

SPORTS MARKETING - A NECESSITY

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ABSTRACT: *Like any new field in our country, sports marketing needs to be defined in order to perceive, at its true value, the importance it has in economic development (through the income it generates) and social (by involving the population in sports activities). The conceptualization of this field must start from the general framework in which sports marketing appeared and developed. With this in mind, this paper aims to discuss the different points of view encountered in theory regarding the definition and classification of sports marketing.*

KEYWORDS: *sports marketing, outdoor marketing, marketing through sport.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the development of the market of sports products and services, organizations operating in this market have noticed the need to implement the elements of marketing, so that their business to grow, leading to an overall evolution of domain. With this in mind, we can say that for starters marketing sports was not seen as a separate field, but as a new area of application marketing. However, during the development of sport in an industry, individualization Sports marketing as an independent field has emerged as increasingly necessary.

Individualization of sports marketing in the more general framework of marketing starts from a series of elements among which we can mention:

- the inclusion of sports activities in the area of services, which makes sports marketing to be delimited and due to the distinct characteristics on which presents them with a service (intangibility, perishability, variability and

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- in addition to these service-specific characteristics in general, sport presents a series of own characteristics that led to the deepening of the delimitation sports marketing;

Although sports have been sold for centuries, the idea of a rational sports marketing system is relatively new. The sports marketing specialist is required to market a product that is totally unpredictable, inconsistent and open to subjective interpretations. The sports marketing expert must fulfill his role on an extremely competitive market, having at his disposal a much smaller promotional budget than organizations of the same size in other fields. The good part of things is the media, eager to offer a comprehensive presentation of the general product and the existence of many possibilities for generating revenue by association with the business or industry.

2. DEFINING SPORTS MARKETING

Like any new field in our country, sports marketing needs to be defined in order to perceive, at its true value, the importance it has in economic development (through the income it generates) and social (through the involvement of the population in sports activities). The conceptualization of this field must start from the general framework in which sports marketing appeared and developed.

Sports marketing sums up all the activities meant to satisfy the needs and desires of sports consumers through exchange processes. Sports marketing has developed two major branches:

- marketing of sports products and services provided directly to sports consumers (athletes, coaches, officials, spectators, listeners, readers, collectors)
- marketing other industrial and consumer products or services through the use of sports promotion

Sport exerts an almost universal attraction and penetrates all spheres of life. There are several ways to consider the universal attractiveness of sport:

From a geographical perspective - sport is present in every nation on the globe and has played an important role in most civilizations.

From a demographic perspective - sport attracts, although often in different ways, all demographic segments (young and old, men and women, poor and rich)

From a socio-cultural perspective - sport is associated with every aspect of leisure and recreation.

Sport is related to many aspects of life:

- relaxation and fun - it is theater and melodrama, it is a game and for some a form of stress relief
- motor exercise - for some participants sport becomes a major part of their lifestyle food consumption - invariably the spectators eat when they attend, and the participants often eat after doing sports - protocol, journalists

- consumption of soft and alcoholic beverages is often associated with watching sports. Many direct participants in sports drink after doing sports
- sex - there are some sexual connotations of sport
- gambling - legal or illegal, have been strongly associated with sports. It is said that much of the popularity of football is based on consumers' passion for betting: bwin, sponsor, bettor is a player
- drug use - mainly concerns the consumption by athletes, inside the stadiums less, guarding, etc.
- physical violence - is a problem on the field, off the field, between participants, spectators, officials.
- social identification - involves association with a certain group, institution, community
- indirect gratification - the spectators enjoy the glory reflected by the victory of a team
- economic context
- religions - sport has religious features (ceremonies, asceticism, sacred lands, symbols
- business and industry - sponsorship, business is associated with sports, politics

In developed European countries, sports-related consumer spending is on average 2% of total consumer spending.

Sports expenses refer to: expenses related to direct participation in sports (club fees, taxes for the use of sports grounds, expenses for the purchase of sports equipment and materials, etc.) expenses related to indirect participation in sports, as a spectator (entrance tickets, transport expenses, etc).

The effects of sports spending are reflected on the health of individuals, leisure, employment and the development of the sports industry.

3. THE NATURE OF THE MARKETED PRODUCT

In the literature, the products are divided into two main categories: sports or non-sports. The first category includes four sub-categories: spectators, participants, equipment and related products.

Spectators are the priority target for sports marketing. The organizers of any competition have as a priority to sell as many tickets as possible and to have the best possible exposure on all communication channels.

Another goal of marketing can be to attract new participants to non-mainstream sports - such as poker, fishing, darts, food contests, billiards - but also to activities that are not considered sports, because there is no a winner (jogging, fitness, etc.)

Sports equipment represents a wide range of products and items specific to the practice of sports: boxing gloves, bowling balls, billiard cues, bowls, bags, golf clubs, gloves, clothes, shoes, etc.

Related products are those products purchased inside the arenas or in the presentation stores: food, soft drink, licensed T-shirts, souvenirs.

The subcategory of non-sports products includes all products that are advertised in stadiums, on sports sites, in sports shows, on team coaches. We see mainly car advertising, medical services, fast food, electronics.

4. PROMOTING SPORTS

The wide visibility that sports enjoy in the media has led to a decrease in the emphasis on sports marketing. Sport did not have to focus on marketing and promotion as other industries did. In fact, sport was based on advertising as the main means of promotion. Each newspaper has a sports column, 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 daily by sports).

Due to the visibility it enjoys, many businesses want to associate with sports. Sport provides a promotional vehicle for which the audience is often identifiable, 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 he or she is pursuing quite successfully. The public and direct participants in sports usually represent higher income groups, and in turn are the main targets for product marketing.

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

Even if victory does not mean everything in the marketing of a team, it is a major factor in explaining the fluctuation of the public. If there is no certain quality of the product "in itself" (clean land, modern stadiums, deserving team) than any strategic phenomena (marketing, sponsorship, advertising) will not matter.

5. THE SPORTS CONSUMER

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

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

- "The others". The socialization of a person for taking on roles in sports is influenced in a considerable proportion by the interaction with those whom sociologists call "those who matter". The others are family members, coaches, teachers, and friends. Parents play a vital role in initiating their children in sports. According to the Miller Lite report (1983), 75% of American parents said they encouraged their children to play sports. 61% of the affiliated members of some clubs found out about the clubs they joined from friends. Moreover, friends were the most important unique factor that could determine someone to try the services offered by a club; advertising and special promotional campaigns had a much lower impact.
- Cultural norms and values. Each individual is influenced by the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of the cultural environment in which he lives and which he learns from those close to him. But there are also forms of sport 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 reward and prestige in sports the existence of elite sports (aviation, yachting, golf, etc.) and of popular sports (football, cycling, etc.)
- Race relations. Behavioral patterns of involvement in sports are related to race. It is, however, difficult to explain why the percentage of NBA players in color is 80%, while the percentage of NBA players in color is only 17%.
- Climatic and geographical conditions (the best Romanian skaters come from Miercurea Ciuc, and the best canoeists and kayakers come from the Danube Delta)
- The marketing behavior of enterprises in the sports industry and in other industries. Nike shoes, Sharks sweaters, Oakland Raiders clothes are no longer today equipment items intended only for the athlete. Commercial enterprises have promoted "sports" lifestyle and "sports" fashion
- The conception of self. The theory of self-conception indicates that the individual possesses:
 - an image of himself
 - an image of the apparent self (as he thinks others see it)
 - 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 sports are generally consumed in public, the behavior of sports consumers is influenced by self-concept. In sports marketing, the images of paramount importance are the ideal self, the apparent self and the self for reference groups.

6. SPORTS MARKETING IN ROMANIA

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean much. We see sports marketing approaches only at football and tennis clubs, only initially at handball, rugby and athletics. However, they are only approaches, which indicate a trend rather than a reality. This situation is generated by the specifics of the administrative organization of the sports field in our country.

The most important structures are the sports federations, they being the ones that should follow the marketing of the sport they coordinate, as well as of the athletes they represent. But the Federations are funded by the state, so the funds are reduced. Of course, they could run branding and / or marketing campaigns to attract sponsorships or private investments, but they do not have enough funds. Thus, I am in a vicious circle. Furthermore, the sports clubs, the county sports directorates face even bigger financing problems, given their low visibility.

On the one hand, sports structures do not apply sports marketing due to lack of funds, but also due to lack of know-how. If we were to look at the good side, however, we could say that we have prospects to implement sports marketing in our country as well, because the market is almost non-existent, but with potential. As long as we still have world and Olympic champions, as long as we still practice sports, we have chances to develop sports marketing in our country as well.

7. THE LEVEL OF INTEGRATION OF SPORT IN THE MARKETING STRATEGY

Traditional advertising has the lowest level of involvement: a non-sports-related manufacturer or service provider buys space in sports publications or profile shows to promote what it wants to sell. Sometimes the models or advertising sports are adapted to the nature of the frame in which they are placed.

Manufacturers or service providers are more involved when they become sponsors. Through sponsorship, they try to capitalize on the official relationship with a league / team / athlete and, implicitly, to benefit from their popularity among fans.

There are several levels of sponsorship: main sponsor, name sponsor (Title Sponsor - companies pay for the stadiums and even the training grounds to bear their name), personal sponsor (who contracts with the stars of the teams) and official supplier (is the strategy through which manufacturers such as Nike or Adidas have become very well-known and have become market leaders).

With a constantly growing market, sports marketing has become one of the most effective forms of marketing due to global exposure and distribution through social media networks.

8. CONCLUSIONS

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

The obvious penetration of 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, proper management of sports facilities, developing relationships with partners in the sports environment, capitalizing on the potential of sports organizations, etc. It refers not only to the individual (to the attitude of those who participate in sports), but especially to organizations, representing a modern perspective of leading sports activities according to criteria of efficiency and satisfaction of the desire of the sportsman or spectator.

This synergy of sport requires the adoption of the marketing concept at the level of sports organizations, the creation of the necessary organizational structures (by setting up a nucleus, office or specialized compartment, staffed with staff with the necessary skills) and developing a marketing strategy so that it responds, as well as possible to its development and performance objectives, but also to the wishes of the direct or indirect participant in the sport. The application of marketing requires short, medium and long term marketing plans, as well as marketing programs that establish the content, succession, resources (human, material, financial) and methods of carrying out practical marketing activities. These specific activities cannot be carried out without the use of research tools (methods, techniques and tools) and a marketing information system.

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