



Research Article

Case Study: Marketing Communication of a Sports Organization Helping it Move towards its Sustainability

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Abstract

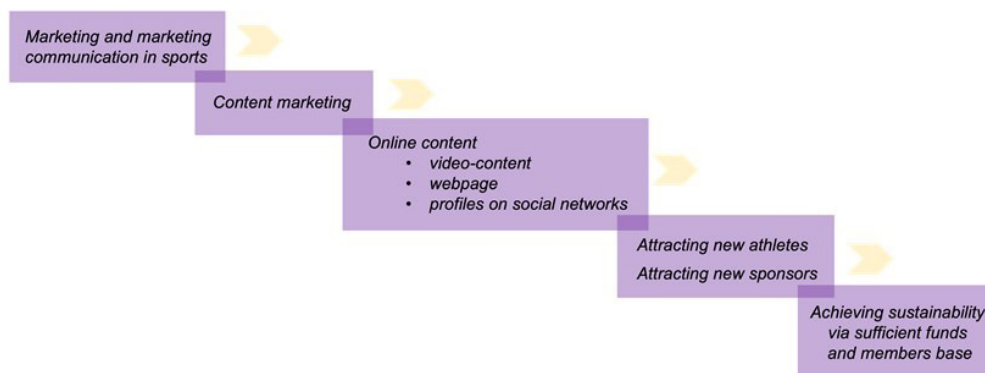
The aim of this article is the analysis of a sports organization's operation focused on its marketing communication to reveal space for improvement. This leads to the support of sponsorship as a part of the organization's sustainability. The analysis was based on the secondary data collected. The result was the identification of the current state of the organization's marketing communication. This situation was connected to its impact on sponsorship and attraction of new athletes. The case study approach included research activities performed in the field, involving the creation of marketing content and the preparation for further content planned. The created content included professional marketing photographs taken on the premises of the organization. The planned content included a script for a video to be used in the marketing communication. The research thus goes beyond the analytical level straight to the application of the partial results. The findings build a knowledge base for the sports managers dealing with marketing communication and relationships with sponsors. Therefore, they are applicable in the training and education of present and future sports organizations' managers.

Keywords: Content marketing, marketing communication, sponsorship, sports management.

Introduction

The aim is to analyse the operation of the Central-Slovak Tennis Association with a focus on sponsorship. At the beginning of the research, specific objectives were set. The article is based on current knowledge of sports sponsorship, which serves as a theoretical support for the research. The analytical part contains important data about the selected sports organization and its current state within marketing communication. To be able to propose effective recommendations, the next step was to analyse the competition, focusing on successful competitors. While creating the recommendations, these were directed towards the content marketing and the proposal of video marketing.

Figure 1 captures the basic elements included in the research. These represent the grasping of a specific part of sports marketing – marketing communication and its tools. The elements are analysed in terms of their influence on acquiring sponsors as well as new members for the sports organization. Therefore, during the creation of appropriate content, it is necessary to connect the interests of both these stakeholders so that the content can simultaneously achieve goals aimed at both parties. The final effect of the correct relations is to support the organization's overall operation towards sustainability, approached via financial resources and the maintenance of the membership base.



**Fig. 1. Basic elements studied
(Authors' own elaboration)**

Literature Review

The views of various authors on sports sponsorship were analysed within the theoretical background. These were followed by the selected aspects of sports organizations' marketing communication.

Sponsorship in sports

In its essence, sponsorship represents an element of the marketing communication mix. Howard and Crompton (2004) define it as a relationship between a provider of financial or other resources and a sports event or organization offering rights helping the sponsor obtain a commercial advantage. Sponsorship can be defined as a mutually

beneficial partnership between the sponsored organization and the sponsor (Amaoko et al., 2012). Both parties are trying to agree on a way to combine their individual interests into a mutually beneficial partnership.

Both sides have different expectations. Sports clubs and associations need funds or other means from their sponsors for their expansion, organization of events, modernization of the infrastructure, and attraction of sports talents. Sponsors are looking for (Government of Western Australia, 2011): improved reputation, improved image in the eyes of the public, increased visibility of the company's name (branding), and increased interest in the company's products and the creation of a long-term relationship with the customers (networking).

However, to maintain sponsorship, it is important for the sponsors to understand that sponsoring a given sports club is more financially effective than other forms of advertising. The placement of advertising content is usually case-specific, considering the possibilities of the sports organization and the preferences of the sponsor. In an offline environment, advertising can be placed on jerseys and sportswear, starting numbers, handrails, sports equipment, scoreboards, panels, bulletins, flyers, invitations, tickets, and on the radio. In the online environment, advertising can be displayed in different forms. Sports organizations most often use their websites or social networks. The implementation is in the form of a video, image, post on a social network, a logo on a website, a mention of a sponsor in an article, etc.

Among the criteria important for companies when assessing the suitability of a sports organization for establishing a partnership are (Greenhalgh, 2010): activity and audience reach, cost effectiveness, structure and size of the audience, media attention, achievements and awards, the organization's infrastructure, and its goodwill.

In general, three types of sponsors can be distinguished. The first category consists of exclusive sponsors who get all the benefits for a high price. In practice, organizations most often cooperate with one or two exclusive sponsors. However, this cooperation brings the sports organization the largest amount of funds (Durdová, 2005). The second category consists of main and secondary sponsors, which may be larger in number. Compared to exclusive sponsors, they pay a significantly lower price and receive a smaller volume of benefits. The third category includes cooperation sponsors who receive only a small part of the benefits (Durdová, 2005). It is therefore necessary for a sports organization not only to appeal to sponsors, but also to create a structure that will be attractive and beneficial both for the organization and the sponsors.

Selected aspects of marketing communication in sports

The first relevant aspect is the non-financial effect of sponsorship, described by Dolores et al. (2021). In addition to the financial aspect, the number of sponsors has an impact on the organization's image in the eyes of fans and the public. Fans perceive the total number of sponsors as one whole. A larger number of sponsors build an image of professionalism. The organization should not focus only on a small number of the best sponsorships and on partnerships with the most famous brands. It should also include other sponsors relevant for its sponsorship program. Thus, a sports organization should actively seek sponsorship to secure partnerships to create the impression of professionalism.

Advertising in sports can be associated with people's positive attitude, as reported by Cheong et al. (2019). It was confirmed that the attitude of young consumers towards sponsorship and advertising in sports was significantly more positive than their attitude towards advertising in general.

Sponsorship in sports is seen as more altruistic and socially responsible. Companies have often considered sponsorship a tool associated with the conduction of philanthropic activities. Therefore, consumers do not see an advertising intention in sports sponsorship. They rather see it as a part of a CSR strategy. (Cayolla et al., 2021)

From a cost perspective, sponsorship is a two-tier way of advertising. It is not only about promotion itself but also about obtaining sponsorship rights. A study shows that for every \$1 invested in sponsorship rights, \$2.20 are spent on advertising and related promotion. Sponsorship is an expensive but also a high-impact way of advertising a brand. (Cornwell and Kwon, 2020)

Byon and Phua (2021) emphasize the role of social networks in the marketing communication of sports organizations. The trends focus on digital and interactive communication via social networks. The recommended ways of communication are the interactions, behind-the-scenes stories, and opinions. Within the framework of interactive marketing communication, it is important to understand the relationship between the club members and the sponsorship, and to communicate it correctly.

Factors that influence medium and small businesses when deciding to sponsor sports organizations were analysed by Datson et al. (2021). These factors include the family ties, friendships, personal ties, and the image of the sports organization. Social media are effective for building awareness. Therefore, from the marketing perspective, they play an irreplaceable role in reaching sponsors. The sponsored team or event and the sponsor have a symbiotic relationship in which there is a transfer of value. The objective of the sponsoring company is to ensure that a clear association is created with the celebrity and that the values of the sports organization are

linked to the corporate values. (Cuesta-Valino et al., 2022)

Materials and Methods

Several steps were set in the research project that determined the structure of the entire research. These steps included:

- a definition of the theoretical backgrounds,
- an analysis of the current state of online communication of the selected sports association,
- an analysis of the online communication of domestic and foreign sports entities,
- a proposal of a set of recommendations for the selected association with the aim of:
 - increasing the attractiveness, reaching more potential sponsors,
 - increasing the interest in sports and clubs united in the association,
 - increasing awareness of the association online,
 - expanding the audience on online platforms,
 - designing video marketing tools.

The data were obtained from secondary sources, including articles indexed in global databases and Internet resources (websites and social network profiles of selected sports organizations). The data entries were processed by content analysis, using the comparison method. Partial conclusions were connected via synthesis. The approach of applied research was used too. New content for the marketing communication of the selected sports organization was created.

Results

After presenting the basic characteristics of the selected sports organization, the individual results of the analyses are

presented. They are followed by the creation of new marketing content and a detailed script for the recommended video.

The selected sports organization

The focus of the research was narrowed to the Central-Slovak Tennis Association (CSTA), which includes several tennis clubs. After the analysis, the goal was to propose and implement a suitable marketing strategy with a focus on attracting sponsors via video marketing and content marketing.

CSTA is one of the four regions under the Slovak Tennis Association (2022). It is an independent civil association, founded for an indefinite period, according to Act no. 83/1990 Coll. on the association of citizens, in which tennis clubs, associations, sections, other legal entities focused on tennis and natural persons operating in the territory of the Banská Bystrica, Trenčín, and Žilina regions are connected. CSTA is an independent legal entity in accordance with the provisions of the Sports Act no. 440/2015 Coll., independent of political parties or movements.

The competence of the Central-Slovak Tennis Association covers the following areas: support for the organization of events for elite tennis, support for the organization of events for recreational tennis players and other groups of citizens (e.g. the disabled people), support for the construction of tennis courts and halls, support for the reconstruction of existing facilities, support for elite and recreational tennis organized in the Central-Slovak region, care for the development of tennis in clubs and schools, support of tennis events in schools. The CSTA's strategic goal is the creation of suitable conditions for the development of recreational and professional tennis, contributing to the regeneration of a person's physical and mental strength, improving health and physical fitness.

Analysis of the organization's online communication

During the analysis of CSTA's marketing communication, it was revealed that the pieces of information about the association are published only on the website of the Slovak Tennis Association. All activities, events or matches are presented exclusively on the website in the regions' section and on the Facebook social network (Slovak Tennis Association, 2022; Facebook – Central-Slovak Tennis Association, 2022). CSTA does not have its own website, which would contain content for potential members and sponsors.

The activity of the Facebook profile lags significantly, and the content is not up to date. As a result, there is a lack of awareness and interaction between the association and members, new members, or potential sponsors. Currently, 344 fans follow the CSTA profile, as of 2 November 2022 (Facebook – Central-Slovak Tennis Association, 2022). The posts are almost without any description so there is no contact with the target audience. The audience is not required to interact. The posts lack a creative level of copywriting that would attract attention.

Due to the low number of marketing channels and their inefficient management, it can be stated that CSTA operates in the online environment as an organization with low activity. Potential sponsors or applicants may conclude that this is not a relevant entity to cooperate with.

The regularity of posts on Facebook was evaluated positively. CSTA adds posts on a regular basis (on average 2 to 3 posts per week). However, the posts achieve minimal interaction. They are not commented on, shared, or liked. The low authenticity of the content was revealed as a negative aspect since most of the posts are only re-shared posts from the Slovak Tennis Association.

Analysis of the competitors' online communication

An example of proper marketing communication on Instagram is the

International Tennis Federation. They inform the target audience about the events and results and create a strong relationship. This Instagram profile is for education but also entertainment. The profile's relevance is high due to the large follower base – 241,000 people, as of 2 November 2022 (International Tennis Federation, 2022).

Another example of marketing communication is via YouTube. The Slovak Olympic team regularly publishes short videos about the achievements of their athletes. Appropriate videos can reach the target audience interested in the sport more significantly. The success of the profile is expressed by the number of views. Several videos of this channel have up to 600 views, as of 2 November 2022. (Slovak Olympic team, 2022) Successful athletes from sports associations are an ideal form of marketing communication. It is the athletes who can present the association in the best way via social networks or interviews for television or local media. Young tennis players from Trnava, who represented the association in the Winter Cup, are a good example. The success and popularity of the association's athlete has a great impact. An effective way to present the sports association is the athletes' statistics and achievements displayed on the website. Such an example is given by the football club SK Slavia Praha. A fan can view the results of individual athletes via this visualization, which allows him/her to learn more about the players.

Another example of proper marketing communication is the use of Facebook to build a community. By adding interesting content, USK Praha basketball club tries to engage the fans and encourage them to interact. They share interviews with the athletes and coaches evaluating the results of the matches via Facebook. An important element of building partnerships is the sharing of informative posts presenting the products and services of partner companies. This way, a sports fan creates a positive relationship with the Hyundai brand, as shown in the example of USK Prague's

Facebook profile. Therefore, an important indicator is the number of followers. The sports club has 3,700 followers (as of 2 November 2022). In addition to these examples, the basketball club also offers the fans live broadcasting of matches via Facebook. Basketball enthusiasts can react to the development of the match while watching it. (Facebook – USK Prague, 2022)

Recommendations for online marketing communication

Based on the analyses, several changes in the CSTA's communication were recommended. The proposals are based on the analysis of the competition.

The CSTA is recommended to establish its own website, where visitors can learn more about the activities, the tennis clubs, as well as about the cooperation opportunities. In addition to the informative function, the website would serve as an advertising space for sponsors. The association is recommended to focus more on social networks. It is suggested to create a profile on Instagram and YouTube. The purpose of being present on these platforms is to *inform, educate, and entertain the target audience.*

Another point is to use the current Facebook profile more actively. The more active use should relate to the authenticity and higher creativity. The organization should limit the passive resharing of content from the Slovak Tennis Association and focus on creating original content.

Within content marketing, it is recommended to focus on: posts about sponsors (acknowledgement, mentions, logos), successful athletes, association's infrastructure; conducting interviews with athletes and coaches; live broadcasts of events; a behind-the-scenes look (e.g., from the training).

An example of new content that can motivate sponsors and new members for a specific tennis club within the association is shown in

Fig. 2. These are the results of applied research.



Fig. 2 Original photos created for the Tennis Centre Slovenská Lupča
Source: Authors' own elaboration

The script for a promotional video

One of the recommendations is the creation of a promotional video and regular contributions to social networks via video medallions about athletes. Video medallions should contain short video entries that will be regularly published on social networks, aimed at approaching the activities of the tennis association from several perspectives (e.g., interviews with coaches, athletes,

presentation of the association's infrastructure, presentation of potential sponsorship opportunities, the association's plans).

To create a unified marketing concept, a higher priority was assigned to the promotional video. The script for this video is presented below (Fig. 3) and its individual parts are then explained in the following text.

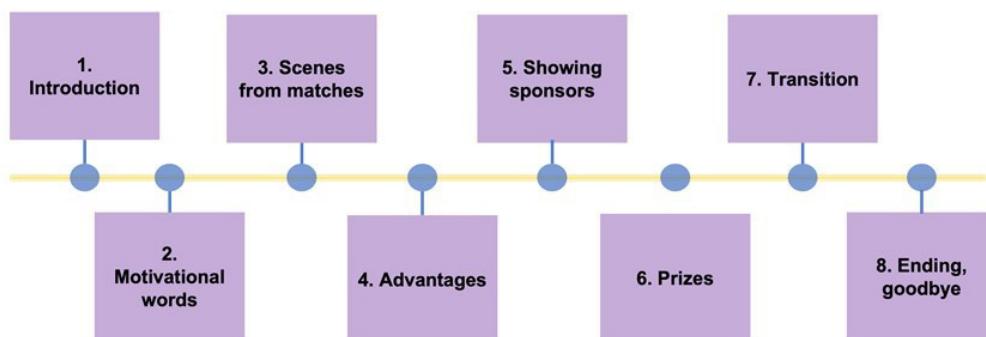


Fig. 3 The script for the main video
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Introduction

The video will focus on the logo and the association itself.

Motivational words

a) Quick show of motivational words and phrases pointing to tennis. (The video should emphasize the dynamism of the sport; the words should include: passion, motivation, dreams, wins, tennis.)

b) Motivational phrases will only be spoken in the background, not displayed. Slow-motion shots of the tennis ball, net, etc. will appear. Everything will be in slow motion to help attracting the viewer. (Point 2b does not have to continue after point 2a. Points can overlap.)

Scenes from matches

After attracting the attention, the focus will shift to the actual shots from competitions or trainings. The purpose is to introduce the association and emphasize the emotion. Both the dynamics and the emotional side of the sport will be displayed. Switching between very fast shots (tracking the ball along with the hit of the racket will be interlaced with a slow motion shot of the athlete's face after scoring.)

Advantages

a) Focusing on a closer look of what the association or clubs can bring to the athletes, or children who would like to play tennis. It will show a close look at how coaches treat the athletes, how they prepare them for matches, and how sports bring joy.

b) This point overlaps with 4a. Shots in 4a and 4b are alternated. It will be a presentation of the city and the environment in which the club is located. The footage will

be taken from a bird's-eye view using a drone.

Showing sponsors

Before the end of the video, a few seconds are reserved for the sponsor logos. This will make it lucrative for future sponsors to appear in a similar campaign.

Prizes

This point has two sections that will overlap. It will be a combination of motivational words and visual content. At the end of the video, it will be emphasised that hard work that the union provides for the athletes leads to results. Thus, there will be a footage of the awarding of the athletes with the prizes. In the background, there will be a phrase that hard work brings not only inner pleasure but also real results.

Transition

This point will be a smooth transition from awarding the athletes with the prizes to an overhead shot, where the shot of the city would slowly zoom out and the screen would gradually darken.

Ending, goodbye

The last point will be a farewell, including a re-display of the logos of the association and the main sponsors.

Discussion and Conclusion

As people spend an enormous amount of time on social networks, these platforms are a great tool for marketing communication. The research analysed how competitors appear on social networks. In addition to social networks, the creation of an original website was included. The selected organizations were analysed in connection to marketing communication. After analysing

them, attention was directed mainly to those that were the most original in terms of content. Another part of the research was the design of the recommendations that are key for the selected sports association. The recommendations included a script as a part of the applied research. Online marketing is constantly developing. Therefore, it is important to focus on the latest trends and strive for creating original content that can attract the potential audience.

The results of the research serve as a case study. They include best practice for how marketing communication should be set up by other sports organizations as part of sports marketing. The article, within a larger research project, provides educational material that can be used by managers of sports organizations responsible for setting the marketing communication and relations with sponsors.

The results created in this research are complemented by a comparison of the results of other authors. In a study conducted by Hsiao et al. (2021), it was revealed that sponsoring sports events is an effective way to increase the value of the brand and influence the consumers' intention to purchase premium products. Successful sports sponsorship can give consumers a good impression of the sponsors, increasing the awareness of the sponsored brands. Spectators' satisfaction with the event has a positive effect on the brand value.

Another example for establishing sponsorship relationships are banks. These can finance small sports teams or clubs. The main reason for sponsoring small clubs is that these clubs tend to be closely tied to the community. Thus, it is beneficial for the banks because even a smaller amount of funds will help the clubs and it will spread more quickly among the community. Partnerships are established this way in several sports, including tennis. (Buszko, 2020) In addition to banks, sports can also be supported by state-owned companies, as demonstrated in Poland (Drózdź, 2021). The

main part of the entire funding system is sponsorship from state companies.

The results of the research were focused on the more narrowly defined area of sponsorship and marketing communication. However, within the framework of better education of sports managers, it is appropriate to put these results back into a wider context of the entire sports marketing. This is aligned with the research done by Zsigmond et al. (2020). Sports marketing represents a special form of marketing influenced by a specific situation on the sports market, the goal of which is the sale of products.

Following the topic of social networks as marketing communication tools, McCarthy et al. (2022) describe these as strategically important. Via them, a sports organization can ensure the achievement of goals. The increasing interest in social networks has created a new opportunity to communicate with potential customers. The main reason for the involvement of clubs on social networks is the creation of community. Organizations can communicate more effectively and create better relationships based on trust. It is also important to conduct an open dialogue with fans using community management and word of mouth (Du et al., 2020). Trust and effective cooperation between the club and commercial partners is the key to the successful application of a sports management strategy that provides content suitable for the club's audience. Clubs also choose which sponsors to promote on social media so that the content does not become a flood of advertising messages.

The connection between the utilization of social networks in the marketing communication of sports organizations and the creation of videos is analysed by Rafiq et al. (2020). Sports videos are the most engaging and profitable content with commercial impact. They are becoming an important medium for sports clubs to interact with their audience. Training videos

give fans a closer look at team activities and the preparation for the next matches.

A look at selected aspects of sustainability in the operation of sports organizations is provided by Faccia et al. (2020). The sustainability of sports clubs in general can be analysed and measured from different perspectives. The main attributes monitored include the improvement in sports performance, maintaining competitiveness, sustainability of the club's financial management, community development, and active education of athletes. It is also possible to look at the connection of the elements described using the perspective of brand marketing, as Manoli (2022) does. Brand marketing in sports is very specific. It is typical that customer loyalty to the brand is much stronger. Brand identification is a unique way to evoke emotions with sports. A person who once becomes a member or a fan of a sports club has a hard time moving on to the competition.

A limitation of this research is the focus on a specific sports organization, sport, and one country. This is related to the selected case study approach. The application of the results for other sports organizations and countries presupposes an analysis of different conditions. Future research can focus on mapping the situation in other sports organizations and countries. However, it is advisable to go as far as the application part and create content for the marketing communication so that sports managers can see the results of research and incorporate them into the organizations' operation.

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