

Consumer engagement using digital technologies in the process of co-creating consumer value in the sports market

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Abstract

The increasing willingness to participate in the processes of creating value for customers became, for many entities, a cause to redefine the business models being used. The key factor to success on the sports events market is the ability to create positive emotional experiences among the customers. This task can be made easier by widely available access to information technologies which can be used to co-create customer value. An absorbing experiences process known in the literature was used in order to conduct empirical research. This process consists of three phases: before purchase, consumption, post consumption. Due to the specificity of the sports events market this model was modified to create a conceptual model consisting of four phases. This model was then empirically verified basing on a case study analysis. The subject of this research was one of the biggest mass runs organised in 2019 in Poland: PKO Białystok Half Marathon. Information gathered came from various sources, namely: individual deepened interview with the event's organiser, information published on the event's website, direct interviews with participants of the event and comments published by the participants in social media. The research verified the correctness of the assumptions of the newly proposed model. The event's participants' engagement in co-creating customer value varied in intensity in different phases. The runners were the most engaged in the consumption and post consumption phase. In contrast, the organiser's marketing activity was high especially in the before consumption phase and during the event itself. There is no doubt that common access information technologies is beneficial to enhance the customers' engagement in co-creating customer value. At the same time it is possible to notice the decrease of the control the sports events' organisers used to hold over the process of creating customer experience. The participants of – in this case – a sports event can strongly influence the final value of the product they are offered and this is happening regardless of the organiser's will. The decrease in control could mean the organisers might need to pay closer attention to building long-term relationships with their customers in order to ensure that in the future they are co-creating and not destroying customer value.

Keywords: co-creation of customer value, consumer engagement, digitization of sport, sport marketing, sporting events

Introduction

The scientific debates on the conditions and methods of creating consumer value have not yet led researchers to reaching any common standpoint. Nevertheless, in spite of the variety of opinions, what does not seem to raise controversy is the fact that the properly created consumer value may be a determinant of the competitive advantage of an organisation and may be used as a basis for building long-term relationships with customers. Moreover, its significance for marketing strategies has been increasingly frequently pointed out recently (Blocker et al., 2011, Vargo and Lusch, 2018, Mascarenhas et al., 2004, Mruk and Stępień, 2013, Loureiro et al., 2015, Ramaswamy, 2008, Langley and Holcomb, 1992, Kumar and Reinartz, 2016). At the same time, the changes observed in the behavior of buyers, resulting from the rapid progress of digitization of social life, cause that today there are even more opportunities to create value for the customer based on solutions in the field of information and communication technologies.

The overview of literature on this subject leads us to a conclusion that consumer value as a scientific issue can be viewed from three perspectives. A part of researchers perceive consumer value as an attribute created for the sake of customers, therefore creating consumer value by commercially-oriented companies occupies an important position in literature (Kumar and Reinartz, 2016). Some researchers approach the problem of consumer value in a fragmentary way (Gronroos, 2011), e.g. explaining its essence, types, or characteristics, without the reference to any specific market sectors, e.g. the service sector, tourism, hotel industry, or healthcare (e.g. Dube and Renaghan, 2000, Wu et al., 2018, Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012, Chen and Chen, 2010, Nordgren, 2008). Among all these markets, the sports market has received surprisingly scarce attention so

far (Horbel, et al. 2016), even though this market, especially the segment of sporting events, belongs to the most dynamically developing markets in many countries all over the world.

The overview of literature on this subject has led the authors of this study to the conclusion that there are few works approaching this problem as a process. At the same time, no study has been found that would describe this problem, taking into account modern channels and tools of marketing communication. Nevertheless, creating value does not result from a single event, but rather from a series of activities and interactions among various entities, which may be sequential, or parallel. An excellent illustration of this thesis is the sports market, which is more and more frequently, though still insufficiently, analysed by researchers of value marketing, or experience marketing, which is complementary to value marketing.

The question addressed by the authors of this article and the objective of their deliberations is: how is the co-creation of consumer value, viewed as a process, taking place on the sporting events market, using information and communication technologies? Based on the literature study, the authors put forward their own conceptual model, which is as a synthesis of the established facts, aiming at answering the question posed above. With a view of verifying the created model, a case study has been used as a method of indicating the correlations described in this model.

Perception of consumer value in literature

In spite of the undertaken attempts at the explanation of the essence of the consumer value, its role and position in marketing strategies, its structure, components, conditions, as well as places of origin, researchers have not managed to reach a common ground. However, among all the presented positions, two seem to prevail. According to one of them, value as an economic category is an object of exchange, reflects the benefit or a set of benefits sought by customers and is offered by a company to its customers, in exchange of their acceptance expressed as making purchase decisions and loyalty to the supplier or the brand (Kotler et al., 2002 r.; Doyle, 2008).

Other researchers believe, though, that consumer value cannot be created by a company by itself, but appears thanks to the engagement of consumers, often building networks of relations among themselves (Pine and Gilmore, 2011, Vargo and Lusch, 2016, Gummesson and Mele, 2010, Ida 2017). This claim was a basis for the theory of the service-dominant logic which promotes co-creation, rather than creation of consumer value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004, Grunross, 2011, Vargo and Lusch, 2008). From this point of view, consumer value as an economic category originates from numerous interactions between a company and the consumers engaged in this process, whereas the market becomes an area for gaining experience, sensations and co-creation. It must be added that the opportunities and the range of cooperation of market entities aimed at creating value vary, depending on the sector, the type of the offered products and the market where they operate.

Experience as the key element of consumer value on the sporting events market

The motivation for the participation in sporting events, either as a spectator or as a participant, are already well-recognised (Filo et al. 2011, Kim et al. 2016, Malchrowicz-Moško and Chlebosz, 2019, Tjønndal 2018, Waśkowski, 2016, Carvalho et al., 2018, Chiu et al. 2016, Nogawa 1996, Davies 2019). Multiple research studies conducted in this area have led to similar conclusions. One of the major motivating factors is the willingness to have an exceptional experience, excitement, the need for expression and positive emotions resulting from the active or passive participation in a sporting event.

In the present times, which are believed to be the times of the economy of experience, it is the sphere of emotions which offers the biggest chance of building relationships between companies and consumers. It means that the experience sought by consumers may be one of the most important elements in the co-created relationship between a company and a consumer (Ramaswamy, 2008).

It is worthwhile to look into the main assumptions of the economy of experience from the perspective of consumers. Here are the most significant ones:

- a. Today's consumers' need for possession is being superseded by the need for excitement and contemplation,
- b. Consumers buy products and services not because of their characteristics or physical qualities, but rather due to emotions arising from their consumption.
- c. Consumers are ready to get engaged in the process of the co-creation of value, taking a partial responsibility for the final effect of this creation,
- d. Consumers communicate with each other, exchanging information and building communities around brands,
- e. Marketing communication based on consumers' feelings and emotions is more effective than that founded on rational and logical arguments,
- f. Consumer behaviour related to purchasing and the consumption of products can be used by companies in their marketing strategies, as an effective way of market penetration.

It should be noted that the above listed assumptions allow for a conclusion that entities with the highest chance for success are those which meet their customers' needs by focusing on their emotions and whose product's consumption is public (Mallen and Adams, 2013). The sporting events market, being a part of the

broader category of the leisure time industry, definitely fulfills these conditions (da Silva and de Freitas, 2009). At present, the leisure time industry is dynamically developing, therefore consumers have increasingly many opportunities for buying pleasure, also in the area of sport. This is why organisers of sporting events should look for solutions which will make the time spent watching sporting events more attractive for the consumers. Undoubtedly, the concept of the marketing of experience, which perceives experience as the main element in the company-customer relation, definitely fits this solution. However, its effectiveness will depend on the skillful matching of its general principles to the specific qualities of the sporting events market.

One of the major qualities of the sporting events market is the unpredictability of the sportspeople's endeavour. Any entertainment event, or a strictly sporting event, is unique, due to its intangible nature. For instance, in the case of artistic events, such as concerts, the unpredictability is related to the way a particular musical piece is performed, or the selection of pieces that are to be presented during the concert. As for the sporting events, the outcome of the competition is unknown and extremely hard to predict by the organiser. It is equally difficult to forecast the course the competition will take, or how much involvement and determination will be displayed by the competitors in their struggle for victory. As a result, the organiser of a sporting event is unable to guarantee that the spectators will experience the specified level of emotions, as it is the case with the sales of luxury products, or artistic events.

Besides the unpredictability of sport, another determinant of the scale and intensity of emotions is the spectators' behaviour during the event (Schwarz and Hunter, 2017). However, also in this case the organiser has no influence on what course the cheering will take. It is definitely worthwhile to look into the phenomenon of the public consumption of sporting events and the spectators' behaviour, as this is where a huge potential lies in the context of the co-creation of value.

The consumption of artistic and sporting events is public by nature (Schmitt, 2010). This fact is of extreme significance in the context of creating consumer value, because the recipients are not only affected by the stimuli produced by the service provider, but they are also the emitters of stimuli sent in the opposite direction, as well as towards the other recipients who are present in the same place. As a result, a unique atmosphere is co-created by the spectators. Without the spontaneously and often uncontrollably responding audience, the event would not be so attractive, as the spectators are its integral, value-creating part. In social psychology this phenomenon is referred to as deindividuation, understood as the loss of a person's usual self-awareness, leading to impulsiveness and deep sensations. Without the participation of the audience, its reactions and involvement in the creation of the event, it would not be possible to achieve such a high level of immersion and the state of flow, which is reached by both the spectators and the competitors. Both these states, immersion and flow, researched in the 80s by Csikszentmihalyi, are related to very strong emotional sensations, which are the basis of the marketing of experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998).

However, it should be kept in mind that consumer value, especially that based on experience, is subjective by nature, can vary in time and can be triggered by various stimuli, not always in accordance with the organiser's expectations (Waśkowski 2016). It complicates the process of managing the relationship with consumers, as not all the emotional elements are controllable. (Greenwell et al., 2014, Dobiegała-Korona, 2015). Another important conclusion in the context of the marketing of experience is Christensen's claim that buyers have a growing ability to independently create experience, at the same time co-creating the value which is of interest to them. It is illustrated by Chart 1.

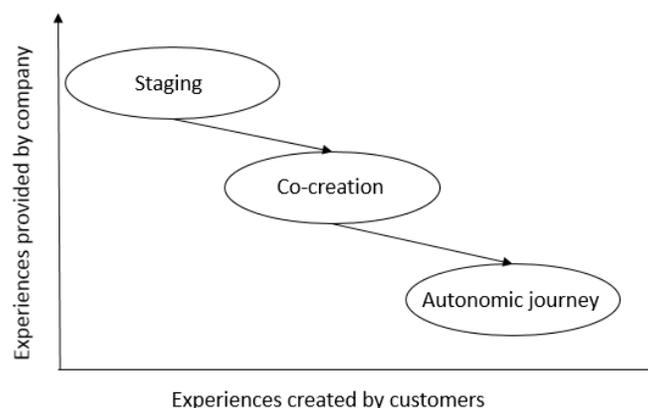


Chart 1. Creating experience and common value by entities engaged in the exchange process

Source: Christensen, B.A., (2013). Connecting Experience and Economy – Aspects of Disguised Positioning, *Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 37, 389-407.

If it is so indeed, the remark about the limited control over the co-created value is by all means justified. It is equally valid in the case of the organisation of sporting events, where the spectators' behaviour is practically beyond the organiser's control.

Some writers (Arnould et al., 2002, Davis and Longoria, 2003, Tynan and McKechnie, 2009) emphasize the need for the process-based approach to the management of consumers' experience. According to Verhoef, a consumer may experience emotions not only during the purchase and the consumption, but also in the pre-purchase, as well as post-consumption phase (Verhoef et al., 2009). Taking advantage of this fact increases the chance of the organisers of sporting events for creating a high consumer value (Chart 2).

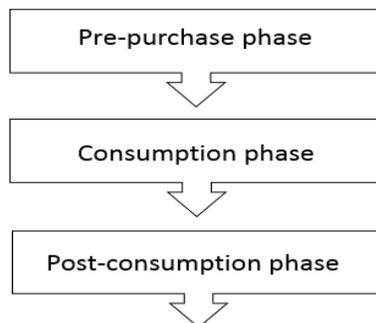


Chart 2. Three-phase process of experience absorption

Source: own elaboration based on Davis, S., Longoria, T.(2003). Harmonizing your “touchpoints”. *Brand Packaging*, 1, 17-23.

Co-creation of value is not possible without the engagement of the consumer (Dwivedi, 2016 Oyner and Korelina, A. 2016). This involvement is a prerequisite for the creation of value by the entities representing both sides of the exchange transaction. The consumer's engagement is understood as all types of behaviour not directly related to the act of purchase. These behaviours may be associated with the direct relations between the sides, may occur at any stage of these relations or manifest themselves in a direct way, e.g. by expressing and spreading opinions. In other words, the issue of the consumer's involvement includes the multidimensional approach to the interaction between the consumers and the company, taking into account the cognitive, behavioural and emotional aspects. The sports market is a sector where the consumers' engagement is particularly remarkable and desirable (Stander and de Beer, 2016, Pronschinske, M., 2012, McKelvey et al., 2012). Sport, due to its emotional character, has the ability to engage consumers, who may play the role of either spectators or active participants of the sport struggle (Hallmann and Zehrer, 2017).

There are two areas of a consumer's engagement in the co-creation of value. One of them is their involvement in the communication processes. On the sports market, by engaging themselves in these processes with the sporting event organiser, or communicating with each other, consumers have a real impact on shaping their image of the event and their expectations. In this way, they help the organiser prepare an event which will meet the expectations they expressed. The other area of consumers' involvement is their participation in the process of creating a product (Harmeling 2017, Säwe and Thelander, 2015). Sporting events have their value in the eyes of a consumer only when the stands are full of engaged spectators, e.g. during a football game, or a mass running race.

The influence of digital technologies on the co-creation of value for the customer

In the light of the above considerations on the co-creation of value for the customer and the role of experience in creating it on the market of sports events, it is worth looking at the opportunities that create so-called digitization of social life. The development of information and communication technologies (ITC) and the widespread availability of mobile devices such as smartphones, palmtops, and smartwatches have changed the behavior of modern consumers. This also applies to the sports market, where, for example, participants in sports events, e.g. street runs, use these devices to communicate with each other, to quickly find needed information, or to share opinions on social media. In the market of sports events, dominated by young and professionally active people, who are particularly open to the acquisition of new communication solutions, the organizers of sports events must use the opportunities offered by ITC to conduct marketing activities, including engaging consumers in the process of creating value for customer. Digitization in sport has become a fact, fans and participants of sports events have never had such large and quick access to information as it is now. The results of the football games, the results of the competitors finishing the marathon runs are delivered almost in real time. Statistics, photos, videos, memes, comments and opinions are all generated almost simultaneously with the ongoing competition in the sports arenas. In this hypermedia environment, broadcasters and recipients of messages can be both the organizers of sports events and the fans themselves. There is no doubt that the role and importance of buyers on the sports events market is changing today. They are more and more willing to participate in interactive communication with the organizers of sports events, sometimes becoming influencers of these events. The use of the UGC (User-Generated-Content) model by the aforementioned organizers in conjunction with their own activities carried out in traditional and digital communication channels may contribute to even greater involvement of consumers in the process of co-creating value for the customer. This statement is also, and

perhaps above all, justified when we look at the value for the customer co-created on the sports events market from a broader process perspective.

Co-creation of consumer value on the sporting events market – the conceptualisation of the model

The literature study into the creation of consumer value, as well as the management of consumer experience on the sports market led the authors of this article to the following conclusions:

- a. The major types of consumer value on the sports market are the emotional value and the symbolic value,
- b. Emotions, as an important component of value on the sports market are stimulated by the interaction between a consumer and the sporting event organiser, or an interaction among its participants,
- c. The process of the co-creation of value is a part of the sports market, because without the participation and engagement of the participants, the organisation of sporting events is pointless,
- d. The sporting events participants’ experiences based on emotions and at the same time the perceived value of these events should be seen in three phases: pre-purchase, consumption and post-consumption phase; therefore they are spread over a longer period of time,
- e. In each of the above-mentioned phases, under the influence of stimuli sent to them, consumers may voluntarily get engaged in the process of the co-creation of consumer value, contributing to its growth,
- f. Changing consumer behavior on the market, widespread availability of mobile devices and willingness to communicate in the virtual world create new opportunities for co-creating value for the customer,
- g. The co-creation of consumer value on the sports market is a process which takes time and involves both the organisers of sporting events and their participants.

Taking all this into account, the authors proposed a conceptual model, describing the four-phase process of the co-creation of consumer value on the sports market in the segment of sporting events (Chart 3)

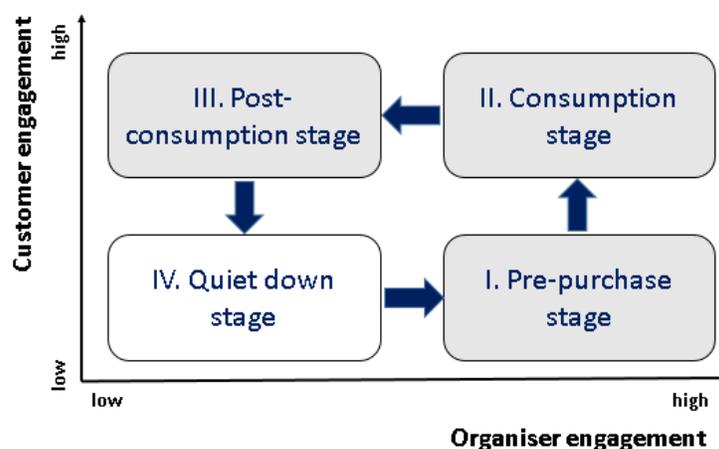


Chart 3. The process of the co-creation of consumer value on the sporting events market – conceptual model
Source: own elaboration

Due to the fact that sporting events are organised on a cyclical basis, the process of the co-creation of consumer value can be described by means of a loop of four repeated phases. In each of them, the degree of the organiser’s and the participants’ involvement may vary, depending on the possibilities and the needs of each side. This involvement may be enhanced through the use of information and communication technologies and activity in social media. However, it should be remembered that modern communication processes on the market are hybrid, so a skillful combination of activities using traditional and digital tools of communication with buyers, as well as the consent for the creation of content by buyers themselves in accordance with the User-Generated-Content model, will determine full success.

In the first phase, the organiser vies for participants, that’s why his level of involvement is very high. The attendance at the sporting event depends on the effectiveness of activities at this phase. The interested and potential participants may join the process of the creation of the future event, responding to the messages and invitations sent to them, through both a dialogue with the organiser and communicating with each other.

In the second phase of the value creation, during the event, both sides are strongly involved. The engagement of the organiser is related to the ongoing service to the customers and providing service at the highest possible level, whereas the participants, being in the state of immersion, experience a specific flow, which during huge events gathering tens of thousands of participants resembles the behaviour of bees in a hive.

The last, post-consumption phase is characterised by still high, though decreasing engagement of the participants, who still relive their experience. The memories of these sensations evoke nostalgia and are evoked

in the interactions with other participants of the event, through the numerous Social Media channels. Also souvenirs, gadgets and trophies, e.g. medals or t-shirts for each participant of a Marathon, are used for this purpose. The organiser's involvement in the interactions with the participants is much less intensive than in the two earlier phases.

The last phase, called the tranquility phase, is the time of the lowest level of involvement of both sides. When the last event is already history and the organisation of the next one is still at the embryonic stage, the value-creation activities and the involvement of both sides are yet to start, closing the loop of the process of the co-creation of consumer value.

The verification of the model by means of the case study method – 7 PKO BiałystokHalf-Marathon.

PKO BiałystokHalf-Marathon is an international event with a few thousand runners from a dozen or so countries starting every year. For seven years this event has been organised in May in one of the most beautiful regions of Poland – Podlasie. Apart from the main run at the distance of 21.1 km, there are also side runs, such as: breakfast run, 5 km run, or runs for children. The quality and the prestige of this event is manifested by numerous distinctions, among others the victory in the Poland-wide competition for the best half-marathon in Poland in 2017, or the fact that this run is included in the so-called Crown of Polish Half-Marathons (an exclusive group of 10 half-marathons). Although the event has been organised only 7 times so far, each edition is perfectly prepared, so its organiser, the BiałystokBiega Foundation, can be defined as a challenger, competing with the other prestigious runs and building its position on the market of running events in Poland and in Europe. The case study presented here covers 7. PKO Half-Marathon Białystok organised on Sunday 5 May 2019. The data used in this case study analysis have been obtained from three sources: a personal interview with the Director of the event, the analysis of the content of the event website (<https://bialystokpolmaraton.pl/>), as well as interviews with a dozen or so participants of this event.

On the basis of the experience from previous years, the organiser was aware of the significant role of the runners for building the brand of the event, therefore all the activities were focused on the co-creation of the consumer value. Bearing this in mind, with reference to the model proposed by the authors, the organiser initiated and used the runners' involvement in the three phases: pre-purchase, consumption and post-consumption, with a view to co-creating with them a valuable product, which is the seventh edition of the half-marathon.

During all phases, the Organizer used both traditional and digital methods of communicating with the runners. ICT techniques used to contribute to the value of the 7. PKO Białystok Half Marathon allowed the runners to participate in the decision-making process regarding selected elements of this sporting event. Social media and virtual networks made the exchange of information and communication two-way, synchronous and based on a network of connections between the Organizers, Organizer and the runners, and also runners among themselves. The BiałystokBiega Foundation has actively used the opportunities offered by Web 2.0. including a collection of new technologies:

- Google Suit service with Organiser own disk on this platform,
- websites (the Organiser's website and others, e.g. www.FotoMaraton.pl),
- service software Zendesk to communicate with runners,
- business communication platform Slack and Trello application to communicate between the members of BiałystokBiegaFoundation,
- high-quality streaming via screens, large screens, on which fragments of the event were played (live coverage - thanks to this, important moments of the event were presented to fans, media, participants),
- mobile applications (e.g. the Yanosik navigation application showing the route of the half-marathon, the way to the office competitions, parking lots and other facilities related to the run, as well as monuments and places worth visiting in Białystok),
- social network services (Facebook, Instagram),
- social media (YouTube) and multimedia platforms,
- blogs and mickroblogs.

Digital technologies offered runners the opportunity to engage in the examples of electronic participation of runners in all phases of the event presented later in this chapter. Thus, ICT provided the participants of the half marathon with value, making the runners become prosumers of the event (i.e. its active co-creators), and not only its users.

The pre-purchase phase

Initiating the organisation of the next edition of the event, the organiser made use of the marketing of experience, with the assumption that the runners' excitement and emotions related to the upcoming event would be gradually building up. In this phase, the activities of the BiałystokBiega Foundation were very intensive and focused primarily on the promotion of the event. Gradually, the suspense was built around the biggest running event in South-East Poland. The activities can be divided into two categories: (1) information about the event,

(2) encouragement of the participants' involvement. In both cases, the Organizer actively used, first of all, digital technologies (website, social media, blogs).

Information activities

Among the numerous messages there were the following ones:

- The information about the beauty of Białystok and Podlasie (along with attractive photos), that could be visited by the runners, including the specialties of the Podlasie cuisine, that were to be served at the finish of the race. In this way, the runners from outside the region were aware that they would be given a significant added value of the event: positive and unforgettable aesthetical and culinary experience.
- The information that & PKO Białystok Half-Marathon belongs to the Crown of Polish Half-Marathons. The Crown of Polish Half-Marathons consists of 10 distinctive Polish runs. Those who take part in 5 of them in one calendar year obtain a Crown – a special medal.
- The message that PKO Białystok Half-Marathon in 2017 was voted by the runners- readers of MaratonyPolskie.pl to be the best half-marathon in Poland and it obtained the second place in 2018, in the category of big marathons (over 1,000 participants). Moreover the Half-Marathon occupies the first position in the ranking of Mass Runs. Such distinctions are a credible recommendation for runners who are considering their participation in the event.
- The information about outstanding international and Polish runners who will take part in the half-marathon, among others: top Kenyan, Polish, or Ukrainian runners. This fact should convince the potential participants of the high level of the event,
- The message that 7 PKO Białystok Half-Marathon is involved in a charity project the objective of which is helping Stowarzyszenie Pomocy Dzieciom z Porażeniem Mózgowym [Association for Children with Cerebral Palsy] "Jasny Cel". Moreover, the runners could take part in a collection for buying and installing a swing for children on wheelchairs, which was later installed in Planty in Białystok.
- A film and photos from the previous editions of the event show the happy atmosphere, the attractive venue of the start, in front of the Branicki's Palace in the park in the city centre, the race route through the park and the modern campus of the University, as well as the finish near the City Hall in the Old Town in Białystok. It should be added that in the view of the research which has been conducted three times by the authors of this study, the attractiveness of the route is one of the most significant motivating factors for the participation in a running event (Waśkowski, 2014, 2016, 2018).
- A 38-second promotional film, with images and words which refer to the reasons why people run, as well as the emotions felt while running. The film ends in a question addressed to the runners: And why do you run? And the half-marathon's motto: 'Take a Deep Breath. 7 PKO Białystok Half-Marathon'.
- A photo of a t-shirt design which is guaranteed for the runners in their starter pack. The t-shirt design received positive comments and 1,400 'likes' on Facebook.
- The motto of the event: "Take a Deep Breath", referring to nature, which is an undeniable asset of Białystok and Podlasie as a whole, which is known for its clean air and beautiful landscapes. The motto was also placed on the official t-shirt, on the sack and a multifunction scarf, which were included in the starter packs for the runners.

The engagement of the runners

Another group of activities were those related to the engagement of the runners, partly initiated by the organiser and partly resulting from the initiative of the participants. A few months before the event, the runners' involvement can be defined as reactive, i.e. they are activated in response to the incentives provided by the organiser. The closer the date of the event, the more willingly the participants got engaged by themselves, making contact not only with the organiser, but also with each other.

- An example and a proof of engaging the participants in the process of the preparation of the event were numerous queries related to its organisation and its course. It was necessary to immediately address the queries, which, according to the organiser, was welcome by the participants, who appreciated this serious approach of the organiser.
- In the pre-purchase phase, the organiser ensured the participants' involvement by means of some elements of gamification. A number of competitions were offered to the participants, in which e.g. a starter pack could be won.
- Another initiative aimed at engaging runners was a vote on the image of the medal. The participants were to vote on which of the suggested sculptures in the garden surrounding the Branicki's Palace (the starting place of the run) should be placed on the medal for each finisher. Over 700 runners took part in the 2-week-long vote.
- It is noteworthy that the exchange of information among the participants on the Social Media was joined by the participants of the previous editions, sharing their positive experience. In this way, the event became even more credible and the participation in it – more desirable.

The consumption phase

A running event is a product which offers to the consumers not only the run, but also a number of accompanying initiatives. All in all, for the full understanding of this issue, the consumption phase should be divided into three subphases: (1) activities at the place of the event, but before the run, (2) the main run, (3) all the activities taking place after the run. International running events, such as PKO Białystok Half-Marathon, normally last for three days. In this phase, the Organizer used both traditional and digital information and communication techniques.

On the basis of the experience from previous 6 editions, the event organiser was aware that the key to the success of the event are the stimuli for emotions and sensations experienced by the participants throughout the run. Multidimensional actions were undertaken, so that the runners could feel that this was their day and feel satisfaction in the three main phases of the run: at the start they were supposed to feel excitement and adrenaline, during the run, in spite of the physical fatigue, they were supposed to feel joy, and at the finish – euphoria, elation, endorphins and satisfaction. Among many activities the organiser undertook to build emotional and spiritual relations with the participants in the consumption phase, the following can be distinguished:

- The guest runners were welcome by the slogan: „Białystok Welcomes Runners!”, placed on the screens of city buses. Already at the station the participants could feel the atmosphere of the coming event and feel welcome. Moreover, the organiser made agreements with hotel managers, according to which the runners could stay one more day after the run, free of charge. In this way, they could go back to their rooms after the run.
- The organiser also prepared side runs, as well as training sessions with runners from the elite of the Polish long-distance runs. On the day before the start, runners could participate in the Breakfast Run, free of charge. There were also runs for children and adolescents Junior City Run, and for beginners and fans of shorter distances – City Run on the distance of 5 km. Before each start, a warm-up was run by professional fitness coaches.
- During the two days before the start, there was a fair of sports gear for runners – during the collection of the starter packs, the participants could have a look at the offer of products for people practicing physical activity, learn about new brands and do some shopping.
- Aware of the significant role of the spectators, the organiser announced a competition with rewards for fans for the best-cheering group during the half-marathon. There were also eight music bands cheering the runners on the route.
- Other activities aimed at raising the value of the event in the eyes of the participants were, among others: setting the pace of the run by pacemakers, four buffets on the route, a medal for each finisher, an energy meal, music in the start zone and the finish zone, the awards ceremony for the winners, coffee shops, where the runners and their families could spend time after the run, as well as free photos of the participants – thanks to an application available to them on the start day.

As it was mentioned earlier, the atmosphere of a sports event is to a large degree created by its participants. Their activity, interactions, sharing emotions, spending time together in Białystok lasted till late night hours. Each participant of this event was genuinely engaged in the creation of this memorable experience, which is the key element of the value of this sports product, in each of its presented subphases. For many runners, the emotional value of the event was enhanced by the presence of their families and friends.

The post-consumption phase

According to the organiser, the post-consumption phase lasts for about three weeks. During this time, it is noticeable that the event participants are more intensively engaged than the organiser, especially for a few days after the event. The character of these interactions is also somewhat different. While in the pre-purchase phase the interactions between the future participants and the organiser dominate, in the post-consumption phase interactions among the participants are prevailing. Aware of the fact that interaction among runners after the run affect the perception of the event in the future, the organiser also remained in touch with the participants, primarily on the digital channels like Social Media and on the official website of the run. The activities initiated by the organiser include: a report on the event in the form of two short video material available in the Internet, articles in the local press, short memories with thanks on the website and FB, as well as replies to questions and few complaints from the participants. An element sustaining emotions was a request to the runners who managed to beat their life record in Białystok to share this fact. An interesting solution was inviting to the event some famous sport bloggers, who described the event in their blogs. Their articles obtained over a dozen thousand hits. The activity of the runners took the form of numerous posts on the Social Media with opinions, comments, assessments of the event, photos, discussions and a wide-spread exchange of information. For obvious reasons, this activity lost its intensity after 7-10 days, the next decrease in the interest of the participants could be noticed after about three weeks, although the topic of PKO Białystok Half-Marathon is present in the Internet all year long. By regularly monitoring the media, the organiser of the event found out that between the sixth edition in 2018 and the seventh one in 2019, there were about a million posts which included the phrase the Half-Marathon in Białystok.

The tranquility phase

In this phase the participants' involvement was clearly falling. The organiser's activities were less visible for the runners and only slightly influenced the value created for them. The organiser provided a summary of the event, among others, informing about the results of the charity action. For obvious reasons, the level of the runners' emotions related to the half-marathon declined, as they engaged in the next running initiatives, in this way co-creating the value of the next events. The organiser announced an action: "Debut worth a medal". The runners who took part in the 5 km side run and had never run a half-marathon were encouraged to explain in writing why they wanted to run for the first time in the 2020 half-marathon, including their running photos. The authors of the best works could participate in a training led by the professional coaches provided by the organiser. Additionally, they were offered a free of charge start in runs for 5 km and 10 km, arranged by the same organiser at different dates. The organiser placed the coverage of beginners' preparations in the Social Media. The beginners themselves were very active in the Social Media and described their activities there, which resulted in their friends' increased interest in the next edition of the Białystok half-marathon. Other elements sustaining the bond among the participants were: season's greetings, or the organisation of free runs in the form of happenings.

The presented analysis of the activities aimed at creating the consumer value of 7 PKO Białystok Half-Marathon shows that the assumptions of the proposed model are valid, but the possibilities of using ITC solutions in different phases are not the same. The value-creation process lasted throughout all the four main phases and in each of them the involvement of both the event organiser and its participants were noticeable, including activities based on communication through digital media. Certainly, these solutions significantly contributed to the joint creation of value for the customer, but it was possible thanks to the use of a hybrid communication model, i.e. traditional and digital forms of communication. However, it should be noted that not only the level of involvement, but also its forms were different in the different phases of this process. Among others, it was noticed that in the third phase, the participants maintained more intensive relations with each other than in the first phase. After a deeper insight into the participants behaviours, it also became clear that they varied within each phase, which means that the conceptual model may consist of four main phases, each divided into a few subphases.

Limitations and further directions of research

The presented model was constructed on the basis of the overview of literature, as well as the observations of the abundance of marketing activities of organisers of sporting events, attended by the authors of this analysis. It is conceptual by nature, therefore it requires further empirical verification in the form of in-depth research, which will allow for the assessment of its application value. The conducted analysis of the selected running event by means of the case study method was useful for a preliminary verification of the validity of the adopted assumptions, as to the number of phases of the co-creation of consumer value process, the identification of different levels of engagement of both sides, and the possibility of using the available ITC solutions for this purpose. However, neither the proposed model, nor the analysis results give the answer to a number of questions, among others: about the degree of control the event organiser exerts over the value-creation process, the consequences of its limitation, the ways of encouraging the participants to join this process, or moderating relations with the participants. From the participants' perspective, it seems justified to undertake further research with a view to obtaining the answers to such questions as: types of engagement in the value creation process, the correlation between the degree of a participant's engagement and the subjectively experienced value, the assessment of the degree of freedom in deciding about the course of the event, or the readiness to join the value creation process in its particular phases. It can be expected that the value creation process using social media and other ITC solutions will not take an identical course for each sporting event. The differences will depend on the character and the scale of the event, the discipline, its media-coverage, its marketing potential for various stakeholders, etc. This conclusion may be another limitation of the proposed model, as it may take a somewhat different shape for a different category of events.

Regardless of the above mentioned limitations, the authors of the article believe that the model proposed by them may be a starting point for further research, the results of which will allow for the improvement of the presented concept of the co-creation of value, filling the gap in the knowledge on the extremely significant and topical issue which is consumer value creation on the sports market based on ITC solutions.

Conclusions

The value for the customer on the sports market in the sporting events segment is created as a result of involvement in the creation process of both the organizer and viewers or participants - recipients of the event. Therefore, the thesis of the dominant service logic theory creators Vargo and Lusch was confirmed. They claimed that the service provider does not create value himself, he can only make an offer to his clients and the value arises only as a result of interactions between parties. As shown on the basis of a literature review and case study analysis, the process of co-creating customer value lasts much longer than the time of product consumption, because it begins long before the sporting event and may last after it. In three out of four phases of

creation illustrated by the author's model presented in this study, it is expedient to engage customers in the process of co-creating value. The carried out case study confirmed the validity of the proposed conceptual model. In addition, it allowed the discovery of new facts, e.g. that not only the strength of the parties' involvement is different in individual stages, but also the type of involvement is different in the pre-purchase and post-consumer stages. This fact poses further research questions, setting out further directions of research on the sport market.

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