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IMAGE CREATION OF PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES USING CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract. Relevance of the research. It is suggested here that social networks are the most important tools for the image creation the context of organizational and personal image management, which presents **the problem of research**. **The purpose of the research** is to present a brief overview of theories pertaining organizational image and its main features; to provide a more detailed analysis of social networks and it is leveraging for creation and management of professional athlete image. **The object of research** is the mass media outlets and social networks. **Analysis** of recent researches and publications, which initiated the solution of this problem: use of articles by authors Cornelissen (2001), Mamedaityte (2003), Druteikiene (2003), Virvilaite, Dilys (2010), Scott (2008), Dulworth (2008), Goffman (2000), Arai et al. (2013), Neves et al. (2015), etc. **The methodology of the research.** In order to fulfill these objectives, an academic literature analysis, and theoretical modeling and interpretation methods were applied. **Conclusions.** Organizational image refers to identity, vision and basic operational aspects of organization. It is one of the most important phenomena of organization management, as positive image enables organization to achieve competitive advantage and strengthen connection with target groups. Professional athletes contribute to the creation of sport organization image. At the same time, professional athletes create their own image and brand. Using their athletic achievements, celebrity lifestyle and personal facade, professional athletes utilize social networks in order to create and enhance personal image. Organizational image refers to identity, vision and basic operational aspects of organization. It is one of the most important phenomena of organization management, as positive image enables organization to achieve competitive advantage and strengthen connection with target groups. Professional athletes contribute to the creation of sport organization image. At the same time, professional athletes create their own image and brand. Using their athletic achievements, celebrity lifestyle and personal facade, professional athletes utilize social networks in order to create and enhance personal image.

Keywords: organizational image; social networks; professional athletes.

Problem solvency in general and its contacts with important scientific or practical tasks. Any contemporary sector of economy is distinguished by high level of competition. The same conditions apply to sports sector, which has enjoyed tremendous growth in popularity and revenues over the last few decades. One of tools to achieve competitive advantage is to create and properly manage organizational

image. This paper explores new forms of mass media – social networks – as means for professional athletes to create and enhance their personal image. First half of this article presents a brief overview of theories pertaining organizational image and its main features. Second half provides a more detailed analysis of social networks and its leveraging for creation and management of professional athlete image.

Understanding of Organizational Image.

Organizational image is seen as a result of organizational activities related to interactions with external environment. It starts with collaborative engagements with various intermediaries, continues with cooperation with organizations that operate in a similar field, and finishes with association with media outlets [1].

Public opinion on organization and its actions is highly valuable and influencing asset in terms of organizational success. Organizations strive to form positive image within general public or target groups because it improves its goal attainments. It is important to not only to manufacture goods or produce services, but also to make sure that society receives proper information about it. Designated actions – public relations or media relations – are the activities that organizations run in order to construct desired public opinion.

Public relations include broad spectrum of actions, which are targeted at creation, development and maintenance of favorable conditions towards organization. Public relations

include information, communication, image creation, promotion, and stabilization functions.

By leveraging public relations organizations typically seek to communicate information outside of organization (to the public) and inside of organization (to the employees). Constant exchange of opinions, facts and information is essential for organization and its stakeholders.

Public relations enable organization to establish and maintain valuable contacts, open lines of communication are being kept with various public fields or target groups. Contacts with outlets of mass media information – television, radio, newspapers, and magazines – are considered to be the most valuable. Publicly recognized individuals, experts of professional field, political or economic institutions, youth groups are also recognized as important and valuable public relations contacts [1].

Actions of public relations will help to form positive image about company's manufactured product or produced service. However, it is important to note that public relations should not be identified as image formation; the two activities are coherent to each other. An established favorable public image of organization is a solid foundation for organization's future success.

Image carries an important instructional element, as it provides information to customers and represents organization. It is important for organization's executives to perceive the importance of organizational image and understand that image does not appear by itself. Proper image cultivating actions

include planning, consistent and purposeful actions, it is also highly time-consuming, as well as requires human and financial resources.

Organizational image can also be described as an abstract opinion of society or certain target group on organization. As a result, creation, development and maintenance of positive reputation regarding organization, its products or services, is main objective of public relations.

Key understanding, while achieving this objective, is the perception that image cannot be based on false or hollow grounds. Public relations experts emphasize organizational image is reflection of reality. Creation of organizational image could be seen as a vertical upward process incorporating the layers of legal foundation, culture, identity, and profile. [2] (Figure 1).

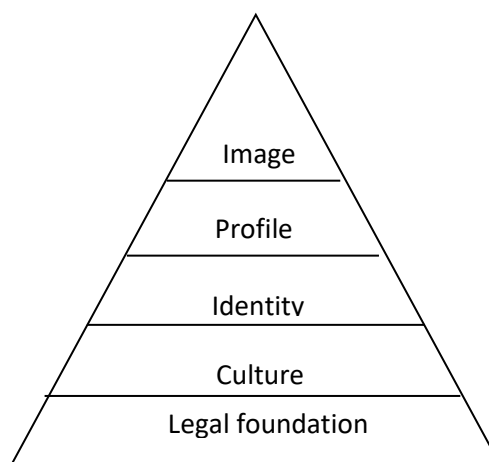


Figure 1 Pyramid of Image Creation Source: A. Glosienė (1999)

Image incorporates many individual features-attributes that are specific to certain object. It is important to note that the attachment of such attributes happens either objectively, or it can be ascribed by individuals or public. For example, an image of being dependable or reliable (bank, trust fund, etc.) is created, while in reality such object could be less trustworthy.

Management and marketing experts provide different definitions of organizational image. Different approaches towards organizational activity in image creation are also presented by different authors. Some state that image can emerge naturally,

on its own, thus, it does not require purposeful actions [3].

Organizational image is aggregate of ideas, feelings, understandings and imaginations that individual or group of individuals hold and which are affected by material organizational elements, communication and social and personal value systems [3].

As a result, it could be stated that image ensures the attainability of long term goals. It is evident that goal attainment needs to be carefully planned in advance, in order to have successful implementation. It could be argued that image is the face organization in public domain. It is applicable in every economy field, including sport. Also, very important

to note that even if organization does not cultivate its image, organizational image will still obtain some kind of form within its surrounding public. Research has shown that in cases where organization does not allocate any resources toward image creation, organizational image in the public eye still takes shape. However, in instances like this, where organization does not pay attention nor takes proper actions regarding its image creation, a naturally formed organizational image could be inadequate and even negative towards the organization.

It could be summarized that organizational image is a conscious impression of organization in individuals and in groups. It is unquestionably agreed that positive image of sport organization can help attract partners, investors, sponsors, and, most importantly, customers. Organizations must pay proper attention to management of public relations and organizational image. It is evident that maintenance of proper image is far more lucrative and needs significantly less resources than management or transformation of negative image and its consequences [3]. The following section of this article will analyze social networks as tools of image creation for professional athletes.

Social Networking by Professional Athletes. Sports industry is one of the most profitable sectors of entertainment business. Sports attract substantial investments; however, it is also constantly being accompanied by various risks associated with player injuries, sponsor retreat, stakeholder folding, etc. Majority of scholars

agree that strong organizational image is one of key aspects upon realization of strategic goals. The image of sport organization is strongly associated with athletes and their achievements [4]. As a result, it is worth analyzing the leveraging of professional athletes and their personal and professional attributes in order to manage organizational image.

Contemporary media consumer habits have shifted dramatically over the last few decades, especially with the emergences of social media platforms. Working in congruence all these media outlets supplement each other and enable organizations to create effective communication system. Obviously, Internet connection has taken the forefront seat among all means of communication. Contemporary everyday life is unimaginable without Internet. Moreover, Internet has displaced several traditional media channels as a source of information. Social networks enable to transfer social world into virtual reality. Sports industry hasn't been exempt to the influence of social networking either. Most professional athletes use such social networks as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram in order to keep in touch with their fans and promote their personal image [5].

The main mission of **mass media outlets** is defined as provision of accurate information about various events, explanation of relevant problems of society, unbiased representation of multiple points of view. However, recent trends show that media is more likely to form a point of view, as opposed to objective information provision.

Print media and Internet websites provide valuable tools for professional athletes in search of constant visibility. Professional athletes for the most part enjoy celebrity status, which enables them to be at the center of media attention. Athletic achievements and events, surrounding athletic performance, as well the private life of professional athletes attract media, because those aspects are of particular interest to general public. If athlete-related news are positive, athlete's image and public perception will also shape in a positive direction. On the contrary, if news messages are related to bad behavior of star athlete, it will negatively impact his or her image. As a result, if one wants to use mass media outlets for positive image creation, he or she must have good reputation, proper behavior and lead suitable way of life.

Social network is an interactive Internet structure that creates its own content and is designed for similar interest member groups [6]. Social networks have become an integral part of our everyday life. Virtually every person, regardless of their age, gender, social status, education or income, has a profile on some kind of social network. Communication via social networking has become one of most influential means for image creation. The main aspect that distinguishes social networks from other Internet websites is the opportunity to directly communicate and share information among totally unrelated and unfamiliar individuals. Members of social media groups form communities, which in turn operate not only locally, but also globally.

Social networks unite many individuals from all over the world, while individuals themselves process large amounts of information, that they receive from their counterparts, as well as create additional content on a social network [6].

In general, external features of an individual are described as **personal facade** (ауторіус, метай). Most common personal features, as provided by number of authors, include:

- Clothing – oftentimes can be an attribute of person's social status. Most common public associations – expensive, brand clothes evidence certain status and wealth.
- Race – represents origins of individuals.
- Gender – represents biological origins of an individual.
- Age – represents biological maturity of a person, as well as his or her experience.
- Appearance – includes all external features of a person.
- Facial expression – eyes, lips, smile, gaze, etc. all improve communication process by providing additional information about a person.
- Speech models – various tones, such as calm, excited or rude, provide information about person's character and mood.
- Body language – provide additional valuable information about a person.

Body language is categorized into external stimulus and manners [7].

External characteristics (clothes, gender, race, height, weight, appearance, facial expression) contains information message

regarding person's social status, while personal manners (speech models, body language) are more associated with person's character, education.

Provide theoretical framework, which separates individual characteristics into three major dimensions: athletic performance, attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle. Their research showed that marketable lifestyle, which includes interactions with fans, athlete's ethical behavior, and personal values, makes the highest contribution to the creation of athlete image, while attractive appearance was found to be least important features of athlete image formation. [8].

As a result, it could be summarized that professional athletes create their image by utilizing external personal facade and by publicizing it through social media networks to others. Personal profile, its photographs and information is voluntarily created and managed by an owner of profile – professional athlete. The visibility of a profile highly depends on owner activity. By using personal manners, eloquence and creativity, star athlete can initiate conversations, publicly share texts with other members of social network.

The aforementioned personal features are very important in image formation strategy. However, it is important to realize that some features are biological and inborn, while others can be acquired through education, experience and sociability. Experts of social networking (autorius, metai; autorius, metai) agree that successful development of social image requires emphasizing of the best characteristics, while at the same time

avoiding controversial comments. As a result, professional athletes are highly recommended to publicly express neutral messages. This is also interchangeable with cultural diversity within social networks – every individual perceives and understands various issues differently.

Mutual recommendations between customers are very powerful and effective forms of advertising. As a result, professional athletes must pay close attention to fan comments, also keep constant contact with their followers and provide responses to their inquiries [9]. Personal image creation and maintenance is complex process of public relations. Many different aspects impact the image of professional athletes. Mass media outlets and social networks provide valuable tools for professional athletes to positively manage their private image. However, this process requires steady communication associated with clear, transparent, consistent and constant information production and publication.

Conclusions

Organizational image refers to identity, vision and basic operational aspects of organization. It is one of the most important phenomena of organization management, as positive image enables organization to achieve competitive advantage and strengthen connection with target groups. Professional athletes contribute to the creation of sport organization image. At the same time, professional athletes create their own image and brand. Using their athletic achievements, celebrity lifestyle and personal facade, professional athletes

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ФОРМУВАННЯ ІМІДЖУ ПРОФЕСІЙНИХ СПОРТСМЕНІВ З ВИКОРИСТАННЯМ СУЧАСНИХ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕДІЙ

Анотація. Актуальність дослідження. В статті відмічається, що соціальні мережі є найбільш важливими інструментами для формування іміджу у контексті управління іміджем організації та особистості, що репрезентує проблему дослідження. **Мета дослідження** - представити короткий огляд теорій, що стосуються іміджу організації та її основних характеристик; здійснити детальний аналіз соціальних мереж та використати їх для створення і управління іміджем професійного спортсмена. **Об'єкт дослідження** - засоби масової інформації та соціальні мережі. **Аналіз останніх досліджень та публікацій**, які ініціювали вирішення даної проблеми: використання статей авторів Cornelissen (2001), Mamedaitytė (2003), Drūteikienė (2003), Virvilaitė, Dilys, (2010), Scott (2008), Dulworth (2008), Goffman (2000), Arai та ін. (2013), Neves та ін. (2015) та ін. **Методологія дослідження.** Для досягнення цих цілей застосовувався аналіз наукової літератури, а також методи теоретичного моделювання та інтерпретації. **Висновки.** Організаційний імідж відноситься до ідентичності, баченню та основних операційних аспектів організації. Це одне з найважливіших явищ управління організацією, постільки позитивний імідж дозволяє організації досягти конкурентної переваги та укріпити зв'язки з цільовими групами. Професійні спортсмени сприяють формуванню іміджу спортивної організації. В той же час професійні спортсмени створюють свій імідж і бренд. Використовуючи свої спортивні досягнення, образ життя знаменитостей та особистий досвід, професійні спортсмени послуговуються соціальними мережами для формування і покращення свого іміджу.

Ключові слова: організаційний імідж, соціальні мережі, професійні спортсмени.

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СОЗДАНИЕ ИМИДЖА ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНЫХ СПОРТСМЕНОВ С ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕМ СОВРЕМЕННЫХ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ МЕДИЙ

Аннотация. Актуальность исследования. В статье отмечается, что социальные сети являются наиболее важными инструментами для создания имиджа в контексте управления имиджем организации и личности, что представляет **проблему исследования**. **Цель данного исследования** - представить краткий обзор теорий, касающихся имиджа организации и его основных характеристик; обеспечить более подробный анализ социальных сетей и использовать для создания и управления имиджем профессионального спортсмена. **Объект исследования** - средства массовой информации и социальные сети. **Анализ последних исследований и публикаций**, которые инициировали решение этой проблемы: использование статей авторов Cornelissen (2001), Mamedaitytė (2003), Drūteikienė (2003), Virvilaitė, Dilys, (2010), Scott (2008), Dulworth (2008), Goffman (2000), Arai и др. (2013), Neves и др. (2015) и др. **Методология исследования.** Для достижения этих целей применялся анализ научной литературы, а также методы теоретического моделирования и интерпретации. **Выводы.** Организационный имидж относится к идентичности, видению и основным операционным аспектам организации. Это одно из важнейших явлений управления организацией, поскольку позитивный имидж позволяет организации достичь конкурентного преимущества и укрепить связь с целевыми группами. Профессиональные спортсмены способствуют созданию имиджа спортивной организации. В то же время профессиональные спортсмены создают свой имидж и бренд. Используя свои спортивные достижения, образ жизни знаменитостей и личный облик, профессиональные спортсмены используют социальные сети для создания и улучшения своего имиджа.

Ключевые слова: организационный имидж; социальные сети; профессиональные спортсмены.

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