

Socially responsible attitudes of consumers as a determinant of creating product value in the sporting events market

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Abstract

The concept of creating consumer value based on social responsibility still is not very popular with sports organisations, which focus primarily on providing the spectators with emotions and impressions resulting from the sports competition. However, involvement in solving social problems may prove to be a source of creating value, because a growing number of consumers are not merely interested in satisfying their own hedonistic needs, but they also attach importance to the protection of environment, or helping people in need. Since the issue of the influence of social responsibility on the consumer value created in the sphere of sport has not aroused great interest so far, there appears to be a serious research gap in the present state of knowledge. The article presents the results of an online survey conducted on the sample of 401 respondents, with the aim of establishing the degree to which the social involvement of the organisers of sporting events raises the value of these events for consumers. The survey confirmed the existence of such a relation, particularly with reference to people with a high level of social sensitivity. At the same time, it has been established that the level of acceptance for the pro-social activity of the organisers of sporting events depends on the whether or not the consumers are expected to get engaged. The organisers' initiatives which do not require the consumers' involvement enjoy a higher support level.

Key words: consumer value, corporate social responsibility, sporting events, consumer behaviour.

JEL: M14, O35, L83, L31.

Introduction

Participation in amateur sport and physical exercise shapes physical, volitional and psychological qualities of the participants. Indirectly it also affects the attitudes and behaviour of consumers by increasing their sensitivity to social problems. Consequently, the values sought after in the decision-making processes change, possibly as a result of the organisation's activities aimed at the improvement of the wellbeing of both economic entities and consumers. Although organisers of sporting events for amateurs are sometimes involved in solving social problems, the influence of these activities on the creation of the consumer value is still insufficiently recognised. This is why, this article undertakes an analysis of this issue. In the empirical part, it aims at filling the identified research gap and providing answers to the question of how the socially responsible actions taken by the organisers of sporting events affect the participants of which are at the same time their consumers are perceived in the context of creating consumer value. The theoretical deliberations, supported by the empirical material allowed for identifying the significance of the social responsibility of the organisers of sporting events for the evaluation of these events by their participants.

Pro-social attitudes of market operators

At present, consumers more and more frequently make their decisions not only on the hedonistic grounds, but they also take into account the influence of their actions on the environment. The issue of sustainable consumption, or the behaviour of the growing segment of the socially-aware consumers are the subject of an increasing number of scientific studies {Gierszewska and Seretny 2019}.

In the light of the considerations presented in this article, the motives based on the concept of creating consumer value is of particular significance. In the research conducted for the need of this article particular attention was paid to the two dimensions of value: social and cognitive. Their significance in making purchase decisions results from: the need for belonging to a group, winning the group's acceptance and recognition, but also the more and more often perceived need for involvement in solving social or environmental problems (Chang, 2017; Calabrete et al., 2016). The growing consumer awareness is reflected in the nature of the values consumers seek. It can be noticed not only in the products chosen by consumers, but also in assessing the companies' orientation for social issues and their involvement in solving them (Calabrete et. Al., 2016; Alafi, 2018). It is not negligible whether or not the supplier they select is engaged in solving social or environmental

problems and it also matters whether this involvement is a part of the company's strategy, or rather an occasional Public Relations action aimed merely at building a positive corporate image (Kim et al., 2017; Formánková et al., 2019; Sato et al., 2016).

The attitudes of consumers, who are displaying a growing social awareness have been noted by numerous organisations which engage themselves in pro-social activities. It is reflected by the adoption of both well-established and new concepts in the light of which social wellbeing is as significant as the need for generating profits (Maten et al., 2003; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Inoue et al. 2017).

The example of the companies which have incorporated CSR to their development strategies is followed by non-commercial institutions and organisations, which recognise the significance of involvement in the social issues. Among these entities, there are numerous, documented cases of social involvement of sport organisations (Kim, 2017). The sports market is one of the most dynamically developing markets in the world. In a number of developed countries the sports market occupies one of the top positions in the ranking of markets. However, there are few scientific studies analysing the significance of CSR and other, newer concepts based on the idea of sustainable development, for sport organisations. An overview of literature in the area of sports management leads us to a conclusion that researchers undertake the subject of social responsibility in relation to big professional sports clubs (Li and Jago, 2013; McDonald et al., 2002; Barajas et al., 2016; Coates and Depken, 2011; Fifka and Jaeger, 2018). In the professional sport the consumers of the services (spectacles) are the spectators, directly or indirectly participating in the sports events. Therefore, the most frequently undertaken research projects are related to the pro-social behaviour of sport organisations, or the social involvement of the entities related to them, e.g. sponsors or spectators (Mamo et al., 2019; Fika and Jaeger, 2018; Rowe et al., 2019, Cegliński, 2020).

Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of studies into the significance and the perception of the pro-social attitudes of entities organising sporting events whose participants are at the same time their consumers (Burning and Walker 2016). For instance, mass running events belong to this category of events. For over three decades running has been constantly popular all over the world (Cobb and Olberding, 2010). It has been estimated that around 50 million people regularly run in Europe. 250 thousand runners take part in the biggest marathons in the world every year, the so-called World Marathon Majors (New York, Chicago, Boston, Berlin, Tokyo), while 6 million directly watch their efforts. In Poland, a country with the population of about 37 million, the number of running events has increased eleven-fold over the last 16 years, from 350 in 2003 to 4,000 in 2019. Research has proven that physical activity in any form, not only running, not only positively affects health and shapes healthy life style, but also raises social sensitivity (Coleman and Ramchandani, 2010; Hemmatinezhad et al., 2010).

The number of organised sporting events is so high that their organisers must compete with each other, trying to attract participants by offering them possibly the highest value (Prado-Gasco V et al. 2018). Organisers of sporting events more and more willingly get engaged in solving social problems, for example by collecting donations, donating a part of their income for charitable purposes, or by organising an event for a charitable cause, e.g. the running event called Wings for Life, organised in several dozen countries all over the world. As it was mentioned earlier in the article, today the value offered or created jointly with the consumers has become the major motivation for their purchasing decisions (Wu, 2019; Andrews and Ritzer, 2018). Therefore, participants of sporting events may not only be financially motivated, but they can take into account the social involvement of the organiser and also get involved in these activities (Aicher, 2015). It means that the social responsibility of organisers of sporting events can become both a significant element of creating or co-creating consumer value and a strong competitive tool (Williams-Burnett and Kearns, 2018).

Therefore, the question arises whether participants of sporting events see a higher consumer value in them if organisers are involved in solving social problems?

Research method and results

With a view to finding the answer to this question, research has been conducted to find out to what extent social engagement of a sporting event organisers increases the value of the event for consumers from the socially responsible sector. The research was carried out in Poland in 2020, by means of an online survey. The snowball methods was used for sampling. On the whole, 401 respondents took part in the survey. It was assumed that the respondents should not be younger than 16. 74% were people from the age group 16-34 and the remaining 26% - persons at the age of 35 or more. The sample consisted of 53.4% women and 46.6% men.

Firstly, the respondents were asked about their level of sensitivity to social problems. The 10-point scale response scale was used: from 0 (lack of social sensitivity) to 10 (a very high level of social sensitivity).

For the sake of the analysis respondents were divided into two groups: persons with a high sensitivity to social problems (responses ranging from 7 to 10) – 67.58% of the respondents, and persons with an average or low sensitivity to social problems (responses from 0 to 6) – 32.42% of the total number of respondents. Moreover, respondents were divided into those who are physically active (81.9% of respondents) and those who used to be active in the past or not at all (18.9%). Another division was that according to the respondents' gender.

The survey shows that a vast majority of respondents have supported a charity campaign, e.g. Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy, collections for social causes, etc. For both sexes and for physically active

and non-active persons the rate of positive responses was ca. 96%. The only type of the breakdown of respondents that showed a clear difference was that based on the degree of social sensitivity (sensitive persons – 98.15%), insensitive ones – 92.25%).

A significant aspect of the survey in the light of the analysed issue was the question whether a respondent takes an active part in sporting events. The positive response to the question about the participation in sporting events over the last 24 months was given by:

- a. Gender: 34.27% - women, 68.63% - men,
- b. Socialsensitivity: 50.93% - sensitive, 41.86 – insensitive,
- c. Sporting activity: 57.23% - active, 8%– non-active.

The respondents were asked whether they had ever taken part in a sporting event, as a participant or as a spectator, because of the fact that it was organised with the aim of solving a social problem. The question was positively replied by nearly half of the respondents with a high level of social sensitivity and the physically active ones. In term of the gender, men were more often motivated to take part in such an event. The detailed findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participation in a sporting event as a chance to help in solving a social problem

Responses	Gender		Socialsensitivity		Sportingactivity	
	Women	Men	Sensitive	Insensitive	Active	Non-active
Many times	38.02%	41.72%	47.23%	24.04%	43.07%	25.33%
Onceornever	38.50%	38.57%	33.21%	49.61%	37.23	44.00

Source: ownelaboration

The respondents were asked to what degree the fact that a sporting event was organised for a charitable cause increased their motivation for the participation in this event. The response scale ranged from 0% to 100%, where 0% meant that this fact had no influence on their decision, whereas 100% - the certainty of participation in the event of this type. In each of the applied breakdownsthe differences in the distribution of responses were noticeable, but the biggest gap occurred in the case of socially sensitive and insensitive persons. The structure of responses is as follows:

- d. Gender: 62.86% - women, 49.68% - men
- e. Socialsensitivity: 64.83% - sensitivity, 39.61 – insensitive
- f. Sportingactivity: 57.51% - active, 53.20 – inactive.

The next question was aimed at establishing the form of involvement in solving a specific social problem that would most effectively encourage respondents to participate in a sporting event. There was a 7-point scale, where 1 meant ‘to the lowest degree’ and 7 – ‘to the highest’. The structure of the obtained responses is shown in Table 2.

Table. 2. The form of involvement in solving a social problem as a determinant of the participation in a sporting event.

Responses	Gender		Socialsensitivity		Sportingactivity	
	Women	Men	Sensitive	Insensitive	Active	Non-active
The whole income from the event is donated for solving a social problem	5.94	5.12	5.87	4.89	5.48	5.88
A certain percentage if the income from the event is donated for solving a social problem	4.68	4.27	4.79	3.86	4.53	4.32
During the event there will be a collection of money for solving a social problem	4.31	3.80	4.37	3.45	4.53	4.17
There is an option of making a voluntary donation for a charitable cause while signing up for the participation in the event	3.71	3.50	3.89	3.05	4.05	3.44
During the event the organiser will use environmentally-friendly products and equipment	4.56	4.02	4.63	3.64	3.66	4.05
During the event there will be an information campaign raising the social awareness of the participants and encouraging to support a charitable cause	4.40	3.69	4.37	3.43	4.37	4.27

Source: owneleboration.

Regardless of the breakdown of respondents, what would encourage a majority of them to participate in a sporting event was the fact of donating the whole income from the organisation of the event to a charitable

cause. The biggest differences in responses with reference to this form of engagement have been noted in the breakdown into socially sensitive and insensitive respondents. Making a voluntary donation to a charitable cause while signing up for an event is a form of involvement in solving social problems the respondents found the least appealing. It should be noted here that numerous organisers of global and smaller-scale sporting events offer this form of involvement in solving social problems. As the findings of this survey show, its appeal to the participants is the smallest of all the forms of involvement.

The respondents were asked what type of values they see in the participation in an event the organiser of which is engaged in solving specific social problems. There was a 7-point response scale, from “Yes, I definitely agree.” To „I definitely disagree.”. The structure of responses is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Elements of consumer value provided by the participation in a sporting event.

Responses		Gender		Social sensitivity		Sporting activity	
		Women	Men	Sensitive	Insensitive	Active	Non-active
Participation in such an event brings me pleasure	Yes	69,01%	60,04%	71.22%	51.94%	67.07%	56.08%
	No	1,41%	4,27%	1.85%	4.65%	2.77%	2.66%
As a participant of such an event first of all I expect the organiser to satisfy my needs and expectations related to the participation	Yes	38,91%	37,43%	38.75%	37.21%	39.69%	32.00%
	No	5,17%	7,49%	5.91%	6.98%	7.08%	2.67%
I know that by participating in such an event I help to solve a specific social problem	Yes	74,17%	61,50%	75.65%	52.72%	68.00%	69.34%
	No	0,47%	3,20%	0.00%	5.33%	1.84%	1.33%
Participation in such an event gives me the feeling of my own social responsibility for my environment	Yes	72,77%	50,80%	71.22%	44.19%	64.31%	46.67%
	No	0,94%	6,95%	1.85%	7.75%	3.69%	4.00%
By participating in such an event I identify with people who are as sensitive to social problems as I am	Yes	57,74%	46,52%	63.10%	30.24%	55.38%	39.40%
	No	1,41%	9,62%	0.74%	14.73%	5.54%	4.00%
The organisation of sporting events supporting social causes develops people's sensitivity to the issues which concern all of us	Yes	68,55%	58,82%	71.58%	48.06%	66.16%	54.66%
	No	2,35%	5,88%	1.85%	8.53%	4.00%	4.00%
The character of the event in which I participate (commercial vs. charitable) does not make any difference to me	Yes	15,02%	25,66%	18.9%	24.03%	20.00%	20.00%
	No	35,68%	24,59%	33.58%	24.03%	29.84%	33.33%

Source: own elaboration.

The response structure is diversified across the applied criteria, although certain regularities can be noticed. The perceived consumer value of a sporting event whose organiser is involved in solving social problems is the highest if the participants are convinced that by their participation they can help those in need. This response obtained the most positive indications in each of the respondents' breakdowns. Moreover, the disparities within one category were substantial, respectively in favour of: women, socially sensitive people and those physically active. In the context of the social engagement, the level of satisfying the participants' needs and expectations was of a relatively minor significance. Therefore, it may be concluded that the hedonistic motivation is of a secondary importance in the structure of a sporting event assessment, whereas social and cognitive elements are dominant.

Discussion and limitations

The presented research findings allow for drawing interesting conclusions. As it has been shown, if the organisers of sporting events are involved in solving specific social problems, it positively affects the value of these events perceived by their participants. From the point of view of the concept of consumer value, this value increases particularly in two dimensions: the social value and the cognitive value.

The conducted research justifies a claim that consumers with a high level of social sensitivity perceive a high value in the sporting events in which they participate if their organisers help to solve specific social problems. There is a strong connection between the perceived social value and a participant's level of social sensitivity, gender – women perceive a higher value than men – as well as their level of physical activity – physically active persons perceive a higher value. A disparity in the perception of various forms of support offered by the sporting events organisers has been noted. Those forms which do not require additional involvement of the participants enjoy a higher level of consumers' approval: e.g. donating the whole of a part of

the income for social causes, information campaigns, or the use of environmentally-friendly products during the event. A lower level of approval was won by the forms of support in which the participants are expected to engage themselves additionally, e.g. voluntary donations during registration, or voluntary donations collected during the event.

Although the conducted research is a source of valuable cognitive material, it also has its limitations. The most important of them are: a relatively small sample of respondents and a limited, domestic extent of the research. The applied set of questions allowed for checking the correlation between the social attitudes of consumers and their assessment of a sporting event from the point of view of the organiser's involvement in solving social problems. However, it was not sufficient for creating model solutions, which could be helpful in the management of sport entities. Considering the fact that the pro-social attitudes are manifested by the participants of sporting events, their organisers and quite often by entities cooperating with the organisers, an interesting direction of further research would be the identification of the chain of values created at each of its elements.

The presented research results may serve as a good comparative material in relation to the findings of other researchers of the sport market and other specific markets. They may also become an inspiration for further in-depth research into creating consumer value through engagement in solving social problems.

Conclusions

Socially-oriented attitudes and behaviours, shown by the consumers on the sports events market, prove that they could be the determining factor when it comes to deciding on the way the events' organisers choose to create customer value. The customers' sensitivity to social problems causes them to pay closer attention to whether the event they are participating in is contributing to reducing said problems. The conducted research shows that physical activity of the consumers does increase their sensitivity to some point, however, even people who have not yet actively participated in sports events are aware of these issues.

The activity of the organisers of sporting events in the area which is the subject of this study directly contributes to reducing the problems faced by those who need help. If the consumers, in this case the participants of sporting events, who appreciate the importance of these actions are involved in this process, the result will be the process of the co-creation of consumer value. Eventually, this will lead to a higher satisfaction of the events participants with a high quality product, benefits for the organisers in the form of: a positive image, a higher level of participation in the event and a stronger competitive position, as well as the improvement of the society's quality of life, i.e. the broadly understood wellbeing, in relation to both the psychological (emotional-mental), as well as the spiritual sphere.

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