

Contemporary dimensions of sports sponsorship

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Abstract

Marketing developed close relation with sponsorship since the beginnings of the industrial era of sports. The relation has transformed in a stable relation, the two forces – the sponsor and the sponsored – transforming into two companions of journey. The effort undertaken in this work was focused on analyzing the modern aspects of the partnership generated through sports sponsorship. The current issue and sport sponsorship has come a long way since the first action of its kind until now. Based on the presentation of new concepts on the development efforts in sport sponsorship, content provides a detailed analysis of the actual specifics of this type of activity. Analysis of influence vectors sponsorship process gives us a picture of the forces that can act on this. At the end of our research we focused attention on elements that empowers sports portfolio in terms of corporate interest, the potentiation commercial message and image association. This technique of promotional community for and through sports is maybe the one that manifests the most “laic” status among the promotional forms. This epithet implies a metaphorical approach given by the possibility of accomplishing some objectives that can have some more obvious “corporality” than in the case of the other forms of promotion used in the sports industry. Sports sponsorship has been an early ally of sports, and has remained a basic communicational technique. This fact is due to some determination in double sense: on the one hand, sport has adapted permanently to the dynamics of the range of sponsorship techniques and, on the other hand, the sponsorship tried to use the chameleon-like offer of the sports potential.

Key words: *sponsorship, partnership, communicational instruments, sports, sports show.*

Rezumat

Marketingului a dezvoltat o relație strânsă cu sponsorizarea încă de la începuturile erei industriale a sportului. Mariajul s-a transformat într-o relație stabilă, cei doi actori - sponsorul și sponsorizatul - transformându-se în doi parteneri de drum. Efortul derulat în această lucrare a fost orientat asupra analizării aspectelor moderne ce le generează parteneriatul prin sponsorizare sportivă. Problematika actuală a sponsorizării în și prin sport a parcurs un drum lung de la primele acțiuni de acest gen și până în prezent. Plecând de la prezentarea noii concepții privind derularea eforturilor de sponsorizare în lumea sportului, conținutul oferă o analiză detaliată a specificului actual al acestui tip de activitate. Analiza vectorilor de influență a procesului de sponsorizare ne oferă o imagine a forțelor ce pot acționa în acest sens. În finalul demersului nostru ne-am orientat atenția asupra portofoliului de elemente ce capacitează sportul din perspectiva interesului corporatist, al potențării mesajului comercial și al asocierii de imagine. Această tehnică de comunicare promoțională pentru și prin sport este cea care manifestă statul cel mai „laic” dintre toate formele promoționale. Acest epitet gratulează o abordare metaforică dată de posibilitatea îndeplinirii unor obiective ce pot avea o „corporalitate” mai evidentă decât în cazul celorlalte forme de promovare utilizate în industria sportului. Sponsorizarea sportivă a fost un aliat timpuriu al sportului dar a rămas o tehnică comunicațională de bază. Acest lucru de datorează unei determinări în dublu sens: pe de o parte sportul s-a adaptat permanent la dinamica instrumentarului de tehnici de sponsorizare și pe de altă parte parteneriatul a încercat să fructifice oferta cameleonică a potențialului sportiv.

Cuvinte cheie: *sponsorizare, parteneriat, instrumente comunicaționale, spectacol sportiv.*

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Introduction

There is in the sports world a long tradition of using this communicational technique. This tradition was formed because of the important advantages recorded in time for the both parties involved. On the one hand, sponsorship is useful to the sports organisation and the sports phenomenon in general, being an important financial instrument. It becomes a channel to attract supplementary funds that allow the good organization and development of the activity and the accomplishment of the objectives of the sports organization, helping the promotion and development of business in this field, both on medium and especially on long term. On the other hand, the process of sponsorship is for the sponsor an imperative communicational instrument. The contractual relation between the financing organization and the development of some sports event offers the former the possibility of accomplishing some punctual promotional objectives. Important in this equation is the harmonization of these objectives followed and the

specific of sports or the competition as offer of interest.

The modern theory of sponsorship

The classical theory of the sports marketing informs us about the so-called “triangle of publicity”: the *sponsor* (beneficiary of image capital through sports, thus becoming its supporter) ⇔ the *event* (the channel of transmitting the promotional information and reception of feedback) ⇔ the *direct or indirect public* (the target of the effort of promotion).

The evolution of the contemporary marketing and its close relation with the extremely dynamic reality of sports led to the completion of this triad. Currently, the component elements of the promotion in/through sports are as follows: the sponsor; the sponsored; the sports event and the participating public with which a direct relation is developed; the classical and modern channels of communication and the indirect public influenced or notified by these media channels (Figure 1).

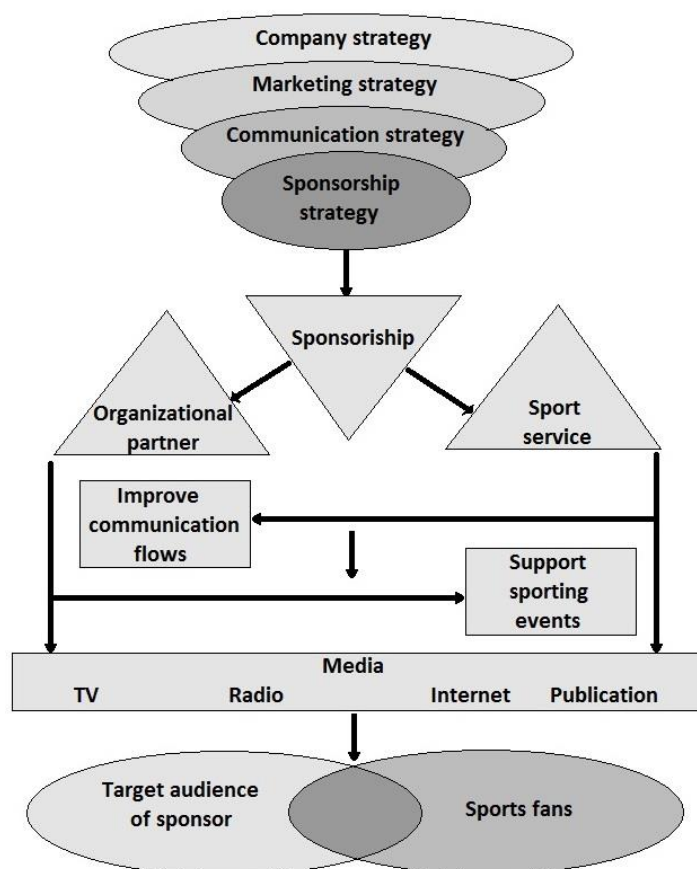


Figure 1. The principle of sport sponsorship (adaptation after Balaban, 2009, p.188)

Developing the activities under the umbrella of sponsorship represents the realisation of *communicational sub-mix* (1) that can include: publicity, public relations, free promotion, stimulation of sales, hospitality, personal sales, etc. The main factors involved in the process of sponsorship determine a communicational flux adapted to the types of relations and the objectives set among the factors involved. Defining the concept offers us more visions:

- a relation of exchange by which the sponsor makes available the sponsored money or other resources of the company, and it directs towards the public information favouring directly or indirectly the realization of objectives of marketing of the sponsor;
- an instrument of communication allowing the direct relation between a brand or company and an attractive event for some specific public (2);
- financial support of some public manifestations in order to make known to the public the brands under which that organization offers its products on the market (3);
- the using by some organization of an event or some person it associates with by financial support, or of another nature, in order to transmit a message to some target public (4).

Specificity of sports sponsorship

The analysis of the problems of the sports phenomenon sponsorship as promotional policy of some organization must be realized from the perspective of the two parties. On the one hand, we must answer the question: *Which are the landmarks of a partner-sponsor in taking the decision of sponsorship of some sports action?* On the other hand, the equidistant presentation of the interests imposed by the answer to the question: *Which is the offer of interest of sports for a potential sponsor?*

In case we direct our effort firstly towards the sponsor's interests, we have to relate the latter to some organization offering sports services for example, in the category of customers or business partners, and not in that of "well-doers."

The decision of some company to sign a contract of sports sponsorship is based on a commercial motivation that can be satisfied by a series of opportunities offers by this collaboration. The increase of the notoriety of the company, the improvement of the public image, gaining some

opportunities, hospitality, strengthening the perception of the public regarding the company are some motivations also met in the relations with various other offers outside sports.

The sports phenomenon also offers a series of unique motivational advantages. They result from the specific of this field. Translated into promotional language, the advantages of a partnership of sponsorship offer the possibility of realizing a communicational flux with some market shares, sometimes reticent to the classical instruments of communication. The promotional message can thus reach the field of interest of some categories of subjects with a certain psychographic, behavioural and motivational profile. These subjects can transform into targets of the marketing effort, offering the possibility to the company to approach new customers and, this, gain new sales opportunities.

The mechanism of the sponsorship in sports

It is imposed at this stage of the analysis a delimitation of the mechanism of sponsorship. The landmark elements are represented by establishing a *strategy*, choosing the *form of intervention* and fixing the *level* of sponsorship.

Choosing the appropriate strategy involves proving the unique qualities offered by the sports show, qualities manifested especially by actions of "event" type and less by other forms of promotion.

Thus, an interested sponsor will be able to associate their image with that event. In this situation, we can talk about a strategy of *sponsorship of credibility*. Once the strategy chosen and adapted to the object of the sponsorship, the sponsor-partner must decide which the most appropriate form of financial intervention is.

Continuing the decisional flux of the strategy chosen, the sponsor will be able to choose one of the forms of intervention adapted to the offer of the sports service and reaching the own objectives. A financial partner can decide the sponsorship of the whole lot of sportsmen of some club or just the most representative sportsman. They can choose the production of a single event or can finance several events.

Such decision will be taken by the company-sponsor following the evaluation of the *quantity of audience* and the *degree of mediatization* (1).

On establishing these landmarks, the sponsor can quantify the level of notoriety of the sports organization, of some sportsmen or some sports event by the image offer made available by the supplier of the sports service or the entity organizing the event. This offer is represented by the package of means of promotion made available for the partner. Thus, the sponsor can make popular their quality of partner, the promotional message or the various components of the visual identity.

The evaluation of the visibility of the sports phenomenon in various forms of media, from articles of newspaper, TV reports, shows with dedication, news presented in the frame of specialty bulletins, news on the radio will clarify the potential of visibility and thus the extent to which the sponsor can use the association of image. The events, the organizations or the sportsmen who benefit from a high level of notoriety obviously enjoy the appreciation of a much larger public. It influences the person who supports the financial effort of sponsorship to establish the optimum *level of sponsorship*. It can be chosen according to the type of *rights package* bought that confer the sponsor a certain title that can be used in their promotional communications: partner, sponsor or official supplier. He can also participate as unique partner or co-financer.

The *geographical dimension* of the sponsorship is the second element of influence of the level of sponsorship. Sport is a phenomenon of international notoriety, yet in most cases it exists through events carried out at local level. Even if the participating public and the audience can be international, the extent of the event is at regional level. This aspect makes us think of the concept of *glocalization-grobalization* (5). A tourist operator who wants to promote some tourist destination can attract tourists by sponsoring some local sports event, but with international participation. Starting from the initiation of this destination of sports tourism, they will be able to stimulate also the other forms of tourism (of entertainment, historical, religious, cultural, etc.), thus increasing the market of the organization.

Important to notice is the fact that closing some partnership of sports sponsorship with an

organization “selling” a product such as a competition, a tournament or a sports discipline has as its main source of motivation the optimization of the communicational flux of the sponsor. This process aims at surveying the modifications at international level, the awareness to the consumers’ attitude and behaviour regarding the offer of products/services of some company, the manipulation of the key elements of the sports show in the sense of improving the public image perceived, the increase of popularity by the visibility associated to the sports phenomenon. The relation sponsor ↔ sport (in generic sense) ↔ sponsored is much more efficient if it is approached from the perspective of this objectives representing directions of action with effects on medium and especially long term.

Building a successful partnership

The analysis of the professional sports and especially the entertainment one as offer of interest in the policy of communicational type of an organization starts from its transformation in a source of interest for the promotional effort of an organizational third-party partner. Many companies have a policy open to alternative forms of marketing and fresh instruments of communication. The appearance of these tools can only be beneficial to both parties.

The success in closing a partnership of sports sponsorship depends on the way the sports organization presents its product (in our case – the sports show) and the relation with the potential sponsors. A first step in building partnership is represented by the realisation of the *file of presentation*, aspect that makes part of the policy of communicational type of some sports organization by which it cultivates its image in the relations with various partners. The presentation of the objectives, the fields of competence and interest, the portfolio of organized events contributes, obviously, to building some identity of professional and competent organization. This document assumes part of the characteristics of the *press file* presenting “between two elegant covers [...] a collection or a combination of informative documents and materials meant for a large audience” (6). It contains a set of data assembled unitarily and presented in a stylish and attractive manner, presenting the sports show as a unique

offer. It thus becomes a strategic instrument of the communication of the sports organization in the relations it has with the potential financial collaborators. It is needful in very many occasions [...], materializing the message of the organization regarding a certain topic" (7). In order to maximize the impact, this document is filled in with photo cutting and accompanied by a video presented on a digital support. If a request of sponsorship, the request of approving some project or launching a suggestion of partnership will reach the desk of a marketing director, accompanied by such an informational package, the latter will be able to form a pertinent and complete opinion on that organization, the chances of success becoming maximal.

The next stage in building some partnership is represented by finding those companies having an interest in the specific of some sports field as suggested offer. The organizers must realize a mini marketing survey to systemize and rank the economic agents from the perspective of a potential partnership.

Based on the design of an *informational system of marketing (ISM)* it will be realized a database used in the process of substantiation of the decision to select the potential sponsors. This information management can be used to systemize the potential sponsors and identify their interests. The volume of information will facilitate the more profound understanding of the markets, the business environment, the quantification of the economical and financial potential of the company and the volume of sales, the identification of the fields of interest and action, as well as the portfolio of services and products, the positioning of the economic agent in the market and the market share taken. All this data will lead to outlining the target sponsor's "portrait" based on which the sports organization will customize the request of sponsorship.

Landmarks of the decisional process of sponsorship

In order to succeed the harmonization of the suggestion of sponsorship with the interests of the sponsor-company, the applicant – the sports organization offering a specific service – must enter the mind of the decider responsible with the promotional expenditures of a company. Identifying the problems they face in the process of decision-

making to use sponsorship and communicational instrument can only facilitate the collaboration between the two parties. Thus, before launching a proposal of sports partnership to a selected sponsor according to the presentation above, the representative of the sports association must be informed about some aspects of the decisional process of the partner company, as an instrument of its communicational mix.

Author Patrick Dambron suggests a list with the most important questions for which the decider must find an answer (1). Here is this list presented in an adapted and completed form:

a. Which is the preferred field to invest?

Directing some funds towards a specific field depends on its characteristic and potential. A sponsor can choose among a cultural event, a social action, a radio-TV show, a humanitarian effort or a sports event. If the organization with direct its efforts of sponsorship towards sport, it will have to choose in a market where the offer of sports disciplines is very generous. Choosing some sport as communicational interface can offer the sponsor a tool of promotion of vanguard characterized by the freshness of the message, the newness of the means used and the credible and efficient support of image, adapted to the organizational objectives.

b. What is it more efficient: to sponsor a sports event or only some participants to it?

A company can decide to support financially an entire competition as unique sponsor. In this situation, they can benefit from the totality of communication and image effects. On the other hand, a sponsor can choose the variant of supporting one single sportsman or some limited group of participants. This variant comprises a higher risk of failure, the flair and inspiration in the chose taken being important.

c. They should associate the name of the company (as producer of value) or only a brand (as individual carrier of the value of a company) with the sports event?

According to the prestige of the company or the notoriety of some product or range of products, a sponsor can decide on which aspect they want to orientate the promotional efforts. In case it is wished to beautify the public image, then the option is to promote the company as a whole. If the sponsors want, for instance, to stimulate the acquisition of

some product/service, then the financial effort will be done on its behalf.

d. They should produce a new event or associate to an already famous one?

If it is unique financier, they will take all the financial burden of the event, but will be able to value the whole capital of image. If they will be associated to one or more financial partners, the rights of image and publicity will be negotiated and shared.

e. On which status to count: permanent sponsor or occasional sponsor?

A statement sensibly similar is given by the duration of the sponsorship: long or short term. The association on long term of a company with some sport proves its wish to develop a coherent communicational policy with delayed effects. A company that wishes to obtain immediate effects will support occasional projects, trying to use at maximum the public transparency and popularity of the moment of the sports event.

We have seen in the text above that, in order to persuade an economic partner to support financially a sports event, it is necessary to make introspection inside the decisional process of sponsorship. The "X-ray" of the decisional problem of some potential partner offers a series of valuable information opening the possibility of customizing the request of sponsorship, offering at the same time the opportunity to choose the appropriate sponsor and the optimum momentum to launch the proposal.

The offer of sports interest used in building the partnership of sponsorship

At the moment, the analysis of the promotional problem by actions of sponsoring the sports phenomenon imposes the realization of a portfolio of specific instruments that can be used as support for the communicational policy by the sponsor. In other words, our theoretical approach is focused on identifying the sports offer regarded from the perspective of the commercial and communicational interest of some partner.

a. Specific events

Large part of the specific events related to the sports phenomenon, allow using a wide range of publicity tools at the place of the event. This type of promotion has two forms:

◆ at the place of consumption of the service of leisure sports (training room);

◆ in show rooms, stadiums, public spaces where events, competitions, shows or demonstrations with public take place.

As for the message transmitted, it is summarized at the simple presentation of the name or logo of the company/brand promoted. This type of publicity benefits from **direct audience** – relatives, friends, family, fans who can watch training sessions or audience in case of organizing some public events. If some event benefits from live or recorded presentation via TV channels or the Internet, then we can talk about **indirect audience**, much more numerous.

b. Visibility media

This type of publicity, realized in an indirect manner, is not found in the sponsor's accountancy registers. Carrying out some sports action well organized and attractive will draw the attention of the media, which will allot in the specific media spaces reserved for that event. Inevitably, the sponsor's name or some elements of visual identity will reach the eye of the audience. An important role is offered here also by the *publicity through cultural and sports media*, which can be periodical or occasional. It can present long reports, articles or interviews both with direct participants and with audience, fans, collaborators or sponsors.

c. Image export

The phenomenon of extreme sports, sports in the open as well as freestyle forms of classical sports represent the new wave of leisure activities. They have a very strong social message. The essence of the message is related to breaking the conformism and daily dullness, flight against the system, combating egalitarianism and mediocrity, supporting the freedom of expression and unconditional choice, supporting authentic values, promoting talents and supporting personal creativity. All of these are actually the goals of a motivational marketing operating with intangible instruments, and leading towards visible results.

d. Publicity on the sportsmen and coaches equipment

It was initially met in professional sports. The companies sponsoring an event belonging to professional sports can write various elements of visual identity on the equipment, footwear or tools used by the sportsmen. Currently, time sports offer

more and more the possibility to present commercial symbols and the sponsors' message. This technique represents a fresh form of publicity contributing to spreading the commercial message in a nonconformist and familiar manner.

e. *Online publicity: sites, forums, social networks*

The sports phenomenon has developed extremely fast also in the electronic environment. The market has been shared very much. Sites dedicated to different types of sports of performance or entertainment has begun to appear in an increased number, having also the advantage of a more professional form of presentation. There are currently gigantic portals and sites, forums with tens of thousands of members, online shops with exclusive customers or wider target. Many of them have exceptional architecture, extremely valuable content, information updated weekly or even daily, recording tens of thousands of viewers every day.

This audience in accelerated increase and distributed at international level transformed this online environment in a publicity support extremely attractive and searched by more and more companies. The members of this community share experience, information and wishes regarding the sports practised, the club joined, the favourite team, as well as lots of thoughts regarding various social, economic, sports and cultural aspects of life. Approaching a strategy of direct communication, using a language specific to the community and acting in form of an individual user, can bring huge benefits to the companies from the perspective of the communicational flux, the relations with the customers, the beautification of the image and the popularization of the own offer.

Conclusions

The publicity associated to the various sub-fields of sports by activities of sponsorship leads to advantages for both parties involved. The advantage of such partnership resides in the newness of the environments of publicity and the characteristics of the fans. It is difficult to realize a comparison between the effects of the sponsorship in the professional sports and those obtained in the area of amateur sports. It is important the fact that the financial efforts representing a part of the budget allotted to the marketing communication are much

smaller in the amateur sports. Inversely proportional is the result of the quantitative estimation of the public in contact with the promotional message. Even though spreading the message is realized in a longer time and by means of some channels that can distort it, the effects cannot be neglected. On the contrary, the familiar character, the common language, and the monolithic behaviour of the fans perpetuate the transmission of the message till places hardly accessible to the modern technology, offering at the same time credibility and transparency.

The sports phenomenon cannot be used as promotional vehicle in any economic field. To determine a sponsor to use the image of the sports as promotional vehicle, they must be persuaded that the communicational policy present a series of affinities regarding the unique and new characteristics of this sports offer.

The key to productive exploitation of the sports phenomenon in the process of sponsorship will be represented by the perfecting of the relation between the sponsor's interests and the objectives of the sponsored. Otherwise, a sponsor who is not convinced by the finalities obtained following their financial effort will not honour the request of sports sponsorship received. Regardless of their financial situation, they are not ready to make the least effort. The partnership proposal must be oriented only towards those sponsors compatible with the increased offer supported by the organizers.

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