small differences were found regarding *Inner Vie* where *platinum segment* triathletes regarded it as a more important motive (3.93) compared to triathletes from the *bronze segment* (3.71). *Health and fitness* also illustrated minor effect size differences. The *bronze segment* differed from the other triathlete segments and viewed *health and fitness* (3.59) as a less important motive for partaking in Ironman South Africa. Investigation of the mean values and the results obtained from the factor analysis showed that all four segments considered *Challenge* as the most important motive to participate in Ironman South Africa. Triathletes from the *bronze segment* indicated *Inner Vie* and *Intrinsic achievement and control* as the most important motives to participate in Ironman South Africa, while the *silver*, *gold* and *platinum segments* considered *Inner Vie* and *Health and Fitness* to be more important motives for participation in the event.

Chi-square test results

Table 4 presents statistically significant differences between *bronze*, *silver* *gold* and *platinum segments* at Ironman South Africa 2013 based on home language ($p=0.031$), province ($p=0.001$), marital status ($p=0.037$), primarily being a runner ($p=0.006$), other tourist attractions visited ($p=0.001$), the web as an information source ($p= 0.012$) and club ($p=0.037$). These differences are discussed below.

- **Gender:** In all four triathlete groups the male participants were more than the female participants, especially in the *platinum segment* (Male=92%; Female=8%)
- **Home language:** All four participant groups were mostly English speaking, although a large percentage of the *bronze* (18%) and *silver segments* (18%) spoke foreign languages. Most triathletes from the *platinum segment* (36%) spoke Afrikaans.
- **Province of origin:** The majority of the *bronze segment* triathletes (37%) were foreign, while the *silver* (42%) and *gold segments* (39%) came from the Gauteng province. Most triathletes from the *platinum segment* originated from the Western Cape (31%) and Gauteng (35%). In all four the triathlete groups there were substantial percentages of overseas participants. However, a variety of participants from across the country participated in Ironman South Africa 2013.
- **Marital status:** Most triathletes from all the groups were married, while it is evident that the *bronze* (26%) and the *silver* (21%) *segments* showed a notable percentage of single triathletes. The *platinum segment* had the most divorced triathletes (9%).
- **Level of education:** All four groups had a high level of education and were mostly in professional occupations or held a diploma, degree or post-graduate qualification. All respondents had a matric certificate.
- **Primary discipline:** All four participant groups indicated that they were not primarily swimmers, although the triathletes from the *bronze segment* indicated that they were uncertain which discipline represented their best performance activity. The *silver* and *gold* groups indicated that they were mostly cyclists (58% and 49%, respectively) and runners (54% and 57%, respectively). More than half of the triathletes in the *platinum segment* (58%)

confirmed that their vast experience in triathlons prepared them to be first and foremost runners.

- **Age categories of participants:** The age categories mostly represented in the *bronze segment* were 30 to 34 years, 35-39 years and 40-44 years. (26%=30-34; 15%=35-39 and 19%=40-44). Triathletes in the *silver segment* mostly entered for the age groups of 30 to 49 years (20%=30-34; 18%=35-39; 14%=40-44 and 13%=45-49), while most of the triathletes in the *gold segment* entered for the age groups 25 to 44 years (11%=25-29; 12%=30-34; 21%=35-39 and 18%=40-44). The triathletes from the *platinum segment* represented most of the age groups (14%=30-34; 12%=35-39; 20%=40-44; 22%=45-49; 7%=50-54 and 7%=55-59). The most professional triathletes were part of the *bronze* and *silver segments* (2% and 3%, respectively).
- **Other tourist attractions visited:** It is evident that the *bronze* and *silver segments* were more likely to visit tourist attractions (50% and 40%, respectively). This corresponded with the fact that a great proportion of athletes from the two groups were foreign visitors. On the other hand, the *gold* and *platinum segments* were nationals and thus were less likely to visit tourist attractions.
- **Information sources:** The majority of triathletes from all four participant groups heard about Ironman South Africa through verbal recommendations. Significantly more *bronze* and *silver segment* participants heard about the event through websites (29% and 26%, respectively) and information gained from affiliated triathlon clubs (12% and 9%, respectively). Magazines and television proved to be more popular information sources for triathletes from all four segments, while radio and email were not important information sources for these groups.

Table 4: Chi-square test results of visitor characteristics between first time and repeat participants

CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION				CHI SQUARE VALUE	DF	SIG. LEVEL	PHI-VALUE
	0: Bronze segment	1: Silver segment	2: Gold segment	3: Platinum segment				
Gender					6,020	3	0.111	0.132
Male	78%	78%	77%	92%				
Female	22%	22%	23%	8%				
Home language					13,901	6	0.031*	0.201
Afrikaans	27%	25%	27%	36%				
English	55%	57%	63%	65%				
Other (foreign)	18%	18%	11%	0%				
Province					54,193	27	0.001*	0.403
Eastern Cape	13%	15%	14%	10%				
Gauteng	33%	42%	39%	35%				
Kwazulu-Natal	3%	5%	4%	5%				
Free State	2%	1%	0%	5%				
Western Cape	10%	5%	13%	31%				
Mpumalanga	0%	1%	4%	0%				
Northern Cape	0%	1%	0%	0%				
North West	2%	1%	1%	0%				
Limpopo	0%	0%	3%	3%				
Outside RSA borders	37%	27%	22%	10%				
Marital status					26,105	15	0.037*	0.275
Married	51%	64%	49%	66%				
Not married	26%	21%	23%	17%				
In a relationship	15%	6%	15%	3%				
Divorced	8%	6%	6%	9%				
Widow/er	0%	1%	0%	2%				
Living together	0%	1%	7%	3%				
Level of education					7,697	12	0.808	0.150
No school	-	-	-	-				
Matric	11%	5%	13%	14%				
Diploma/degree	37%	41%	36%	29%				
Post-graduate	20%	26%	24%	24%				
Professional	31%	27%	27%	32%				
Other	9%	1%	0%	2%				
Primarily a:					2,836	3	0.418	0.91
Swimmer	Yes=24%,No=76%	Yes=21%,No=79%	Yes=14%,No=86%	Yes=20%,No=80%	2,836	3	0.418	0.91
Cyclist	Yes=44%,No=56%	Yes=59%,No=42%	Yes=49%,No=51%	Yes=37%,No=63%	2,686	3	0.443	0.88
Runner	Yes=36%,No=64%	Yes=54%,No=46%	Yes=57%,No=43%	Yes=58%,No=42%	12,283	3	0.006*	0.189

Discussion

The research presented clear and significant differences between first time and repeat triathletes competing in the Ironman South Africa event in terms of their demographic profile, behaviour and participation motives. This supports the notion by Saayman and Kruger (2012) that sport participants cannot be regarded as a homogenous target group. Furthermore, the results confirmed that most differences were based on triathletes' discrepant behavioural patterns.

The research also included results that are not available in current sport literature, namely that according to *group size*, it is evident that repeat participants travel in larger groups than first time participants. The rationale could possibly be that repeat participants are mostly locals and who are familiar with attractions. This could also be the basis for repeat participants incurring lower *expenditure* compared to first time participants who are mostly foreigners (Saayman & Kruger, 2012). However, this study showed that repeat participants do not visit *tourist attractions* in the event area which contradicts the findings of Saayman and Kruger (2012). An interesting result was that first time participants were *exposed* to triathlons at an earlier age (average age of 28.95 years) which contradicts the results of Tribe Group (2009) which found that triathletes started their participation at an older age. Results also showed that first time participants used websites, verbal recommendations and club affiliation as *information sources*, while repeat participants relied on verbal recommendations, magazines and television advertisements. These findings are consistent with those of Tribe Group (2009) as well as Saayman and Kruger (2012), although the influence of club affiliation as a marketing medium was not previously surveyed in sport participant research. The high reliance on verbal recommendations can be associated with the participants' club affiliation. Consequently, triathletes that form part of a club inform and encourage each other to participate in triathlons. *Event novelty* was identified as a unique motive in this research. In addition, results confirmed that first time participants were mostly motivated by *challenge*, *inner vie* and *intrinsic achievement and control*, whereas repeat participants viewed *event novelty*, *challenge*, *inner vie* and *health and fitness* as the most important motives to participate in Ironman South Africa consistent with previous research (Ogles & Masters, 2003; Lovett; 2011; Saayman & Kruger, 2012). In terms of socio-demographic variables, two aspects showed significant differences namely *age* and *gender*. First time participants were younger (30-34 years) compared to repeat participants (45-49 years) which corresponds with results of Gitelson and Crompton (1984), Lau and McKercher (2004) and Li et al. (2008). Both groups were mostly comprised of male participants although there were less female repeat participants than first time female participants. This corroborates with previous findings (Case &

Branch, 2001; Chang & Johnson, 1995; Clingman & Hilliard, 1987; Tribe Group, 2009; Devine et al., 2010; Martin & Pancoska, 2010).

Another important finding was the identification of four distinct segments namely *Bronze*, *Silver*, *Gold* and *Platinum* participants. The identification of such segments has not been done in previous studies. It is important that event organisers realise that both first time and repeat triathletes are viable markets and should be targeted through a variety of marketing strategies (Harisson-Hill & Chalip, 2006, Saayman & Kruger, 2012; Kruger et al., 2010). Marketers should consider loyalty programmes where each triathlete is classified in a group according to his/her past participation experience. For example, first time participants receive a bronze card that gives them certain benefits and distinguishes them from other triathletes. Thus, the more an athlete participates in triathlon events, the quicker he/she can advance to another level (colour) presenting them with additional benefits. Therefore, the first two segments (*bronze* and *silver*) could be combined as they share similar characteristics and form the first time participant category. The *gold* and *platinum segments* may also be merged to form the repeat participant category. Based on the present results, event organisers could follow a three-fold marketing strategy, with the first two strategies based on the event itself (that is attracting both first time and repeat participants). A third marketing strategy should aim to increase participation in triathlons in South Africa and promote the sport in general.

The first marketing strategy should be created for the *Bronze segment* as well as the *Silver segment*. The marketing message should focus on participants' motives to participate, but especially on *challenge*, *intrinsic achievement and control* and *inner vie*. Since the triathletes have just started participating in Ironman South Africa, it is important for them to experience a sense of achievement, push themselves to further achievement, improve their self-esteem and challenge their body and mind. These marketing messages should firstly be distributed at international Ironman events, but also to international triathlons to attract more athletes. As this segment had the highest spending, but travelled in smaller groups, they must be encouraged to increase their expenditure and travel in larger groups. The Ironman Expo is an ideal event to increase expenditure as it exposes first time triathletes (who are not yet professional triathletes) to the top of the range triathlon equipment and products. Therefore, more marketing emphasis should be placed on the expo and the variety of products on offer. Tourism organisations in the area could also collaborate with sport event organisers to create packages that allow the triathletes to visit main attractions in the area as most of the participants are international guests and this strategy could promote a longer stay and greater spending by triathletes visiting the country.

The second marketing strategy should be created for the *gold* and *platinum* segments. These are the loyal participants at Ironman South Africa and therefore need to be encouraged to return to the event each year. For these participants *event novelty* is a very important motive to participate, thus the event itself is an important attraction. These participants take part in Ironman South Africa each year and therefore the way in which it is organised has an important effect on the athletes' decision making process. Thus, the event must improve and offer something unique each year. Ironman South Africa's marketing messages must highlight the uniqueness of the event. This could include the international nature of the event, the scenic surroundings (such as the event being surrounded by the ocean and mountains making it aesthetically pleasing while participating in the event), that the premier endurance factor will make the continuous participation a challenging and rewarding experience. Noting that experience influences the type of event and number of events triathletes choose to participate in, marketing messages should be distributed at other sporting events. Triathletes should be informed that experience and age can contribute to better performance and drive. The repeat triathletes travel in larger groups, but spend less money during the event; thus marketers should develop packages that involve the whole group (spouse, children and friends) as it will increase expenditure and influence participants to return to the event each year. Marketing messages should also be channelled to other provinces in South Africa to expand participation from all the provinces.

The third marketing strategy should focus on expanding the Ironman brand in South Africa as there are only a limited number of triathlons hosted in the country. The main goal of sport organisers should be to make triathlons accessible to all people of South Africa irrespective of ability, gender, race or geographic location. Furthermore, it should be marketed as a recreation and professional performance event. The message to convey should be that completing an Ironman event is the ultimate endurance challenge. Marketing should be channelled to all the provinces, at sport clubs, schools and even at sport equipment manufacturing companies. Furthermore it is important that marketing messages should emphasise the benefits of entering the competition from a young age, enabling the participant to be part of this event for many years. Marketing messages should be targeted to engaging athletes from all ages. Furthermore, South Africa has the ideal climate, terrain and infrastructure to present a world class destination for endurance sport and the Ironman brand could therefore be extended to other coastal cities. This could increase the number of Ironman and half-Ironman events in South Africa each year. Non-coastal triathlons such as 5150 Bela-Bela triathlon, North West triathlon championships and Ekurhuleni 5051 African Championships should also be marketed as the ideal preparation for the Ironman event. Ironman South Africa should also collaborate with other cycling, running and swimming events in

order to motivate participants in those events that they provide excellent preparation that will lead to a peak performance during the Ironman event.

Finally, the results of this survey contradicts Frimmel's theory (2012) that past experience influences a participant's knowledge of an event and therefore better prepare the participant for the next event. The results of this research also opposes the theories of Tribe Group (2009) and Villaroel and Conzález (2011) in which it was concluded that a participant with more experience in a sport event will show an increased desire to continue participation in the future. Results showed that first time participants did not take part often in the individual discipline events (swimming, running and cycling) that comprise a triathlon. First time participants seemed to be in the peak of their triathlon experience, thus they focus less on participating in individual endurance sports, but rather on a large number of triathlon events to advance as a triathlete. First time triathletes see all three disciplines as important and do not prefer one discipline over another. These triathletes are in peak physical condition and do not participate just to finish, but rather to improve their event time. This is also evident in the number of professionals that is in the *bronze* and *silver* segments. Repeat triathletes on the other hand are more likely to come from South Africa and as the numbers of national triathlon events are limited, they participate more in other individual endurance events like cycling. Repeat triathletes, due to their past experience, know in which discipline they perform best namely running, cycling or swimming. Thus, triathlon participants, due to the extreme physical and mental preparation needed to participate, peak in the beginning of their career at a younger age. This is due to the fact that although experience has an positive influence, first time participants still have to adapt their lifestyle, training and mental preparation to be able to successfully participate in an Ironman event. The uniqueness of triathletes is also evident in their motives to participate, which includes *challenge*, *health* and *fitness*. These motives were not apparent in endurance sport literature, which emphasises that further research is needed on Ironman South Africa and focussing on the types of endurance sport events required to understand the unique mind-set of triathletes.

Conclusions

This research aimed to segment participants at the only Ironman triathlon event on the African continent, namely Spec-savers Ironman South Africa. The research was based on analysing the frequency of participation to distinguish between the profile of first time and repeat participants. This research made key contributions namely that segmentation based on frequency of participation is a useful tool to categorise participants in a meaningful manner, as endurance athletes cannot be regarded as a homogenous target group. Secondly, the results revealed unique attributes that have not been reported in previous studies,

especially when focusing on the motives and behavioural patterns of participants. In the third place, four distinct clusters namely *bronze*, *silver*, *gold* and *platinum segments* were identified. Each of these clusters demonstrated different characteristics and therefore a three-fold marketing strategy was designed (combining the first two segments for the first strategy, the last two segments for the second strategy and all the segments to form a strategy) to increase triathlon participation in general. Fourthly, loyalty programmes and cards were successfully introduced as a marketing tool. This loyalty programme should be used as a retention tool for first time endurance sport participants. Furthermore, the study challenged existing sport theories in its finding that although experience has an influence on different aspects of participation it has a lesser influence on triathletes because they need to be in peak physical and mental conditions to compete in an Ironman event. This emphasises the unique nature of the triathlete. Lastly, the research contributes to existing sport literature, as it is probably the first research done in South Africa on to understand the unique characteristics of triathletes. The research also contributes to endurance sport literature in general as there is a dearth of research in this field. These contributions emphasise that understanding endurance sport participants will help to promote the sport in South Africa and contribute to making South Africa a premier endurance sport destination. It is therefore recommended that future research should investigate the career ladder of professional triathletes, the difference in gender preferences and how the uniqueness of triathletes differs from those of other endurance sport participants.

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