

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Administration, Lappeenranta
Degree Programme in International Business

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Sport Marketing: Cooperation of Sport Organizations with Russian Athletes

Thesis 2018

Abstract

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Sport Marketing: Cooperation of Sport Organizations with Russian Athletes,
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The purpose of the research was to develop guidelines for companies on how they can start successful sponsor relationships with Russian athletes. Introduction to sport marketing and the phenomenon of sponsorship are explained in the theoretical part. Afterward, guidelines for starting sponsor relationships were created according to the theory.

The information was gathered from literature, articles, magazines, reports, researches, and videos. The authors' experience in the field supplemented the empirical part, which were done through interviews with a head representative manager and sponsorship property of HEAD Swimming Russia. In addition, an online survey was conducted and collected 100 respondents.

As a result of this thesis, a step-by-step guideline for starting sponsor relationships was created. This thesis can be used by any Russian or foreign sport organization who would like to start to co-operate with Russian athletes.

Keywords: sport marketing, sport marketing strategy, sponsorship, sponsorship property.

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Appendices

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Glossary

Athletes' endorsement – athletes' positive feedback about particular product or service.

CSR (corporate social responsibility) – an organization responsibility for the impacts of its decision and activities on society and the environment.

MIS (marketing information system) – a management information system designed to support marketing decision making.

ROI (return on investments) – a financial coefficient which is used for analyzing the results from investments.

Role model – a person whose behavior, way of life and goals, success can be emulated by other people. It can be famous athlete, actor, singer, etc.

SMM (social media marketing) – a form of internet marketing, which implements social media networks.

Sponsorship agreement – a contract between an organization and a sponsorship property.

Sport property – an athlete who already have a sponsor relationship.

Sport spectatorship – a sport that is interesting to watch by an audience, without taking part, for example, football or basketball.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Marketing strategy is an important part of every company. It can take a lot of time to create, develop and implement the strategy into the company. There are different ways how to create a marketing strategy for companies, for example, one of the methods is cooperation with athletes.

As defined by Dr. Philip Kotler, marketing is the science and artwork of investigation, creating, and delivering value in order to increase customer satisfaction (Kotler Marketing Group n.d.). In comparing marketing and sport marketing there is no big difference. As defined by Aaron C.T. Smith and Bob Stewart, sport marketing is a process of developing relationships between sport brand and consumer, where the main goal is to focus on planning and creating how a sport brand will stand and distribute to the target audience (Smith & Stewart 2015, p.6).

The research topic is “Sport Marketing: Cooperation of Sport Organizations with Russian Athletes”. There are two types of sport marketing: the first one is marketing of sport and the second one is marketing through sport (Smith & Stewart 2015). Both of them are focused on collaboration with athletes, where the main goal is to have athletes’ endorsement of a particular brand.

In the research, the author decided to make empirical research on cooperation with Russian athletes, which was done by HEAD Swimming Russia. HEAD is a leading manufacturer of production sport clothes and equipment. They are focusing on winter sports, tennis, diving, sport clothes and licensed production (HEAD Swimming 2017).

In this research, the author would like to describe a sport sponsor relationship. Sport sponsorship is an agreement between a sponsorship property and an organization, where a company provides goods, services or any financial support for commercial benefits, for example, promotion and endorsement of a particular brand. (Smith & Stewart 2015, p.182). Sponsor relationships is a process which must be developed carefully, companies should think carefully

about athletes with whom they want to cooperate and by which method (Saunders 2016).

This topic is interesting to the author for several reasons, the first one is that the author was a professional artistic gymnast for 15 years. The author took part in Summer Olympic Games 2016, in Brazil, as a volunteer on road-cycling competition and in Russian Fans House. During studies at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences, the author went for an exchange program to Singapore from April 2017 until August 2017. The author had a course on exchange program related to sport, the course was Sport Administration, where one of the topics was sport sponsorship.

During the research, the author found a qualitative study at HEAD France, which was done by Marlène Lesaule and Matthiew Bouvier (2017). Their research topic was "The role of athlete's sponsorship on the marketing strategy of a sports brand". The main goals of their research were to provide a better understanding of using sponsorship techniques in the sport marketing strategy and analyze communication between sport brand, athletes and customers. Based on their results they made a conclusion that nowadays social media have a huge impact on athletes' sponsorship. A common topic of both researches is sport sponsorship, however, there is a difference. The difference is that Marlène Lesaule and Matthiew Bouvier (2017) were focusing on the explanation of athletes' sponsorship as a marketing communication tool, how sport brands determine sponsorship strategy, whereas in the meantime, the author of the current research is focusing on creating guidelines for companies how they can start to sponsor athletes and explanation of sport marketing and sponsorship.

The author used previous researches for better explanation the phenomenon of sport sponsorship and sport marketing. In the theoretical part, the reader can find "The Four Domains of Sports Marketing: A Conceptual Framework", by Fullerton and Merz (2008). The author used their research for understanding sport marketing concepts and principles. The explanation of the phenomenon of sponsorship is based on the articles from scholarly journals such as: the article "Sponsorship and Small Businesses", by Gardner,

Meryl and Shuman (1988) in “Small Business Management” journal; the article “Does sponsorship work in the same way in different sponsorship contexts” by Olson (2010) in “European Journal of Marketing”, etc.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are to create a guideline for companies how they can start to co-operate with athletes and show the effectiveness of sponsorship. The author would like to describe the relevance of sponsor relationships for companies and identify main benefits of the cooperation with athletes. One of the objectives is to show that sponsor relationships are not only for big companies. Also, small and middle size companies can sponsor athletes.

1.3 Research questions of the study

The research question is: “How sport organizations can start to cooperate with Russian athletes”. The main goal of the research question is to identify steps for creating successful sponsor relationships with Russian athletes. The author relied on theoretical frameworks and examples of cooperation with Russian athletes, which was done by HEAD Swimming Russia, for answering to the main research question. Moreover, the author would like to add examples of cooperation with Russian athletes which was done by different international companies.

For the better explanation of the main research question, the author decided to create the following sub-questions:

1. How to find suitable candidates (athletes) for cooperation?
2. What kind of characteristics are important?
3. What are the advantageous and disadvantageous of sponsor relationships?
4. How to use sponsorship of athletes as a marketing tool?

1.4 Delimitations of the study

The main delimitation is that the research is focused on the Russian market. There is a different level of relationships between athletes, companies and consumers in different countries, that is the reason of focusing on the one market. In the research the author used examples of sport sponsorship deals with Russian athletes. Moreover, the author decided to use an example sponsorship experience with Russian athletes which was done by international worldwide companies, for example Nike and Adidas.

As the main research topic is “Sport Marketing: Cooperation of Sport organizations with Russian athletes”, the author decided to focus on marketing of sport. The target audience of the research are sport organizations, which would like to start cooperation with athletes and focus on sport marketing implementation strategy.

The research was conducted within the sport marketing theoretical framework which is introduced in a book “Introduction to Sport Marketing” by Aaron C.T. Smith and Bob Stewart (2015). In the theoretical framework, the author focused on the third part which is called “Plan the Sport Marketing Mix”, especially on the sponsorship part. The second theoretical framework is “The Lifecycle of Sponsorship” by Vicky Saunders (2016). The author used the lifecycle of sponsorship as a base for creating the guideline.

The main delimitation of the empirical part is that research based on HEAD Swimming Russia. The author decided to conduct interviews with HEAD Swimming Russia representatives: head of representative branch and sponsorship property. The author focused on their sponsorship relationships with athletes and create a guideline which is based on their experience.

1.5 Theoretical background

Speaking of the theoretical part of the thesis, the author decided to use “The Sport Marketing Framework” by Aaron C.T. Smith and Bob Stewart. The aim of the Sport Marketing Framework is to create a sport marketing strategy. The framework consists of the four main phases such as: identifying sport

marketing opportunities, developing a sport marketing strategy, planning the sport marketing mix, implementing and controlling the sport marketing strategy. The author focused on the third phase which is called “Plan the Sport Marketing Mix”, which includes six main elements: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Sponsorship, and Services. (Smith & Stewart 2015).

As the main research topic is Sport Marketing: Cooperation of Sport/Non-sport Organizations with Russian athletes, the author will focus on sponsorship part.

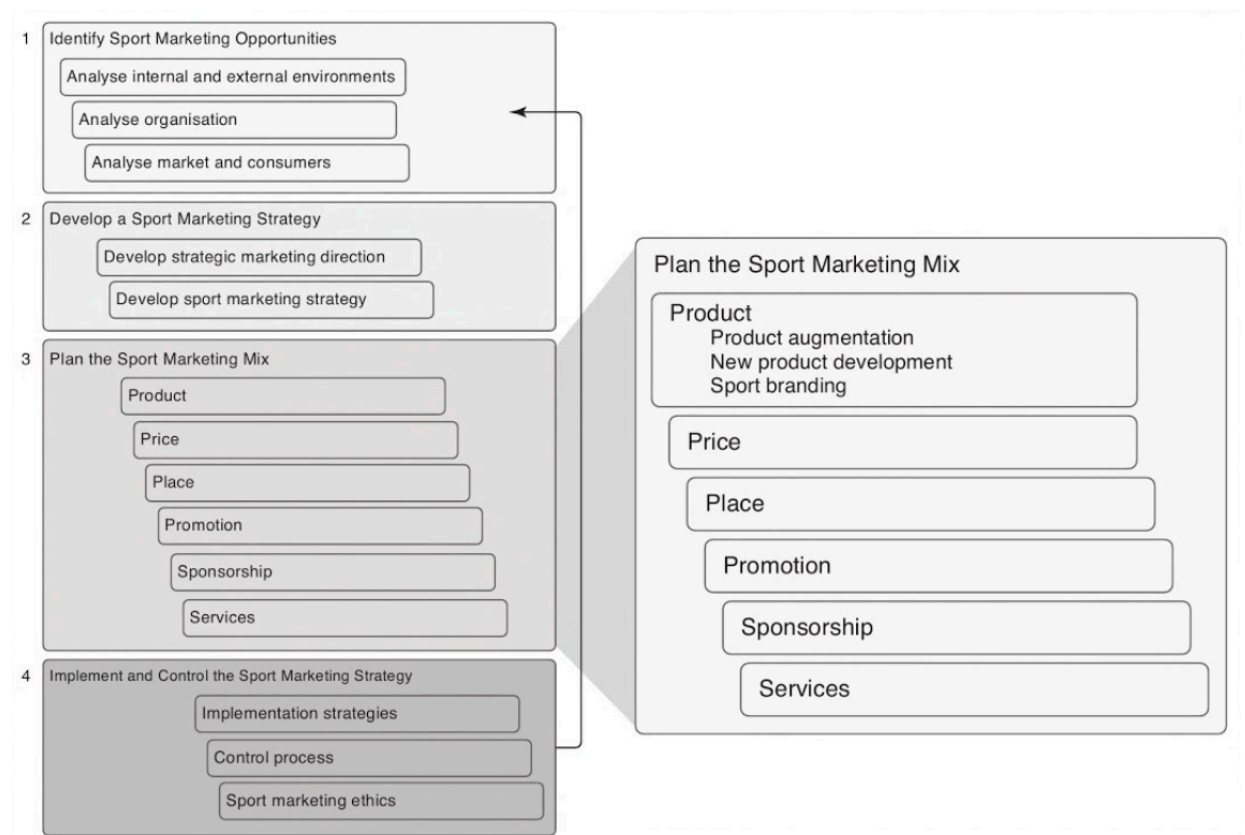


Figure 1. The Sport Marketing Framework. (Smith & Stewart 2015.)

The Sport Marketing Framework is focused more on developing the sport marketing strategy. For the better explanation of developing sponsorship relationships, the author used “The Lifecycle of Sponsorship” by Vicky Saunders (2016). The lifecycle of sponsorship includes three main phases such as: obtain, maintain and retain. The first stage includes analysing requirements, objectives and goals from athletes’ sponsorships, finding possible ways how to start cooperation and how to find athletes. In brief, the first stage of the lifecycle of sponsorship is planning. The second stage is an implementation of the strategy, starting to work with athletes. The last stage

includes analysing of work which was done and underlying positive or negative results from cooperation with athletes. On the third stage companies will see the results from cooperation with athletes, if it was successful or not, what can be improved? What kind of mistakes were made? (Saunders 2016).

1.6 Research Method

During the research, the author used a qualitative research method. The qualitative research method is about collecting data through group discussions, individual interviews and participation/observation. The sample size for collecting data is small and all respondents are selected individually. (DeFranzo 2011).

The author decided to create a questionnaire on the FreeOnlineSurveys platform. FreeOnlineSurvey helps to create questionnaires, forms, reports, etc. All the results are presented in percentages, which can help to easily analyze all the collected data. The main goal of the questionnaire was to collect 100 responses. Moreover, the author focused on collecting 60% of respondents from Russia, because the main delimitation of the research is Russian market. Also, 40% were international respondents because one of the main goals of the research is to create guideline for starting cooperation with athletes not only for Russian companies, but for international companies too. The online survey was conducted through the Internet. The questionnaire was published on social platforms such as Facebook and Vkontakte. The questionnaire consists of nine multiple choice questions and one open-ended question. The main purpose of the online survey was to understand consumers' behavior to sport, athletes, role models, athletes' endorsement of products and services, and their attitude to sponsored advertising with athletes. The results of the online survey are presented in Appendix 1.

The main purpose of the qualitative research was to analyse work of previous cooperation with Russian athletes of a particular company. The author decided to create unstructured interviews, where both interviews were unique and have different questions. Interviews started with guiding explanation, and there was a possibility to move the conversation in any direction of interest and

interviewed people had an opportunity to explain interesting answers intensively and deeply (Ikävalko 2016). The author conducted unstructured interviews individually. The first interview was done with a head of representative branch at HEAD Swimming Russia, Stanislav Zevakin. The target goals of the interview were to identify advantages and disadvantages from cooperation with athletes, what are the main requirements for athletes are and what can be improved in sponsor relationships. The second individual interview was done with one of the sponsorship property of HEAD Swimming Russia, Marina Ivanova. The aims of the interview were to get her own experience and thoughts of sponsor relationships with HEAD Swimming Russia, identify the main advantageous and disadvantageous of sponsorship and what can be improved in sponsor relationships from athletes' point of view.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

Thesis structure consists of five main chapters. The first chapter is "Introduction", which includes the background of the research, objectives of the study, and research questions, delimitations and review of the sources. The second chapter is "Sport Marketing", which includes the definition of sport marketing and phenomenon of sponsorship; in this part the author explains the main theoretical framework – the lifecycle of sponsorship by Saunders (2016). The third chapter is "Empirical Research". Empirical research is a key chapter in the thesis, which includes instructions to sport organizations about how they can start sponsor relationships with athletes. Furthermore, this part includes empirical findings of interviews and results from the online survey. Following that, the "Conclusion" which includes the whole summary about the thesis and recommendations for further researches. The next chapter is "List of references", where presented all the sources such as books, scholarly journals, articles and previous researches which the author used during thesis writing. The last chapter is "Appendices", where the author presented the results from the online survey (Appendix 1); and the list of questions from individual interviews (Appendix 2 and Appendix 3).

2 Sport Marketing

Before starting a sponsor relationship, it is essential to understand the basic meaning of sport marketing and sponsorship. The present chapter provides an overview of sport marketing. In the first part, the author explains the current understanding of sport marketing, main concepts, principles and types. Then, the phenomenon of sponsorship, types and challenges are presented. The last part consists of the deeper explanation of the lifecycle of sponsorship by Vicky Saunders (2016).

2.1 Definition

Talking about sport marketing, the author starts with an explanation of sport. Sport is a global product and service, which people in the whole world like, enjoy, play and participate in. Nowadays, sport started to be commercialized and internationalized. Looking deeply in the definition of sport marketing, Chadwick (2005) identified it as a *“process through which a contest with an uncertain outcome is staged, creating opportunities for the simultaneous fulfilment of objectives among sport customers, sport businesses, participants and other related individuals, groups and organizations”* (Ratten & Ratten 2011).

Sport marketing is not only about selling sport products to customers, it is a way of communication between companies and target audience. Most of the people have their own sport role model, they are fans and spectators of an athlete or a team. Sport fans are people who are crazy about their favourite sport, team or athletes. So, most of them would like to use the same products and services as their role model because nowadays athletes have started to be like celebrities (Bashford 2017). People would like to trust athletes' choice in sport clothes, equipment or other goods and services, they would like to see athletes' endorsement of a brand (Team Sports Marketing n.d.).

It goes without saying that role models can be changed, sport fans will continue love sport and will buy sport related products. Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, International and National tournaments are hold every year, so new athletes will come, all the time (Beech & Chadwick 2007).

As the interest in sport is increasing rapidly, the marketers can see the relevance of implementing sport marketing campaigns into the company. Nowadays, there are various platforms with using sports, through which companies can communicate with the target audience, such as advertising on TV, magazines/sport magazines, radio programs, social media platforms, billboards in arenas and stadiums (Marketing-Schools 2012).

Sport marketing is divided into two types: marketing of sport and marketing through sport. Both of them are focused on creating relationships between a company and target audience. The main goal of sport marketing is to increase awareness of sport/non-sport brand by communication with sport consumers and satisfying their needs. By the way, sport marketing can help to increase the interest of sport among young people and adults. Also, sport marketing help athletes to increase their network, and sign sponsorship agreements during or after their sport career (Smith & Stewart 2015).

There are three basic principles of sport marketing which can help to understand the sport marketing industry. The first one is the nature of sport marketing, two types of sport marketing. The second principle is the nature of the product, sport or non-sport related products. The last principle is the level of integration, by traditional or sponsorship-based level of integration. The concept of sport marketing consists of four domains such as theme-based strategies, alignment-based strategies, product-based strategies and sports-based strategies (Fullerton & Merz 2008). Figure 2 shows the main principles and concepts of sport marketing.

Talking about marketing of sports and marketing through sport, they are both using traditional marketing and sponsorship-based strategies for integration. The main differences between them is the type of products which they are offering to their customers; another difference is that marketing of sport focusing on sport-related products when in the meantime, marketing through sport is focusing on non-sport products and services (Fullerton & Merz 2008).

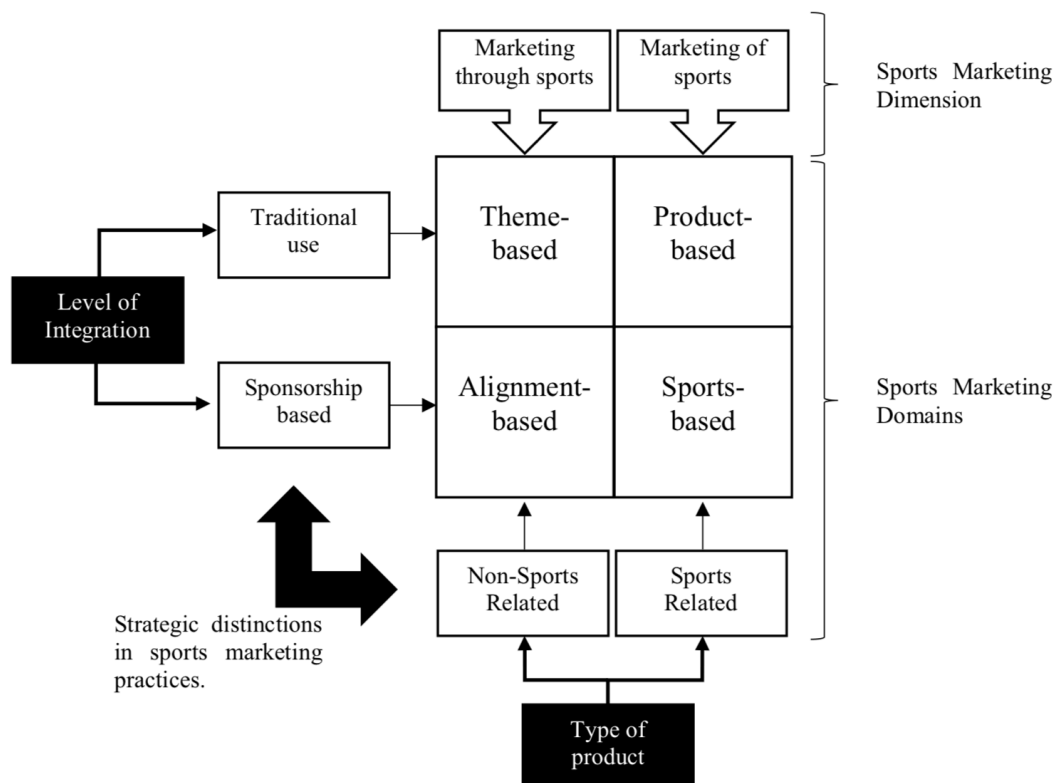


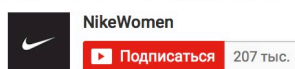
Figure 2. The Four Domains of Sports Marketing (Fullerton & Merz 2008).

2.1.1 Marketing of sport

Marketing of sport is a way of communication between athletes and sport companies which produce and offer sport-related products and services (Smith & Stewart 2015). Such companies like Nike and Adidas are cooperating with athletes. The author would like to use an example of marketing of sport - cooperation of Nike with Russian athletes (Figure 3). Nike used a popular Russian song which is called "What are girls made of", the original words tell us that girls made of flowers, marmalades, riddles, etc. Nike presented a new version and say that girls made of power, bruises, skills, strength, etc. The main characters on the video are famous women athletes in Russia, for example, Adelina Sotnikova, a Russian figure skater and an Olympic gold medalist in Sochi 2014 (Prasad 2014). The main objective of this cooperation is to encourage girls to be active, try a sport which they like, do whatever they want without any barriers.



Nike: What are girls made of?



376 026 просмотров

Figure 3. What are girls made of? Video on Nike Women Channel (NikeWomen 2017).

The main goal of marketing of sport is to increase the interest of sport among fans and spectatorship. Sport spectatorship is a sport which is interesting to watch without taking part, usually people doing it by TV. So, marketing of sport is one of the ways to increase broadcasting of competitions and matches (LaurenSports 2014).

2.1.2 Marketing through sport

Marketing through sport is a way of communication between athletes and non-sport companies which produce not-sport related products and services (Smith & Stewart 2015). Companies use famous athletes in order to promote and communicate with target audience (LaurenSports 2014.) The author would like to use an example of marketing through sport: JBL (an American audio electronics company) Russian department, cooperates with Russian snowboarders by giving them headphones and speakers. As an example, Figure 4 shows one of the type of the sponsorship requirements of JBL. Sponsorship property Olga Smeshlivaya wrote about JBL speakers in her Instagram post, put hashtags and mentioned JBL account on photo.



Figure 4. JBL cooperates with Russian athletes (Smeshlivaya 2017).

2.2 Sponsorship

During the last years, sponsorship became one of the instruments of the marketing communication mix (Gross 2015). Sponsorship started to be an effective strategic marketing tool, big companies and organizations recommend using sponsorship as a formal process in a corporate policy and strategic priorities (Vance 2016).

This chapter provides information about the phenomenon of sponsorship, explanation of sport sponsorship types and challenges which companies can meet at the beginning of starting sponsor relationships.

2.2.1 Phenomenon of sponsorship

Talking about the phenomenon of sponsorship there is no exact definition. As defined by Gardner and Shuman (1988) “Sponsorships may be defined as investments in causes or events to support overall corporate objectives (for example, by enhancing company image) or marketing objectives (such as increasing brand awareness)”. According to Philip Gross (2015) “Sponsorship

is a business-oriented relationship between a sponsor and sponsorship property that implies a cash settlement, an in-kind fee and/or a service provided by the sponsor to the property in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with the sponsorship alliance”.

There are different kinds of sponsorship: sports sponsorships, art sponsorships, educational sponsorship and environmental or ecological sponsorship. Sport sponsorship is one of the old type of sponsorship and consist of two potential markets: participants and spectators (Ikävalko 2004).

Sport sponsorship can be identified as a tool between a brand and an athlete which can help to engage consumers. For example, a football club will buy one of the famous football player, so in the result, the bigger amount of football fans would like to come to the match to see the game and more people would like to see the game on TV. However, sponsorship does not replace traditional advertising, it is a tool which can be integrated into marketing strategy (Beech & Chadwick 2007).

Marketing managers who are responsible for integrating sponsorship into company's marketing strategy need to develop a way of communication with target audience and way of promotion on a high level because the main goal is to deliver a positive attitude of companies' sponsor relationships. Sponsorship attitude is an essential part which must be developed carefully, the final “message” which will be delivered to final customers should not be too commercial (Olson 2010).

The phenomenon of sport sponsorship is increasing nowadays, companies in the whole world started to invest more in sponsorship deals. The author suggests seeing a statistic about global sponsorship spending by region from 2009-2018, all numbers are presented in billion U.S. dollars (Figure 5). Sponsorship is a global worldwide market which has a tendency of growing. According to the statistic, North America has taken a leadership position of sport sponsorship since 2006 to 2018. Big and prestigious companies are continuing to focus on sport sponsorship, when in the meantime, the increases in finding directed to small and middle-size companies. This is due to the fact

that companies are searching for well-established properties, in order to get benefits for both sides by creating new products (Statista 2018).

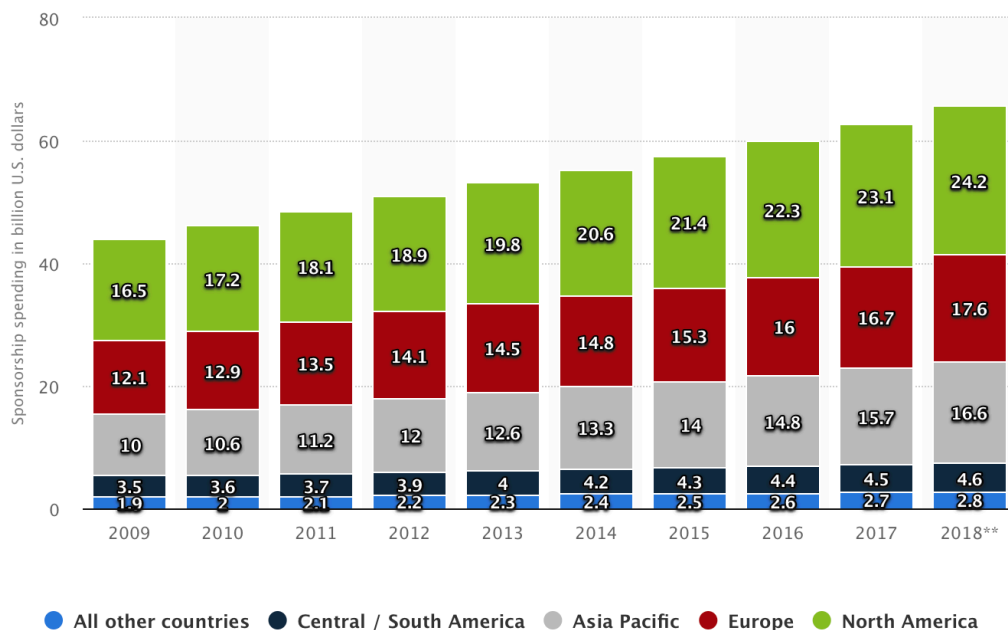


Figure 5. Global sponsorship spending by region from 2009-2018 (Statista 2018).

2.2.2 Types of athletes' sponsorships

There are different types of sponsorship which can start from free tickets for different events and finish with a financial deal with an amount around 50 million euro. It goes without saying that it depends on the level of the company and athletes (UK Sport world class success 2018).

Sponsorship deal is offered not only for Olympic medallists, it depends on audiences' behaviour to an athlete. For example, Yulia Lipnitskaya (Russian figure skater), took part in Winter Olympic Games 2014. Lipnitskaya did not win a gold medal, she was only 5th in a list. Anyway, her level of performance, charisma and her attitude to meet with difficulties helped her to have a sponsorship deal from Adidas. Russian department of Adidas was persuaded that Lipnitskaya can become a role model for many people and increase the interest in sport (Ganeev 2015). The author suggests watching a commercial video with Yulia Lipnitskaya and Adidas, where the main goal is to never give up, and everything depends only on you (Adidas Russia 2015).

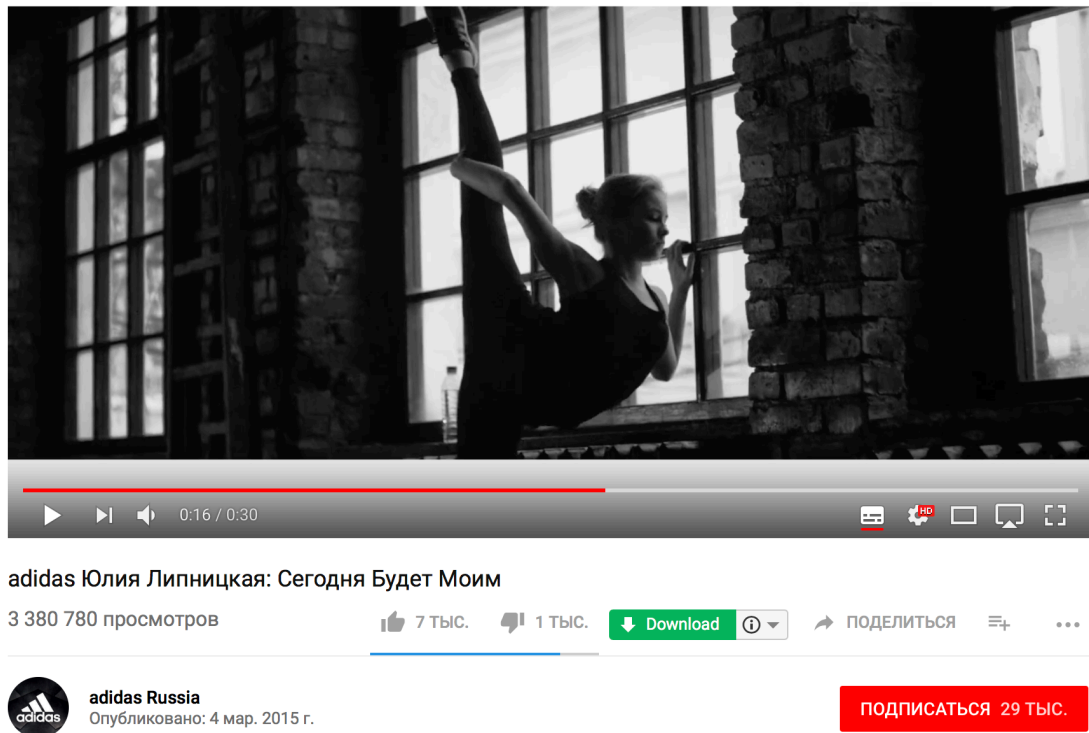


Figure 6. Commercial video on Adidas Russia's channel with Yulia Lipnitskaya (Adidas Russia 2015).

One of the most famous types of sponsoring is clothing, where athletes have a logo of a brand on their t-shirt, jacket, leotard, etc. Athletes can publish photos on their social media platforms where they are wearing these clothes. Another type of sponsoring is equipment for athletes, for example, tennis racket, soccer ball, sport bags, etc. Both of these types will show consumers that these products have athletes' endorsement. This type of sponsorship is called **product sponsorship**. It can be a soft type of sponsorship, because companies to give goods or services to athletes for free rather than paying to them (Saunders 2016).

Fans can be really enthusiastic about the t-shirts or any other clothes of their favourite team. So, when they are buying and wearing clothes of their favourite football team, they are making indirect kind of promotion of a brand (Team Sports Marketing n.d.).

Another type of sponsorship is **service sponsors**. It is the same kind of sponsorship as product sponsorship, but the main difference is that companies can offer various services for free, for example massage. **Media partners**

sponsorship is when a company is a sponsor for an interview in magazine publications or radio stations. **Cost-reducing sponsorship** is when a company offers a discount to athletes for buying their products or services. Usually, this type of sponsorship is used at the beginning of developing sponsor relationships (Saunders 2016).

Financial sponsorship is kind of a salary for athletes for cooperation with them. Athletes can receive financial support plus free products or just financial support. Usually this type of sponsorship is using with famous athletes. Another type of financial support is **commission sponsorship** when athletes will receive a reward if a certain amount of people bought products/service after athletes' endorsement of a brand (Smith & Stewart, 2015). For example, in 2008 Alexander Ovechkin, one of the famous Russian hockey players, in 2008 signed a contract with Washington Capitals for 13 years with an amount of \$124 million (Ganeev 2015).

By the way, there are other types of sponsoring, such as being a **sponsor of competition**, sport stadium or providing accommodation and transport (Saunders 2016). Being a sponsor of competitions and stadiums means that companies logo and names will be presented on arenas. When journalists will take an interview with athletes, they can do it in front of sponsors banners. Also, when competitions are broadcasted throughout the world, people will see who sponsored the match/competition. When a company provides transportation to teams their logos will be published on the buses, so people will see who support the team. (Teach Pe 2017).

Athletes can become an ambassador of a brand. Sport ambassador is a "face" of a brand; ambassadors are communicating with target audience, deliver information to the audience in a short time. Also, they present a brand on competitions and different events. Sport ambassadors can effect on decisions and actions of a brand, inspire actions and aspirations. Sometimes, brand ambassadors can receive payment. It depends on the company and their agreement (Saunders 2016).

2.2.3 Challenges of sponsorship

The first challenge which companies can meet is **no clear statistics** about the effectiveness of cooperation with athletes (Saunders 2016). Companies prefer to trust tested and reliable way of promotion in case that they are afraid to have an unsuccessful marketing plan. It goes without saying, that every promotion strategy has a limited budget and companies want to be sure that their investments will be profitable in the end. Companies cannot calculate the ROI (return on investment) before starting sponsor relationships, it can be an approximate number. They can analyze worldwide sponsoring which is done by other companies with the particular athlete (Jacobs, Jain & Surana 2014). It goes without saying, that examples of successful and bad results from sponsorships have existed, and companies will analyze and focus on them. Results from sponsorships are different for every company, there are different features which can affect, and not all of them will be published for consumers.

The second challenge is **athletes' reputation and level of performance** (Saunders 2016). International level of competition is bigger than national games because athletes on international competitions compete with best athletes from different countries, but there are only three people who can win the competition. Also, the reputation of athletes depends on doping. Unfortunately, some athletes can take doping for better performance. When companies support athletes who took doping, they can have a bad impact on this relationship. For example, Maria Sharapova (one of the highest well-paid athletes in Russia) lost major sponsors after a positive drug test at the Australian Open (a tennis tournament which was held in Melbourne, Australia) in January 2016. Companies such as Nike, Porsche and Swiss decided to suspend their relationships with Sharapova, because it can bring bad influence for their companies (O'Reilly 2016).

The third challenge is that companies can think that **sponsorship is a donation**, so when they support athletes they will not have any impact on them. In the result, companies do not want to start any sponsor relationships. Sponsorship is not a donation, it is an investment with continuous benefits for both sides, athletes and companies. Donation relationship is when a company

support an athlete or a team and have not got anything back. By the way, the right sponsor approach will bring to companies more benefits from their investments (Saunders 2016).

2.3 The lifecycle of sponsorship

The lifecycle of sponsorship journey is a plan of action which companies need to follow in order if they want to create successful sponsor relationships. The sponsorship journey consists of three main phases such as obtain, maintain and retain. The lifecycle of sponsorship is an ongoing process which can be repeated after finishing the first cycle. It is better to continue sponsor relationships with sponsorship properties, in order to make changes and improve the sport marketing strategy. As a matter of fact, it is needed to create a sponsor relationship with new athletes, but previous experience will help to avoid potential mistakes (Saunders 2016).

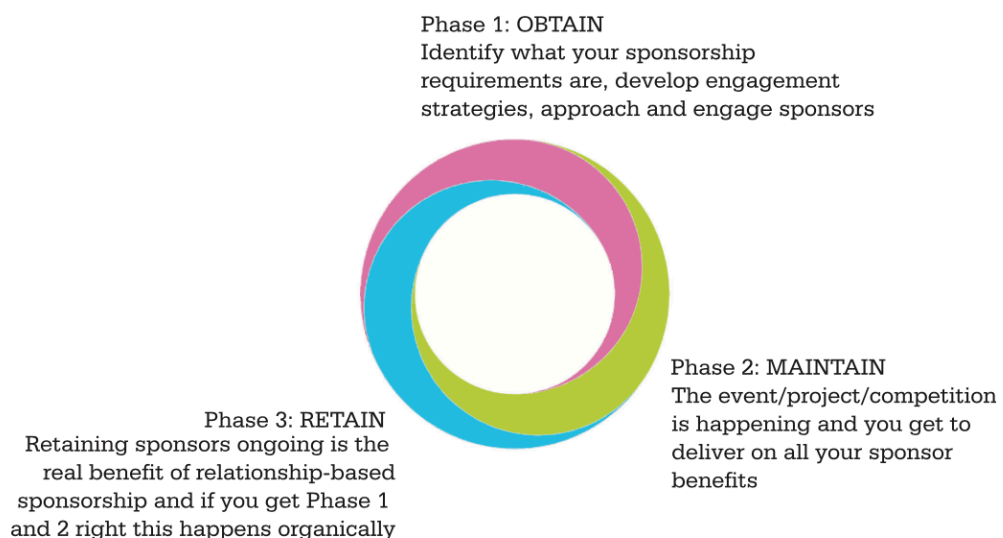


Figure 7. The Lifecycle of Sponsorship (Saunders, 2016).

2.3.1 Obtain

The first stage of sponsorship journey is obtaining. This part is about developing of starting sponsor relationships. The main purpose of the first stage is to create a strategy, identify marketing and sponsorship goals, objectives from cooperation with athletes. Also, in the beginning, it is

necessary to understand the limitations of budget, which company is ready to spend for a sport marketing strategy (Saunders 2016).

At the beginning of creating a sport marketing strategy, the essential part is to make a research of sport market and analyze internal and external environments. The research can include SWOT and competitor analysis. In SWOT analysis, strengths and weaknesses must be focused on present days, by reason of circumstances which are influent on current trainings of athletes, their sponsorships agreement with other organizations (if they have existed). In the meantime, opportunities and threats should be focused on future, due to what companies can get from sponsor relationships (Mihai 2013).

Sponsorship objectives depend on the size of the company, type of sponsorship and an athlete with whom a company would like to cooperate. Sponsorship objectives are divided into four main market segmentations such as general public, target market, distribution channel members and internal stakeholders. In segmentation of **general public**, the main objectives can be promoting the image of a brand, increasing mass media exposure and brand awareness. The main objectives of **target market** segmentation are increasing consumer awareness of goods and services, increasing sales, developing a brand equity and customers loyalty. Talking about **distribution channel members** segmentation, the main objectives are increasing sales among channel members, for example wholesalers, distributors, suppliers, promote discounts between them and create new relationships. **Internal stakeholders'** segmentation of objectives is about improving staff satisfaction, developing friendly relationships with media through CSR and corporate hospitality (Smith & Stewart 2015).

Companies should analyze athletes with whom they are planning to start sponsor relationships. Athletes' analyzing consists of several clauses, such as analyzing performance quality of an athlete, how they have competed for the last few years, how they succeeded. Another clause is personal skills and style (Conway 2014). For example, in artistic gymnastics, athletes can have the same elements in their programs: they can do them with their own approach, so it will look different. Based on athletes' personalities, uniqueness and

relationships with fans, companies can understand who can better present their brand and communicate with a target audience.

All the information which companies will get from the research will help them construct a strategy. Apart from internal and external researches, companies should understand who their consumers are? Why would they like to buy and use sport products and services which you offer them? When and where these products will be relevant? (Mihai 2013.) For example, to offer snowboarding and skiing equipment in warm countries will not be a profitable and logical decision.

Further, companies need to think about 7Ps: product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process. Product is what company is offering to consumers; price is to analyze what amount of money consumers are ready to pay for product/service; place is where to distribute product/service; promotion is about communication with target audience in order to satisfy customer needs; people who are responsible for delivering the right message to consumers; physical evidence is about design of a product; and the last one process is about how everything is working and delivering to consumers (Mihai 2013).

When a company has created a list of athletes, with whom they would like to cooperate, they need to contact them and create an individual sponsorship approach. Companies should attract athletes by offering them interesting marketing collaborations and show what kind of benefits they will get after signing a sponsorship agreement. Companies need to create a sponsorship agreement and send it to the athlete. Sponsorship agreement is a contract between an organization and a sponsorship property. This agreement includes information about goals and objectives from cooperation, terms and conditions, athletes' benefits and guarantees, limitations, and dates. When both sides will be satisfied with all paragraphs, the agreement can be signed (Upcounsel n.d.). After signing the sponsorship agreement, the next step for companies will be creating a social media plan (Saunders 2016.)

The sponsorship agreement must be followed by both sides. When one side has not followed the requirements, the sponsorship agreement can be terminated (Upcounsel n.d.).

2.3.2 Maintain

The second phase of the lifecycle of sponsorship is called maintain. It is about an implementation of the strategy (Saunders 2016).

Successful sport marketing strategy depends not only on the first preparation part. The implementation of the strategy must be put into action in a right way, otherwise, the strategy can be failed and get a negative influence. The implementation of the strategy consists of the five main steps, which are the following: leadership and commitment, communication and delegation, teamwork and projects, rewards and reinforcement, control and feedback (Smith & Stewart 2015).

The first part of the strategy implementation is **leadership and commitment**. The main goal of this stage is to have a leader who will be responsible for the strategy, timetable, and staff. A leader is a person who inspires and motivates other people. This person is responsible for high integrity and honesty, solving problems and analyzing any kind of problems. Also, leaders will be responsible for results, technical and strategic parts (Economy 2014).

The second part of the strategy is **communication and delegation**. It is important to deliver main objectives and goals to sport marketing team. All members should understand their roles and responsibilities in a right way. A leader must communicate with a group and identify in which sphere every person in a team should concentrate. So, the second part mostly depends on leaders' work, how they communicate with staffs, distribute their responsibilities and evaluate and control the work of others.

Teamwork and projects are the third part of strategy implementation. Teamwork is one of the most important parts of every strategy. The success of the strategy depends on how leaders, staffs, and volunteers are working together for achieving the same goals. People who are working in one team is

a mix of skills, knowledge, experiences, and approaches, so creating a good team is one of the leaders' responsibility.

The next part of the strategy implementation is **rewards and reinforcement**. A reward of the team is one of the main tool to motivate people for better work. There are different kinds of rewards, such as positive feedback of work, financial bonuses, or good results of teamwork can be reward by cakes or any other bakery which a leader decided to give to employees as a reward.

The last part of the implementation of the strategy is **control and feedback**. This part consists of an evaluation of implementation performance of sport marketing strategy (Smith & Stewart 2015).

2.3.3 Retain

The last phase of the lifecycle of sponsorship is retaining. This part is about analyzing the work which was done. Companies can understand what are the main advantageous and disadvantageous are from cooperation with athletes. Also, they can ask athletes about their feelings about cooperation e.g. if they are satisfied with sponsorship agreement? What can be changed in sponsorship? And do they want to continue working with you? All these questions can help to identify the main issues in cooperation with athletes and improve them in future sponsorship deals (Saunders 2016).

The last phase can include control process, which must be developed for better future sponsor relationships. Control process consists of six main steps which are setting performance measures, defining critical success factors, measuring performance, comparing results, identifying variations and making corrections. During the control process, it is necessary to return to the beginning and see which goals and objectives were created and compare with the final results. What kind of benefits company can get after cooperation with athletes? (Smith & Stewart 2015).

2.4 Conclusion of the theoretical part

To make a conclusion of the theoretical part, the author would like to mention that previous researches, books and scholarly journals helped to understand

the base of sport marketing, the phenomenon of sponsorship and the lifecycle of sponsorship. Obviously, examples of existing sponsor relationships with Russian athletes helped to comprehend theory with practice. In brief, sport marketing is focusing on promoting products and services through athletes, sport events and everything that can be somehow connected with sport. The main goals of the lifecycle of sponsorship are to avoid common mistakes in the beginning of sponsorship, to develop better strategy and implement it in a right way, to deeply understand the phenomenon sponsorship

As the main research topic is: "Cooperation of Sport Organizations with Russian Athletes", the author focused on marketing of sport. In the next chapter, the author will compare theoretical knowledge and real-life experience of sponsorship by sport organization HEAD Swimming Russia.

3 Empirical Research

In this chapter the reader can find an introduction of HEAD Swimming Russia, a step-by-step guideline to sport companies about how they can start to cooperate with Russian athletes and results from the interview and the online survey. The author used a lifecycle of sponsorship by Vicky Saunders (2016) as a base for guideline. This chapter is the main part of the thesis which includes empirical findings and analysing results with theory.

3.1 HEAD Swimming

HEAD Swimming is a part of HEAD UK Ltd. Nowadays, HEAD is a one of the leading global manufacturer and marketer of premium sports equipment and apparel. They produce products for skis, snowboard, tennis, paddle, squash, swimming, etc., (HEAD 2018).

During the research, the author used as an example sponsor relationship of HEAD Swimming Russia. The philosophy of HEAD Swimming is to have in focus the most important aspect – quality. They provide women, men and children collections for trainings, competitions and leisure time (HEAD n.d.).

HEAD Swimming is famous for the high quality of products, their collections were recognized and endorsed by professional athletes and sport lovers. These results are based on competitions where athletes won medals and used HEAD equipment. Moreover, in 2016 HEAD Swimming Russia became a general sponsor of SwimRun Lake (SwimRun 2016).



Figure 8. The logo of HEAD Swimming.

3.2 Interviews and online survey.

The author contacted with the head of representative branch at HEAD Swimming Russia, Stanislav Zevakin, and one of the sponsorship property of brand, Marina Ivanova (skier and swimrunner).

In the interview Stanislav Zevakin (2018) mentioned that they started to sponsor athletes around 4 years ago and for current days in their piggy bank they have five athletes. Marina Ivanova (2018), has been cooperating with HEAD Swimming Russia for 1,5 years. She is an ambassador of HEAD Swimming Russia. It means that she has a possibility to buy sport outfits with special prices with big discounts. So, when she is participating in competitions, she is using HEAD swimming equipment. Also, she promotes and recommends the brand among other athletes.

One of the question on the interviews was sharing personal experience of sponsorship in Russia, the results are following:

“Sponsorship in Russia is very different compare to Europe. In Russia, everything is focused on “live/cash money”. What is different from out ideology. It is pleasuring to understand that athletes understand you and using our equipment which they got from us, and together with sponsor are looking forward to achieving common goals”. Stanislav Zevakin (2018.)

“Sponsors are ready to support competitions with big number of participants. By the way, they are ready to support with prizes, they do not provide any financial support. When in the meantime, managers of competitions need a financial support for better organization. Maybe it can be possible to decrease application fee if companies can help with finance. However, they are not interested in it. It is difficult to find sponsors for a middle-level athlete. Only when you are already famous and won competitions, you started to be interested to sponsors. Nevertheless, the way to become a winner is the main difficult part”. Marina Ivanova (2018.)

To make a conclusion of the personal opinion about sponsorship in Russia, both sides have their own point of view. It essential to talk in the same language. When companies want to have relationships with athletes, they are looking for having the same goals and wishes from cooperation. They do not want to sponsor athletes who are caring only about profit. Companies want to see that athletes are motivated to talk about the brand, use their products and services because they endorse them. Unfortunately, some of sponsorship properties can say that they love particular products because they receive payment from the brand. In the result, companies do not want to make financial support because they want to have truthful endorsement of their products. In the meantime, athletes are searching for financial support for organizing better level of competitions.

3.3 Guidelines

This part consists of step-by-step guidelines on how companies can start sponsor relationships with athletes. There are three main stages of sponsor relationships such as developing, implementing and analysing. As it was mentioned before, the guideline includes interviews of both sides, sponsor and sponsorship property; results from the online survey which are presented in percentages. 100 participants answered to the questionnaire. Also, the author used theory for explaining main aspects in the guideline. The scheme below shows the main stages of starting sponsor relationship with athletes.

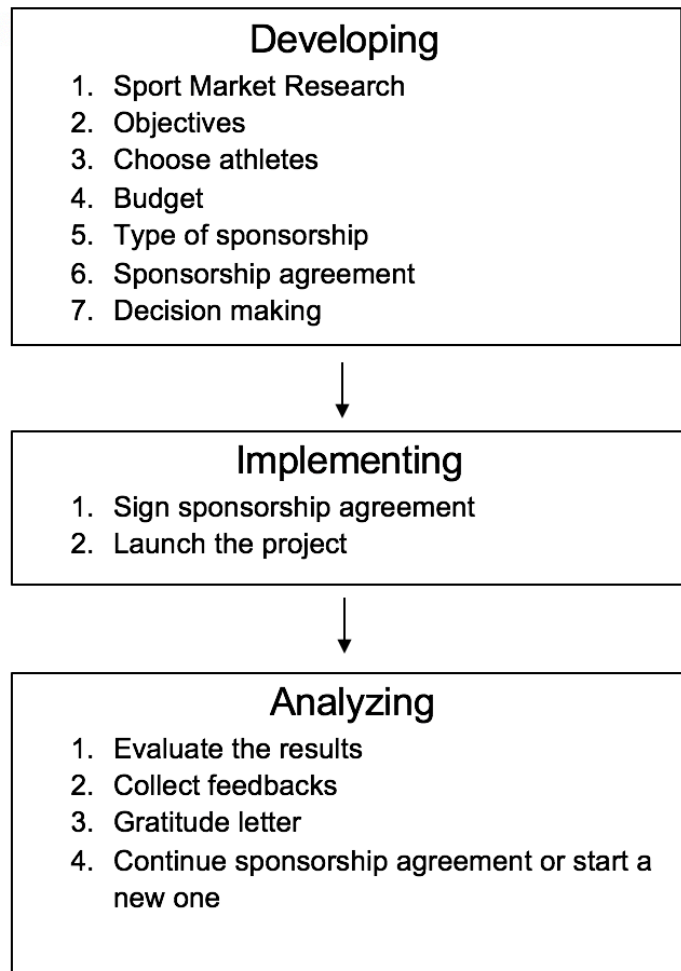


Figure 9. Stages of starting sponsor relationships with athletes.

3.3.1 Developing

1) Sport market research

In the beginning of creating sport marketing strategy sport brands need to analyse sport market. The main goals of sport market research are collecting and preparing data and identifying a target audience and their needs. Collecting and analysing data can be an expensive procedure, that is why some of the companies can think that it is unnecessary expenses of time and budget. By the way, careful and reliable market research is the essential part of marketing strategy which can help to analyse all risks (Beech & Chadwick 2007). There is a list of preliminary questions for which companies need an answer in the market research:

1. Who are the customers?

2. What sports do consumers participate in?
3. What new sport products, sport services or sport opportunities would appeal to consumers?
4. What are demographic, geodemographic and social characteristics associated with what consumers? Who is playing? Who is watching?
5. How do consumers become involved? (Beech and Chadwick 2007).

All the collected data is a foundation of marketing information system (MIS). The main concept of MIS is discovering, collecting, interpreting, analyzing and intracompany disseminating (Green, Tull & Albaum, 1988). External data, primary and secondary data are the main sources for MIS.

It is significant to analyse sports market, identify which sport is more popular nowadays, and behaviour of a target audience to sport and athletes. Do they have role models? And is it important to them to have athletes' endorsement of products and services? The results of the online survey show that most of the people have their favourite sport, however, only 65% of respondents play this sport.

The online survey shows that 55% of respondents would like to have and use the same kind of products as their favourite athletes. In the meantime, 24% answered that they do not want to have the same products and 21% do not know about it. Based on the online survey, 61% needs athletes' endorsement of products. According to the survey, that people listen to athletes' opinions of products and services. It goes without saying that there are a lot of different sport brands and most of them have athletes' endorsement, so it depends on whom they are sponsored.

Analysing sports market consists of understanding what sport industry is. According to Smith and Stewart (2015) sport industry is a cooperation of the all suppliers of goods and services which are working for satisfying sport consumer needs. The industry of sport is dividing different categories which depends on the types of goods and services.

2) Objectives

The second step of creating sport marketing strategy is creating objectives. The result of sponsorship depends on how companies will create their objectives in the beginning. Sometimes companies do not achieve their goals because of no objectives' specification (Beech & Chadwick 2007).

Companies need to understand what they want to get from sponsor relationships. Based on empirical findings which the author did during the research, the main objective for HEAD Swimming in Russia is to show and deliver to their target audience that they have a high-quality equipment. Currently, they are working with five athletes and their main objective of the cooperation is to show athletes endorsement of their brand.

“From cooperation with athletes and their endorsement of HEAD Swimming equipment, our final consumers can be sure in quality of our products”.

Stanislav Zevakin (2018.)

Talking about sponsorship objectives segmentation, HEAD Swimming has general public and target market segmentation. By cooperation with athletes, they want to promote their image of a brand and increase brand and consumer awareness of products. The list of sponsorship objectives segmentation is presented on page 23.

3) Choose athletes

Athlete sponsorship is a relationship between a company and an athlete, companies are creating their reputation with athletes. Some of the athletes can have a bad reputation among fans, so companies are risking their own reputation by offering athletes a sponsorship deal (Davis & Hilbert 2013).

Sponsoring athletes is one of the fastest ways to deliver information to the target audience (Saunders 2016). That is why it is an essential part to choose the right athlete for sponsoring. Companies can find athletes by themselves or sometimes athletes are searching for sponsors, so it means that they already have a sponsorship proposal to companies. Talking about HEAD Swimming, Stanislav Zevakin (2018) mentioned that sometimes they are searching for

athletes themselves and athletes can ask them personally, the proportion is 50/50. Marina Ivanova told that she got acquainted with brand HEAD Swimming Russia through her triathlete friend. During that period Marina was responsible for SwimRun Russia organization and HEAD Swimming decided to become a sponsor of the event. After that she started to cooperate with a brand as an athlete (Ivanova 2018).

Choosing a right athlete for sponsoring is not a simple task, companies should understand what type of athlete they need for better cooperation. There are aspirational, relatable, informational and inspirational types of athletes. The results from the online survey shows that 65% people are playing their favourite sport and 61% of respondents have an athlete role model. It means that people have their favorite athletes who motivate them and inspire for trainings. By the way, there are several types of athletes for motivation, companies need to analyze who will be more relevant for sponsor relationships.

Aspirational athletes are motivating other people to achieve the same level of performance as they are. These athletes cannot have a high level of performance and win Olympic medals, they can motivate others with their hardworking skills, hard workouts for achieving goals, etc. **Relatable athletes** sharing their lifestyle, experience, issues. They are showing real life; these athletes can have some disabilities, but they are still motivating to do sport and their example motivate other people to do the same. **Informational athletes** are sharing their opinion about sport clothes, food, equipment, etc. They are not just mentioned about the brand which they use, in the meantime, they can share information about advantageous and disadvantageous of products, different types of using goods and services. **Inspirational athletes** motivate and inspire people to try to achieve the same goals. These athletes are role models for people. It goes without saying that maybe they will not achieve the same results, but athletes' performance can motivate them to try (Saunders 2016). For example, Joseph Schooling, a Singaporean swimmer, won a gold medal on Summer Olympic Games 2016, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. After his victory on Olympic Games, more parents decided to enroll their children to swimming school. Schooling became a role model for most of the Singaporean

children (Sen 2016). Moreover, Schooling won a first gold medal for his country and competed with Michael Phelps and three world-class swimmers from the United States. Phelps is a role model for Schooling, that is why it was a historical moment for most of the people (Callum 2016).



Figure 10. Joseph Schooling and Michael Phelps (Callum, 2016).

Companies can create own requirements for athletes whom they are planning to sponsor. HEAD Swimming has several requirements for their sponsor properties: use HEAD's equipment, take photos and publish them in social media.

4) Budget

Financial part is one if the difficult issue in creating marketing strategy (Beech & Chadwick 2007). Companies have pricing issue in the final price of products and services. They have a limit budget for promoting. A budget that companies are ready to use for sponsoring depends on level of the company. Also, it depends on type of sponsorship which companies choose.

Talking about HEAD Swimming they use product sponsorship. They provide equipment to athletes. They give equipment in estimated value, so athletes can understand how much money was invested into them. Also, HEAD

Swimming understands the importance and relevance of using social media platforms in their sport marketing strategy and try to pay attention to them.

5) Type of sponsorship

There are different types of sponsorship which companies can use for promoting their goods and services through athletes, such as: product sponsorship, service sponsors, media partners sponsorship, cost-reducing sponsorship, financial sponsorship, commission sponsorship and sponsorship of competition. Sport brands need to think about which type of sponsorship is relevant and suitable to them. The list of types of sponsorship is presented on page 18.

Based on the research by Lesaule and Bouvier (2017), social media started to play a significant role in sponsorship. Communication with target audience can be done through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc. The author decided to analyse which social media platform is most popular. Based on the online survey the first is Instagram (53% of respondents), second place is Facebook (22%) and the third place is YouTube (10%). Nowadays, most of the people have accounts in social media platforms, especially one of the most popular Instagram. Social media marketing (SMM) managers are focusing on creating an interesting content in order to attract target audience. SMM is a form of internet marketing, which implements social media networks. The main goal of SMM is to create a content which customers will share in the Internet (Husain, Ghufraan & Chaubey 2016). HEAD Swimming Russia is using social media platforms for communication with potential customers.

“If we are talking about the target audience, so nowadays people started to use actively and productively social media platforms. Especially Instagram, with hashtags and followers who subscribe an athlete, it is possible to promote products in a good way”. Stanislav Zevakin (2018.)

6) Sponsorship agreement

As it was mentioned before, sponsorship agreement is a contract between an organization and sponsorship property. Sponsorship agreement it is not just a

message about offering sponsor relationships, it should be a well-developed document, which is written in a polite way. It is essential to have signatures in sponsorship agreement of both sides.

The first part of sponsorship agreement can include a brief explanation about the company: background, views, and objectives for the next years. Also, companies can write welcome greetings to athletes, mention about that they make a research about them and reasons why they decided to offer sponsor relationships to them.

The second part of sponsorship agreement is to explain requirements: what athletes should do during the sponsorship process and what they will get for it. This part includes the detailed explanation of sponsorship agreement.

The third part of agreement consists of information about dates when a sponsorship agreement will be launched and expired. Also, in this part companies should add their contacts and the contact of a manager who is responsible for athletes.

The last part of sponsorship agreement is a conclusion. This part consists of companies' wishes for cooperation with athletes, that they are looking forward to receiving athletes' decision as soon as possible (UpCounsel n.d.).

Talking about HEAD Swimming, Ivanova (2018), mentioned that they have not got any specific sponsorship agreement. All the sponsorship requirements, goals of cooperation and possible changes are discussed in meetings with a head representative branch at HEAD Swimming Russia.

7) Decision Making

The last stage of developing part is a final decision. Companies collected all the information from the previous stages and on this stage, they can see the whole picture of sport market in current days. They have a list of goals and objectives which they would like to achieve at the end of cooperation, a budget which they have for sport marketing strategy and a list of athletes who answered positively for sponsorship agreement.

To sum up, at this stage companies need to make a final decision about with whom they are ready to co-operate and by which method.

3.3.2 Implementing

After finishing the first part with decision making, the next part is implementing the strategy. This part is about signing the sponsorship agreement with athletes and launching the project.

The first part is signing sponsorship agreement. It is essential to sign an agreement between both sides before launching the project. On this stage, both parties should check all the information in sponsorship agreement, discuss all paragraphs and if it is needed to make changes.

The second part is launching the project. Implementation of the sport marketing strategy consists of the five main tools such as leadership and commitment, communication and delegation, teamwork and projects, rewards and reinforcement, control and feedback. The explanation of implementation strategy tools is presented on pages 25-26.

Companies should choose a leader who will be responsible for the whole project and create a group of people who will work on implementing the project. However, there can be only one person who will be responsible for the project. A leader should communicate with sponsorship properties, check the work which sponsorship properties are doing and if it is necessary, be ready to make changes in strategy.

HEAD Swimming have not got any specific requirements for cooperation, but they want their athletes to use Heads' equipment and publish it on social media. So, they can check athletes' social media platforms if they have used their equipment. Did they mention HEAD Swimming in the post? Did they put hashtags? Did they write about HEAD Swimming equipment? And any other things which were discussed with sponsorship property.

Figure 11 shows an example of how sponsorship property of HEAD Swimming Russia, Marina Ivanova, published a photo of using HEAD Swimming equipment for competitions and used hashtags for tagging the brand.

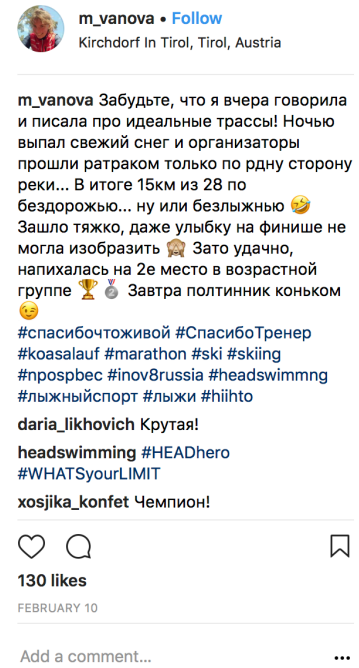


Figure 11. HEAD Swimming Russia sponsored Marina Ivanova (Ivanova 2018).

3.3.3 Analyzing

This part is the end of the sponsorship journey. Companies can see the results of the work which were done. This part consists of a process closing the project, a step-by-step process of evaluation, collecting feedback from sponsors' properties and gratitude them, and make a decision of continuing the sponsorship agreement with current athletes, or starting new sponsor relationships.

1) Evaluate the results

As it was mentioned in the beginning, one of the main objectives of sport sponsorship is to increase brand awareness. Companies can measure the results by analyzing the amount of sales before and after sponsor relationships. Another evaluation criterion is recognition and recall from consumers. Recognition is when consumers can identify products or services by a particular brand from the list. Recall is when consumers can identify products or services by a particular brand without the list (Smith & Stewart 2015).

In the interview with the head representative branch at HEAD Swimming Russia, the author asked about their results from sponsor relationships with athletes. Stanislav Zevakin (2018) mentioned that from their cooperation with athletes they received recognition and awareness of the brand. Also, companies can identify what kind of advantages and disadvantages they met during the implementation of the sponsorship. One of the disadvantages of cooperation with athletes was:

“We are not talking the same language. We talk from the sales side, when in the meantime athletes talk from sport side”. Stanislav Zevakin (2018.)

Another question on the interview was to evaluate personal experience, of HEAD Swimming Russia, of athletes’ sponsorship. Stanislav Zevakin (2018) mentioned that it was rather pretty difficult and interesting at the same time, because one of the main difficulties was different language.

As it was mentioned in the research, one of the main challenges for companies for starting sponsors relationships is that there is no clear statistics, especially companies cannot calculate the ROI. There are several methods how companies can calculate an approximate ROI from sponsorship which will be suitable for sport organizations. It can be calculated by the following formulas:

$$\begin{aligned} & \textit{Value of the Consumer Impacts} + \textit{Tangible Benefits} + \textit{Media Exposure} \\ & = \textit{Total Value of the Sponsorship}. \quad (1) \end{aligned}$$

$$\textit{Total Value of the Sponsorship} - \textit{Cost of the Sponsorship} = \textit{Net Gain} \quad (2)$$

$$\frac{\textit{Net Gain}}{\textit{Cost of the Sponsorship}} = \textit{ROI}. \quad (3)$$

Where “Value of the consumer Impacts” is an amount of times, when a consumer was exposed to companies brand, for example through logos, booklets, social media posts, etc. “Tangible benefits” is an amount of sold products and services during sponsorship process (Scilly 2017).

2) Collect feedbacks

After finishing sponsor relationships with athletes, companies can ask them about their opinion about cooperation, what kind of advantageous and disadvantageous they can mention? What can be improved? What can be changed in sponsor relationships based on their point of view?

The main advantageous of HEAD Swimming Russia which Marina Ivanova (2018), are that they have high-quality products and produce the best wetsuits for SwimRun. Also, they offer their consumer unique products which are not produced by other sport brands. The main disadvantageous is the sizing, because the main problem is the sizing of needed clothes in Russia. For the last question about what can be changed, Ivanova answered that it can be better to get some free products, for example for testing.

Moreover, companies can collect feedback from their consumers. It can be done by online questionnaires, face-to-face short interviews, etc. The main goal of collecting feedbacks from consumers is to analyze their attitude to sponsor athletes and sponsor advertising.

Based on the online survey which the author did during the research, 62% of respondents have “neutral” attitude for sponsored athletes; 36% answered “positive”, when in the meantime, only 2% of respondents mentioned about “negative” attitude. It means that most of the people have a favorable opinion about sponsored athletes.

The results of the online survey show that 77% of respondents have a positive attitude for sponsored advertising (grade 5 and more). Respondents answered from the scale from 0 to 10.

3) Gratitude letter

Gratitude letter to sponsorship properties can be one of the motivational and inspirational document for athletes. There are several advantageous of writing a gratitude letter to athletes after sponsor relationships. The first advantageous is that companies will show their politeness and behavior to athletes. After finishing sponsor relationships athletes can put companies’

gratitude letter to their resume or personal portfolio for future sponsorship deals.

Moreover, companies can put the personal experience of cooperation with particular athletes, who will receive this gratitude letter. It can help other companies in sponsorship decision making. In the same time, gratitude letter can be a recommendation letter.

4) Continue sponsorship agreement

This is a final step of guidelines about how companies can start to cooperate with Russian athletes. On this step company will have results from cooperation, feedback from sponsorship properties and consumers; companies will see the whole picture of their sponsorship journey.

Companies should analyze all advantages and disadvantages, weigh all the pros and cons of the cooperation with sponsorship property. All the results will help to make a final decision about prolonging the sponsorship agreement with this athlete or offer sponsorship deal for new athletes. In both instances the lifecycle of sponsorship can be used.

3.4 Conclusion of the chapter

The author would like to make a conclusion of the empirical part. Talking about the research process, all the goals which were created in the beginning of interviews were achieved. Answers of interviewed people helped to identify the main advantageous and disadvantageous of sponsorship, understand the main requirements for athletes; and what kind of improvements can be done for better sponsorship relationships. The online survey helped to analyse consumers' behaviour to sport, sponsored athletes and advertising with them.

4 Conclusion

The main goal of the research was to create a guideline for companies, how they can start to co-operate with athletes and show the effectiveness of sponsorship. Also, the author wanted to identify the main benefits of sponsorship and show that sponsor relationship is not only for big companies. By gathering various sources of literature – books, articles, journal, reports, etc., the author achieved the main goals of the research and answered the main research questions. Theoretical frameworks about sport marketing allowed to understand the main concepts of sport marketing and sponsorship.

Furthermore, the author suggests the sport companies to pay more attention to the developing part of the sponsorship strategy. Moreover, for better increasing brand awareness, companies should start to sponsor a bigger number of athletes. For example, add one or two new sponsorship properties per year.

Talking about the research process, the author interviewed the head of the representative branch at HEAD Swimming Russia and one of their sponsorship property. All the answers from the interviews were presented in the chapter. The lists of questions which the author asked interviewed people are presented in Appendices 2 and 3.

Another thing to mention is the online survey. The online survey collected 100 respondents as it was planned in the beginning. The questionnaire consisted of nine multiple choice questions and one open-ended question. Unfortunately, only 5% of respondents answered the open-ended questions and their answers were not appropriate and helpful for the research. Analysing of empirical research was based on theoretical part. The empirical part was the most important part of the thesis, since that the final outcome a step-by-step strategy of starting sponsor relationships with Russian athletes has been created. The results of the online survey are presented in Appendix 1.

As for the further researches, the author would recommend interviewing several sponsorship properties in order to collect and analyse their experience deeper. During the research the author used sponsor relationship experience

of HEAD Swimming Russia as an example, so further research suggestion is to analyse sponsor relationships in a case company. Moreover, the topic can be covered globally, analysing the level and effectiveness of sponsorship on the international level. Another recommendation for further research is to analyse the influence of SMM on sponsorship, how companies can use social media platforms and how to create relevant content for catching new consumers. The topic of sport sponsorship is huge, there are a lot of topics which can be covered. Moreover, sponsorship can be covered from athletes' point of view, how they can find sponsors, etc.

To sum it up, the author would like to mention that popularity of sponsorship is increasing rapidly throughout the world. In Russia, sponsor relationships are on the developing level. Most of the companies start to put sponsorship in their marketing strategy. As it was mentioned in the research, one of the main challenges is that there are no clear statistics about the effectiveness of sport sponsorship. So, the author thinks that the guideline which is presented in the research will help sport organizations to avoid common mistakes in the beginning of the sponsorship journey and start sponsor relationships with Russian athletes.

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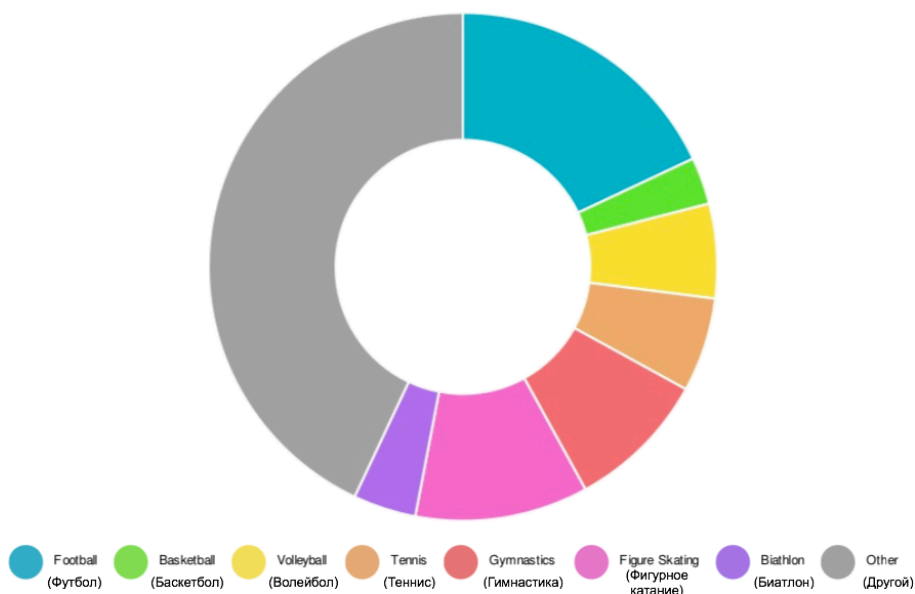
Appendices

Appendix 1. Results of the online survey.

(Какой ваш любимый вид спорта?)

1. What is your favorite sport?

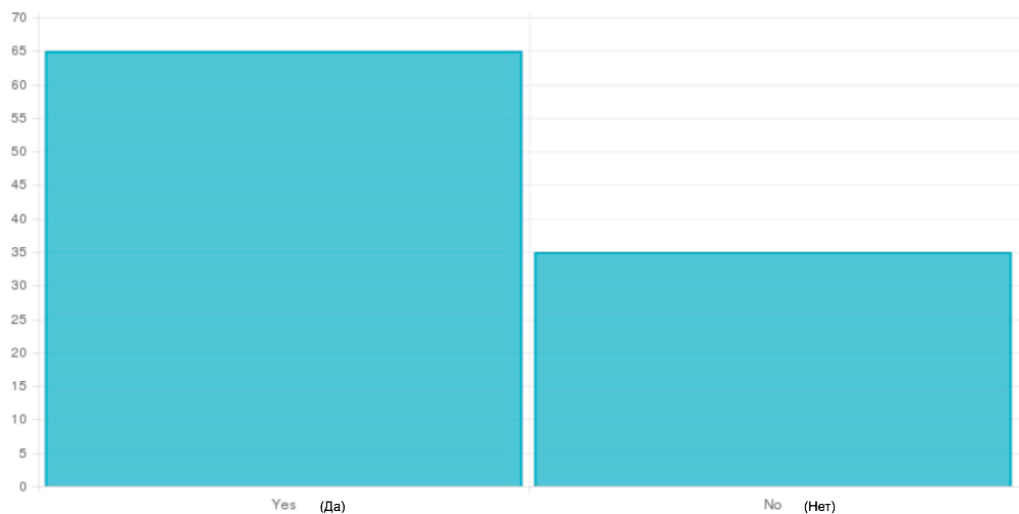
	Football	Basketball	Volleyball	Tennis	Gymnastics	Figure Skating	Biathlon	Other	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	18 (18%)	3 (3%)	6 (6%)	6 (6%)	9 (9%)	11 (11%)	4 (4%)	43 (43%)	12.36	100



(Занимаетесь ли вы этим видом спорта?)

2. Do you play this sport?

	Yes	No	Responses
All Data	65 (65%)	35 (35%)	100



(Есть ли у вас любимый спортсмен?)

3. Do you have an athlete role model? (favorite athlete)

	Yes	No	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	61 (61%)	39 (39%)	11	100



(Хотели бы вы иметь/использовать такие же продукты как ваш любимый спортсмен?)

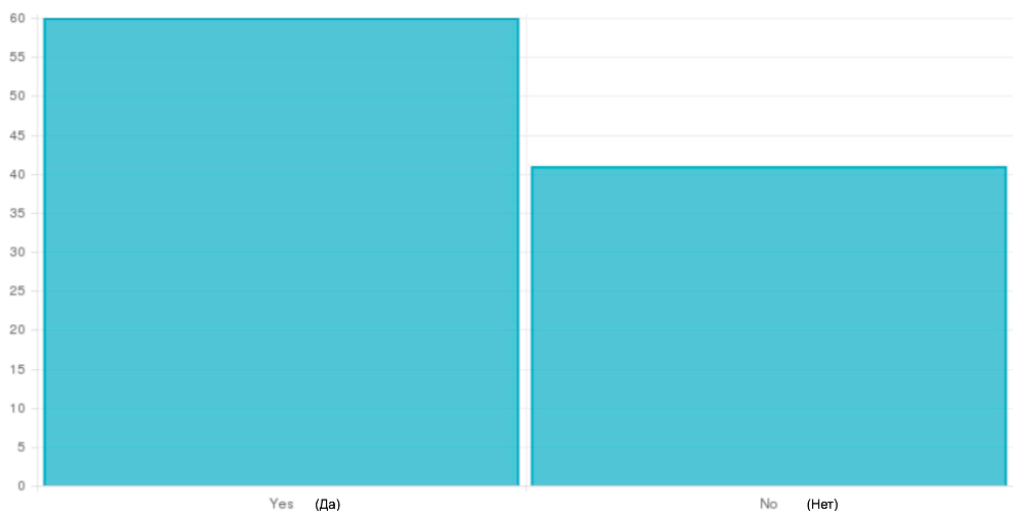
4. Would you like to have/use the same kind of products as your favorite athlete?

	Yes	No	I don't know	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	55 (55%)	24 (24%)	21 (21%)	15.37	100



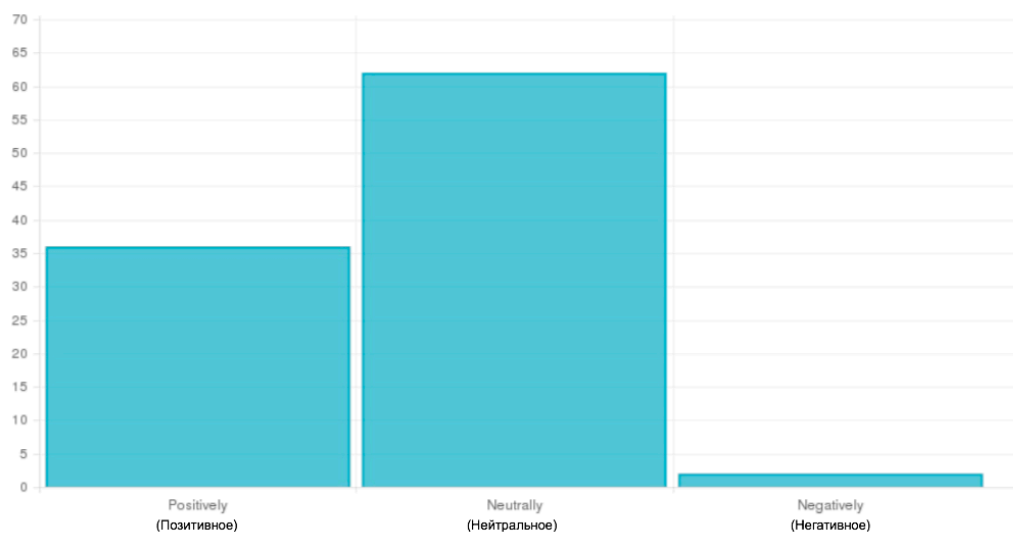
(Важно ли для вас мнение (одобрение) спортсменов о товарах?)
 5. Is athletes' endorsement of products important for you?

	Yes	No	Responses
All Data	60 (61%)	41 (41%)	99



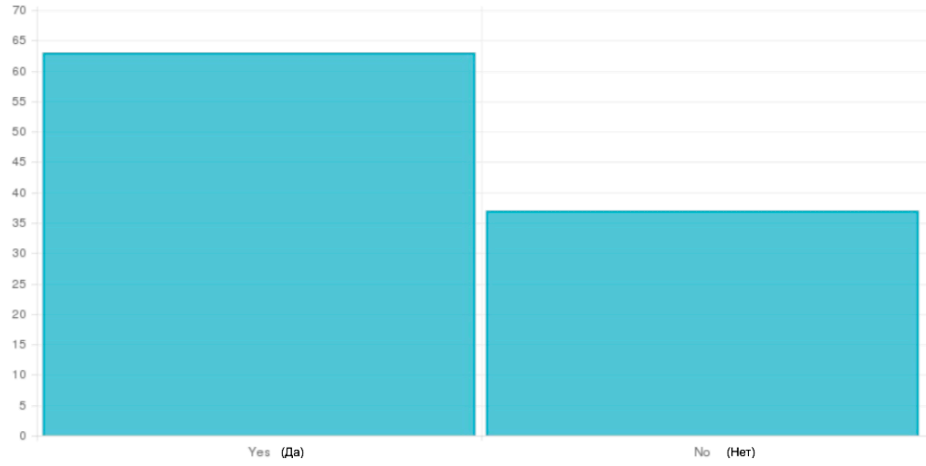
(Какое ваше отношение к спонсируемому спортсмену?)
 6. What is your attitude for sponsored athletes?

	Positively	Neutrally	Negatively	Responses
All Data	36 (36%)	62 (62%)	2 (2%)	100



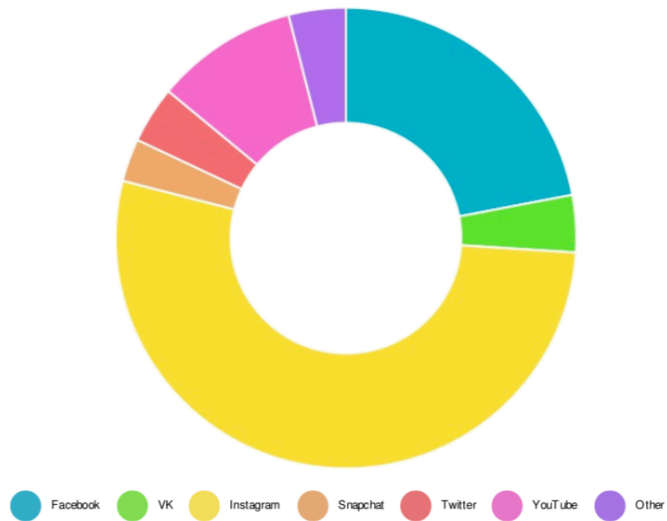
(Подписаны ли вы на вашего любимого спортсмена в социальных сетях?)
 7. Do you follow your favorite athletes on social media?

	Yes	No	Responses
All Data	63 (63%)	37 (37%)	100



(Какая ваша любимая социальная сеть?)
 8. What is your favorite social media platform?

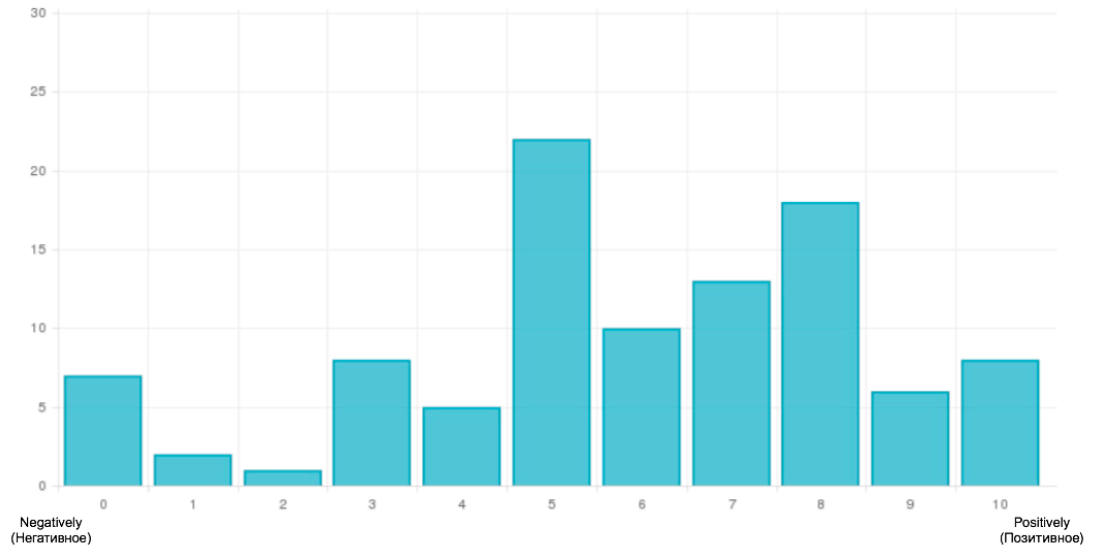
	Facebook	VK	Instagram	Snapchat	Twitter	YouTube	Other	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	22 (22%)	4 (4%)	53 (53%)	3 (3%)	4 (4%)	10 (10%)	4 (4%)	16.99	100



(Как вы относитесь к спонсируемой рекламе в социальных сетях?)

9. What is your attitude for sponsored advertising on social media?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Standard Deviation	Responses	Weighted Average
Negatively - Positively	7 (7%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	8 (8%)	5 (5%)	22 (22%)	10 (10%)	13 (13%)	18 (18%)	6 (6%)	8 (8%)	6.11	100	5.87 / 10
													5.87 / 10	



Appendix 2. Interview with HEAD Swimming Russia.

**INTERVIEW FOR HEAD OF REPRESENTATIVE BRANCH AT HEAD
SWIMMING RUSSIA (ИНТЕРВЬЮ ДЛЯ ГЛАВЫ
ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЬСТВА HEAD SWIMMING В РОССИИ)**

Instruction (Инструкция)

Thank you for your agreement for the interview. Thesis topic is “Sport Marketing: Cooperation of Sport Organizations with Russian Athletes”.

The aim of the interview is to identify what are the main advantageous and disadvantageous from cooperation with athletes based on existing cooperation with athletes; what are the main requirements for athletes and what can be improve in sponsor relationships.

The interview consists of 12 open-ended questions. You can answer for the questions as much as you want. By the way, you can miss the questions for which you do not want to answer, because you think that they are not appropriate.

(Спасибо, за то, что согласились ответить на вопросы интервью. Тема диплома – Спортивный маркетинг: Сотрудничество спортивных организаций с Российскими спортсменами.

Главная цель интервью — это определить главные преимущества и недостатки сотрудничества со спортсменами. Какие главные требования для спортсменов и что может быть улучшено в спонсорских отношениях.

Интервью состоит из 12 открытых вопросов. Вы можете ответить на вопросы в том объёме в котором хотите. Также вы можете пропустить вопросы если считаете их не подходящими.)

Questions (Вопросы)

1. When did you start to sponsor athletes? (Когда вы впервые начали сотрудничать со спортсменами?)

2. With how many athletes does your company co-operate nowadays?
(Со сколькими спортсменами вы сотрудничаете на данный момент?)
3. What are the main objectives from co-operation with athletes for HEAD Swimming? (Какие основные цели от сотрудничества со спортсменами?)
4. What are the main advantageous from co-operation with athletes can you identify? And what are the main disadvantageous? (Какие главные преимущества от сотрудничества со спортсменами вы можете сказать? Какие недостатки?)
5. How do you communicate with your target audience through athletes?
(Как вы используете сотрудничество со спортсменами для общения с целевой аудиторией?)
6. Do you have any specific requirements for athletes with whom you can start sponsor relationships? If yes, can you tell five main requirements for an athlete and why they are important? (Есть ли у вас определенные требования для спортсменов, с которыми вы хотите сотрудничать? Если да, то какие требования и почему они важны?)
7. Do you usually find athletes by yourself? Or athletes can ask you about being their sponsor? (Вы обычно сами ищете спортсменов для сотрудничества? Или спортсмены сами спрашивают про спонсорство?)
8. How does your company can evaluate personal experience from co-operation with athletes? (Как ваша компания может оценить личный опыт сотрудничества со спортсменами?)
9. Do you have any challenges from working with athletes? (Возникают ли у вас какие-нибудь проблемы во время сотрудничества со спортсменами?)
10. What kind of results does your company have from co-operation with athletes? (Какие результаты от сотрудничества со спортсменами вы можете назвать?)
11. Does your company co-operate with athletes by financial support? Or by providing goods and services by HEAD Swimming? (Как вы

спонсируете спортсменов, финансово? Или вы предоставляете оборудование для тренировок и соревнований?)

12. If you have some other comments about your co-operation with athletes? Or maybe about sponsorship in Russia, feel free to mention about it =) (Если хотите, то можете добавить комментарии по поводу спонсорства спортсменов со стороны вашей компании, или о спонсорстве в России =))

Thank you for your time! (Спасибо за ваше время!)

Appendix 3. Interview with a sponsorship property.

**INTERVIEW FOR SPONSORSHIP PROPERTY OF HEAD SWIMMING
RUSSIA (ИНТЕРВЬЮ ДЛЯ СПОНСИРУЕМОГО СПОРТСМЕНА HEAD
SWIMMING В РОССИИ)**

Instruction (Инструкция)

Thank you for your agreement for the interview. The main goals of the interview are to analyse your personal experience of being sponsorship property of HEAD Swimming Russia and identify the main advantageous and disadvantageous of sponsorship and what can be improve in sponsor relationships from athletes' point of view.

The interview consist of six open-ended questions. You can answer for the questions as much as you want. By the way, you can miss the questions for which you do not want to answer, because you think that they are not appropriate.

(Спасибо, за то, что согласились ответить на вопросы интервью. Основные цели данного интервью – проанализировать ваш личный опыт быть спонсируемым спортсменом компании HEAD Swimming в России и выделить основные преимущества и недостатки спонсорства и что может улучшено в спонсорских отношениях с точки зрения спортсмена.

Интервью состоит из шести открытых вопросов. Вы можете ответить на вопросы в том объёме в котором хотите. Также вы можете пропустить вопросы если считаете их не подходящими.)

Questions (Вопросы)

- 1) How long are you co-operating with HEAD Swimming? (Как долго ты сотрудничаешь с HEAD Swimming?)
- 2) How can you explain your personal experience with HEAD Swimming? (как вы можешь описать твой личный опыт сотрудничества с HEAD Swimming?)
- 3) What kind of advantageous and disadvantageous you can mention? (Какие преимущества или недостатки вы бы могла назвать?)

- 4) What do you think you would like to change in your sponsorship deal?
(что бы вы изменили/исправили в сотрудничестве?)
- 5) Did HEAD Swimming Russia offer you a sponsorship agreement? Or did you write them by yourself? (HEAD Swimming первыми предложили сотрудничество? Или ты написала им первая?)
- 6) If you want, you can add any comments about sponsorship in Russia=
(Если хотите, то можете добавить комментарии по поводу спонсорства в России =))

Thank you for your time! (Спасибо за ваше время!)