

Review

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58984/smbic240201265r>

Received: 11.11.2024

Accepted: 19.12.2024

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DILEMMAS AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN THE SPORTS MARKET

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Abstract: Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) in the broader sense in the sports market encompasses all promotional techniques from the promotional mix spectrum, as well as all communication potentials of the point of sale of the sports product and the product itself, digital resources, and public relations. The lack of coordination in the use of communication potentials has led to the necessity of the IMC concept. The dilemmas and challenges arising from the sports market regarding the application of IMC stem from the issues of defining the sports segments that make up this market, the imprecision in distinguishing between marketing, promotion, and public relations, as well as the lack of synchronisation of communication aspects in the process of reaching customers and maintaining good long-term relationships with them. This paper will consider these dilemmas and challenges, aiming to highlight IMC's full potential in the sports market. Given that the sports market has specific characteristics compared to others, the main research question in this paper is which communication potentials of this market can be considered part of IMC. The results indicate that the sports market possesses a broader spectrum of communication potentials that can be utilized in the application of IMC, as well as that public relations represent a significant resource.

Keywords: Promotion, Integrated Marketing Communications, Public Relations, Marketing, Sport

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Introduction

The sports market is defined in various ways, consequently affecting its application of marketing and promotion. The public image of sports is mainly beyond its direct control, making it essential to implement strategies that influence media coverage (Desmarais & Bruce, 2008). Considering the strengthening of the sports market (Rahmani et al., 2024), regardless of how different authors interpret it (Winfrey, 2009; Zhang et al., 2018) and the fact that competition is increasingly intense (Shilbury, 2012), it is necessary to establish clear definitions to facilitate the more precise development of strategic plans at all levels. In this paper, the sports market implies primary and secondary segments. The primary segment includes sports organizations, athletes, sponsors, and specialized sports media (Ratković & Dašić, 2023). The secondary segment consists of all companies and entrepreneurs who produce and market sports products or services, whether intended for end-users or other organizational entities, regardless of whether they operate within the same segment or in a different one (Ratković & Dašić, 2023). The connection between the primary and secondary segments is direct in a marketing and promotional context, as the growth of the secondary segment is significantly driven by the rapid development of the primary segment, which is highly relevant from a profit perspective. The high transfer values of football players (Metelski, 2021), the substantial implications of organizing major sporting events for a destination (Chalip & Costa, 2005), the transfer of images from famous athletes to their home countries (Hautbois et al., 2024), as well as the large sponsorship sums originating from the secondary segment (Ratković, 2023), and finally, media support on new platforms at a global level for sports events and other related activities (Antunovic, 2022), all contribute to creating an increasingly valuable market with significant implications for anyone involved in supporting its development. As a result, the secondary sports market is becoming an almost equal segment, which from a marketing perspective plays a multifaceted role. Specifically, this segment provides part of the sponsorships, produces technology, equipment, apparel, and footwear necessary for the functioning of the primary segment, and ensures infrastructural support for the realization of sports events and the promotion of athletes. At the same time, it also targets other audiences influenced by sports, shaping their lifestyles to make them eager consumers of the products and services generated by the secondary sports market segment.

The focus of marketing activities in the sports market can be viewed in two ways, depending on specific sports products (Ratković et al., 2023), participants, and the nature of its operation (Ratković & Dašić, 2023). Namely, if we consider an athlete as a product, it can be said that marketing efforts are invested in creating a personal brand. The athlete, as a brand, represents a communication asset for themselves and other

brands with which they establish partnerships (Hasaan et al., 2018). Since athletes are key components of the sports market, this specificity is crucial for discussing the application of marketing and promotional potentials, particularly Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). Moreover, the high visibility of sporting events, which are primarily the result of the work of athletes but also other participants in the sports market, provides a significant framework for the application of these marketing potentials, a framework that undoubtedly differs substantially from other markets (Dašić & Ratković, 2022). For example, one of the implications in both cases is the application of sponsorships, which are most prevalent in sports (Toscani & Prendergast, 2019). Additionally, the participation of sports services in the rapidly growing fitness industry, which is supported by digital technologies (Newsome et al., 2024), as well as the esports market (Ratković & Pečić, 2024), represents new infrastructures for the application of marketing and promotion. These sectors also independently carry significant communication potential, considering that the fitness industry is part of the secondary sports market. At the same time, esports is part of the primary segment in the context of sports activities. However, esports can also be considered part of the secondary market when considering the technology producers as an integral part of the gaming industry's functioning.

Therefore, the application of marketing and promotional potentials, which will be discussed within the framework of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), carries many specificities that arise from the nature of the sports market and the characteristics of its participants. At the same time, every industry, by its primary goals, is focused on profit, while the application of all modern marketing, promotional, and public relations potentials aims to attract new users, audiences, and consumers, as well as to maintain good long-term relationships with them and all other intermediaries in the value delivery chain (Garača et al., 2013). In other words, regardless of the industry in which the value delivery chain is considered, it has the same marketing and promotional goals. This means that although the sports market has its specificities, the potentials of marketing, promotion, and public relations—which are the subject of discussion within IMC in this paper—are those that are applied to a greater or lesser extent in other markets as well. Considering the necessity of addressing misconceptions about marketing, promotion, and public relations, which will be the focus of the first part of this paper, it can be said that the above points serve as a basis for further analysis in this text.

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is an organized framework for developing a brand's overall marketing communications strategy, which emerged as a strategic approach in the early 1990s (Villarreál, 2010). "IMC can help create coordinated and consistent messages across various communication channels" (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). The IMC concept emphasizes the importance of all participants in the

value delivery chain, highlighting their impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty, as well as the strategic approach to engaging them (Holm, 2006; Jin, 2003; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015; Pickton & Hartley, 1998). This underscores the importance of synchronizing all aspects of communication.

The subject of this analysis is the potential of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) within the sports market. The goal of this analysis is to highlight the full potential of IMC in the sports market. The primary research question addressed in this paper is which communication potentials of this market can be considered as part of IMC. Although theoretical, this study has practical implications. These are found in the necessity of precisely defining terms, participants, and relationships within the sports market and the segments that comprise it to ensure that the selection of IMC potentials in practice is the most effective and leads to tremendous success.

Misconceptions In Understanding the Terms Marketing, Promotion, And Public Relations

A prerequisite for identifying the sports market's communication potential lies in specifying the domain and scope of promotional techniques, as well as all other elements and processes that, in various ways, communicate with value users. Given that the goals of all promotional techniques align with the goals of promotion and that promotion supports the objectives of marketing, it can be said that these elements form the foundation of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). However, it is essential first to highlight that certain misconceptions arise in the field of marketing (Baker, 2013), which result in the underutilization of communication resources within this area. Such negligence may stem from the superficiality of some authors, leading to the dissemination of oversimplified information to a target audience that readily accepts these explanations without questioning or delving deeper into what a so-called "expert" has explained. This often leads to the conflation of terms like marketing and promotion (Boisen et al., 2018), as well as misunderstandings regarding the exact role of public relations, especially in the sports market, where many authors focus solely on its primary segment (Ratković & Dašić, 2023), neglecting the secondary segment. Since public relations roles differ between the primary and secondary segments, these generally accepted interpretations often overlook a portion of their potential. For example, public relations in the primary segment of the sports market play a crucial role in managing crises (Bruce & Tini, 2008; Ratković et al., 2022b). A crisis denotes a specific state in the development of an event, a turning point in its course that likely garners media attention (Senic & Senic, 2015) and can be triggered by internal and external factors (Grubić, G. et al., 2012). Negative publicity in the media, as an indicator

of a crisis caused by internal factors such as scandals involving athletes, can only be resolved through appropriate public relations techniques. In other markets and under normal circumstances, public relations work in tandem with other promotional potentials, particularly in the secondary sports segment, where crises are less frequent than in the primary segment. In these cases, effective PR strategies are less about crisis management and more about maintaining a positive image through coordinated promotional efforts. At this point, it is worth addressing another misunderstanding related to public relations, namely its connection with publicity. Some authors equate PR with publicity; even though publicity can be both a cause and an outcome of public relations, it is not synonymous with this resource. In other words, negative publicity often triggers a crisis, necessitating the application of PR techniques to resolve image-threatening issues. In contrast, good publicity is usually the result of effective public relations, especially when consistently achieved. "Negative publicity and shifts in public opinion can have catastrophic effects on the activities of an organization or individual" (Funk & Pritchard, 2006), as such publicity, when it involves athletes, "extends to sponsors and the club" (Yoon & Shin, 2017). While negative publicity is generally undesirable, exceptions exist (Chang, 2018; Frisby, 2017). However, research on the impact of publicity is not very common despite its necessity (Funk & Pritchard, 2006), and the results of existing studies raise questions about the effectiveness of publicity compared to other promotional techniques (Skard & Thorbjørnsen, 2014). Recent research indicates that a lack of corporate responsibility, controversial advertising, and corporate scandals undoubtedly generate undesirable publicity (Pacis et al., 2022).

However, the greatest marketing misconception is using promotion as a synonym for marketing. Media practice has contributed to this by referring to TV commercials during programs as marketing. This misunderstanding of the marketing concept, equating it with a promotional technique, is inexcusable. Specifically, advertising is a promotional technique, and in addition to its TV-supported form, it also includes print, digital, and other formats. Furthermore, promotion is part of the marketing mix, which consists of four elements in its basic form, although in the sports market, five are essential. The marketing mix itself is just one concept within marketing that considers a set of elements or its marketing contexts of use (Ratković & Dašić, 2018). Perhaps in the latter part of this sentence, there might be some partial justification for equating promotion with marketing, given that we emphasize marketing contexts, which in most cases are promotional. However, besides this, marketing encompasses processes that form the foundation of all activities and decisions, the most important of which is the research process. Therefore, marketing is neither a promotion nor a TV commercial; instead, it is a complex field of potential based on market research, segmentation, and positioning through decision-making about the marketing mix. Another explanation that might clarify the incorrect connotation of marketing in practice is that its

promotional aspect is transparent, meaning that what the public sees of marketing is, in fact, promotion. Since the goal of promotion is to be seen and perceived in a way that attracts new value users and maintains good long-term relationships with existing ones, the perception of these activities in this way is correct and desirable. Some forms of promotion are direct and precise, while others are not. Coordinating all forms of promotion, as well as the processes that precede it, and identifying and simultaneously utilizing other relevant communication resources to attract users and maintain good long-term relationships with them is the primary task of IMC.

The extent to which the sports market will provide resources that serve the achievement of the IMC mentioned above task is an important topic in sports marketing theory, as it forms the basis for the desired perception of the quality of the offering, thereby enhancing user satisfaction with the purchased value. Therefore, the goals of IMC overlap with the goals of marketing. At the same time, promotion supports them by utilizing appropriate techniques aligned with the sports market, as well as other communication capacities of marketing that arise from the processes that constitute it, along with other integral elements. A prerequisite for the successful application of IMC in the sports market is the understanding of the factors within sports segments, which are divided into primary and secondary, as well as the precise definition of the terms marketing, promotion, and public relations, and the identification of all communication potentials derived from applied marketing resources. Additionally, the sports market has certain specificities, the most fundamental of which relates to the fact that an athlete is both a product and a brand, often serving as a vehicle for promotion, typically through sponsorships (Ratković & Dašić, 2023). As such, the athlete plays a dual role within IMC, with these roles being entirely different: on the one hand, communication resources are invested in their promotion, and on the other, when their name becomes a brand, they embody IMC potential, promoting another brand (Arai et al., 2014; Su et al., 2020). However, these two roles of the athlete are closely connected in the context of IMC, given that communication potentials build the personal brand to enhance its value and, indirectly, establish the foundation for the continuous execution of activities that constitute these communications (Dašić et al., 2021). Therefore, any scandal caused by the athlete will impact both the brand's image that sponsors them and their personal image, degrading it and diminishing their current and future value. The only salvation in such a crisis is public relations, not any other promotional technique, no matter how effective it may have been until then.

Proper understanding of the key concepts related to IMC is of fundamental importance for successful marketing communication, as well as for the synchronized management of various channels of informing, persuading, and reminding about the offer or the individual, in the case of an athlete. A prerequisite for this is distinguishing the sports market into primary and secondary segments and clearly defining the IMC subject. The

primary segment may include sports organizations, athletes, and events, while the secondary segment could encompass sports brands of clothing, footwear, and equipment, as well as sports services and their providers, among others.

IMC as a Key Potential for Advancing The Sports Market

Considering the advantages of integrated marketing communications (IMC), which are reflected in the synchronization and joint action of all communication channels towards target groups, this is one of the effective ways to attract value-driven users and maintain long-term relationships with them. Since these two tasks are simultaneously the primary objectives of the modern marketing concept, the IMC concept can also be considered a useful tool for enhancing the position of participants in the sports market (Whitburn et al., 2020). To achieve complete success in managing IMC over time, it is necessary to strategically approach and implement the activities that make up this process (Gligorijević & Janičić, 2011). IMC possesses interactivity, dynamism, and flexibility characteristics, requiring the synchronization of activities of all participants in various supply chains delivering the same value and who are involved in promotional activities. Integrated marketing communications (IMC) result from joint efforts, excluding individual focuses (Csikósová et al., 2014).

The implementation of IMC should be designed to create a continuity of positive perception throughout the entire purchasing process, even when the customer transitions from one channel to another, so that they do not perceive any difference in communication style or offer presentation (Kim et al., 2004). During the purchasing process, information needs vary, and it is essential that participants in the value delivery channels are always aware of the customer's demands and ensure the availability of relevant information when needed.

IMC encompasses all promotional techniques considered within the promotional mix as part of the marketing mix, along with digital resources, as well as the point of sale and public relations, even though the latter two communication resources are positioned within distribution and promotion in the 4 Ps concept. Given the specificities of sports marketing, the fact that the sports market is divided into primary and secondary markets, and their interconnectedness, as well as the importance of public relations, corporate social responsibility, athletes as brands, and employees, particularly their global influence as influencers, and finally, the significance of partnership relations, which are predominantly realized through sponsorships, it can be said that IMC in the sports market has a richer assortment of potentially more successful communication activities targeting value consumers. Considering the increasingly fragmented niches of target groups concerning product pricing, this spectrum of IMC should also include

price as a potential communication and positioning tool, not only in the sports market but more broadly. In line with the above, and acknowledging the challenges posed by the rapid growth of the sports market, as well as the ambiguities in defining its segments and participants, the potential of IMC can be grouped into the following categories:

- ATL (Above the Line) (Quebra et al., 2013),
- BTL (Below the Line) (Quebra et al., 2013),
- Digital solutions (Rehman et al., 2022),
- Public relations (Naumovska & Blazeska, 2016),
- Point of sale (Westerbeek & Shilbury, 1999),
- Corporate social responsibility (Camilleri, 2017),
- Branding (Milovanović et al., 2018),
- Relationship marketing (Hutton, 1996),
- Employees (Ferdous, 2008), and
- Pricing (Villarejo-Ramos & Sánchez-Franco, 2005).

ATL and BTL activities utilize a group of techniques that, in previous publications, have been discussed within the promotion framework as an element of the marketing mix. These techniques include advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, publicity, sponsorship, exhibitions, and trade shows, except public relations, which we list separately among the potentials of IMC in the sports market. Of the mentioned techniques, those that use mass media to target a larger audience fall under ATL. At the same time, BTL utilizes the point of sale as the promotional infrastructure aimed at smaller groups or individuals. The media employed by ATL include TV, radio, print, and the internet.

In contrast, BTL utilizes the point of sale for sports value, exhibitions, trade shows, email marketing, personal selling techniques, direct marketing, and more. ATL primarily focuses on attracting new value consumers, that is, informing and persuading them in line with the general objectives of promotion. In this context, this IMC potential raises brand awareness and enhances brand image. On the other hand, BTL is focused on individuals with the goal of enhancing sales. A newer term that correlates with ATL and BTL is TTL promotion (Through Line Marketing), which combines these two approaches (Bozhkova & Timokhina, 2014; Šehović et al., 2014).

The mentioned potentials of IMC in the sports market overlap in their scope of activity, which is expected given the various situations in which they are applied, as well as their multiple roles in market communication. Digital potentials can be viewed in the context of applying all the IMC mentioned above elements. However, they are singled out due to their increasing importance, the potential of new communication infrastructures they offer, and the value they create when modifying existing ones due to

their application in the online environment. The progressive growth in the use of digital networks highlights their power in communicating with the global sports market, and its participants are recognizing this. There are numerous examples of the use of networks not only for the commercial branding of athletes but also among all other participants in both the primary and secondary segments. Sports organizations organize events that must also have a digital presence. All sports entities are active in the online environment, at least with one social media account, and participants in the secondary segment align their business operations with digital development trends. Additionally, as an entirely new market, esports is entirely based on new technologies, to the extent that it would not be able to function without them, and all aspects of its communication activities are conducted in the context of digital communications. Naturally, there are also examples of partnerships realized in a traditional environment through promotional campaigns by some companies in collaboration with well-known esports players.

The capacity of public relations today primarily lies in social media (Boyle & Haynes, 2014). Public relations, which are a technique of mass communication (McCoy & Hargie, 2003), are also realized based on digital potentials, and sports organizations and athletes specifically use these two resources to communicate with the broader public more effectively than other participants, both in the secondary market and beyond. The significance of public relations as an IMC potential and an independent tool (as will be further explained) is that this resource is the only one that can assist in crisis situations. The solution to bad publicity, often resulting from unethical or even illegal activities of individual sports personalities, lies solely in public relations. Of course, any investment in good public relations before a situation causing bad publicity arises is valuable, while failing to respond to bad news in today's digital environment can undoubtedly lead to the deterioration of an athlete's image and the destruction of their career. Therefore, public relations in crises are a priority resource and the only one that can provide concrete results at the given moment.

Additionally, the importance of public relations is also evident when discussing sponsorships, as sponsorship is one way of realizing public relations. However, this importance is more pronounced "on the other side" in the literature on corporate sponsorship objectives; sponsorship is often viewed as a significant public relations tool. When discussing entities on the sponsored side, it is desirable to be compatible with the values that the sponsor promotes, which are often sought in social responsibility. In such cases, sponsorship brings an additional effect on the public relations of the sponsored side. However, the greatest potential of PR, and the reason it is highlighted in the IMC set, remains its contribution to resolving crises. Research indicates a positive correlation between publicity, sponsorship, and brand value (Tufail et al., 2014). "The practice of public relations in sports is not always evident, but it has much to offer in

the modern sports business" (Hopwood, 2005). As in other markets, in the sports market, "public relations represent a management function tasked with establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics that surround it and upon whom its success or failure depends" (Katlip et al. 2006; Kos Kavran et al., 2020). However, public relations play a much broader role in the sports market than in other markets (Summers & Johnson Morgan, 2008).

Public relations in the context of sporting events are often conducted at the event location or within sports organizations, underscoring the venue's importance for promotional purposes. This venue could be the press box where journalists are located during a sporting event or the press conference room within a sports organization. Ensuring adequate conditions for the media in these instances is crucial for generating good publicity or addressing bad publicity. Naturally, the nature of the news plays the primary role, but all other factors are directly influenced by the location where the news is being communicated. However, the venue in this context does not have sufficient capacity for positioning within the set of IMC potentials unless we also consider the situations involving the audience at the event location and the conditions under which they experience the event. For instance, the location of a well-executed event can be utilized by certain brands as a site for their promotion through activities that create the perception among the audience that the brand is one of the sponsors, even if that is not the case. Nike is well-known for this strategy, and such occurrences are called ambush marketing. While these activities may result from creativity, they pose problems for existing sponsors and sponsorship sellers, leading to the development of innovative solutions to prevent them, such as the presence of "sponsorship police" at the event location and other measures. Therefore, preventing the exploitation of the event location to promote a non-sponsor brand represents a risk for the organizer and official sponsors. This highlights the significance of the venue for IMC, even though such situations are contrary to the logic of leveraging all other potentials, as in this case, the focus is on preventing the use of resources. On the other hand, the venue's potential is explained through the creation of conditions for the uninterrupted following of the event, both for the media and the audience. Additionally, the venue as a marketing potential has long been a topic in various publications, emphasizing the importance of organizing the point of sale for sports services, such as fitness centres, or the significance of arranging the sale of sports products in retail stores, and through this, the importance of employees as well.

Compatible with public relations and the venue as IMC potentials is corporate social responsibility (CSR), given that public relations serve as a means to inform the public about socially responsible activities. In contrast, the event location that serves a socially responsible purpose in any way is a promotional potential. Of course, CSR can be realized in ways that do not involve a physical location, but when it does, the event venue will be

arranged in a way that communicates with the audience, promoting the theme, brands, participants, and the event itself. Socially responsible engagements by athletes like Novak Djokovic through his foundation, sports organizations like FC Barcelona through their youth academy La Masia, and other participants in the secondary sports market, such as Adidas with its production of sneakers from recycled plastic waste or Les Mills through its support for building wells in Africa with the Workout for Water program, are highly present in the global sports market. This results in a significant communication potential that can be positioned within IMC. The importance of the CSR concept is growing due to the increasingly active role of consumers in these activities and their expectations that brand providers also behave responsibly (Jotanović et al., 2017).

Socially responsible activities contribute to raising brand awareness (Ratković et al., 2022a). A brand is created in the market and "communicates" with the market. A sports brand like the well-known Nike or Adidas conveys its identity and image through its logo alone. When part of a campaign aimed at boosting its sales or in partnership with another brand, its recognizability extends to every activity within that process, creating a narrative through publicity. Athletes as brands are not only valuable products but also promoters, advertisers, and partners in the communication strategy with the target market. Managing athletes as brands is a sensitive task from the perspective of IMC, as they are "living" products susceptible to mood changes and sometimes incidents that can escalate into scandals and inevitably result in bad publicity. Therefore, in addition to the athlete's value and popularity, their personal characteristics must also be considered when selecting them as the face of a promotion.

In establishing partnerships in the sports market, such as between an athlete and a sponsor, a particularly prominent characteristic is also a goal of the modern marketing concept: a good and long-term relationship. These types of relationships correlate with the nature of sports activities within a team, where each individual strives to contribute to a common goal. This principle also applies to other types of relationships in the sports market, which are built on the relationships between sports value providers and users, participants in the value delivery chain, the public and sports actors, and employees in the sports market and their superiors. These relationships can be viewed as relationship marketing (Ratković et al., 2011), aiming to achieve the most positive effects based on participant cooperation (Ratković et al., 2014). A significant portion of these positive effects lies in promotion, and much of the success in achieving positive publicity depends on effectively managed communication. Therefore, the key to maximizing the effects of cooperation between the participants, as mentioned earlier in the sports industry, is effectively managed communication, with the expected communication effects manifesting as positive publicity that enhances the image of the sports entity, making it more attractive for future collaborations. The results of well-managed relationship marketing should not be overlooked within IMC, both in the

sports market and beyond, given the growing trend of partnerships, even though the benefits derived from publicity due to their collaboration may not be direct.

One of the four types of relationships we consider in the context of relationship marketing as a contribution to IMC is the relationship between employees and their superiors. This relationship creates a satisfied or dissatisfied employee who will speak about their employer or the brand (Ratković et al., 2012). They will first share their impressions with customers, followed by the broader environment. In the case of service sales, where the employee is highly involved in value creation and delivery, such as in fitness training, they have a direct and greater influence than any other information channel during the purchasing process. This understanding should prompt several questions, starting from the value that employees represent for the organization to how they can be leveraged to promote the brand of the employer for whom they work. Their communication potential always exists but is greatest when the employee is selling a sports service and can spend more time with the customer, as in the mentioned case of a fitness club. Aligning employee communication with the environment is especially important in crises. Nike has developed a protocol for crises, where one of the first critical activities in crisis management is informing employees about the nature of the crisis to prevent rumors. The concept in marketing that focuses on employee satisfaction is called internal marketing (Raletic-Jotanovic et al., 2015; Ratković, 2009).

Price is the last-mentioned potential of IMC, and it can be said that it is equally present in other markets. Price adds value to a product by positioning it as a brand or a luxury item, and price is the basis of promotion when it comes to sales. Price management, which is directly implemented for promotional purposes, falls under sales promotion, one of the promotional elements. The ticket price determines the location for viewing a sporting event and the special treatment of the audience, which often includes public figures who are also conscious of their image. Many factors that may seem unrelated to the price contribute to formulating a football player's transfer fee. However, they undoubtedly add to the promotional potential of the club the player is joining. His image, charisma, and personal traits will increase his value as a transfer asset, which is desirable in the promotion process when the athlete is the face of the campaign. As such, he becomes a promoter of his club and its sponsors.

Conclusion

The dilemmas and challenges that arise from the sports market stem from multiple sources. The first is the unclear delineation of its segments and participants. In this paper, the sports market is viewed through its primary and secondary parts, with athletes, sports organizations, sponsors, and specialized sports media participating in the pri-

mary part, and all manufacturers and sellers of sports equipment, clothing, and footwear, as well as service providers, in the secondary part. The rapid growth of the overall market has led to the creation of some new segments that were irrelevant in this analysis. However, from the participants' perspective, it can be said that they are present in both the primary and secondary parts, such as esports, given that the realization of this sport integrates technologies, with players being in the first segment and manufacturers of this equipment in the second.

The second set of questions related to identifying IMC potential, which can also be viewed partly as a misconception, is the misunderstanding of the terms marketing, promotion, and public relations. These key terms are fundamental resources from which the potential of IMC arises, and their understanding is essential for any further market communication activities. This paper explains that promotion is not marketing and that marketing, in addition to other elements of the mix to which promotion belongs, also includes certain processes such as research and segmentation. Additionally, public relations are sometimes viewed in certain analyses as an element of the promotional mix, which in a way diminishes the value of this resource, given that in crises, which are abundant in the primary sports market, they are often the priority and, at times, the only means of resolving bad publicity. There is also the dilemma regarding the overlap between the terms public relations and publicity, concluding that publicity is both a cause and a consequence of public relations, with the cause often having a negative nature and the consequence usually being positive. Furthermore, publicity can be caused by any other activity from the marketing mix or other business activities.

After specifying the foundation from which the potentials of IMC in the sports market are identified, it is concluded that there are more potentials than in other markets due to the specific characteristics that sports, as the key activity of its primary segment, possess. Without delving into the specifics of presenting an athlete as a brand and thus their communication and promotional potentials, ATL and BTL were identified, as well as digital communications, public relations, and the point of sale, just like in other markets. However, in addition to these, in the context of IMC on the sports market, employees, social responsibility, brand, and price are also important, as all of these communicate with the market and can be managed to coordinate and synchronize the overall communication effect.

Public relations have been analyzed the most out of all the mentioned elements, given their importance in the crises, while the elements of the promotional mix have been categorized into IMC's ATL and BTL potentials. In this way, the answer to the research question regarding IMC's potential in the sports market has been completed.

The practical implications of this paper exist despite its theoretical nature, but they are, therefore, indirect. This means that the information presented in this paper will

be confirmed through practical application. However, a prerequisite for their effectiveness is the clarification of terms and their proper understanding to define the potential of IMC. Which of these potentials will be relevant in a particular case depends on the specific circumstances, and the analysis of case studies on this topic is left for future research.

From the above, the key limitation is also clear, which is the theoretical nature of the analysis, even though a certain number of examples were used to illustrate the points made. Additionally, the topic is presented broadly, so a deeper analysis of the added potentials of IMC cannot be expected. However, this does not mean such analysis is unnecessary or will not be conducted in the future. This does not diminish the theoretical contribution or the importance of understanding the basis of IMC potentials, which has been clearly emphasized. Therefore, challenges related to this topic still exist. However, they now lie in the analysis of case studies and the research of the combined effects of applying the identified IMC potentials in the practice of the sports market. As for the dilemmas regarding the understanding and distinction of terms essential for defining the basis of IMC research, it can be considered that they have been clarified through this analysis.

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