

BUILDING THE BRAND OF ROMANIAN SPORTS TEAMS FROM HANDBALL

I. TURCU¹ G.B. BURCEA² D.L. DIACONESCU²
A.A. TOHANEANU² M.C.R BARBU²

Abstract: *In our days building a brand means that you start getting visitors to the site who have no reason to be there, except that part of the brain is connected with the company name. In the long run, this situation becomes paramount to expanding the brand. Because it is a first choice, people think about the name of the business and will tell or recommend the services / product to their peers. In the paper " Building the brand of Romanian sports teams from handball" we initially sought to present the theoretical aspects of the brand term, an introduction to the history of Romanian handball, presentation of the results and medals won by the Romanian teams and the strategy used so far that led to the transformation of Romanian handball into a brand.*

Key words: *branding, handball, marketing strategy, history, sport.*

1. Introduction

Building a brand means creating stories. The product and company are there to support and facilitate customer success. The brand is the differentiator in the business market already crowded with a multitude of solutions for the same needs [1].

There are brands that have innovated by communicating the sharing of business experience, education and support offered to other people to learn about business, market, mechanisms. Others have opted for transparency and innovation has continued over time because it came from a genuine place. To build a brand you can't just talk about

innovation. It needs to be brought to fruition and create an incredible consumer experience.

Creating a brand is quite a long process. This means you have to be patient and develop a long-term strategy. The brand image must be supported by actions and creations that are pointing in the same direction [12].

To stay in people's minds, you must repeat yourself. How many times it is necessary. Here comes the created content, which can be a tweet, a Facebook post, a blog article. The key is to be distributed and can be remodelled several times. The strength of quality content is scalability, both as a large number of

¹ Department of Motric Performance", *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

² Department of Theory and Methodology of Motor Activities, University of Craiova.

people who can consume information and the multiple ways in which it can be transmitted and produced.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical notions about the brand

Once upon a time, brands were simply household goods - soap, tea, washing powder, shoe cream, boring everyday products that were consumed and replaced. The brand was a symbol of consistency. In a time when the products were counterfeit, the quality of the production was inconsistent, and the price, variable, the brand meant quality, quantity and standard price. The brand image designed and supported the product.

Today, all this has changed radically; brands have affirmed their place in the world. Most often, we consider the functional qualities of a product as self-evident and, while brands continue to deal with the image, it is not just their own image anymore, but ours. Nowadays, branding is mainly about involvement and association, the external and visible demonstration of private and personal affiliation [4]. Branding allows us to define ourselves by using an immediately intelligible abbreviation for the world around us. Diesel, Adidas and W hotels mean a lifestyle; Hermès, Ralph Lauren and Ritz are another. You can combine and match them to adjust, amplify, and emphasize your perception of yourself.

Branding has so far exceeded its commercial origins that its impact is practically immeasurable in social and cultural terms. He has spread in education, sports, fashion, tourism, art, theatre, literature, regional and national politics and in almost all other areas we could think of. Branding is increasingly

being used by charities and non-profits, which compete with commercial brands on the emotional territory of people's minds and hearts, for the money in their pockets [5].

The brand is the key element in the development process of a company, so it is important that it is used effectively in the sales process.

The branding mechanism has been designed and defined by modern communication techniques. But the success of the idea of branding has surpassed even the most ambitious dreams of its creators. Branding has so far exceeded its commercial origins that its impact is practically immeasurable in social and cultural terms. He has spread in education, sports, fashion, tourism, art, theatre, literature, regional and national politics and in almost all other areas we could think of. Branding is increasingly being used by charities and non-profits, which compete with commercial brands on the emotional territory of people's minds and hearts, for the money in their pockets.

All this means that the brand is not actually controlled by the marketing people, despite their huge budgets, their research programs and their army of branding, advertising and event management. The brand is controlled by us - by the customers. When a brand is truly successful, it can develop in ways and rhythms that amaze those who claim to control it; and when a brand has problems, the opposite happens.

Brands are those intangible resources that need to be developed daily and maintained with great care. The characteristics of a brand are: reputation, trust and recognition among customers [9].

People involved in branding try to

develop or align expectations behind the brand experience, creating the impression that a brand associated with a product or service has certain qualities or characteristics that make it special or unique. A brand is therefore one of the most valuable elements in an advertising theme. The art of creating and maintaining a brand is called brand management and it takes colossal work to achieve the desired results [7], [8].

While many people value the brand as a logo, as a brand, it needs to be specified that the brand is something more than them. A brand includes consumer confidence and loyalty. The brand identity is described as the one that offers the customer safety, and this perspective is beneficial. The brand gives people the measure of things - an indicator of the level of their expectations and the assurance that promises will be kept.

Brands make a difference, which is why they matter. Loyalty to the brand is proof that consumer preferences are not always determined by the lowest price. Brands decrease the price elasticity and this means that brands will ask for and receive higher prices because they are unique and cannot be repeated by other products or services.

2.2. Introduction to the history of Romanian handball

The emergence of handball as a sport

Like basketball or volleyball, the handball game was invented by a gym teacher. It's just that he does not teach at an American college, but in Germany. Carl Schellenz (1890-1956) actually adapted the football game. The first "handball" teams were made up of eleven players, and the field was the size of the football, which explains the scores quite similar. But Carl Schellenz's

idea was not entirely original. At the end of the nineteenth century and in the first two decades of the twentieth century, there were already several variants, practiced in Bohemia, Denmark or Germany.

Former athletic champion, Carl Schellenz thought of handball in eleven especially for women, whose football was rather forbidden. The success of the new discipline was also due to the position of professor at the Higher School of Sport in Berlin, held by Carl Schellenz. Thus, the future teachers of physical education began their career already knowing the rules and taste for this game. Became very popular in Germany, handball in eleven was included in 1936 in the program of the Berlin Olympics, a tournament attended by Romania. But it was not until 1972 (in Munich, for men) and in 1976 (in Montreal, for women) that handball became an authentic Olympic sport [2].

The history of Romanian handball begins with a physical education teacher from Sibiu. In Transylvania, in the Saxon schools organized and administered by the Evangelical Church, physical education was an old tradition. Teachers were often sent to Germany or Austria to learn the methods of teaching gymnastics and sports games. It happened that in February 1920, when Carl Schellenz organized the first demonstrative handball match at eleven on a football field, such a teacher was among the spectators. Therefore, the birthplace of Romanian handball were the schools in Sibiu where Wilhelm Binder was active as a teacher.

The first games were played in 1921. The other communities of Transylvanian Saxons or Banat Swabians also adopted the new sports discipline. During the interwar period, handball was played

mainly in Sibiu, Mediaş, Sighişoara, Bistriţa or Braşov, but also in Lugoj, Timişoara, but less in Bucharest.

However, the centre of Romanian handball remained in Transylvania and Banat and the first big players were Saxons and Swabians. Sighişoara, where an Olympic training centre was established a few years ago, gave one of the most powerful teams. Moreover, in the city of Târnăvă, handball was preferred to football by physical education teachers.

Introduction to the Romanian female handball

Romania has three gold medals, all obtained at the World Championships. The first two in 1956 and 1960, in handball in 11, the last in 1962, even in Bucharest, in the current format: seven against seven.

After some painful defeats in the semi-finals of the final tournaments of 1999 and 2000, Romania returns to the podium in 2005: the team led by Gheorghe Tadici wins the silver at the World Championship in Russia. Gold remains with the host team.

However, for the national team there are a few years of transition, in which the goals remain unfulfilled: the 13th place at the 2011 World Cup results in the failure of the qualification for the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Romania overtakes Brazil in eighth, defeats dramatically, after overtime, Denmark in the quarterfinals and loses (also in overtime) the semi-final against Norway. In the bronze medal game, the girls leave Poland no chance

In the preliminaries for the European Championship in Sweden, Romania wins - after a break of 15 years - Norway, a team that currently holds all the major sports titles: it is the World, European and

Olympic champion.

Romania wins the pre-qualification tournament at the Olympic Games. Rio 2016 is only the fourth qualification out of 11 attempts, and the best ranking came at the inaugural edition: fourth place in 1976, in Montreal.

Marketing strategy for Romanian handball

According to the National Audience Survey (SNA), handball is in fourth place among the sports pursued by Romanians, being overtaken by football, gymnastics and figure skating. 37% of Romanians said in 2017 that they were watching handball, and last year their number increased to 39%.

In sports, football has 42% of the people who are attentive or dedicated, with 40% who watch daily, handball - about 30% watch daily. Women's gymnastics has about 36% public attention or dedicated, figure skating 35%, handball 29%, tennis 15%, basketball 5%, rugby 1%, fencing below 1%.

Outlining a new identity of the Romanian handball: a new logo that underlines, through the presence of the tricolour, the connection between the Romanians and the handball, a mascot represented by a gray dacus that reminds of the tradition of this sport in Romania, an anthem, a symbol - the Dacian wolf, whose courage and heroism is meant to inspire the players of the national teams - and a new equipment, with a Dacian armour drawn on the back.

All these elements of identity emphasize the main message of the new strategy, that handball is the national sport of the Romanians, being also the most awarded team sport in Romania. At the same time, the aim is to outline an image of the Federation that conveys, trust,

professionalism and credibility in the eyes of corporate partners - one of the FRH audiences, according to the new vision.

As an execution, most of the implemented campaigns were carried out by Leo Burnett, but also by other advertising specialists, which Balint attracted to handball: Viorel Samoila, Senior Art Director at Publicis, made the new logo, illustrator Valentin Petuhov thought and drawn the mascot of the Dacian, Alexandru Pomană came up with the idea of a poster made from the gold medal won by the national U18, and IAA Young Professionals Cluj organized a sports marketing conference in the context of the Carpathian Trophy.

Also from the desire to make handball more accessible and to fulfil its promise to turn it into a national sport, the FRH tried to facilitate access to matches for people with disabilities. This is how the idea of creating a 3D poster with the face of Cristina Neagu - the first poster of a sports celebrity for the blind - appeared, and to offer T-shirts with 3D messages written in the Braille alphabet.

The strategy also includes building strong brands, such as the Trophy Carpathians, a friendly tournament reinvented by Balint that attracted 7,300 spectators, a record for indoor sporting events in Romania.

Among the brands that Balint believes handball can build are the National League, Romanian clubs that have international results, national teams, players and personalities in handball.

There is also a campaign that includes a series of videos of one minute, in which are presented heating techniques, teaching handball in schools, game tactics, with footage of the women's national and of the Bucharest Science. We have a good

school of handball teachers, but they have to wake up a little, many of them latent.

The campaign "There is gold in each of us" followed, built around the gold medal won by Romania at the 2014 Under18 World Championship and aimed at inspiring young generations. A limited number of posters, created by using an ink in which the gold medal was mixed, were sent - or taken personally by players - to junior handball clubs, personalities that have given them inspiration over time and central publications. The campaign, carried out in collaboration with Leo Burnett, also marked the partnership between BRD Groupe Société Générale and the Romanian Handball Federation.

Attracting sponsors and partners is still difficult, although their number has increased since the marketing department [14]. It is generally difficult to attract sponsors, but in sports there is also the reluctance to associate with seemingly endless scandals [3].

Thus the result obtained at the World Championship should open doors easier and start some conversations. It is important to build strong personalities, strong personal brands around handball players, to come and sponsors. But the efforts will continue to be the same - to create projects that provide value to the sponsor.

The goal is for more people to watch handball, to have it declared a national sport and to have support. It also requires Centres of Excellence to attract young people and develop this sport.

2.3. Building brands in sports

What would sport look like today without the support of the brands?

Hard to imagine, especially if we talk

about performance, competitions, equipment, halls or grounds. Definitely, sport could not reach such a phenomenon without the major involvement of many brands and organizations

But is it worth it for brands to get involved in this area?

But let's get into a little argument about the involvement of companies and brands.

First of all, we can say that the amateur sports table enjoys a very good time in our country. It's on the wave and it seems to be just the beginning. The Bulgarians started down the valley, it will continue to grow.

Not at the same moment we observe it at the level of performance sport, in which the Romanians do not find national symbols much. There are hopes, however, and the relatively few stars we have today are quickly assimilated and loaded with the positive energy of the fans who are successful.

Let's answer briefly some basic questions that brands could ask.

How?

So where do I invest, brand? What should I focus on, company?

Disappointing or upbeat, there is no single direction. The study reveals some opportunities, some ideas.

The development is catalysed by the increase in the number of amateur competitions. If 6-7 years ago I had a few mountain bike races spread throughout the country, this year we had at least one event every weekend. For example, of those who are interested in cycling and cycling, 8% say they have participated in at least one amateur competition in the last 12 months prior to the study.

This evolution naturally attracted many sponsors and even the emergence of more sophisticated competition systems [10]. Similar situations can be observed in

the case of running or triathlon, to name just a few of the fast growing sports (of course, starting from different bases of practitioners).

Some companies are constantly present at these events, either as part of a global strategy or as a local decision. These associations begin to work at the level of branding, on different levels, from notoriety to positioning and relevance.

The involvement of the brands in this direction can be more risky and, surely, it is considering collecting fruit for a longer time [13].

The development of long-term, consistent and sustainable strategies, however, can lead to extremely strong associations, both through the addressed table and by relevance, by obtaining remarkable emotional effects [11].

A third direction, perhaps less visible and with more difficult observable effects, is the support of the juniors: the development of the practice of mass sport among the children and the search for talents for the promotion towards the performance.

The involvement of companies in supporting sports for children, in schools or clubs, is revealed by the study as a strong direction expected by Romanians. It is clear that in order to do things properly, long-term decisions and considerable budgets are needed. On the other hand, this direction also has a rich social load. In an era where social responsibility is increasingly entering the DNA of powerful organizations, the above direction can be an extremely bidding platform.

Each organization is good to make its own plan to evaluate the effects of these actions and to draw the conclusions correctly and objectively.

When it comes to selling something

intangible, the relevance of the association is even more difficult. That is why many companies in the services or utilities sectors can use sponsorship, thus having the advantage of a pre-formed audience core. By carefully selecting a sponsorship or association, a company can target exactly that segment of customers that offers relevance. Also, authenticity is important, whether we are talking about sponsorship or other branding issues. Even if, when it comes to the relevance of an association with sport, as consumers, fans do not necessarily make rational decisions, it is good to remember that a brand cannot be built on an empty promise.

Certainly, the association with the sport ensures a high visibility for a brand, but in Romania, the orientation towards the supporters can be more suitable and less risky than the orientation on local stars, the Romanian sportsman having a rather negative image.

Campaigns that are based on the promotion of young talents must have a purpose and not remain at the declarative level or at the level of simple competitions [6].

People want to see the result of children's sports competitions in the form of discovering talents to be heard in the future.

Therefore, the best association with the sport must generate content, be relevant to the audience to which it is addressed, using the right language, to present sports in the most relevant form to the target audience, constant communication, regardless of events, being another important condition in building a long-term loyal relationship with the consumer [16].

3. Case Study: The Cristina Neagu Brand, the Best Handball Player in the World

Cristina Georgiana Neagu is a professional handball player from Romania. Currently, she is evolving at the CSM club in Bucharest.

Cristina Neagu is the only handball player in the history of this sport rewarded four times with the title of Best Handball player of the year.

From 2016, Cristina Neagu is also the captain of the national team of Romania.

Neagu entered the world of casual handball, in 2000, when he was only 12 years old, at one of the sports hours, through coach Maria Covaci, who had come to select girls for the handball section of the School Sports Club number 5. Cristina says about this meeting: "I said I have nothing to lose if I go too. Handball got into my soul from the first moment."

In 2006, at the age of 18, Cristina was noticed by the professional club Rulmentul Municipal Braşov, being transferred to the team coached by Mariana Târcă, former player of the national women's handball team of Romania. Neagu quickly became the basic component of the "Bearing" team, being declared the athlete of the year in Brasov.

In 2007, she was summoned by coach Gheorghe Tadici at the National, being included in the team that participated in the World Championship in France, where Romania ranked fourth. In the match in which the Romanian team defeated the host country Cristina Neagu shone, being the best player on the field.

Cristina Neagu was 22 years old in 2010, when she was chosen by the International Handball Federation the best player in the world. It was at the end of a season in which she had won the European

Championship with the European team, where he was also a goalscorer, with 53 successes, and played the Champions League final with Oltchim.

But in the summer of 2011, she decided to operate on his shoulder, where she had long been suffering from cartilage erosion. In the two years away from the field that followed, there was a lot of talk about how and if it will return to its former shape, if the throwing force in the right arm will be the same. Three months after he returned, in October 2012, she was injured again in a training. A torn ligament in the knee kept her another six months away from the game. In 2013 he transferred to Budućnost, where he found patience until his knee ligaments were completely healed. With the team from Montenegro won the Champions League final in May 2015, in what she said was the most beautiful day of her sporting life until then, "after the dark years of accidents".

The legs of Cristina Neagu are always moving. Covered with long socks, pulled to their knees, they move their weight from one to the other, shake them, jump on the spot, stopping only for the hymns. When the match begins, her white sneakers always play on the floor, in defence with interrupted, shaken movements, and in attack with large, alert steps, which suddenly change direction. It's one of the qualities that make it exceptional, the ability to change the tempo in a match, to move from an alert tempo to a slower one. And then, all of a sudden, all her legs propel her up in the air, where she seems to sometimes stay suspended, bombarding the gate with goals that leave those in the stands with their mouths open.

When she comes out of the game for a few minutes, she sits down next to the

other girls and puts on his black jacket with yellow sleeves on her shoulders.

But the sneakers continue to play on the floor, and her hands they do not stop rubbing their feet, keeping them warm. She also urges younger colleagues to do the same, and follows his example.

At the end of the match, after giving interviews and taking pictures with some fans, she remains the last one on the field, even refusing to attend the press conference. Recovery has to be done. She lays on the floor and asks someone from the staff to massage her legs with a foam cylinder, orange, which helps in muscle relaxation.

Not coincidentally, today the number 8 has become a mantra that Cristina has included in her personal brand. It's that little symbol that helps her remember where she started and where she wanted to go: from 8 (the number on the first shirt) to ∞ (unique performances) (www.cristina-neagu.ro).

Personal stories in which ambition, determination and constant effort overcome any obstacles are not many. And the one of Cristina Neagu can certainly be included in a golden book, for the moment not very long, of the Romanian athletes who have overcome their condition, crushed their prejudices and put their medals with the serenity of the one who knows her victory was deserved.

Behind the creation of the brand there is not only the persistence and tenacity of the handball player, but also an elaborate process, carried out by the Rusu + Borţun Brand Growers brand agency. An audit process carried out with the people around Cristina Neagu, with personalities from the Romanian marketing, as well as in-depth discussions with Cristina about the values in which she believes, where

she wants to reach, what she proposes from a professional point of view.

Thus, the representatives of the agency sought to identify the potential areas of association with Cristina's personality and built the brand strategy meant to reflect the reality and features identified as a result of this process. Cristina Neagu is UNSTOPPABLE. Perfectionist, full of determination, with great self-confidence and clear leadership qualities [15].

Cristina Neagu has adopted a brand identity that reflects her values and personality. The chosen symbol (CN8) represents the duality between power and femininity: the initials of the name of Cristina Neagu, using different types of letters, one expressing strength and the other, elegance. In the centre is the reference number for the sportswoman, the 8th - endlessly, designed by the agency team specially for this new logo, so as to convey dynamism.

The CN8 brand is about process, about focus, about how you can get unstoppable. From a visual point of view, CN8 identity describes the tension between sportsman and woman. The strength, explosion and determination of the sportswoman along with the elegance and delicacy of the woman Cristina Neagu.

4. Conclusions

In this article we wanted to show that the process of creating a brand is quite a long process. This means you have to be patient and develop a long-term strategy. The brand image must be supported by actions and creations that are pointing in the same direction. We used the analysis of various narratives to construct our point of view [16].

The process of building a brand is a lasting one in any field, not only in sports, especially in handball. As we have presented in this article, handball has become one of the most appreciated sports, due to the positive results it has obtained and the promotional campaigns carried out. The association with sport, for the local brands, can target either the glorious past or the potential that the future holds through junior clubs and the attempt to discover new talents.

Certainly, the association with the sport ensures a high visibility for a brand, but in Romania, the orientation towards the supporters can be more suitable and less risky than the orientation on local stars, the Romanian sportsman having a rather negative image. Brands are eminently relationships between individuals and groups. Good brand planning generally determines 'everyday' communication, but a strong and alive relationship also means on-the-go adaptation, updating and non-engagement in the project. Strong brands have an obvious red thread but, as obvious, they are captivating - they do not get bored, there are no broken mills that mechanically repeat or reproduce things.

Modern brand communication means a lot of dialogue and a brand positioning much more equal with his client, he says, so a coherent communication does not mean a completely "defined" brand recital, but a natural conversation on a topic that convinces and attract.

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