

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

Challenges of Sports Branding

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Abstract

Nowadays, sport has a much more complex and important role than it used to have in the past from many different points of view- it has become not only a way of everyday life which represents a source of positive energy and contributes to healthier life, but also a symbol of the power of the nations themselves and a kind of business industry which has strong implications on different aspects of social development as well. Today's sports organizations realize their business at a highly profitable level and invest huge money in sports marketing and branding. Contemporary sports marketing is oriented towards a proactive relationship with customers of products and services, as well as with other stakeholders in order to achieve their main goal and to make loyal and satisfactory "consumers". Having on mind the fact that brand represents synonym of quality and that it motivates, runs, empowers and create confidence- it is clear why creating a brand identity and image has a great importance for sports organizations, customers, fans, sports clubs, media, as well as for the country itself.

Key words: *sport marketing, brand identity, brand image, marketing communications*

Introduction

The paper will provide not only theoretical, but also a practical approach to challenging of branding in sports organizations. Having on mind the evident increase of interest for sports events as well as the fact that demographics of people who are keen on sports events have already been significantly changed, it is clear why marketing approach in sports organizations is much more important than ever before. On the other side, it is important to mention the socio-cultural background of most sports which is based on strong emotional feelings which very often leads to high level of loyalty to clubs and teams.

Today's sports organizations realize their business at a highly profitable level and invest huge money in sports marketing and branding. Many sports organizations have sponsors who invest millions of euros in sport events in order to promote their products and services, increase the visibility of the sports brand and increase profits. The date that maybe represents the profitability of sport is the transfer of Neymar from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain which costed 222 mi-

llion euros and represents the biggest transient transaction in football history.

Sports industry is a highly profitable business. According to (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2013), sports marketing aims to meet the needs and desires of sports consumers through all the activities through the exchange process. The main focus of all sports marketing actions are sports viewers. Therefore, the understanding of the demographic and psychological factors that affect sports consumers in the basis and key element of development of the brand strategy. Something that is very specific in sports marketing is the fact that products/services related to one team or club are not attractive to supporters and fans of another team or club and that fact should be the important element of marketing strategy itself.

The basis of sports marketing lies in the uncertainty of the results of the event itself and elements of drama which are usually strongly connected to it, so the increase of uncertainty actually attracts spectators and causes feelings of excitement and passion. One of the key elements of success in sports organizations is actually the process of understanding of the



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audience. But, unlikely in some other fields, in sports this process is quite complicated because of the fact that there are many different target groups that should be addressed by different marketing approaches. One category will be extremely familiar with particular sport and its rules, with players and their strengths and weaknesses, the other will not, one category will attend every match, while the other will be satisfied with TV transmission or only with making familiar with results. All these categories will demand different marketing approach but all of them will try to make its favorite team or club to its own values which is extremely important for making successful strategy.

The aim of this paper is to point out the significance of sports branding for sports organization and clubs, through the prism of modern media and communications.

The sports branding

The brand identity includes a combination of the name, logo, slogan, design, color, brand performance, etc. which aim to achieve stimulation reliability in order to provoke positive feelings and emotions of closeness (Clow & Baack, 2002). The brand name is a kind of primary interface in communication between brands and potential consumers.

In the process of choosing the brand name, it is necessary to take into the account its symbolism and the associative characteristics of culture, as well as the communicative potential of the name itself. Good examples are: Manchester United, Fed Cup, Olimpiakos, Barca, etc. In this context it is interesting to mention Hans Gamper who published the advertisement in the Catalan newspaper *Los Deportes* in which he expressed his desire to establish a football club in Barcelona. Because of the great interest, the first eleven Barca players appeared at the first meeting. It was a Swiss-Catalan-British mix which today represents one of the most challenging Spanish football institutions. But something that is extremely important from the point of view of sports branding is the fact that its great official slogan "More from the Club" from 1899 is kept until today.

Branding represents a unique idea and concept that enables sports organization to enter into the consciousness of sports consumers. A sports brand as a holistic sum of many different elements represents a unique and identifiable symbol of a sports organization which makes it different from its competitors. The value of the sports brand is strongly used in the service of increasing the revenue of the sports organization. The brand leads to customer loyalty or consumer loyalty, and loyalty alone can encourage readiness to pay a higher price for a product or service, from 20 to 25% (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Maybe the perfect example is English Football Club Manche-

ster United, maybe the most popular European football club, which according to estimations of KPMG is worth of 4.125 billion euros and whose brand value significantly exceeds the value of the Football Club Real Madrid and Football Club Barcelona.

The Football Club Manchester United, with its name and mark, associates the target group on good sporting values, achievements and sports fun. Although Football Club Manchester United is not the best club in the world, or in Europe, the fact is that it is one of the most recognizable. For example, it's the most recognizable football club even in China (everyone knows what you mean when you say "ManU"). This Club is third ranked in the world in terms of wealth and revenue. The club has various recordings to its name like the joint record holder of FA Cups, a record number of titles, league cups and FA Community Shields. Branding as the culmination of the complete marketing process is also the ultimate success of the business. Fan loyalty is basically a brand strategy of this club, which generates up to \$ 200 million a year from tickets. The value of his brand makes up 24% of the total value of the club. The advantage of the club is the ability to communicate fans through a website with their favorite club.

The important part of branding process is also a logo itself. The role of the logo as part of an integral communication system of a company or organization is to symbolize its modes of operation and project the unique credibility of the entity it represents. Among sports brands, Nike is in second place by the brand value. With the breakthrough on the Asian market, Nike has found great potential for growth. Nike is the name of the Greek goddess of victory, while the logo of this company symbolizes her flight. Its creator is a student at the Faculty of Design, Carolyn Davidson, who received \$ 35 for the design of this logo, so that Nike's founder, thanks to the huge increase in popularity of this brand and in gratitude, donated 500 shares of Nike company.

The brand's slogan is an associative sentence or term that represents the mission and essence of the brand. A good slogan can play a valuable role in identifying the brand. Frequent repetition of a good slogan with the name of the brand may have hypnotic effects on consumers and lead to unconscious acceptance of the brand and the creation of its desired image (Rakita & Mitrovic, 2007). For example, Nike's advertising campaign from 1988 contained a simple slogan - Just to it. It is somewhat considered that this advertising campaign is the most deserving for the success that the company has achieved in the coming years, leaving its main competitors behind and it represents one of the most successful advertising campaigns in the world in general.



Figure 1. Logo of basketball club Chicago Bulls

When analyzing sports clubs, it is interesting to mention the logo of the Chicago Bulls Sports Basketball Club (Figure 1).

One of the four most recognizable clubs in the world, Football Club Barcelona, a leading proactive brand strategy, modernized its logo in September 2018, which will be officially launched in the 2019-2020 season. The biggest change for the logo will be the removal of the "FCB" lettering currently featured prominently on the club's shield.

The number of brands is increasing year by year, which was highly influenced by market hyper fragmentation, the diversification of the market, the shortening of the life cycle of products, etc. (Kotler & Trias De Bes, 2003). Brands today have strong associative and functional attractiveness. Functional attractiveness is based on technological and innovative superiority, while the associative advantage meets existing human needs in a unique and recognizable way. A high level of asso-

ciative value has the Lakers Sports Basketball Club, as a global brand by which people are delighted (iconic brand).

The three-dimensional commitment of each brand is defined by: the character of the brand - brand personality which is derived from the profile of the target group of the brand's users, as well as by the brand's purpose which reflects its usefulness and credibility. The comparative advantages of associative brands are often connected with various intangible associations - they are not equally visible to everyone and they are not easily provable. Not only is there a large number of associations on a particular brand, but there are also a very large number of ways to challenge those associations (Rakita & Mitrovic, 2005). A sincere brand is a brand with a strong tradition and a clear set of values reflected on consumers. The relationship that such a brand accomplishes can be identified with a relationship that the respected family member has with



Figure 2. Logo of football club Red Star

his or her fellowmen. The brand of Football Club Red Star belongs to this category of brands (Figure 2).

An exciting brand is the one that associates on youth, which has the spirit of modern times and which is innovative. A typical representative of this group of sports brands is Football Club Manchester United (Figure 3). A competent brand reflects the impact and performance, and logo of Barcelona belongs to this category. Sophistication as a characteristic implies a

certain amount of exclusivity and not every brand can possess it. This brand creates a strong connection with its consumers in a unique way and provokes a high level of loyalty. A strong brand is an individual, one who cares about itself, a bit egocentric, focused on its "athletic attributes" (Aaker, 1996). Such a brand is Nike, which reflects individuality and constant need for proof which differentiate it from many other brands and triggers consumer preferences.



Figure 3. Logo of football club Manchester United

From identity to image of sports brand

The strength of the brand is based on the image of the brand and is located in the consumer's mind. Brand image is an image or perception that consumers create about the brand. The brand's positive image exists only when consumers respond positively to the product. The brand with a positive image is more suitable to be the carrier of the extension and it represents a great basis for a more promising promotion. For example, the arrival of David Beckham in the Football Club Manchester United, brought a million profit from the sale of promotional material with his name, which is also a great example of personal branding in general.

Propaganda marketing is in the function of propaganda communication between production services and concrete consumers (citizens) (Spirtovic, Acimovic, Medjedovic, & Bogdanovic, 2010). The future of marketing belongs to emotional branding which is based on the idea of psychological and emotional connection with the consumer. The brand is treated as an emotional asset. Investing corporate efforts and resources in provoking true emotion of consumers is the best investment a company can make.

The role of media in sports branding is crucial in order to achieve a positive publicity and establish strong, emotional closeness with consumers of sports messages. Communications have made a huge influence on the appearance of the golden age of sport. Online betting, live broadcasts, interviews, advertisements, sponsorships, etc. had greatly influenced that sport became a transnational activity. It is considered that advertisements make the best connection with sports, especially when it comes to announcements of sports events (Olympic Games, Champions League, WC and other World Championships). So, it is clear why, for example, four years sponsorship of the main sponsors of the Olympic Games (Alibaba, Coca-Cola, Visa, Atos, Samsung, etc.) costs about \$ 200 million. In addition to the entertainment role of advertisements, thanks to the possibility of visualization, sport is presented as a form of movement, with emotions, a state of tension and excitement.

There are so many ways to inform public and sports consumers, to inspire and motivate them. Media and communication is the world's fastest growing industry today and is an area of rapid and continuous technological, political, economic, and social change (Vineet, 2012).

It is well known that press, television, radio and social media play an important role in creation of image- they may create heroes, legends and champions, giving sportsmen a mythological significance, stuttering even in their intimacy. Lessons from the Tiie Television Sports Manhood Formula are seen, in varying degrees, in these football, basketball, extreme sports and Sports Center programs and their accompanying commercials. U.S. sports media outlets enjoy great popularity. In the late 1990s, 94% of children surveyed said they consumed sports media, and many said they did so daily (Hardin & Greer, 2002).

In this age of digital advertising and proactive consumers, more and more sports brands are turning to brand videos instead of conversion videos. They all try to tell us great story, trying to drives brand awareness without selling a product too hard, makes a bold statement and convenient, online consumer accessibility.

When talking about sports branding, it is inevitable to mention sponsorships which represents excellent form of pro-

motion in sports marketing. Typical example is Red Bull which has extremely interesting sponsorship strategy for sporting events, especially those closely connected with adventurous ones. This group of events is not chosen by chance-in contrary it is its main target group- people keen on adventure, adrenaline, excitement, adventurous sports etc. In addition to the great slogan "Red Bull gives you wings," the company offers free tours for all its sponsored events, believing that opinion makers and sports consumers have a major impact on the growth of purchases. In classical Red Bull manifestations, such as sports events such as Motorcycle Racing and Red Bull's Day of Flying, event participants are even included in designing a marketing initiative. By sponsoring sport events and including participants in tastings and prize-winning games, the company achieves greater connectivity with potential and actual consumers of the brand, specially focusing on its target groups.

Conclusions

Nowadays, marketing approach and branding of sports activities have more important role than ever before. Sports branding is a strategic process that consists of series of activities carried out in order to create strong brand identity and make its recognizable image on the market.

The main goal is to send a positive message to specific target groups and make loyal, satisfied sports consumers. In that process, the role of media is one of the most crucial in order to achieve positive publicity and make a strong, emotional closeness with consumers of sports messages. By recognizing the importance of this approach, it is evident that a lot of sports organization put a great effort on branding process and invest more and more money in realization of different marketing campaigns, and it is sure that this approach will be even more important in future. From that reason, it is extremely important to put these issues in the center of not only professional, but scientific and research interest as well.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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