

THE ROLE OF MARKETING IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF SPORTS CLUBS

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Abstract

Marketing is crucial for the development and promotion of sports clubs, playing a key role in increasing visibility and building a positive club image. This paper outlines the primary marketing activities used in sports, such as promotion, online communication, sponsorship, and fan engagement. It also examines the importance of tailoring these activities to the specific nature of the club and the expectations of the audience. Effective use of marketing can help sports clubs raise awareness of their activities and strengthen relationships with fans and partners.

Keywords: *marketing, sports club, promotion, communication, sponsorship*

1. Introduction and context of the study

In the specialized literature, marketing is presented from various perspectives. Essentially, it aims to identify and satisfy customer needs, ensuring that the organization's activities also generate favorable economic results. (Kotler, 2007, p. 43).

For a sports club, a marketing strategy is crucial for attracting supporters, promoting the club, and maintaining strong relationships with partners. To this end, the club's resources must be utilized effectively, and promotional methods selected based on the target audience. At the same time, the club needs to find ways to differentiate itself from other clubs and increase its visibility within the community.

Developing a marketing strategy therefore entails understanding the competitive landscape and the activities of other clubs, as well as identifying specific elements that can help build a distinctive image. By employing appropriate promotion and communication methods, sports clubs can increase their visibility, strengthen relationships with supporters, and create opportunities for long-term partnerships. In this context, tailoring marketing activities to the club's unique characteristics and the audience's expectations is a key aspect of the sports organization's development.

In today's society, sport plays a significant role and is practiced by a vast number of people. Although often viewed as a form of entertainment, sport differs from other such activities because its course cannot be fully predicted. For instance, a play follows a pre-established script, and a concert adheres to a program prepared and followed by the artists.

In sport, however, circumstances can shift from one moment to the next, as participants must react to unfolding events during the competition. Consequently, both the progression of a match and the final outcome are shaped by the athletes' actions and the situations that arise along the way. (Constantinescu, 2015, p. 13)

2. Marketing in sports clubs

Sports marketing is a field that has steadily developed in recent years, bridging the gap between sports activities and marketing principles. It contributes to promoting sports organizations, bringing them closer to the public, and building a favorable image in the marketplace. (Ștefănică, 2023, p. 7)

In the specialized literature, sports marketing is approached from various perspectives. Some experts consider it to be, in essence, the application of marketing principles to the field of sports. Thus, concepts and strategies used in general marketing are adapted to the specific nature of sports activities and the particular characteristics of organizations within this sector. Researchers such as B.G. Pitts, D.K. Stotlar, B.L. Parkhouse, and H. Schlossberg fall into this category. In his 1993 work, D.K. Stotlar does not formulate a formal definition of sports marketing; instead, he highlights the importance of sports organizations adopting a marketing orientation during the strategic planning process. (Stotlar, 1993, p.21)

However, there are also specialists who view sports marketing as a distinct field with its own characteristics and tools. This perspective is based on the idea that the sports sector possesses specific features requiring approaches that differ from those of traditional marketing.

Consequently, the strategies and methods employed must be adapted to the specific situations and demands encountered in sports activities. In this regard, G. Lewis and H. Appenzeller distinguish between two primary ways in which marketing can relate to sports activity. (Heerden, 2001, p. 47) The first approach concerns sports marketing and involves using specific marketing mix tools to highlight the advantages and benefits of participating in or watching sports.

The second approach is marketing through sport, where sport serves as a vehicle for promoting products or services; a common example is sponsorship, which allows companies to showcase their products to a clearly defined target audience.

Regardless of the perspective from which sports marketing is approached, the specialized literature seeks to highlight what distinguishes this field from general marketing.

When marketing principles and tools are applied to sports, they are not simply adopted in their original form; rather, they are adjusted to suit the unique characteristics of sports activities and the way the sector operates.

Consequently, applying marketing within the sports industry entails modifying established concepts to better meet the specific demands of the sport. This process is known as adaptation.

Table no. 1. Marketing activities used by sports clubs

SPORTS CLUB PROMOTION	
ONLINE COMMUNICATION	
SPORTS SPONSORSHIP	
FAN RELATIONS	

(Source: V. Ștefănică, 2023)

These activities contribute to promoting sports clubs and increasing their visibility, as well as to improving communication with the public and maintaining a close relationship with supporters. In this way, clubs can better showcase their image and encourage public engagement and support.

3.Applying marketing principles in sports

The handball club analyzed in this case study operates in the municipality of Târgu Jiu and plays a significant role in supporting and promoting the sport within the local community.

Through its activities, the club aims to achieve sporting success while also strengthening ties with the public and with individuals interested in playing and supporting handball.

The club's activities center on participating in competitions, training athletes, and promoting handball within the local community. Depending on the age of the participants and the level of play, the club focuses both on the training and development of young players and on participation in official competitions. Through these activities, the club fosters interest in handball and encourages as many people as possible to discover and play the sport.

The local community plays an important role in the club's operations. Attendance at matches, along with interest in the team's performance and results, helps foster a closer bond between the club and the public. In this way, the club's activities extend beyond the realm of sports competitions, becoming an integral part of the sporting and social life of Târgu Jiu.

Regarding its marketing efforts, the club employs various methods to promote and showcase its activities. Social media plays a significant role, serving as a platform to promote matches, highlight results and athletes, and share updates on the team's activities.

Collaboration with partners and sponsors, who support the club's operations, is another key aspect. By consistently using these promotional strategies, the club enhances its visibility and maintains ongoing communication with the public.

An online presence plays a significant role in how the club communicates with the public. Through digital platforms, the club rapidly disseminates information and maintains a direct connection with supporters. These platforms feature details about upcoming matches and results, alongside photos and videos from training sessions and competitions. Club activities are also showcased. Through this consistent communication, the club increases the visibility of its operations and maintains a close relationship with the public.

Relations with sponsors and partners represent another important aspect of the club's operations. Established partnerships contribute financial and organizational support for sporting activities and facilitate the implementation of long-term projects. At the same time, collaborating with the club offers sponsors and partners visibility and the opportunity to promote their image through association with the team, matches, and sporting events.

4.Results and discussion

The handball club's marketing activities focus on promoting the team, the athletes, and the matches, as well as on developing relationships with the public and partners. Through these activities, the club raises awareness of its operations and strengthens its presence within the local sports community.

Promoting matches is a key priority, with information about the games played being disseminated through the club's communication channels. Details regarding match schedules, results, and key sporting highlights are presented.

Another element is the club's visual identity. The logo, colors, kit, and promotional materials contribute to the team's recognition and the maintenance of a unified image.

Relations with sponsors and partners constitute another component of marketing activities. These collaborations support sporting operations, while partners promote their image by associating themselves with the team and the events organized.

Promoting handball among children and young people complements the club's activities. Initiatives and projects aimed at this demographic help attract new players and foster local interest in the sport.

To highlight how marketing tools are utilized by the two clubs under analysis, a comparison of their key promotional and communication activities was conducted. The analysis examines how the clubs present their sporting activities, promote matches and results, and maintain engagement with the public.

The comparison examines several aspects of marketing activity, such as social media usage, the promotion of the team and athletes, communication with supporters, collaboration with partners, and initiatives aimed at attracting the public. Analyzing these elements highlights the key similarities and differences between the marketing strategies employed by the two sports clubs.

Table no. 2 Comparison of marketing tools used by handball clubs in Târgu Jiu and Bucharest

Marketing activity	Târgu Jiu Club	Bucharest Club
Official website	Yes	Yes
Facebook	Yes	Yes
Instagram	Yes	Yes
Match promotion	Yes	Yes
Result promotion	Yes	Yes
Player promotion	Yes	Yes
Photo/video content	Yes	Yes
Online broadcasts	Yes	Yes
Season tickets	Yes	Yes
Online tickets	No	Yes
Season ticket packages	No	Yes
Online store	No	Yes
Merchandise	No	Yes
Promotion of European competitions	No	Yes
Commercial partnerships	Yes	Yes
Sponsor promotion	Yes	Yes
Fan events	Yes	Yes
Youth activities	Yes	Yes
Promotion of community activities	Yes	Yes
Newsletter	No	No

The information in the table shows that the two clubs use several similar methods to promote their sporting activities and communicate with the public. Both have official websites and maintain a presence on Facebook and Instagram, where they share information about the team's activities.

Promotional activities include announcements regarding matches and results, player profiles, photographs, and video content. Additionally, both clubs utilize online broadcasts and promote activities aimed at supporters. These tools help keep the public informed and maintain interest in the teams.

The main differences between the two clubs lie in their commercial activities and methods of fostering fan loyalty. The Bucharest-based club employs various strategies to attract and retain supporters, including online ticketing, season ticket packages, an online store, and merchandise.

Participation in European competitions also contributes to promoting the team and increasing its visibility.

In the case of the Târgu Jiu club, the same types of commercial activities were not identified in the analyzed public information. Nevertheless, both clubs place emphasis on promoting their teams, collaborating with partners, and communicating their sporting activities to the public. Thus, the main differences lie in the variety of commercial tools used and the way fan loyalty initiatives are developed.

5. Conclusions

The analysis shows that marketing plays a significant role in the operations of sports clubs, contributing to their promotion and the development of relationships with the public. In the case of the handball clubs analyzed, marketing activities include promoting matches and results, communicating via online networks, showcasing players, collaborating with partners and sponsors, and maintaining a constant connection with supporters.

The two clubs employ similar methods for promotion and public communication. Official websites and social media channels are used to share information about the teams, matches, competitions, and results. Additionally, photos and videos are utilized to showcase the teams' activities and maintain a connection with supporters.

Regarding commercial activities, certain differences are observed between the two clubs. The Bucharest club offers the option to purchase tickets and season passes online and features an online merchandise store. For the Târgu Jiu club, based on the information analyzed, the same types of commercial activities were not identified.

An analysis of the two clubs' activities reveals that sports marketing goes beyond merely promoting matches and competitions. It encompasses a range of activities through which clubs promote their image, communicate with the public, and strive to maintain the closest possible ties with supporters and partners. These activities include player promotion, social media communication, and collaborations with various partners.

For the handball clubs analyzed, marketing activities play a significant role in both promoting the team and maintaining relationships with supporters and partners. At the same time, it is evident that the two clubs do not employ the same promotional methods. Differences arise based on each club's organizational structure, available resources, and chosen means of communicating with the public. Consequently, marketing activities are tailored to each club's specific situation and capabilities, as well as the objectives it aims to achieve.

6. Practical contributions of the study

The practical significance of this study lies in the presentation of methods for applying marketing within handball clubs, aimed both at promoting the team and fostering a closer connection with the audience. The analysis of the two clubs offers insight into how various marketing tools are utilized and highlights the differences between their respective strategies. The findings provide a perspective on how promotional activities are conducted within the clubs under study.

The information derived from the analysis can help define strategies to improve marketing activities. Key areas to consider include online communication, match promotion, maintaining close relationships with supporters, and developing partnerships. Regarding the Târgu Jiu club, the comparison with the Bucharest club highlights specific commercial methods the latter uses to promote its activities and sustain public interest; these can serve as examples of solutions that might be analyzed and adapted to the Târgu Jiu club's capabilities.

The research findings can be useful for analyzing how sports clubs conduct their marketing activities and for identifying opportunities for improvement. Particular attention can be focused on team promotion, communication with the public, and the development of relationships with supporters.

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