

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROMOTION OF UNIVERSITY SPORT ON THE FACULTY LEVEL – CASE ANALYSIS: FACULTY OF EDUCATION OSIJEK 2014 TO 2020

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### **Abstract**

The ways of informing students about the activities which are organized on a faculty or university level daily present an increasing challenge. The very aim of this work is to analyze and compare ways of informing students of the Faculty of Education about the sport activities on the faculty and university level. The way of informing students about the activities will be compared with the ways of informing about general sport activities in order to identify possible deviation from two different types of activities. Promotion being one of the marketing elements, so is the appliance of adequate promotion tools very important in all social processes. Numerous examples, especially in sport, proved that the activities of the sport participants will not be successful without the adequate use of promotion. University sport in developed countries surely occupies an important place in the academic community; from that point of view it is very important to determine the way of managing the university sport. The university sport in the Republic of Croatia is becoming more significant element of students' activities every day, and the promotion contributes to that. Apart from comparing the ways of informing about sport and regular activities, this paper will provide the time comparison of the mentioned researches between 2014 and 2020.

The comparison of the same data with the time lag will provide the best picture of the changes in the ways of informing in a 6-year-period. The obtained results have shown that even after six years, students continue to prefer certain communication channels, i.e. they remain primary.

**Key words:** sport management, university sport, marketing, promotion

### **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of sport and sport activities has been proven many times throughout the history. Sport is essential in the context of health. That context should not be viewed as single-valued, because the influence on health affects the economical context of sport.

Increasing the quality of health in the economical context will reduce sickness leave and increase working productivity, thereby the productivity and employers profit will increase, as well as the entire economy. On the expenditure side, the increase of quality of health will reduce the treatment costs and the Health Care System. Sport also influences the entire educa-

tion system, including the Higher education system. In developed countries sport often influences the choice of faculty. University sport influences the quality of studying; it provides students with physical activity, fulfils their free time well and its social component gives opportunities to make new social contacts and mutual networking. (Galić, Tomac & Maleš, 2020).

The marketing approach to university sport activities is a great challenge, especially in Croatia, since university sport is not as significant as it should be. Therefore, the competitive part of university sport is not adequately recognized and sport participants experience difficulties in coordinating sport and learning obligations. The promotion of sport on the university level and locating appropriate communication channels about sport activities on the faculty and university level presents a great challenge regarding organization. If sport is viewed as a hobby, then sport on the university or faculty level has its place on a specific market and tries to win users from cultural, musical and educational content. The task of the promotion is finding competitive advantages on such market and the best way of informing students about them, and this paper will try to determine the current state of the preferred communication channels in the promotion of university sport.

## THEORETICAL PART OF THE PAPER

### Student sport

It is well known that activities covered by sport in the Republic of Croatia are defined by the Sports Act, yet sport can be divided into four main groups (Bartoluci & Škorić, 2009:16):

- Competitive sport
- Recreational sport
- Physical education, i.e. sport in educational sense
- Kinesitherapy and sport for people with disabilities

Academic sport or sport intended for students is mainly carried out in the realm of non-profit sport, since its primary goal is to satisfy the health needs of students. Some studies have confirmed that participating in sport activities for students is tightly related to specific life habits in later years; the freedom of choice to participate in sport activities at university is related with inner motivation for competing in all fields, which is extremely important in that developmental life stage (Kimball, Freysinger, Valeria, 2010).

If sport in academic institutions is seen through the prism of general division of sport activities then sport in academic institutions can be divided into three basic categories: physical education, recreational sport and competitive sport. The main goal of physical education is to fulfil the basic health needs of students, necessary physical activity of a young person and development of human body, along with its intellectual development. The goal of recreational sport is to offer students diversity of additional sport activities which will further satisfy their need for physical activity. The range of activities offered to students in their free time defines the number of students who practice recreational sport during studies. The range of activities includes infrastructure, as well as the substance.

The goal of competitive sport is to encourage excellence in sport among the academic community. Stimulating and organizing mutual competitions foster recreational sport, strengthen the community affiliation and increase the competitive advantage of specific academic institution through accomplishments (Galić, 2015).

According to the above mentioned, it is obvious that the complexity of student sport requires a professional approach to management of organizing all the mentioned activities. It

results in the importance of marketing activities in order to popularize and improve the quality of student sport.

### **Marketing activities in university sports**

Prior to explaining the term of the use of marketing activities in sport, it is important to define marketing as a process. Kotler (2001: 9) defines marketing as “a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they want and need through creating, offering and exchanging products of value with others”. This definition rests on the basic design: need, desire and demand; products (goods, services and ideas); value, expense and satisfaction; exchange and transaction; relations and networks; markets; marketers and potential buyers.

Generally speaking about marketing in sport, as well as university sport, two versions of the term are possible. One refers to marketing in sport, the other to sport marketing. Although numerous experts in marketing in sport often cannot find clearly defined differences in the concept, it is important to emphasize the conceptual difference in terms. Marketing in sport is based on implementation of general marketing activities to sport, in the way it is implemented in agriculture, culture, trade or any other area. General marketing activities in this context refer to marketing strategies, marketing tools, marketing approaches that are equally applied to all activities, be it sport or other. Marketing activities have their peculiarities in each segment of society or each activity, therefore it is often emphasized, when defining general marketing, that marketing in practice has different scopes of application.

Accordingly, the application of marketing in sports is considered the application of marketing in a special area, so unlike the term marketing in sports, the term sports marketing is used more often.

Unlike marketing in sport, which involves the application of general marketing regardless of the field, the term sports marketing is the application of specific marketing, with its own marketing philosophy (Galić, 2015).

Thus, "it can be said that there is its own philosophy of marketing, so one who does not understand enough specific (e.g. sports) activity, with all its characteristics and specifics, with obligatory knowledge and knowledge of marketing management, supply and demand (e.g. sports) products and services, as well as knowledge in the field of management, cannot make relevant decisions" (Bartoluci & Škorić, 2009:216).

When it comes to the marketing approach, along with the way of marketing content distribution, the content of marketing messages is very important. Biloš and Galić (2016) claim that the content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing the consistent and relevant content through several different communication channels in order to attract and retain the attention of clearly defined audience, which aims at profitable user activities (Biloš & Galić, 2016; Content Marketing Institute, 2015; Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

Beech and Chadwick (2010) define five key marketing tasks for sport services:

- Reliability (assurance of customers that their expectations regarding services will always be met),
- Responsibility (willingness to help customers with timely services),
- Guarantee (level of trust and security that customers have towards employees),
- Empathy (possibility to provide personalized services),
- Tangibility (physical traces).

As the research placed special emphasis on the application of digital tools in advertising and information, it is important to emphasize what digital marketing is. The society today in all its segments is going through a digital transformation, therefore sport, as an important segment of the society, is affected by various processes whose aim is digital transformation. Ružić, Biloš and Turkalj (2014) define electronic marketing in a narrow sense as the process of making an offer, setting prices, distribution and promotion in order to meet the needs of customers in the electronic market following the principle of profitability. In a broad sense, it is defined as only one of the tools used by economic entities to a greater or lesser extent to complete the overall offline marketing activities. Kotler, Wong, Saunders and Armstrong (2006) considerably simplify and define e-marketing as the marketing side of e-commerce.

### Promotion and promotional set

Ružić, Biloš and Turkalj (2014) believe that the entire traditional marketing system with a marketing mix (product, price, distribution and promotion) has had to adapt to today's environment. Since the topic of this paper is promotion and the way of transmitting information, it is necessary to conceptually define promotion. Promotion includes all methods and channels of communication that one can use to provide information about their products / services or about the company to their customers and the general public (Pintar, 2013). Promotion in a broad sense is a term for the improvement of something (from the Latin word *promovere* - moving forward), and in a narrow sense, promotion as an element of the marketing mix is a set of activities that broadcast various information from the economic operator into the environment (Meler, 2005).

As promotion has the task of establishing communication between producers and consumers, then we can talk about a promotional or marketing-communication network, which includes the following promotional activities (Meler, 2005):

- Advertising
- Publicity
- Public relations
- Sales promotion
- Personal sales.

As the very definition and promotional set shows, the management of promotion at any level is a demanding process that involves an adequate combination of each element of the promotional set. For the purposes of this paper, we will not go into the complexity of each element in its application to university sports, but only try to emphasize its importance.

Although it may not seem so, the analytical approach shows that university sport in its promotional sense contains all the elements of a promotional mix. Advertising as a paid form of promotion is perhaps the least represented in university sports primarily for financial reasons. Public relations as an element of the promotional set in university sport is a display of self-image and here it is perhaps most important that the organizers of university sport competitions get involved because in this way they certainly contribute to raising awareness about university sport. Similar to public relations, publicity as any unpaid form of public information about a legal or natural person, place, thing or event (Sudar, 1984: 569) is an important segment of the promotion of university sport because, unlike advertising, they are unpaid and use public media.

Sales promotion in university sport can be interpreted as a process of raising awareness of organizers of student sports competitions or various student associations or volunteers about all the content of a particular sporting event so that target users or students get acquainted with these activities as easily and accurately as possible.

Personal selling as a promotional activity is face-to-face communication, without the means of the media (Meler, 2005) among students may be the best way to "sell" university sport activities, because students who are already involved in sports activities, either as participants or only escorts, can personally convey information about university sport to their colleagues, or in the economic context to a potential new market group.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the methodological sense, the paper used scientific survey methods and sampling methods, analysis and synthesis, generalization method, and statistical method. The scientific method of description was also used in some parts of the research. During the collection of survey data, the survey questionnaire was available in offline and online versions. The Likert scale of attitude measurement with a range from 1 to 7 was used to collect data in the survey questionnaire, where the value 1 indicated the rarest way of informing, and the value 7 the most common way of informing. The research was conducted in 2014 as a part of the final paper of the co-author Tvrtko Galić with the topic "Application of e-marketing in university sport on the example of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek" at the Postgraduate Specialist Study "Marketing of Special Areas" at the Faculty of Economics in Osijek.

### Respondent sample

The sample consisted of 182 students from the Faculty of Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek. The total sample was divided into two sub-samples, one consisted of 91 students of Class Teacher Study and Early and Preschool Education Study surveyed in 2014, and the other sub-sample consisted of 91 students of the same study programs surveyed in 2020 by the same research method with the same questions. The sample consisted of items from a survey questionnaire designed for more extensive research, and the items were related to examining the use of digital technologies and the access to information in order to determine the application of e-marketing in university sport on the example of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek.

### Data collection methods

The data were collected during regular classes in the academic year 2014/2015 and 2019/2020. The survey questionnaire was completely anonymous, and the students were given the opportunity to fill it out offline and online.

### Data processing methods

Basic descriptive parameters, arithmetic mean and standard deviation, as well as the minimum and maximum results in all the items for both sub-samples have been calculated. A t-test with a significance level of  $p = 0.05$  was used to determine the differences in the results between the sub-samples.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the research show the responses relationship according to the Likert scale, whereas the value 7 indicated the most intense way of informing, and the value 1 the least common way of communication.

Table 1. Basic descriptive parameters in the items related to the question "How do you most often find out information about general student activities at our university (meaning, for example, a public lecture of a well-known lecturer, freshmen party, student action or scholarship competition, etc.)" of the sub-sample surveyed in 2014

	N	AS	SD	Min	Max
Directly at the Faculty	91,00	4,81	1,93	1,00	7,00
Faculty website	91,00	3,14	1,99	1,00	7,00
Other websites	91,00	2,15	1,69	1,00	7,00
Facebook	91,00	5,33	1,99	1,00	7,00
Offline media - TV, radio, newspapers	91,00	2,35	1,68	1,00	7,00
From colleagues, friends, acquaintances and similar	91,00	5,76	1,64	1,00	7,00
Other	91,00	1,64	1,30	1,00	7,00

Source: author's research

The research showed that the greatest value when it comes to informing about general student activities in 2014, which also means that the most common way of communication, has oral transmission from colleagues, friends and acquaintances (5.76) and Facebook (5.33). On the other hand, information transmitted via some other websites (2.15) and offline media (2.35) are marked with the lowest values, and are thus shown as the least used methods of communication.

Table 2. Basic descriptive parameters in the items related to the question "How do you most often find out information about general student activities at our university (meaning, for example, a public lecture of a well-known lecturer, freshmen party, student action or scholarship competition, etc.)" of the sub-sample surveyed in 2020

	N	AS	SD	Min	Max
Directly at the Faculty	91,00	4,26	1,74	1,00	7,00
Faculty website	91,00	3,13	1,85	1,00	7,00
Other websites	91,00	2,52	1,86	1,00	7,00
Facebook	91,00	5,79	1,83	1,00	7,00
Offline media - TV, radio, newspapers	91,00	2,09	1,66	1,00	7,00
From colleagues, friends, acquaintances and similar	91,00	6,01	1,58	1,00	7,00
Other	91,00	1,79	1,49	1,00	7,00

Source: author's research

As in 2014, the survey showed that the greatest value, when it comes to transmitting information about general student activities in 2020, which also means that it is the most common way of communication, is spoken word from colleagues, friends and acquaintances (6.01) and Facebook (5.79). On the other hand, information transmitted via some other websites (2.52) and offline media (2.09) are marked with the lowest values, and are thus shown as

the least used methods of communication. In 2020, compared to 2014, information transmission via Facebook was somewhat more frequent, while the information transmitted via offline media decreased further.

Table 3. Basic descriptive parameters in the items related to the question "How do you most often find out information about sport activities at our university (meaning, for example, a basketball tournament, competition between students from different years in a sport at your college or university sporting day, etc.)" of the sub-sample surveyed in 2014

	N	AS	SD	Min	Max
Directly at the Faculty	91,00	4,80	2,13	1,00	7,00
Faculty website	91,00	2,75	1,95	1,00	7,00
Other websites	91,00	1,66	1,11	1,00	5,00
Facebook	91,00	3,98	2,35	1,00	7,00
Offline media - TV, radio, newspapers	91,00	1,89	1,43	1,00	6,00
From colleagues, friends, acquaintances and similar	91,00	4,66	2,17	1,00	7,00
Other	91,00	1,47	1,11	1,00	6,00

Source: author's research

The research showed that the greatest value, when it comes to informing about student sport activities in 2014, which also means that it is the most common way of communication, is the spoken transmission from colleagues, friends and acquaintances (4.66) and Directly at the Faculty (4.80). On the other hand, information transmission via some other websites (1.66) and offline media (1.89) is marked with the lowest values, and is thus shown as the least used method of communication.

Table 4. Basic descriptive parameters in the items related to the question "How do you most often find out information about sport activities at our university (meaning, for example, a basketball tournament, competition between students from different years in some sport at your college or university sporting day, etc.)" of the sub-sample surveyed in 2020

	N	AS	SD	Min	Max
Directly at the Faculty	91,00	4,57	2,05	1,00	7,00
Faculty website	91,00	2,58	1,73	1,00	7,00
Other websites	91,00	2,00	1,47	1,00	6,00
Facebook	91,00	4,11	2,31	1,00	7,00
Offline media - TV, radio, newspapers	91,00	1,85	1,46	1,00	7,00
From colleagues, friends, acquaintances and similar	91,00	5,49	1,83	1,00	7,00
Other	91,00	1,55	1,15	1,00	7,00

Source: author's research

As in 2014, the survey showed that the greatest value, when it comes to informing about student sport activities in 2020, which also means that it is the most common way of communication, is spoken word from colleagues, friends and acquaintances (5.49) and Directly at the faculty (4.57). On the other hand, information transmission via some other websites (2.00) and offline media (1.85) is marked with the lowest values, and is thus shown as the least used

method of communication. In 2020, compared to 2014, the information transmitted orally with colleagues and acquaintances was more frequent.

Table 5. Differences between participants measured in 2014 and 2020 in the question "How do you most often find out information about general student activities at our university (for example, a public lecture of a well-known lecturer, freshmen parties, student actions or competition for scholarships, etc...)"

	AS 2014.	AS 2020.	t-value	df	p
Directly at the Faculty	4,81	4,26	2,02	180,00	0,045*
Faculty website	3,14	3,13	0,04	180,00	0,969
Other websites	2,15	2,52	-1,38	180,00	0,170
Facebook	5,33	5,79	-1,63	180,00	0,106
Offline media - TV, radio, newspapers	2,35	2,09	1,07	180,00	0,288
From colleagues, friends, acquaintances and similar	5,76	6,01	-1,06	180,00	0,291
Other	1,64	1,79	-0,74	180,00	0,459

\*p<0,05

Source: author's research

Table 6. Differences between participants measured in 2014 and 2020 in the question "How do you most often find out information about sport activities at our university (meaning for example, a basketball tournament, competition between students from different years in some sport at your college/department or university sporting day, etc.)"

	AS 2014.	AS 2020.	t-value	df	p
Directly at the Faculty	4,80	4,57	0,74	180,00	0,457
Faculty website	2,75	2,58	0,60	180,00	0,546
Other websites	1,66	2,00	-1,77	180,00	0,079
Facebook	3,98	4,11	-0,38	180,00	0,703
Offline media - TV, radio, newspapers	1,89	1,85	0,21	180,00	0,837
From colleagues, friends, acquaintances and similar	4,66	5,49	-2,81	180,00	0,006*
Other	1,47	1,55	-0,46	180,00	0,646

\*p<0,05

Source: author's research

## DISCUSSION

According to the results of the research, habits on information transmission models have not changed much. When it comes to informing about general student activities, students are still mostly informed by their colleagues and acquaintances, via the social network Facebook, and directly at the Faculty, while the least used way of information tra is through the offline media, and through the website (faculty or other).

When it comes to informing about sports activities, the research showed that even there the ways of informing have not changed much in any category, and the results of the survey



from 2014 are approximately equal to the results from 2020. Information about student activities, as well as general activities, is mostly transmitted in personal conversation with their colleagues, the social network Facebook and directly at the Faculty. As the least commonly used way of informing about sports activities, students marked offline media such as newspapers or radio, and websites.

When comparing the results of research in two time periods, the only two statistically significant changes relate to the direct way of informing about general student activities, which increased in 2020, compared to 2014. The second change refers to the direct way of informing colleagues when talking about sports activities, and here we witness an increase in value, or an increase in the frequency of information personally from colleagues or acquaintances.

As the primary task of this paper is to explore ways of informing about sports activities, it is interesting to what extent the way of informing about sports activities from colleagues and acquaintances has increased. This fact can be attributed to the launch of pre-graduate study of Kinesiology at the Faculty of Education in Osijek, which certainly gave emphasis to sports activities at the Faculty, as well as spoken communication between students.

It is also significant that in 2014 and 2020, the method of informing via the website was marked with a relatively low grade. This refers to the Faculty web site and other web sites. The level of information about general sports is slightly higher than about sports activities. This leads to the conclusion that the website has not changed its content during the stated period, and it is still not the primary way of informing about student activities.

## CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, it is important to point out that adequate and timely information about student sport is extremely important for its development since sport and sport activities have no purpose on their own. It is essential to promote it in order to popularize it as much as possible and thus increase it primarily in quantitative terms. The theoretical part of the paper explained the general importance of promotional activities in student sport, and the importance of the way of communication and the creation of adequate content in the marketing of any activity, including sport activities.

A fact that should not be ignored is that students communicate with each other and share information with each other through such a way of networking. In addition to networking, there is still a high intensity of the use of social networks (in this case Facebook) as an example of digital networking. Digital networking and the use of social networks to promote certain sports activities have been recognized by the world's largest sports clubs, as well as the organizers of the world's largest sports competitions. This should certainly not be ignored by the organizers and all participants in student sport activities. The extremely low level of information through newspapers, radio or television proves that students have switched to newer and more digital (non-traditional) ways of communication. Obviously, these communication media have not been in the focus of students for many years.

The conducted research has several limitations that affect the possibilities of drawing conclusions, but also provide possible guidelines for future research in this or a similar orientation. The main limitations are related to the sample size and the way the sample is generated. Recommendations for further research should certainly go in several directions.

The first should certainly be the continuous monitoring of the way of informing about student sport in the next period. The second, the further research should be extended to other components of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek in order to compare data on ways of informing students from different University components.

That research would provide an overview of the general level of information about student sport at the University level, but would also provide a comparison of marketing activities in each component with the aim of popularizing academic sport.

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