

SPECIAL CHALLENGES IN THE COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT OF SPORT ORGANISATIONS – THEORETICAL SUPPOSITIONS, EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DAILY PRACTICE

Sebastian Kaiser, German Sport University Cologne, Germany, s.kaiser@dshs-koeln.de
Gerhard Nowak, Cologne, Germany

INTRODUCTION

Any changes in the economic, social and communicative environment also have a considerable impact on the communication of sport organisations. However yet there has scarcely been any academic examination of the special challenges facing the communication management (CM) of sport organisations. The thinking and models of general management need to be re-examined to determine the extent to which they can meaningfully be applied to the specific circumstances of the sport sector.

METHODS

In the economic theory chart the paper first contrasts the main functions of CM (strategic communication planning, operative communication planning, methods) with the key special features of the sport sector (Providers, Goods, Demand, Markets etc.) and discusses the resulting special needs of sport organisations regarding CM. Secondly the special relationship between sport organisations and the media is highlighted. Aspects of sport coverage during three soccer world cups (1990, 1998 and 2006) are surveyed based on the latest research results of the most comprehensive content analysis of the daily German press to date (Nowak 2007). The study examines reporting on economic aspects of sport between 1984 and 2006. Over 140,000 newspaper pages were analysed and systematically classified using a subject catalogue covering 21 economical aspects (Büch 1985). Following La Roche (1987) the 8 main journalistic formats have been encoded and included in the codebook as well. Data has been transcribed and analysed using Software SPSS. The quantitative content-analysis is based on the assumption, that (mass-) media reality is affected by communicators (Luhmann 2004). Thereby the communicator is not completely free in the decision on what and how he publishes. He is influenced by third party (colleagues, publishers, functionaries etc.). Scheufele (2004) referred to this interaction as “framing”. If f. e. certain economic aspects of sport are frequently picked out as a central theme, conclusions on the communication-relationship between sport agents and media-communicators can be drawn. In this context McCombs (2006) alludes to „attribute Agenda-Setting“ i.e. the accentuation of specific subjects enhances the chance of being published. Over 100,000 individual sets of data were encoded, covering a range of topics from “economic dimensions”, “sponsoring”, “merchandising” and “sports industry” through to “ticketing” and “sports venue construction”. The publications surveyed were “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, “DIE WELT”, “HANDELSBLATT”, “FINANCIAL TIMES DEUTSCHLAND”, “Kölnische Rundschau”, “Stuttgarter Zeitung”, “BILD” and “B.Z. Berlin”. The aim of the study was to identify “developing stories” and to make recommendations for decision-makers in the media and sport organisations. Based upon the representation of the results, the special CM challenges facing nationally and internationally operating sport organisations are discussed and pointers for successful CM formulated.

RESULTS

A clear increase in the percentage of reports focussing on the “economic consequences” of the World Cup was noted in the period under review. In 2006 a peak of 24.8 percent was recorded, i.e. one report in four on the economic aspects of the World Cup focused on consequences extending far beyond the type of sport (football) and the event (World Cup). During the 1990 World Cup the figure was 8.1 percent, rising to 6.0 percent in

1998, i.e. the percentage for this subject had tripled within just 16 years. Under “People” the main interest lay in “Active sportsmen and women” (4.9 %). “Former players” attracted scarcely any attention at just 0.2 percent. It is striking that “Market researchers” came in second with 20 publications (2.4 %). Politicians (9/1.1 %) and Academics (4/0.5%) are used much less frequently as interview partners. The high number of reports concerning national bodies or ministries corresponds to the high level of attention paid to the economic effects of the 2006 World Cup (6.9 percent of all published articles). With reports on German sportsmen claiming over 95% of all reports, there was clear evidence of ethnocentricity.

DISCUSSION

The sport business has a number of special features which present unique CM challenges for sport organisations. Simply transferring general methods to the field of sport is not viable. Detailed knowledge of the communication conditions and the media representation allows the communication to be controlled effectively and any dysfunction and unintended consequences to be tackled at an early stage. A range of concrete recommendations for successful sport organisation CM can be derived from the theoretical discussion and the results of the present analysis. Of prime importance is precise knowledge of the particular target group, the relevant stakeholders (members, fans, sponsors, politicians, media) and the organisation’s own communication management goals. It is crucial that each organisation has its own unmistakable branding. Up to now the bilateral relationship between sport and the media has been singled out as the key theme, whereas in the planning and organisation of major sports events it is increasingly important to communicate with national bodies. Sport organisations must also consider that a quantitative but also a qualitative media presence is important, i.e. communication must be managed in terms of its impact on image. In the study for instance, it emerged that “BVB Dortmund” was mentioned more frequently than “FC Bayern Munich” in the period from 1984 to 2006, albeit with negative content (e.g. stock market crash etc.).

It is mass media reality that so called „telegene“ sports are more frequently published. This applies however primarily to communication with television offices. Given the economic dimensions involved, however, business and politics desks should often also be included in the communication management. Finally, more attention should be paid to economic aspects in the education of sport journalists. To date budding sport journalists have mainly learnt specialisation and exposition skills, however in order to reflect sports events faithfully, their limited insight into the economic dimensions of sport events or clubs leaves them at a disadvantage. Conversely, many managers in the sport world assume that sport desks are the only contacts which exist in the media world.

LITERATURE

La Roche von, W.: Einführung in den praktischen Journalismus, 17. aktualisierte Auflage, München 2006

Luhmann, N.: Die Realität der Massenmedien, 3. Auflage, Wiesbaden 2004

McCombs, M.: setting the agenda – the mass media and public opinion, Cambridge 2006

Nowak, G.: Medienberichterstattung anlässlich des FIFA World Cups 2006, Abstract anlässlich der 11. Jahrestagung des Arbeitskreises Sportökonomie in Magglingen, Magglingen 2007

Scheufele, B.: Frames - Framing - Framing-Effekte, theoretische und methodische Grundlegung des Framing-Ansatzes sowie empirische Befunde zur Nachrichtenproduktion, Wiesbaden 2003