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Sports events as an effective way of brand marketing communication using the example of the Orlik sports facilities

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Authors' Contribution:

A Study Design
B Data Collection
C Statistical Analysis
D Data Interpretation
E Manuscript Preparation
F Literature Search
G Funds Collection

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abstract

The aim of this paper is to place marketing in the sports context and to explain what sports marketing is today and to show how to effectively implement brand marketing communications using sports facilities. Thus, the object of the authors' research has been effective marketing communication, with special focus on brand marketing communication at the Orlik sports facilities. Towards this end, the available literature on the subject has been analysed. The authors have attempted to capture the specific character of marketing communication in sport with a view to define conditions for its maximum effectiveness. Apart from the analysis of literature on the subject, the authors have performed their own empirical research (a survey). Based on the gathered material, i.e. the analysis of available literature on the subject and the survey results, it has been concluded that people participating in sporting activities organised at the Orlik facilities notice the marketing communications addressed to them by various brands. The brands that are present in sports facilities are positively assessed by the users, and thus contribute to building a positive image of brand owners. Thus, it may be concluded that an appropriate selection of advertised brands and a well-constructed marketing communication will effectively enhance the value of brands.

Key words: brand, marketing communications, marketing in sport, quantitative research.

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INTRODUCTION

Increasing public awareness of exercise and physical culture means that year on year more and more people are using sport facilities. Due to the growing need for sports and for sporting events in general in Poland, there has been more focus on the 'Orlik 2012' facilities, which offer regular activities, tournaments and sports and recreational events catering for a multi-generational public. Thus, the Orlik facilities have become a place buzzing with sports events, a place of brand marketing communications and a place for commercialisation in sport-for-all.

The wide reach of the project entitled Lokalny Animator Sportu (Local Sports Promoter), initiated by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism and implemented by Fundacja Orły Sportu (Sports Eagles Foundation), offers possibilities to organise country-wide sports events, in cooperation with business partners for whom the CSR ethos plays a key role in marketing communications. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the potential that Orlik facilities have in terms of marketing communications for different brand categories: from brands addressed to individual customers to those on an industrial scale. The sport-for-all market still remains an unexploited area vis-à-vis brand exposure. Most companies focus on professional sport while neglecting ordinary users. The opportunity of direct communication with almost 18 million people visiting Orlik facilities every year is an asset that no other traditional forms of communication can offer.

MARKETING AND SPORT

When discussing marketing communications at sports events, one should focus, initially, on basic terms that would serve to explain the functioning of marketing in the sports industry in general. Firstly, the marketing itself means subordination of all activities in the area of product manufacturing and trade to a single primary goal, which is to meet the needs of the buyer [1]. In sport, a product may be: a broadly understood sports event, a match or an athlete. Therefore, it is these three elements that satisfy the human need for contact with sport.

What then does the term sport mean; What is sport about? In a broad conceptual sense, sport is an activity, practiced systematically according to an established set of rules and characterised by a significant competitive factor and by a tendency to achieve better results, aimed at demonstrating physical ability [3]. However, the term sport also has a narrower meaning. It comes from a Latin word *desportare*, which may be translated as to relax or to entertain oneself. Thus, *sport* is most frequently defined as a form of conscious and voluntary human activity aimed at improving physical strength and ability, performed according to certain established rules. Nevertheless, scientific literature on the subject has always emphasised the complex nature of sport as a social phenomenon, involving not just competition, fitness and physical ability, but also related to health, hygiene, religion, art, entertainment, play, work, policy and raising and educating the young [19]. In the 21st century sport has also become a branch of economy, and, as A. Sznajder puts it, an industry in itself and thus a kind of activity directly or indirectly connected with sport, an activity to the functioning of which sport makes a significant contribution. Since the beginning of the new millennium Polish sport has been functioning more like business, and thus business ideas have been used to manage its product and brand, and nowadays sports events are created and sold like typical consumer products. Athletes work on their image with

the use of a variety of marketing strategies and by participating in activities promoting both products and the said image. It should be remembered that the position of sport in the concept of marketing is two-fold and may be described as marketing through sport and the marketing of sport. Sometimes a sports event is identified with a product, even though in reality sport has none of the features of a typical product. The characteristics and elements that distinguish sport from other products include: positive and joyful competition, escape from real time and place, different rules and regulations, physical ability and physical training of oneself [16].

MARKETING OF SPORT AND MARKETING THROUGH SPORT

The first concept of marketing through sport assumes using sport as a promotional vehicle [13]. A similar understanding of this concept has been demonstrated by the German school of sport marketing, where 'Marketing mit Sport' is defined as exploitation of rights in the communication sphere by third persons, e.g. sport sponsoring, advertising featuring sport, and as obtaining license rights to sport organisations [7]. Also, the term marketing of sport has several meanings. In one of them, a set of marketing tools is assumed to be used to communicate with consumers, and the benefits of practicing sport and of participating in a sports event are highlighted [9]. The idea is presented differently by one of the pioneers of sports marketing. In 1979, in the Advertising Age magazine, the term marketing of sport was defined by Jeffrey L. Kesler, who for years had been one of the creators of marketing in the sports sector. As defined by Kesler, marketing of sport means 'actions and decisions taken by experts in the field of industrial products and services marketing that use sport as a tool to promote products and services' [9]. Taking a look at both of the above-mentioned concepts of using sport in marketing, it should be said that regardless of their direct application, they play one common role, namely, they combine marketing activities of various sports actors: sport organisations, clubs and associations and organisers of sports events on the one hand, and sponsors and enterprises that normally operate outside of sport on the other. Thus, companies from various non-sports sectors, wishing to satisfy the needs of consumers of sports products, get involved in selected forms of supporting sport with a view to deriving some marketing benefits from them, and in this way increasing the involvement of marketing through sport, featuring athletes and sports events that serve to prove not only the credibility but also the reliability of products.

MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN SPORT – PR

Public relations activity in sport is a voluntary, planned and continuous effort aimed at creating and maintaining mutual understanding between a sport organisation and its environment. In a practical sense, such activity includes the following elements: publicity, image and identity [10]. A modern sport organisation cannot afford to neglect such an important element as PR. It is thanks to PR that sports events attract publicity, athletes build their image, and sports fans can identify with sport or with a specific sports team or sports facility. The outcomes required for brand communication in sport may be achieved by distinguishing (MR) – media relations and (CR) – community relations [10]. However, despite such distinction between the two (CR and MR), the key to success is the final image of the sport organisation and what people think of it. Therefore, PR experts attempt to build positive associations with sport, such as fascination, health, physical activity, youth, pleasure and

entertainment, and the joy of being in a group. Such an approach may have positive effects, but it may also lead to the loss of one's own identity, in so far as the sponsoring assumes a greater importance than the actual sport. It should be remembered that sport can have both passive and active forms, and the same can be said about sports fans – they can be both active and passive. For this reason, in developing a PR strategy in sport, direct tools and contacts should be used, e.g., sales and phone calls, as well as indirect contacts, namely word and image. To enhance the impact of words and images, mass media are used, as mass media shape public opinion directly. Many sports actors also use press information, press conferences and press, radio or TV interviews.

Social media is a new form of marketing communications in sport which keeps growing in importance and which plays an increasingly significant role. Social media can be defined as new media technologies enhancing interactivity and joint creation, which in turn allow for development of content generated by their users and for sharing such content between organisations and individuals [4]. Contemporary sport organisations frequently benefit from the latest technology development and, in many cases, they are pioneers introducing cutting-edge IT solutions in their communication with stakeholders, both in their own industry and in the entire economy. Social media is one of the tools used most often, and it has become a leader in communication and PR services. Social media puts its users in a position that is more symmetrical in relation to other individuals, the traditional media and the plethora of organisations operating in the public domain. First of all, the user is transformed into a participant, both active and creative. Secondly, this participant becomes important from the point of view of other participants of the ecosystem – his/her opinions, attitudes, emotions and choices have a real impact on reality. Participants may include groups, organisations and individuals [5]. As one can see, in the 21st century social media may be used not just for information activities but also to involve the customers directly. Such a form of bilateral communication, offering feedback as well as an opportunity to implement social initiatives, was not possible twenty years ago, when the only way to reach sports fans were sports events.

A SPORTS EVENT — EVENTS AS A FORM OF EMOTIONAL MOTIVATION

Talking about sports events as conveying emotional motivation, i.e. the kind of motivation that is most desirable by marketers, one should first of all highlight the focus on experience and on the emotional impact of the event [2]. Sport carries a unique emotional load that other branches of economy may only dream of. Taking into account the features of sports events distinguished by Wolf Rübner, one may notice the following elements: staged communication, dramaturgy, dynamic group process, symbols and rituals. Analysing the said characteristics, it may be concluded that sports events have a competitive advantage. They are unique and rare, special and short-lived, and they are artificially created [2]. As a result, communication and marketing measures taken at such events have a specific and unique character. According to Freyer, sports events, including the biggest mega-events, are characterised by a large number of visitors, supra-regional interest and extensive media coverage.

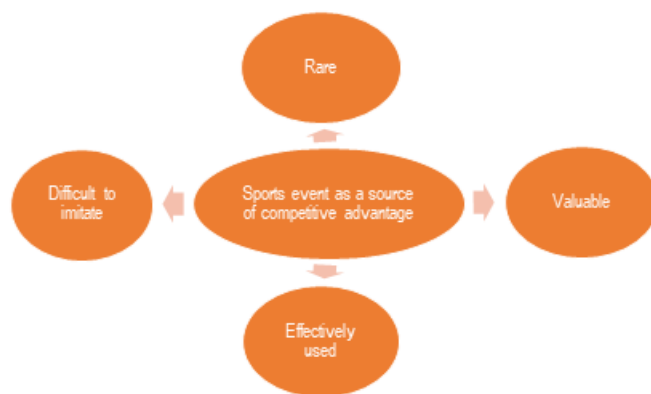


Fig. 1. Sources of competitive advantage of sports events [2]

SPORTING IMAGE OF TOWNS, COMMUNITIES AND DISTRICTS

Discussing the issue of athletic tournaments and sports events as an effective way of brand marketing communications using as an example the Orlik sports grounds, one cannot neglect the local and global dimension of the impact generated by these facilities. Because of their location, the Orliks have the biggest impact on local communities. Furthermore, considering the scale of the project and the number of facilities (2604 Orlik sports grounds throughout Poland), one may also talk about the global impact they create. Generally speaking, contemporary sport has many diverse forms. Its cultural importance is manifested in its global reach, as sport is the most popular form of culture and a significant element of mass culture [6]. For this very reason, towns, communities and regions have increasingly employed sport as a means of communication. Local governments make use of the Orlik facilities to implement their strategy aimed at developing physical culture among children, youth, adults and seniors. In many cases the Orlik facilities themselves have become a site for marketing communications of local, nation-wide and global companies. For years, sport has been a product that has contributed to building their positive image, both among local communities and tourists. In EU countries, scientific interpretation of data on the structure and motivation of people participating in sports and recreational physical activity is quite important, as is evaluation of the sports policy at local and regional levels, and assessment of the effectiveness of programmes supporting local sport [6]. As regards the use of 'Orlik 2012' facilities, this translates directly into funds obtained in local government - partner cooperation. Local authorities are more willing to engage in nation-wide schemes, such as for example the 'Lokalny Animator Sportu' (Local Sport Promoter) programme, financed by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. Therefore, contemporary local sport has a significant social dimension (spending free time - local sports events, youth behaviour patterns and rules; body culture - fitness, health-promoting behaviour, improved life quality; socialisation - strong relationships and bonds in sport organisations; social and civic activity - association movement and voluntary service in sport, local sport lobbying), as well as an economic dimension (work - employment, promotion of towns and regions through sport, sport and recreation facilities); and the educational dimension (personnel training - regional education policy, voluntary service, local sports manager, social and civic activity, health-promoting behaviour, youth behaviour patterns and rules) [6].

WAYS OF BRAND COMMUNICATIONS BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE ORLIK SPORT FACILITIES

Sport and sports events oftentimes become identifiable elements of promotion and marketing policy. Frequently, the very best events and teams are colloquially called 'brands in themselves'. What then does the word brand mean, what is its essence? Literally, a brand may be defined as a 'name, term, sign symbol (or a combination of these) created or developed to identify the product (or service) and to differentiate them from those of the competitors [11]. The brand, however, is in fact much more than just an inscription or a logo distinguishing from other entities. A brand is a combination of a physical product, brand name, packaging, advertisements and supporting activities connected with product distribution and price; it is a combination which provides the consumer with distinguishing functional and/or symbolic benefits, and in result it creates a loyal group of buyers, thus allowing [a company] to achieve a leading position on the market [8]. Thus, apart from the brand itself, we may also distinguish buyers who are willing to use the brand.

BRANDS IN SPORTS EVENTS

In the sport context, we may talk about sports organisations, associations, clubs, players, games and events which all make up a given brand. As to the buyers, we often mean sport fans and participants of sports events. The great interest that accompanies certain sports events provides an opportunity to present specific content to a wide audience. A lot of sports events are broadcast live by the media, in particular by TV stations. The audience, whether participating in a sports event directly or thorough media broadcast, get acquainted not just with the event but also with a set of various marketing messages. In effect, sports events are used by companies, non-profit organisations and territorial units as a means to communicate with the market and promote companies, their products and services as well as ideas and places [12]. In this way, companies make use of the human tendency to subconsciously memorise graphic signs and logos, which later will have positive connotations for the consumers when the target group make their shopping choices. Attracting famous brands also has an impact on how the events are perceived, and it evokes positive associations. A sports event that is supported by global or nation-wide companies gains credibility in the eyes of the audience. Additionally, using brands makes it possible to obtain funds from sponsors, and such funds may be used to organise a sports event or to increase its territorial, organisational and communication scope. Next to brands belonging to companies, also territory-specific brands appear more and more frequently and boldly. This creates an opportunity for towns and regions to promote their own local products. A possibility to reach a wide audience, namely sports fans on the local market, in the region, in the country, on the continent and for some events even world-wide, is an excellent opportunity to build brand knowledge and reap the resulting benefits [12].

SPORTS MARKETING AND SPONSORING IN BRAND CREATION

The huge amount of positive emotions accompanying sports events has a favourable impact on brand creation through sport marketing and sponsoring. Moreover, sport represents a big market in which various consumers meet: sports fans, organisers, sympathisers, volunteers, participants of sport activities and athletes. Because of the characteristic features as outlined

activities and athletes. Because of the characteristic features as outlined above, sports marketing substantially differs from traditional marketing, and is distinguished by the following:

- cooperation between the organisation and marketing environment,
- broad range of knowledge among the audience (customers),
- unpredictable nature of the offer,
- volatile market trends,
- specific consumption manner,
- unpredictability of the service outcome and little impact on the shape and effect of the final product.

On the one hand, these differences pose a huge challenge for, and may even hamper the effectiveness of actions undertaken, but on the other hand, they provide an opportunity for achieving high efficiency (e.g. in the case of a spectacular victory or sports result, or an outstanding athlete's personality) [14]. A wide spectrum of sports stakeholders provides an opportunity for brands to participate in unique events and for image transfer. The trust built up in this way creates strong bonds that translate into the interest in a product or service offered under a given brand. The benefits arising from using sport for marketing and sponsoring purposes are very desirable and tempting for the organisation involved. Presentation of a product or a brand during short sporting events may bring about huge marketing benefits, but long-lasting effects may only be achieved by consistent, systematic long-term effort [18].

COMMERCIALISATION OF SPORTING ACTIVITY – A NEW ACTIVE MODEL OF COMMUNICATION USING THE ORLIK FACILITIES

In 2017, many major brands known on the Polish and foreign market appeared during sporting events organised by Fundacja Orły Sportu (Sport Eagles Foundation). The money spent on physical culture, and thanks to commercialisation available for sport-for-all, has yielded returns in the form of a healthier society and has had a cultural impact – nowadays, sport is a form of entertainment and a way to meet people. Thanks to the greater involvement of the private sector and the extended range of the programme entitled 'Lokalny Animator Sportu' (Local Sport Promoter), which is implemented jointly by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism and local governments, the offer of the Orlik facilities has become more diversified, as evidenced by projects such as 'Dzień Sportu na Orliku' (Sports Day on Orlik). The project involved local communities and national sport stars, such as Cezary Trybański – a basketball player and the first Pole ever in NBA, Paweł Mikołajczak and Mateusz Mika - volleyball players representing ONICO Warszawa and Trefl Gdańsk respectively, Maciej Szczęsny – a football player, Maciej and Tomasz Gębala – brothers competing in handball, Krzysztof Wiłkomirski – an Olympian and a judoka, and Filip Dylewicz from Trefl Sopot, to name just a few. Dzień Sportu na Orliku (Sports Day on Orlik) was an all-Poland event, funded from ministerial resources as well as from funds of state-owned companies, e.g., KGHM Polska Miedź S.A and Totalizator Sportowy, and a private company GO Sport. The event was carried out on 700 Orlik facilities, and it attracted over 50,000 participants, and its communication scope was estimated at PLN 300,000. Considering this undertaking, it should be stated that the financial issues play a major role in sport development. Today, we have excellent sports infrastructure which – if put to good use – may enhance the interest in sport and consequently increase the share of Polish population that becomes fit through physical activity. In this context, one of the primary tasks is the professionalization of the Orlik

facilities. Towards this end, the sports offer of the Orlik facilities is continuously increased and partners are sought to support new all-Poland sporting events. The support from commercial brands will be crucial in such activities.

THE ORLIK FACILITY USER PROFILE

To define the potential of various brands on the Orlik facilities, the authors have conducted their own empirical survey among people using these facilities (participants of sports activities). The survey, carried out between September and November 2017, covered whole Poland. The CAWI technique was used for the survey. 404 effective responses were obtained during the period considered. Characteristics of respondents who participated in the survey are presented in Table 1.

The basic aim of the survey was to establish the user profile of participants of sports activities organised on the Orlik facilities, by finding out:

- the frequency of attending the activities organised on the Orlik sports grounds,
- the average time spent per one-off activity,
- kinds of sports disciplines practiced on the Orlik sports grounds,
- the sports discipline practiced most frequently (preferred discipline),
- for how long has the preferred sports discipline been practiced,
- the level of interest in sport,
- the visibility of advertisements in the Orlik facilities during sports activities,
- the attitude of participants towards advertisements visible during sports activities.

Generally speaking, such characteristics of users served to verify the assumed hypothesis, namely: Marketing communications of brands at sports facilities (including Orlik sports grounds) build a positive brand image, thus enhancing positive reception of a given brand.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants of sports activities at the Orlik facilities (n = 404)

Characteristics	Number of response	[%] of response	
Sex	male	337	83.4%
	female	67	16.6%
	total	404	100%
Age	18-29	83	20.5%
	30-39	154	38.1%
	40-49	83	20.5%
	50-59	66	16.3%
	over 59	18	4.5%
	total	404	100%
Professional status	pupil / student	35	8.7%
	employed	340	84.2%
	self-employed	8	2.0%
	retired / pensioner	16	4.0%
	unemployed	5	1.2%
	total	404	100%

Source: Own compilation, based on empirical research

The results of surveys conducted draw attention to the fact that participants of activities organised at the Orlik facilities include people of all ages, whereas the distribution of participants across age groups demonstrates that the biggest group are people between 30 and 39 (38%), and the smallest groups includes people over 59 (5%). These people participate in sport activities frequently. According to the survey, 53% of respondents participate in such activities more than twice a week. When analysing the frequency of participation in different age groups, an interesting observation may be made – most respondents from each age group declare that they participate in sporting activities more than twice per week (Fig. 2).

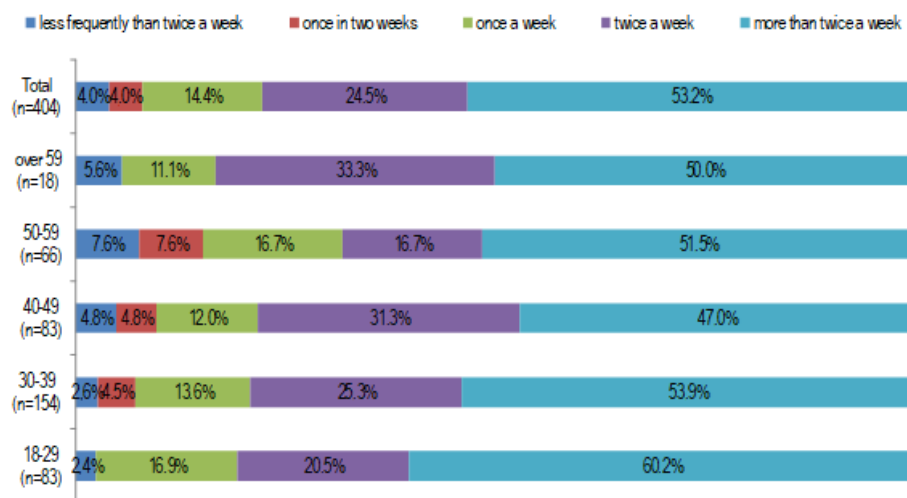


Fig. 2. Frequency of participation in sports activities organised at the Orlik facilities, broken down by age

Source: Own compilation, based on empirical research

For 56% of respondents, the duration of a one-off activity is between 1 and 2 hours. The age category of participants has no significant impact on the duration of a one-off activity (Fig. 3). Considering the frequency and duration of a one-off activity, it may be concluded that most people practicing sport at the Orlik facilities spend there up to 4 hours a week. The amount of time spent there makes it possible for well-constructed marketing communication to have a wide audience, provided that the message is carefully tailored for the target group.

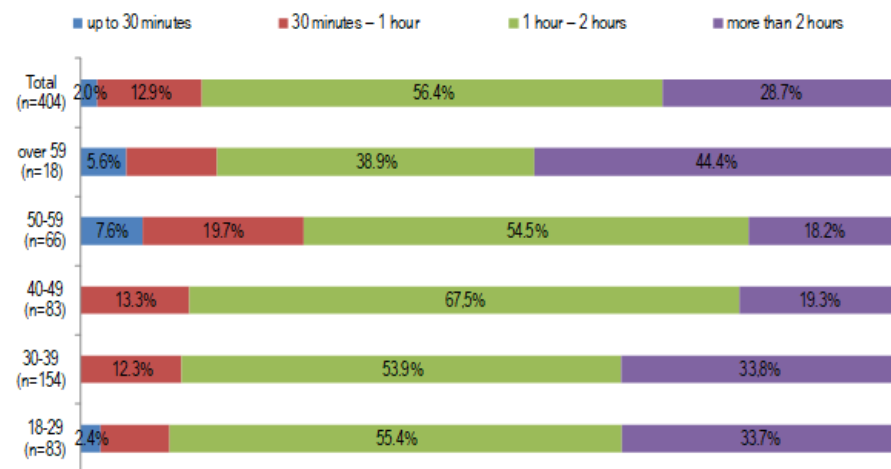


Fig. 3. The duration of one-off activities at the Orlik facilities, broken down by age groups

Source: Own compilation, based on empirical research

It is noteworthy that people practice various sports disciplines at the Orlik facilities, with football being the most popular. Apart from football, other sports are also played, creating the possibility for exposure of various sports brands, not just those associated with football. Other brands, rather loosely connected with sport, may also be advertised (Fig. 4).

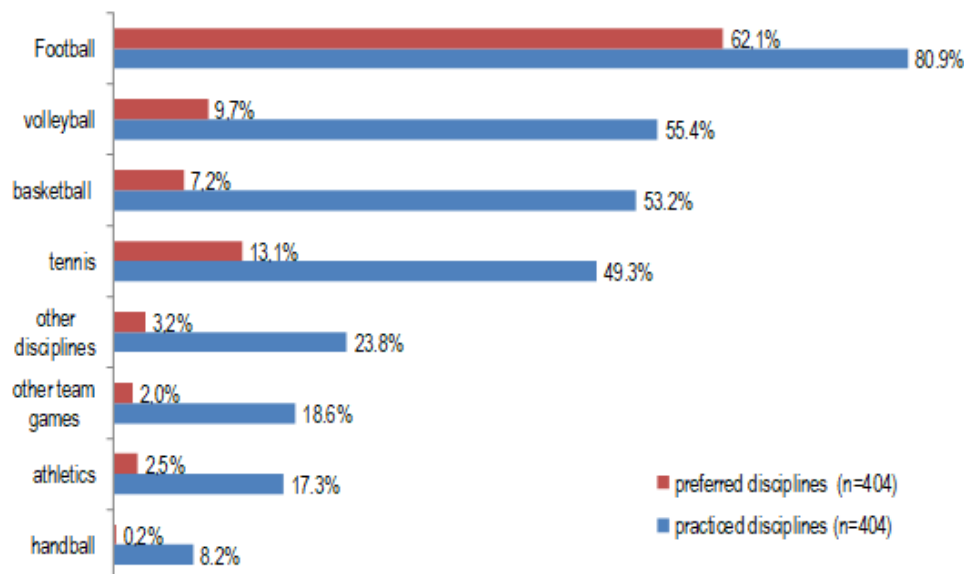


Fig. 4. Practiced and preferred sports disciplines at the Orlik facilities

Source: Own compilation, based on empirical research

The respondents have also been asked if they are interested in sport. 66% have answered that they are generally interested in sport and keep track of most sporting events. 27% of respondents follow selected sports events (events they are interested in), 5% keep track of a single sports discipline – their preferred one, and merely 2% are not interested in sport at all. The above results confirm the opinion about the mass character of sport in Poland. Concomitantly, people participating in sports activities barely notice any advertisements (e.g. billboards, exposure of various brands) at the Orlik facilities – only 36% of respondents have noticed some advertisements, mostly of local brands. No other brands have been noticed, simply because there have not been any advertised. This may be a challenge and at the same time an unexploited potential for various companies, services and products. The question on the attitude of people practicing sport at the Orlik facilities towards potential advertisements or brand exposition has served to find additional evidence in support of the above statement. 35% of respondents have stated that they would not mind advertisements, whereas 24% claim that companies advertising their products at the Orlik facilities would be more positively perceived. Only 10% of respondents would find advertisements annoying, and 31% have no opinion on the issue. A similar distribution of answers is observed for all age categories of sports participants (Fig. 5).

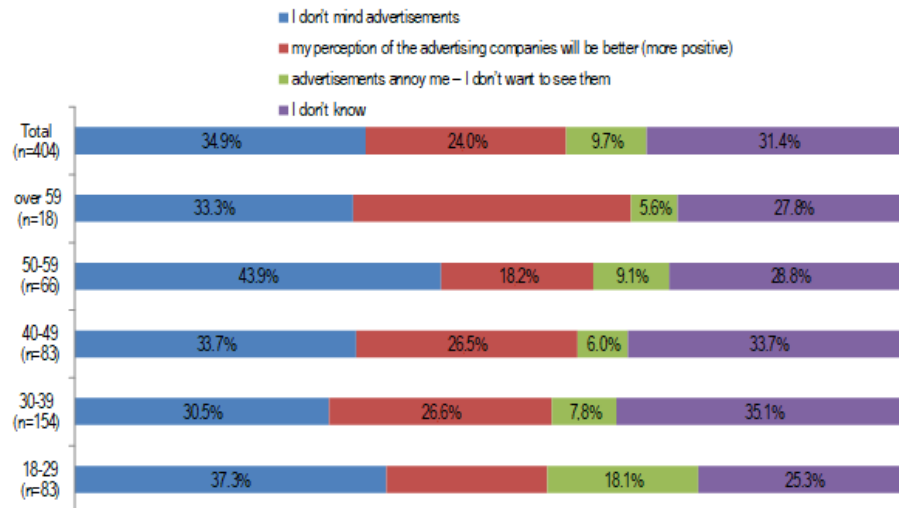


Fig. 5. If some advertisements of various companies or products appeared at the Orlik facilities, what would be your attitude towards such advertisements?

Source: Own compilation, based on empirical research

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding what marketing in sport is today opens new areas for marketing communication, unexploited thus far. The mass nature of sport may, with support of marketing, contribute to building a positive brand image, not only in the target group, but also in a wider social environment. Marketing communication, properly constructed, should be subordinated to this goal. If a suitable market niche is found, such communication will have a positive effect on the sender of the message. The Orlik sports facilities should be considered as such a niche. Thanks to the large number of these facilities and of events organised there, Orliks may become a productive place for brand exposure (this opportunity has not been used so far). Exposing brand in this place (in accordance with survey results) will be successful, enhancing brand image and promoting its positive perception. Awareness that brand exposure does not disturb sport participants and that brands are perceived positively leads to the conclusion that such an opportunity must not be wasted. All parties involved in such a relationship will profit from it: the sender of the message and its recipient as well as the owner of facilities. However, the proper marketing and financial relation between all the stakeholders may pose a problem.

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