

PARTICULARITIES OF MARKETING IN ROMANIAN SPORT

CRISTIAN ILIONI *

ABSTRACT: *Although sport has been around for centuries, the idea of a rational system of sports marketing is relatively new. The sports marketing specialist is required to market a product that is totally unpredictable, inconsistent and open to subjective interpretations. The expert in sports marketing must fulfill his role in an extremely competitive market, having a much smaller promotional budget than the organizations of the same size in other fields. The good part of this is represented by the media, willing to offer a broad presentation of the general product and the existence of many possibilities for generating income through association with the business or industry world.*

KEY WORDS: *marketing, manager, competition, efficiency.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The wide visibility of sports media has diminished the focus on sports marketing. Sport didn't have to focus on marketing and promotion as the other industries did. In fact, sport was based on advertising as the main means of promotion. Each newspaper has a sports section, the radio and television stations allocate large spaces for sports broadcasting. The reason for this state of affairs is simply the general interest in sports. (95% of Americans believed that their lives were affected by sports daily.

Due to the visibility it enjoys, many businesses want to associate themselves with the sport. Sport provides a promotional vehicle for which the audience is often countable, and the number of spectators (demographics) is generally good. Each sport attracts a certain audience; therefore, sponsoring a competition allows the associated sponsor to reach the target group pursued by him quite successfully.

* *Lecturer, Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, c_ilioni@yahoo.com*

The public and the direct participants in sport, usually represent categories of population with higher incomes, and represent in their turn main targets for product marketing.

The increasing use of athletes as spokespeople for a product is largely due to the ability of the athletes to attract the attention of the public and the credibility they enjoy.

Even if victory does not mean everything in marketing a team, it is a major factor in explaining the fluctuation of the public. If there is not a certain quality of the product "itself" (clean lands, modern stadiums) than any strategic phenomena (marketing, sponsorship, advertising) will not count.

2. THE PREMISES OF THE EXTENSION OF MARKETING IN SPORT

The accelerated pace of change requires the adoption and application of long-term efficiency criteria in all areas. It seems that the society is headed towards a type of "human economy", whose main purpose is the higher satisfaction of individual and social needs.

Marketing is a modern science, perfectly adapted to respond by practical action, both to the requirements of higher satisfaction of the needs and desires of individuals and groups, as well as the criteria of economic efficiency.

Contemporary marketing can be defined as "a means by which the standard of living is created and offered to people". It also develops in areas that only belong to the sphere of business (ecological, educational, political, ecclesiastical marketing, public health, etc.).

The question may be asked: "*Why is contemporary sport compatible with the marketing approach?*"

3. THE FOUR P'S (MARKETING MIX)

McCarthy divided marketing into four business segments. Its topology has become universally recognized, and its 4P set has become a language term.

The four P's are:

- **Product** - the aspects of product management and product marketing deal with the specifications of the good or product concerned, and how it relates to the needs and wants of the end user.
- **Price** - refers to the pricing process for a product, including price reductions.
- **Promotion** - includes advertising, promotion, advertising and personal sales, and refers to different methods of promoting a product, brand or company.
- **Placement or distribution** - refers to how the product reaches the customer; for example, placement at the retail or retail location. This fourth P refers to the place where the product or service is sold, eg geographical region or industrial branch, and the segment to which it is

addressed (young adults, families, companies, businessmen, women, men, etc.).

These four elements are usually called a marketing mix. A marketer can use these values to draw up a marketing plan.

4. SPORTS CONSUMER

The behavior of the sports consumer is influenced by factors that are related to the environment or the individual and which are permanently in interaction.

The environment influences the lives of people who, in their turn, can reshape the social, physical and cultural landscape around them. Between the individual and the environment is very dynamic in the case of sport, causing socialization and involvement effects. The most important environmental factors that influence the decision of the sports consumer are:

"The others". The socialization of a person for assuming roles in sports is influenced in a considerable proportion by the interaction with those that sociologists call "those who matter". The others are family members, coaches, teachers, and friends. Parents play a vital role in introducing children to sports.

According to the Miller Lite report (1983), 75% of American parents said they encourage their children to play sports. 61% of the affiliated members of some clubs found out about the clubs in which they signed up from friends.

Moreover, friendships were the single most important factor that could cause someone to try the services offered by a club; advertising and special promotional campaigns had a much smaller impact.

Cultural norms and values. Each individual is influenced by the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of the cultural environment in which they live and which they learn from their close friends. However, there are also forms of sports that appear in response to the desire for creativity and freedom of individuals who want to get out of social patterns (extreme skiing, scuba diving, skateboarding, snowboarding).

Social class. Easier access to the reward and prestige in sports; existence of some elite sports (aviation, yachting, golf, etc.) and of some popular sports (football, cycling, etc.).

Relationships between races. Behavioral patterns of involvement in sports are related to races. It is, however, difficult to explain why the percentage of color players in the NBA is 80%, while the percentage of color supporters of the NBA players is only 17%.

The climatic and geographical conditions (the best Romanian skaters come from Miercurea Ciuc, and the best kayakers and canoeists come from the delta). Marketing behavior of enterprises in the sports industry and other industries. Nike shoes, Sharks sweaters, Oakland Raiders clothing are no longer the only sports equipment items. Commercial enterprises promoted the "sporty" lifestyle and the "sporty" fashion

Self-concept. The theory of self-concept indicates that the individual possesses:

- an image about himself;
- an image of the apparent self (as he thinks others see);
- an image of the ideal self (as it would like to be);
- an image of the self in relation to the reference groups, to which the true self is added.

Because sport is generally consumed in public, the sport consumer's behavior is influenced by self-concept. In sports marketing, the images of paramount importance are the ideal self, the apparent self and the self for the reference groups.

Stage in life or stage in the family life cycle. The marketing specialist must formulate his strategies and programs according to the biological, psychological and behavioral stages of the sports consumer.

Physical characteristics. Often, sports advertising addresses our desires to possess better physical qualities, to the ideal self.

Learning. Despite the fact that physical abilities can be inherited, many of them develop as we interact with the environment, including the activities of sports organizations. The marketing specialist must take into account the three types of involvement defined in the learning theories: cognitive, affective and behavioral.

Perception. It is the process by which the individual scans, collects, evaluates and interprets information from the environment. The main difficulty faced by marketing specialists in sports is related to perception, because they tend to offer potential consumers their own perception of the product / service.

The task of the sports marketing specialist is to establish a consonant between the images transmitted through the product (the competition itself, the sports arrangement) and the self-image of the consumer. He has to take into account the three types of sports consumers: casual, medium, frequent)

Here are just a few of the reasons why marketing in sports is necessary:

4.1. Exacerbation of competition in sports

Organizations that make up the sports industry are simultaneously in competition and cooperation. In the sport organized on a competitive basis, the competition gives the sport its full significance, manifesting itself both horizontally and vertically, both individually and between organizations. There are several forms and meanings of competition:

- generic competition between sports organizations and those from other fields that want to capture consumers' attention;
- competition between sports;
- competition between organizations in the same sport;
- competition between athletes of the same organization;
- competition with itself.

Both individuals and organizations feel the competitiveness of the environment. Success is the goal of both, but the misunderstanding of the motto "Citius, altius, fortius" leads to doping or to forms of violence in the case of the sportsman, and the exclusive profit orientation leads to unethical conduct in the case of organizations.

In the current stage, where all forms of competition seem to have tightened, the role of marketing is to restore the balance between the benefits of the organization and those of the sports participant. Competition between sports organizations stimulates the adoption of market strategies that aim to differentiate the products / services offered by a particular club, federation, etc., attracting as many members as possible and their loyalty by offering quality services.

4.2. Increasing commercialization of the sport, including the Olympic Games

Marketing has a positive meaning and requires development. The term commercialization in sport refers to the association of the sport product / organization(s) with a commercial company in the mutual interest of the two parties. The conditions of association are defined by both parties and are aimed at mutual interests. Public or private sector enterprises are not free to use their capital for purposes other than those related to declared activities; they must act in such a way that any use of resources will bring income.

Funding by associating sports organizations with commercial enterprises is encouraged by governments, which thus feel relieved of the burden of supporting the development of sport. At the same time, the sports organizations gain through this association more autonomy of action and become more responsible for the efficient management of the funds. Commercialization is also an alternative to raising public awareness of the values of sport.

The main danger of the exaggerated commercialization of the sport is to affect its fundamental values, to exploit its image excessively. The money also attracts both athletes and sports organizations who are tempted to sign long-term contracts in the otherwise good idea of being able to make long-term development strategies.

On the other hand, the Olympic rings have attracted the most powerful companies (Coca-Cola, Kodac, IBM, Panasonic, Reebok, Swatch, etc.).

By entering into long-term sponsorship contracts, they can exert pressure to impose their views on how to exploit the Olympic emblem, especially during the Olympic Games. The impartial observers could not help but notice, for example, that the Olympic Games of the '98 Centennial Atlanta were the "Coca-Cola Games".

4.3. Changing the dynamics of sports: old sports / new sports

The tastes of consumers impose on the "open" nomenclature to the organizers of competitions and to the sports services providers. The sport product has a variable life cycle: some sports survive long, others are ephemeral. Various forms of play have a longer life cycle.

The more expensive a product is and raises major decision problems, the longer the period of innovation diffusion. The researchers found that a new sport has a higher chance of surviving if it goes beyond the marketing phase. Therefore, the product should be promoted in a way that will appeal to early adopters and early adopters. They will, in turn, attract other consumers through personal communication channels.

The renewal of the products raises the problem of adapting the sports facilities and facilities to the specificity of the new sports, and these adaptations require equipment and modernization costs, staff training costs and promotion costs. To this is added a certain degree of risk.

Adapting to the new is not available to any club. If it has non-convertible facilities and limited resources, it can be oriented towards a strategy of diversifying product extensions and promoting the improved offer.

Even the performance sport adapts to the newer tastes of the spectators. The degree of audience of a particular sport is one of the major criteria for the selection of sports in the Olympic program.

4.4. The complexity of the demand of the sports consumer

In order to get an idea of the demand of the sports consumer, it is necessary to first refer to the economic components of the consumer's behavior, respectively, to answer the questions:

What does the sports consumer want? Economic theory responds concisely: maximizing satisfaction. The satisfaction obtained through sport has a different content in time at the individual level (modified as the participant of the sports participant ages) and at the society level. A recent survey conducted in the Nordic countries revealed that the main expectations expected from sport are pleasure and social communion.

What are the consumer's possibilities? The financial resources of the sports consumer and the price of sports can influence their decision to participate in sports, but not decisively. The most frequent fans of the stadiums are not the highest income consumers. Tickets are expensive for sports that attract the highest number of spectators, and the average price of a ticket per stadium increases from season to season.

The main factors of the demand for sports are:

- the level of competition;
- its stake, uncertainty of the result;
- their teams and stars;
- comfort of the sports base;
- ease of purchase of tickets;
- the services at the place of the competition;
- access to sports facilities, etc.

What does the sports consumer choose? It is the most difficult answer as it involves studying the dimensions of the manifestation of the consumer's behavior, respectively of the reasons for participation/non-participation in sports, of the preferences towards one sport or another, towards a mode of involvement or another, of the intentions, the habits, the habits of participation, of the attitudes adopted towards the involvement in sport and the image it has about the sport.

Secondly, marketing research should provide the opportunity to know the dimensions, configuration and forms of sport demand. Most organizations in the sports industry, with the exception of those in the sports goods industry, do not possess sufficient data on the above issues, rarely resorting to bodies specialized in market research.

4.5. Multiplication of sports clubs and bases or, on the contrary, their insufficiency

The situation of endowment with sports facilities is very different. In developed countries there are an impressive number of clubs (about 80,000 in Germany and Switzerland). The adoption of marketing determines the finding of an efficient response to the absence, decrease, latent character or seasonality of the demand, through appropriate marketing strategies.

In the developing countries the number of clubs is insufficient (about 3,500 in Romania). For this reason, sports bases are used mainly for performance sports, competition between them is weak.

Adopting the marketing optics at the level of the management of these facilities could ensure their financial independence from the public budget. In addition, they would thus contribute to the diversification of the service offer.

5. THE NECESSITY OF SPORTS MARKETING IN ROMANIA

When adopting the concept of sports marketing in Romania, we must take into account the following difficulties which, at the same time, constitute arguments in favor of assuming by the factors responsible for this difficult mission.

Delaying the reform. It is felt at the level of the whole economy, the extension of the transition period has slowed down the restructuring of the sport.

From 1990 to 2000, when the Law on physical education and sport was enacted, the entire sports system felt the lack of specific regulations that would allow each sports organization to assume a certain role and a certain direction of development in accordance with its social mission and with its position in the sport hierarchy.

The new sport law seems to integrate both elements of the liberal model, in which sporting activity is considered to be the expression of the free and autonomous citizens' initiative, and the state has only the role to create the material conditions necessary for the practice of sport (as in the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway), as well as elements of the interventionist model, in which sport is considered a public service, and the state assumes, to a greater or lesser extent, the responsibility for its promotion and development (as in France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Belgium, Luxembourg).

The educational goal. In the world of sports in Romania, marketing is still an insufficiently known notion and hardly applied scientifically.

However, because marketing theory has been shaped and enriched after marketing practice, it can be said that some of the marketing principles apply to us -

instinctively or empirically - in organizing competitions, in offering sports services (especially private), in negotiations and contracts, in the price policy that some clubs, especially football, apply when determining the cost of tickets, etc.

Speaking of the educational gap, one cannot overlook the fact that the politics of sports organizations in Romania, at all levels (ministry, federations, clubs, associations, etc.), depends rather on the personal talent of the manager, on pressing needs dictated by situations from outside the organization and not by the knowledge of the demand of the sports market and by the existence of a coherent strategy of sport development, structured at the level of each organization.

In addition, sports marketing is not included as a subject of study in the programs of physical education and sports institutes.

The structural gap. At the level of the sports organization there is no structure concerned with sports marketing. The existence of this nucleus depends on the management of the respective organization, on the quality, training and modernity of the respective manager who sets the short, medium and long term objectives of the organization.

In Romanian sport, the *inertia* seems to be at least as great as the desire for restructuring. That is why an authentic reform at the conceptual level becomes necessary. The good results that are still obtained in the elite sport through the merit of the "field" athletes and technicians do not sufficiently motivate the cantoning in structures and mentalities that are inadequate to the current evolution of the sport.

Structures should be energized to become more functional, more open, more flexible. And, because the structures are abstract entities in the absence of the people, the ones from which the reform of the sport should start are the people of sport themselves.

The reform of the mindset means the connection to modernity, learning the ways to become efficient, adapting to the pragmatism of this millennium beginning.

Lack of a database on the sports market, with all its components (sports organizations, supply and demand in sports, resources, intermediary agents, number of contributing members in clubs, size of amateur, recreational and professional sports, size of indirect participation in sports, bets, contracts, sports promotion, etc.).

It seems that at the level of sports organizations, with the exception of the sports media, the concerns for collecting, storing and processing information are minor, and the national statistics regarding the dimensions of the sports phenomenon are poor.

The **lack of specialized personnel** in marketing and, more specifically, in sports marketing, both at the level of the sports organizations themselves and at the level of higher education institutions specialized in the formation of sports frames.

The **current status of the athlete**, who feels the need for specialized guidance and who faces complex situations strictly related to the market: contracts, rights deriving from advertising, negotiations, game bonuses, procurement of technical equipment, etc.

The **standard of living**, better said the changes of standard of living that have appeared in the last years at the level of the various categories of population, determines changes in the structure of leisure, in the development of services (including sports) and in the cost of direct or indirect participation in sports.

One cannot speak of the standard relation of sport-life without revealing the importance of pro-sport education, of sport for all, of cultivating the ethical and sanogenic values of sport. The main objective of marketing, according to specialists, is to raise the standard of living. In it the living standard is actually created.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The obvious penetration of the economics in sports determines the openness of sports organizations to the knowledge of this new applied science.

It involves researching the sports market, creating an attractive offer, promoting products, services and organizations, properly managing the sports bases, developing relationships with partners in the sports environment, harnessing the potential of sports organizations, etc.

It refers not only to the individual (to the attitude of those who participate in sport), but especially to organizations, representing a modern optics of conducting sports activities according to criteria of efficiency and satisfaction of the desire of the sportsman or spectator.

Sport has an international or global dimension par excellence. At the same time, the concept of marketing acquires its full economic and social significance also on a macro scale. In these conditions, the Romanian sport, preserving its national specificity, must follow or be permanently in accordance with the evolutions of the international sport: the competition limited only at local, regional and national level loses its significance.

This synergy of the sport also requires the adoption of the marketing concept at the level of the sports organizations, the creation of the necessary organizational structures (by establishing a core, office or specialized compartment, staffed with personnel with the necessary competences) and the elaboration of a marketing strategy so that it responds as well as its development and performance objectives, but also the wishes of the participant directly or indirectly in sports.

In order to apply the marketing, short, medium and long term marketing plans are required, as well as marketing programs that establish the content, the sequence, the resources (human, material, financial) and the methods of carrying out the practical marketing activities. These specific activities cannot be carried out without the use of a research tool (methods, techniques and tools) and an information marketing system.

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