

COMMUNICATION AND SPORT

COMUNICAZIONE E SPORT

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Abstract

Communication can be defined as the process through which a subject transmits a message to others and is made up of several elements: a source, an encoding process, a message, a communication channel, a decoding process, a recipient. With specific reference to sporting events, it should be clarified that the attractiveness of the events is largely agreed upon by the effective and efficient management of communication activities. The purpose of this paper is to draw a conceptual framework relating to the evolution of communication in the sports world.

La comunicazione può essere definita come il processo attraverso il quale un soggetto trasmette ad altri un messaggio ed è formata da diversi elementi: una fonte, un processo di codifica, un messaggio, un canale di comunicazione, un processo di decodifica, un destinatario. Con specifico riferimento agli eventi sportivi è opportuno chiarire che l'attrattività degli eventi è concordato, per la gran parte, dalla gestione efficace ed efficiente delle attività di comunicazione. Scopo del presente paper è quello di disegnare un quadro concettuale relativamente alla evoluzione della comunicazione nel mondo sportivo.

Keywords

Communication, Sport, Innovation

Comunicazione, Sport, Innovazione

Introduction

Over the last few decades, the communication policies of sporting events have seen alongside the traditional ones defined above the line (TV, radio, daily and periodical press, billboards), those based on unconventional communication generically defined below the line (sponsorships, public relations, direct marketing, fairs and exhibitions, etc.). Recently, attention has been paid to forms of communication through social media. This is made possible

by the widespread adoption of digital technologies; in fact, the world of the web and social media assumes increasing importance in communication policies thanks to a series of phenomena that have a key role in determining this situation: the evolution of the Internet and its penetration into large sections of the population; the explosion of social networks; less use of traditional means of communication; changes in consumer attitudes. Web and social networks require on the one hand and make possible on the other a further form of communication, of an integrated type, defined through the line based on the multiplicity of available means) in order to exploit the mutual interdependencies between the sender of the message and its recipients. More generally, communication has come to represent the content of a business function, whose importance is comparable to those now consolidated such as human resources, production or marketing. In addition, communication is today an indispensable competence for managers and business professionals who intend to adequately play their role in organizations whose proper functioning is based on the networks of interpersonal relationships that represent its supporting structure (Invernizzi, 2002). Specifically, the communication of various sectors, including sports, takes the form of determining the objectives, methods and means of contact with the various interlocutors. The communication activity must be interpreted both from the point of view of the purpose to be achieved and with respect to the recipients to be achieved. In fact, it also involves in the process social groups other than the buyers of the productions (public authorities, suppliers, financiers, etc.). The company, in the relationship of mutual exchange with the environment, needs to receive and send messages, to create relationships, to fit into the socio-cultural context that surrounds it. In this perspective, the communication activity therefore goes far beyond promotional action, reconnecting to any form of relationship with the environmental system. However, it should be noted that promotion and, in particular, advertising play a central role in the sales process and remain important tools of commercial management (Sciarelli, 2014). With reference to the communication of sporting events, it should be emphasized that the multiplicity of the interlocutors of the events and the communication tools that can be used to achieve them generates for the subjects who issue the messages a considerable organizational and managerial complexity, linked both to the plurality of the subjects involved, and to the diversity of the objectives that are intended to be achieved with the event, and the characteristics of the tools that can be used. In the same way, the problem related to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the communication activities of sporting events is complex and articulated due to the multiplicity of tools and techniques that can be used for evaluation.

1. Communication and innovation

Despite the rapid growth of digital technologies, it is observed that until a few years ago there was little focus on these issues by the academic world. Only in recent years, there has been a greater attention to the phenomenon by scholars, attracted by the considerable strategic and operational repercussions, in particular for companies, deriving from the application of Social Media and Web 2.0 technologies (Williams & Chinn, 2010). In particular, among the most

recent contributions of the literature on the subject of sport, reference is made to the introduction and implementation of new communication tools such as blogs, podcasts (Lewis & Kitchin P., 2010), Twitter etc. used in the context of the existing relationships between the different subjects operating in the sector. Although considerable progress has been made in this direction, the existing literature seems to be progressing slowly. Recently, it is found in numerous contributions (Durkin & Lawlor, 2001; Kitchen & Schultz, "A multi-country comparison of the drive for IMC", 1999; Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Jones, 2004a; Schultz, 2002) the trend towards a reduction in overall expenditure on the mass media. Other authors further support this trend and observe the increase in multimedia communication as an alternative form of communication (Drossos, Fouskas, Kokkinaki, & Papakyriakopoulos, 2011; McCoy, Everard, Polak, & Galletta, 2007). The reasons for these changes can be traced back to: the segmentation of the recipients of communication messages, the increasing fragmentation of the media, the simplicity of access to online media and recipient databases (Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Jones, 2004a). According to Dahlen (et al, 2010), the main focus of marketing communication is to focus on "planning, integrating and controlling interactive dialogue with reference users/consumers to achieve mutual benefit goals" (Dahlen, Lange, & Smith, 2010). In the last decade many scholars have contributed to the determination of the theoretical framework of reference by focusing attention on integrated marketing communication. Semenik (2002) defines this concept as "... the process of using promotional tools in a unified way so that a synergistic communications effect is created" (Semenik, 2002). In essence, integrated communication "... attempts to combine, integrate and synergize elements of the communications mix, as the strengths of one are used to offset the weaknesses of others" (Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Jones, 2004a). In addition, the authors underline the importance of synergy as a vehicle to maximize the potential of communication. Duncan (2002) proposes an integrated communication model in which communication is represented as a circular process able to create brand value with consequent positive effects in terms of sales, equity and profits (Duncan, 2002). The model is therefore an effective tool for the development of the communication strategies of many companies (Kitchen, Schultz, Kim, Han, & Li, 2004b). Kitchen et al. referring to Kwangwoon and Ilchul (1982) they highlight the importance of targeting the implementation of this model by making it fully operational (Kwangwoon & Ilchul, 1982). While there is a vast knowledge and a heated debate on the subject of integrated communication, the area that concerns more specifically the optimal combination of the different means of communication is still quite little explored. With regard to the impact of emerging technologies in the landscape of sport in general and sporting events in particular, there is a lack of contributions from the literature on the impacts of the web and social media on the marketing and communication strategies of sports organizations. In this regard, recent studies on the subject have deepened the considerable opportunities deriving from the use of digital technologies in relations between the Stakeholders of the sporting event with particular attention to interactive communication between sports organizations, athletes and fans (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010). In recent years, sports organizations tend to invest time and resources in digital media and social media to improve communication between the many different stakeholders. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Foursquare, Instagram, Pinterest, Google+, blogs, are considered the most important platforms for effective

communication between the different actors. In fact, social media, by expanding the field of communication, effectively and efficiently reach the numerous Stakeholders in a short time, allowing increasing flows of information and a remarkable capacity for interaction (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). These tools, applied in the field of sports communication and sporting events, allow interaction with the public, brand awareness and customer relationship management. Rothschild (2011) in addition to observing a significant growth of social media in the field of sport and sporting events in the face of a reduction in the use of traditional media, identifies some obstacles that stand in the way of the implementation of the communication strategy based on social media such as, for example, organizational learning and communication control (Rothschild, 2011). Finally, other authors note the difficulty of using the different means of communication effectively and efficiently and of determining their optimal combination, especially following the tumultuous development of information technologies. Specifically, the information and knowledge gap in these aspects generates uncertainty about how sports organizations use the new communication tools and how they seek the optimal mix between traditional and innovative tools (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011).

2. Stages of the communication process

In general, the phases of the business communication process are articulated as follows: the identification of the target audience, the development of the positioning strategy, the definition of the objectives, the definition of the budget, the tools of the communication mix and the definition of the means of communication. Communication, to perform a real strategic function, must precisely define the types of its interlocutors, the objectives it wants to achieve, the tools it intends to use, the amount of the budget available and the timing of the interventions; all this following a real communication process. In fact, communication can be defined as "the process by which a subject transmits a message to others and consists of several elements: a source, an encoding process, a message, a communication channel, a decoding process, a recipient, the possible presence of noise and to close the process there is the response of the receiver that translates into feedback for the sender". The source is represented by the subject who issues the message to another subject; coding is the process by which the sender (the source) transforms an idea into a set of symbols (verbal, sound, visual/graphic); the message is represented by the information or image to be communicated to the receiver by the issuer; the communication channel consists of the means used for the dissemination of the message; decoding is the process by which the recipient of the message gives meaning to the symbols transmitted by the source and is carried out by the recipients according to their attitudes, values and beliefs; the recipient represents the target audience for which the message is intended. During the communication process, the phenomenon of noise can occur, consisting of factors that operate an unplanned distortion of the message, which therefore may not be correctly received by the recipient. Noise can consist of a simple mistake or the use of terms and images that fail to perform their communicative function correctly. Feedback consists of the sender's interpretation of the response and provides an indication of the correct decoding of the message by the receiver. Response and feedback create the so-called feedback loop (Kerin, Hartley,

&Rudelius, 2010). To measure the effectiveness of business communication, it is important to evaluate the response of audiences to the message and to verify the extent to which the objectives set have been achieved. However, in some cases, the communication process can be ineffective when coding errors occur (the source may not be able to adequately transform the abstract idea into a set of symbols), errors in the choice of channel (it may happen that a correctly encoded message is sent through a wrong channel; in this way, the message will never reach the desired recipient), decoding errors (the recipient misunderstands the message). It is therefore clear that the realization of a fully effective communication requires the common effort of all the actors involved in the process.

3. Communication and sport

With specific reference to sporting events, and for a correct interpretation, in this context, of the problems concerning communication, it should be clarified that the attractiveness of events is determined, for the most part, by the effective and efficient management of communication activities. This accounts for the high complexity and relevance of the communication of sporting events. In fact, the success of a sporting event can be measured in a multidimensional way on the basis of parameters that highlight in summary the attractiveness of the event. For this purpose, reference is made to the set of parameters proposed by (Sentedals, 2005): number of athletes or participants; number of delegations or participating countries; number of journalists; hours of television coverage; revenues from private sponsorships; other revenues; number of days of competition; number of volunteers; number of spectators; number of accredited persons. Specifically, it is possible to distinguish the parameters that are an expression of communication activities such as the number of journalists, the hours of television coverage, the revenues from private sponsorships, the number of spectators present and distant from the parameters, which relate more specifically to the offer of the event, such as number of participating countries, the number of days of competition, the number of volunteers, the level of the participating athletes. Each of the considered parameters is in itself a partial indicator of the size of the event while a global sizing can be obtained from the joint consideration of all parameters. In particular, from the joint consideration of the parameters that are an expression of the communication of events, a measure of the attractiveness of the events themselves is obtained. With regard to the different forms of communication, in general, it is necessary to distinguish the traditional ones (above the line and below the line) from the innovative ones, of more recent affirmation, so-called through the line. The line we are talking about can be considered as a sort of boundary between the activities whose final message aims primarily at the sale (above the line) different from the activities having the intermediate objective of exposing advantages and quality of products / services, or even to illustrate events related to the company (below the line). In detail, the expression Above The Line (ATL) identifies all those mass communication activities aimed at obtaining greater visibility, specifically those conveyed through traditional media, such as TV, radio, daily and periodical press, billboards (largely attributable to traditional advertising). Below The Line (BTL), identifies all those communication activities aimed at reaching a narrower and more targeted target of users; specifically, those conveyed through unconventional communication, such as

sponsorships, public relations, direct marketing, promotions. Through The Line (TTL) represents a new perspective, which goes far beyond the mere integration between "above" and "below" activities, focused on the integration of different forms of communication thanks to the introduction of the web and digital marketing. It is important to note that the communicative process through traditional modalities is based on sequential logic, introduced by scholars Shannon and Weaver in 1949, which sees a direct and unidirectional relationship between the sender of the message and the receiver. The communication process therefore always takes place in the same direction: the only sender produces the message, the many recipients can only receive and decode it. This means that the message, for example through the press, TV, etc., addressed to a wide audience, and not immediately modifiable, will give its effects through feedback for the broadcaster at a later time, for example through an estimate of the trend of sales recorded for the product or service (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Conversely, with the innovative mode through the line (in this case the line assumes a transversal function to all types) there are a plurality of senders and recipients who can exchange roles. Every single communication process is bidirectional, and takes the form of dialogue. The relationship between issuer and receiver takes place in real time with strong mutual interdependencies generating a totally dynamic feedback, so the message can be continuously modified. In addition, as in the case of social web, a large number of relationships are activated. The most obvious consequence of these innovations is to circulate information at an ever greater speed and at low cost. From the careful consideration of the forms of innovative communication, a summary of the main characteristics of each is provided below: the most widespread categories of below-the-line communication are represented by viral marketing, guerrilla marketing, ambient marketing and street marketing, which are also widely developed in the sports field. Viral marketing is a type of unconventional communication that exploits the communication skills of a few interested parties to transmit the message to a large number of end users. The way the message is spread follows a typical profile that has an exponential trend. In general, it can be said that viral communication is a sort of evolution of the most classic word of mouth, with the great difference that the message does not spread one-to-one, that is, from mouth to mouth, but exploits the infinite potential of the network by propagating in a one-to-many way. In essence, a viral marketing campaign is linked to the internet and multimedia, and consists of the dissemination of content (often bizarre, cynical, funny or, in the case of sport, focused on impossible performance) able to stimulate word of mouth among users. Interactivity therefore lies in making users an active part of communication, involving them directly as actors or as disseminators. Guerrilla marketing is a definition coined by the American advertiser Jay Conrad Levinson in 1984, to indicate a form of unconventional and low-cost advertising promotion obtained through the creative use of aggressive means and tools that leverage the imagination and psychological mechanisms of end users (Cova, Giordano, & Pallera, 2007). L'ambient marketing è una forma di comunicazione non convenzionale che sfrutta l'ambiente sia esso una strada, un negozio, un ascensore, una cabina telefonica, ecc. per "incontrare" il target. Ambient marketing seeks to bring advertising directly to where its specific target is located, building ad hoc messages for its objectives; a potentially very receptive target, because it was taken "by surprise" in a moment of relaxation, in an environment where he went with completely different motivations from the usual ones for

receiving an advertising communication. Street marketing is a form of unconventional communication that is expressed exclusively on the actual streets of a city or at most within shopping centers, and privileges, as tools, the body and action of performers. In particular, communication in street marketing opts for the "spectacularization" of its making, of its being performance that happens in very exact space-time coordinates: at that precise moment and for the public that has decided to go to "hit" acting on that location. For what has been said, the distinction between above the line and below the line communication is losing its meaning; in fact, originally the "line" served to distinguish the share of the budget allocated to advertising from that to be allocated to other marketing communication methods, controlling the profitability margins and the resources available for both aggregates. Today, however, more and more companies are exploiting the combination of different tools and means of communication, in a perspective that has been defined through the line. In short, it is a distinction that seems to have had its time, especially if we consider that in the perspective of consumers these lines have no meaning (Kotler, Keller, Ancarani, & Costabile, 2012).

4. Communication 2.0

In the traditional view, corporate communication is seen as a substantially tactical activity and organizational function; communication and strategy are linked by a linear relationship of cause and effect. In addition, the company has a significant control of communication flows; organizes and implements communication campaigns to influence the public. In recent years, with the advent and spread of new media, as a result of the development of web 2.0 applications, communication takes on a strategic dimension that finds expression in the circular relationship between communication and business strategy, creating strong mutual interdependencies. These phenomena lead to the loss of control of the contents of the communication by the company (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). In particular, the world of the web and social media assumes increasing importance in communication strategies thanks to a series of phenomena that have a key role in determining this situation: the evolution of the Internet and its diffusion; the explosion of social networks; reducing the use of traditional media; changes in consumer attitudes. Even in the world of sports and sporting events, the use of the web and social media is growing rapidly; many sports organizations tend to commit more and more resources and time to the creation of their social channels and to interact with the different Stakeholders. The strategic dimension of communication finds expression in the complexity and interdependencies between the different Stakeholders. We therefore move from a communication that tends to be centered on the company to a communication on the net. Therefore, the contents of communication are generated by companies, traditional mass media and above all by individuals in their online conversations (Siano, 2012). Social media is therefore characterized as consumer-generated media. Among their effects are the phenomena of user/consumer-generated content and consumer/stakeholder empowerment (Pires, Stanton, & Rita, 2006) (Kucuk & Krishnamurthy, 2007). These phenomena change the way organizations plan and implement online communication activities (Vollero, 2010). In this perspective, it is recognized that new media are for sports companies an efficient means both in terms of costs and in terms of audience size with the possibility of making the viewer live

an interactive experience. Traditional and innovative communication are placed side by side with the possibility of being able to spread the message of promotion of an event to a greater number of users using different means depending on the target objective to be achieved. With "through the line" communication, the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) model is affirmed, defined as "the planning process aimed at ensuring the combined use of communication tools capable of generating synergistic effects, which become a vehicle to maximize the potential of communication" by adopting the flexibility necessary to face with reactivity the continuous challenges that come from continuous changes. This model therefore provides valuable support to the decision-maker on the choice of the optimal combination of the means of communication to be adopted. In this perspective, a sports organization in the choice of tools and communication channels to be adopted for its communication strategies, should take into account not only the peculiar characteristics of the medium and the possibility of using it in synergy with other tools, but also the propensity to receive and welcome new technologies by all Stakeholders.

Conclusions

The world of sport and, in particular, the management and organization of the multiple types of sporting events, recall the typical problems of a sector considered "high business intensity". In particular, the number of actors present within sports organizations highlights the importance and complexity of communication activities and therefore of the development of corporate communication as an autonomous area of management. In fact, with the spread of new media, communication takes on a strategic dimension that finds expression in the circular relationship between organizations and stakeholders; communication costs are generated not only by companies and traditional mass media but increasingly also by all individuals in their online conversations. The evolution of the means of communication and the increasingly widespread dissemination of new media (smartphones, Internet, social media, digital terrestrial and satellite television, etc.) allow the development of communication through the line through the implementation of the integrated communication model going to profoundly change the planning and implementation of communication activities. In this direction, sports organizations tend to seek the optimal mix of the means of communication, from the combination of traditional and innovative means, to the development of an effective and efficient communication strategy. The insights provided by this work can be considered an important food for thought to encourage a change in the perception of corporate communication as a management function based on professional skills and able to manage the complexity of the relationships between all the actors who contribute to the realization of sporting events. In this perspective, the use of new media represents for sports organizations the path to follow for the realization of fully successful communication strategies; however, the specific role of the media must not be neglected, each with its own identity made up of codes, dynamics and expectations, but also of costs and benefits, to be evaluated carefully in advance of their use.

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