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NEW PERSPECTIVES OF CORPORATE IDENTITY IN SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the topic of corporate identity in sports. The main objective of this paper is to present new views, trends and tools in building a desirable image for sports organizations using corporate identity tools, including some selected areas relating to the brand. The main points of this paper include corporate design, communication, culture and sports organizations' product. These tools are all linked and transformed into the creation of a cool brand for a new generation of athletes and consumers – the so-called Generation Y of sports. This group is becoming a new economically important group for many companies in sports, as well as many sports organizations. The Sports industry is heavily dependent on the new generation of athletes in all performance levels, and sport fans. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly be innovating new corporate identity tools with a focus on the sports area.

Keywords: corporate identity; brand; Generation Y; sport organizations; image

INTRODUCTION

In the new millennium, marketing has been a dynamically changing sector, where those who are successful are the people who can adapt to these conditions adequately, or change them with new creative ideas, procedures, tools and methods. This trend is also visible within the sports environment. There is an apparent increasing power and influence on the sports market of the new consumer generation, sport companies customers, sportspeople and other interest groups in the sports environment; such as fans, spectators, volunteers, club members etc. This generation had grown up in a colourful marketing environment (Yarrow & O'Donnell, 2009; Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2012) and they are therefore more or less immune to the classical marketing tools and consequently very critical towards them. This new generation is also called "Generation Y" (Bush, Martin, & Bush, 2004; Manpower study, 2007; McCrindle, 2009; Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2012; Vysekalová, 2011; Yarrow & O'Donnell, 2009). A sports environment offers this generation a big

amount of possibilities how to spend their free time, how to have unique experiences, how to evoke strong emotions, and how to tell famous stories. For different sports organizations there has been development of a highly competitive environment where they fight for keeping current members and are engaging new ones from target groups labelled “customers”. Sports organizations must constantly come up with new solutions to attract their target groups to differ from competition and to be unique, special, original and attractive. In this respect there is importance in creating a strong brand, which has its own clear identity, and is somehow specific (Quart, 2003; Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2012). It is the corporate identity that sports organisations should focus on in their marketing activity to support and fulfil their aims (Voráček, 2012). Sports organizations will no longer be only “empty” providers of a sports product. The new generations of people do not want to satisfy their basic needs by being connected with the basic form of a product offered any more (Wells, 2011; Quart, 2003; Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2012). Generation Y is searching for more than just physical exercise and activities, sport performance, sports equipment etc. within a sports product. The main aspect for attractive sports products are entertainment, excitement, experience, emotions, story, freedom and sharing these aspect with friends. It is therefore appropriate to link these aspects with a sports organizations’ brand and its overall perceived image through the use of corporate identity tools. They increase the chance to make the sports organization interesting and attractive for the younger generation.

Due to a strong tendency to share everything with friends, each satisfied and enthusiastic customer from Generation Y is a bearer and propagator of an organization’s image and this contributes to and supports the PR activity of the specific sports organization. This oral communication among people, (also known as: “word-of-mouth”, oral propaganda, grapevine, one lady says etc.) or a recommendation or not to a friend, has currently shown as the trustworthiest source of information for new customers (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013) which, is entirely for free. This contribution is focused on new trends in the sports organisations corporate identity creation aimed at the new consumer generation of sport products.

This article shows the differences and characteristics of Generation Y and also shows the brand new model (CRUSH) developed by Van den Bergh and Behrer (2012) on the basis of many researches on Generation Y. This CRUSH model is then applied into a sport environment, and sports organisations by the author of this article.

METHODS

This paper is not typically a research paper, but it is theoretical concept developed by the author of the article. Because of that, the basic method for this paper is analysis of literature resources, especially one – Van den Bergh and Behrer (2012, 2013). These authors developed the CRUSH model.

Generation Y

The so-called Generation Y has already been mentioned in the introduction – it is therefore essential to give the basic characteristic of this segment and how it is classified. This generation has not been clearly classified yet. However, it consists of individuals born in the 80s or the 90s of the 20th century. Bush, Martin and Bush (2004) claim that Generation Y is described as anybody born between 1977 and 1994. The Manpower study (2007) according to Morgan shows the generational division of Generation Y, are individuals born between 1976 and 1990. McCrindle (2009) presents in his study, the ABS Census, a source that defines Generation Y, as those who are born between 1982 and 2000. It is therefore a generation of young people who are getting into or have already reached the highly productive age. Van den Bergh and Behrer (2012) state several important characteristics of this generation in relation to a brand creation:

- Members of Generation Y are addicted to stimulation. Their favourite trendy brands appeal to their individual control and immediate satisfaction.
- Generation Y uses technologies to build a social life, never vice versa.
- For them content is the social currency number one.
- Friends are the filter of relevance through which the members of Generation Y perceive the brands messages. Trendy brands use social media and communicate equally with everybody – they do not dictate but engage young people while offering them control.
- Members of Generation Y have a higher confidence in people and social contacts.
- As a result of mamahotels and boomerang returns the members of Generation Y have a higher influence on family purchases.
- Members of Generation Y choose and mix the right pieces for the real moment and purpose. Brands should take care of this range of opportunities and needs and offer a possibility of choice.
- Attraction to brands and identification with them is being created in adolescence in connection with brain development.
- This consumer generation is looking for basic brands which can offer stability, harmony and authenticity.

Vysekalová (2011) characterises Generation Y in the following words:

- Generation Y have been growing up surrounded by modern technologies that are, unlike older generations, natural for them. The world is for these people accessible with “one mouse click”.
- They are spoilt children of loving parents, born in a quiet time. They are confident, used to express their opinions also on products about which they discuss on various internet forums.
- High flexibility is typical for them which projects into all spheres of life. As customers they are demanding and want the goods to be accessible anytime and anywhere they need.
- They are different from previous generations. They perceive more incentives at once, listen to music, browse internet websites and discuss things with friends at the same time. They perceive visual incentives more and prefer complex information.

- Social bonds are important for them as well, just as life in a community. Thanks to the internet and social networks they keep these bonds. Peers opinions and the “Word-Of-Mouth” communication are important aspects while choosing products.
- Questions of ecology become more significant. They are sensitive to environmental problems.
- This generation is characterized by its higher loyalty to brands they share with their peers. Not only do they buy a product with a brand but also the overall company image.

The demonstrations and characteristics mentioned are necessary to be considered also within a sports environment, where self-realisation and self-expression not only of members of this generation, are visible through sport performance and the behaviour while doing it. The following tools of corporate identity in sports are adapted to the above mentioned Generation Y.

Corporate identity in sport

Despite the fact that the vast majority of sports organizations in the Czech Republic are nonprofit (only professional football clubs and ice-hockey clubs are the profit sport organisations), it is necessary to realise and implement marketing principles typical of a profit sector. Marketing oriented management is also connected with corporate identity creation, which is then closely connected with establishing a brand. The basic tools of a sports organizations corporate identity are: specific corporate design, communication, culture and obviously the very product, which is the core of the organization activity. Using these tools reflect significantly on the image which is very important in relation to the above mentioned Generation Y. Before mentioning new approaches and trends in individual parts of corporate identity, one must not omit one major initial aspect of sports organizations, their corporate philosophy. Corporate philosophy, expressed by a motto, mission, credo or vision, is always rooted in sports organisations statutes (if it is a civilian association), or in another founding document. This is usually one reference. Therefore there comes the main task for sports organizations chairpeople and leaders to compose this philosophy into the above mentioned corporate identity tools. This is the only way to create a unified, unique and original sports brand focused on the young generation of the sports oriented public.

The main solution to the effective creation of corporate identity focused on Generation Y is implementation of the CRUSH model by Van den Bergh and Behrer (2012) on the corporate identity system of sports organizations as it is mentioned by Voráček (2012). This implementation is illustrated in picture 1.1. CRUSH model includes the following 5 aspects – *cool, real, unique, self-identification* and *happiness*.

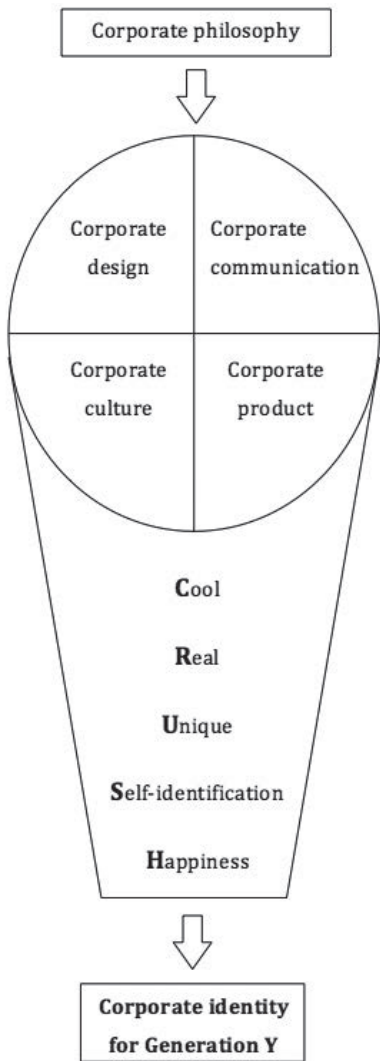


Figure 1. Implementation of the CRUSH model on the corporate identity sports organisations system

Very problematic in this model is the *cool* aspect. According to the authors of this model, Van den Bergh and Behrer (2012), the basic archetypes of what *cool* is are these:

- Be trendy
- High status
- Clean reputation
- Success
- Creativity
- Be entertaining, funny
- Cheerful

- Own style
- Changes a lot
- Luxury
- Clear opinion, posture or position
- Contemporary
- Honesty
- Retro
- Attractiveness
- Originality
- Popularity

However, which archetype a member of the Generation Y deems *cool* in a specific situation is, mostly determined by friends, television or music industry. In the sports environment it can be expected a high influence of sports personalities and events that generally belong to the least significant aspects.

The next aspect of the CRUSH model is *real* (authenticity). For Generation Y Van den Bergh and Behrer (2013) show these meanings and advice for keeping the brand *real*:

- Don't underestimate the power of face-to-face personal contact with Gen Y.
- Brand origin, history and heritage are often not relevant or even not credible for the critical youth.
- This classic interpretation of authenticity should never be shouted (no mass media) but only be whispered and even better: be experienced.
- Authenticity is all about staying true to yourself; not imitating, not faking.
- Keep your brand's vision central but reinterpret the meaning of your brand following changes in tastes, interests or values.
- Honesty means more for a brand than Corporate Social Responsibility programmes or "not lying"; it's about being respectful to youth and youth's life, about listening and discussing with them on the same level, and about sticking to your own ideas.
- Real brands are transparent, open and human: like a friend.

Unique is the third aspect of the CRUSH model. Everyone wants to have something unique, especially the Generation Y. To mark (sports organization) unique, it should prove to find answers to questions that generation Y in relation to this aspect puts according to Van den Bergh and Behrer (2013):

- Who are you?
- What is your unique brand DNA; your identity that makes you stand out from competition?
- What are you?
- What "brand meaning" do you offer me?
- What's your brand vision?
- What do I have in common with the brand?
- What do I feel about you?

Self-identification of consumer with brand (sport organisation) is the one of the main ways to gain brand loyalty consumers. To increase the aspect of *self-identification* includes according to Van den Bergh and Behrer (2013) these activities and facts:

- Identification of tribes, that are relevant for brand positioning.
- Reflection of the passions and interests of selected tribes.
- Consideration Gen Yers as partners in marketing and product design.
- Screaming about that are related to your DNA and facilitate existing passions.
- Showing every day how the brand's vision is related to these passions.
- There's a close fit between online and offline identities of youth. "You are who you know" is not only reflected in friending but also in brand fandom on social networks.

The last but not least aspect of the CRUSH model is *happiness*. According to Van den Bergh and Behrer (2013), happiness seems to be the emotion that has the largest impact on brand leverage. The right ways to tap into emotional branding are connecting with and arousing positive emotions or taking away negative ones. Van den Bergh and Behrer (2013) also state:

- By addressing youth's senses, especially scent, sound and design, a brand puts EQ (emotional quotient) in its offer to Generation Y.
- Gratifications are challenging experiences fuelled by gamification, through different touch points (in-store, online, mobile or at events) that require one's full attention and socially connect Gen Yers to peers.

Corporate design

Generation Y, as it has already been mentioned, perceives more visual incentives and is therefore important to aim their attention to all the details of visual elements of sports organizations corporate design. Some of these elements according to Voráček (2012) are:

- Name of the sports organization, team, club
- Logo as an identification mark
- Colours of team, club
- Printed material
- Merchandising products
- Interior and labelling buildings, stadium, arenas, motorhomes, fanshops and other sport facilities
- Clothes of the organization, club, team members
- Sports equipment
- Means of transport and other technical equipment
- Official websites and other online presentations of the organization, team, club
- Events visual elements
- Expositions on exhibitions and tradefairs
- Sponsorship

Each of these elements should be based on the already mentioned sports organization's philosophy and history. This way the deeper meaning of the design used is supported. Companies in the profit sector innovate their brand design continuously and sports organizations may not overlook new design trends either. In relation to the basic theoretic concept, the visual incentives for the Generation Y remain to be *cool* and *unique*. One of the most precise examples of a successful corporate design in sports in the Czech Republic

is the Olympic collection of the Czech athletes at summer Olympics in London 2012 and also the Czech House. A well-done design will afterwards reflect on another factor, which is *happiness* that in this meaning includes evoking positive emotions and surprise. Even design can be emotional and surprising as it was visible within those examples mentioned.

Corporate communication

Sports organisations have currently focused heavily on the external communication with the public, mainly through massmedia. However, the current sports public has already gotten used to the strategically driven and controlled communication by the sports organizations; whether it be clubs, unions, or individual athletes. In this respect there was one illustration visible in 2012 showing how media are told only the stuff required within a sports organization. This moment happened during a Czech representation press conference where the manager was overheard telling the coach how to answer individual questions. However, this will not be acceptable in the future from the point of view of corporate communication. External communication will become less and less significant and valuable. The result will be clear, characteristic, typical and authentic in style of communication. On the contrary, the meaning of internal communication will grow focused on sports organization members who are the important and loyal bearers of the organization image.

All elements of the CRUSH model play a significant role during the sports organizations communication and mostly in between athletes. The first three (*cool, authenticity, uniqueness*) are typical of this part of external communication. Sports environment are nowadays full of special personalities, athletes, coaches, managers etc. However, a lot of them underestimate the significance and importance of being *cool, authentic* and *unique*. The future sports public will accept exceptionally striking sport personalities who are somehow unique. Therefore, sports organizations should put an effort on the personal approach and their own way of communication characteristic for a specific organization, athletes or their members. A good example can be Jaromir Jagr, who is typical for him being on first-name terms, good relationship with media representatives and frequent humour during an interview. In this way he fulfils those three aspects – his is *cool, real* and *authentic*, also *special* and *unique*. The aim for other sports organizations and their members are not copying his style but have their own style and way of communication with interest groups in the area of sports.

Other significant factors related to *authenticity*, which are going to become more and more important for communication with the sports public are:

- Transparency
- Confidence
- Honesty

If this is fulfilled during communication, it highly contributes to the growth and support of a specific sports organization and to the athlete's authenticity. Media, are in this respect, strong, in that they can either support this authenticity, or damage it very severely. As an example it is appropriate to mention the cyclist Lance Armstrong who confessed to doping. Obviously his brand including the foundation he established were heavily damaged, however, this may be a very good stepping stone for an even bigger strengthening of his identity and brand. Because this confession, with respect to the above-mentioned

honesty, transparency and confidence, he could use this as a base for creating his brand for fighting against doping in sports.

The future of corporate identity in sports can be seen in the strength of life and sports stories which, thanks to their characteristics are created by the sports themselves. Nevertheless, it will be only up to the sports organizations and athletes about how they share their stories with the sports public. Stories have the specific characteristic that they can evoke very strong emotions and therefore support the aspect of happiness (or other emotions such as sadness, surprise, sympathy etc.) They can also involve the sports public into the story itself, which corresponds with the aspect of identification with the brand. Sports are such a colourful area that each sports result of each sportsperson bears a potential life story which is necessary to be told to support their specific identity. Good examples are the stories of significant Czech successes – the fairytale about the last javelin throw of the javelin thrower Barbora Spotakova at the Olympics in Beijing 2008 or the story of Czech hockey players in Nagano 1998 etc. There can obviously be found many examples, however, the perspective for the future is sharing this emotive content and background after each significant sports performance.

Other important areas of corporate communication are internal interest groups, mainly sports organizations members. They are those who will become the most important during the creation of the organization's image. The membership base for sport unions, club and sporting associations is one of the income sources for these sports organizations. These members are not tied with a contract or a condition on which information they can say to the surrounding environment. Especially, in the period of time of social networks and mobile devices enabling a constant contact and sharing information with friends, the right communication is the base for keeping up the desirable organization reputation.

In communication with internal interest groups there are obviously the same communications with the external environment. It is therefore essential to stay transparent, keep confidence and stay honest. This can be quite well ensured via open, detailed communication with all members about how everything is happening within the organization. Thanks to the tools such as various social networks and email, any information can be easily transmitted to all sports organization members. Higher and higher pressure is on the mutuality of communication. Future communication in sports organizations should be based on sharing all information with all members.

Corporate product

Higher and higher influence of sports organization members on the individual sports product creation will be increasing. Participation on the content of the organizations sports activity is more and more relevant with respect to the extending possibilities for the new generation of future sportspeople. The possibility of participation supports the idea of *identifying with the brand*. The bond of members to the sports organizations will be much higher. The probability of a product evoking positive experiences, emotions, entertainment and *happiness* in sports organization members is much higher. This aspect is currently an important initiator of sports organizations members' behaviour.

Corporate culture

Another significant trend is a bigger need to share sports organization's values, transmission and mainly their advancing and obeying. In this respect the most important person is the organization leader who is the main bearer of these values. These values should correspond with the main message and the sports organization's vision. The vast majority of the sports public does not even know the basic values and messages of their sport organization whose members they are. Corporate culture on the level of a sports organization is quite specific and shows certain positive aspects but is often unrealized and uncontrolled. Here it is necessary to think about all five aspect of the CRUSH model – *cool, real, unique, self-identification, happiness*. It is necessary to engage the sports organizations members to all aspects of corporate culture, which are symbols (that are also related to the above mentioned design), rituals, heroes and values. Sharing their opinions while creating and keeping the culture in the organization is the cornerstone for the success at Generation Y.

CONCLUSION

Generation Y has currently become the main target group for sports organizations and therefore it is necessary to get to know it perfectly and use this knowledge as a base during marketing management for a specific sport subject. It includes completely different, innovative tools, mostly with the usage of technological innovations. To create corporate identity that will be respected and positively accepted by this very generation. It is necessary to approach individual tools more creatively and more originally than ever before, mostly with respect to corporate design creations which must be modern (even with emphasis on tradition and history). It is characteristic for Generation Y, within the area of sports and sports brand creation and its identity, to use all technical tools enabling them to be constantly in contact with their social group. This case refers to their friends and other members of sports clubs and organizations. With that said, it is possible to share sport performances, experiences, emotions, tensions, stories and surprise that sport environment can offer. Another important solution is the openness, transparency, honesty and trustworthiness of communication among these young athletes, spectators, fans and sport club members.

Generation Y also highly appreciates their participation in the sport product creation, which obviously includes a whole range of possibilities related to sports, or other areas; e.g. music. This engagement can enable members of sports clubs, organizations and athletes to identify themselves with a certain brand and its identity by which a stronger connection and potentially higher loyalty are created. This will obviously be shown on the overall image of the sports organization. By the help of the above-mentioned points, there is established a completely unique (conscious or unconscious) culture in sports organizations where everybody shares the same values. This is a very important fact for sports organizations because there is the team spirit in sports and team work is an inseparable, not only of sports success. It is necessary to conclude that supervisors, chairpeople and leaders of sports organizations should realize that for the Generation Y in regards to sports (traditional, but also new, freestyle, extreme etc.) within these CRUSH model aspects are important – be *cool, real, unique*, enable and support *self-identification* and emphasize and provide *happiness*.

One example of the new and modern corporate identity of sport organisation, focused to Generation Y according to author of this article, could be the Czech Olympic Committee. Design of the last three Olympic collections for Czech athletes, made by AlpinePro was considered successful, original and unique. Communication is actually transparent, quick, with use of modern technologies (mobile application) and social networks. Also the products especially Czech Olympic House in London 2012 and Czech Olympic Park in Prague 2014, includes all the aspects of corporate identity, including culture, for Generation Y. Of course nothing is perfect, but this example shows, that sport organization can be *cool, real, unique* and increase *self-identification* and *happiness* of the new generation of consumers, Generation Y. At the end it is appropriate to use the claim of one of the marketing communication strategy of Czech Olympic Team: “New generation brings new achievements”.

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