

Sponsorship Communication in Poland During the Football World Cup in 2018

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ABSTRACT

The article contains an analysis of the communication of companies related to the FIFA World Cup Russia 2018. **Scientific objective:** To define the most common motives, emotions reached by sponsors and advertisers in Poland and the influence of sponsoring communication on fans. **Research methods:** Quantitative research of sports sponsors in Poland, qualitative research of people who have been active in sport and sports sponsorship for many years, as well as own analysis of communication of selected brands. **Results and conclusions:** Poles do not know the sponsors of the most important for them and the most popular national teams. The reason for this is e.g. schematic communication of companies, which for many years has been based on similar and predictable creative concepts, common patterns that do not give rise to much emotion and do not captivate fans. That is why the 2018 World Cup was a time of wasted opportunities to reach fans and distance the competition. The marketing potential of the football team has not been sufficiently exploited. **Research value:** A picture of the sponsorship communication of companies and its reception by fans at the biggest football event in the world.

KEY WORDS

advertising, communication, football, football world championships, sports sponsorship



The World Cup in football is not only a sport competition, but also an advertising and sponsorship clash. What is more, it is believed that the latter is not only tighter, but even more important than the football games themselves (Marketing Charts, 2018). At the World Cup in Russia in 2018, 32 teams fought on the fields, and besides them, hundreds of sponsors of national teams and World Cup itself. They have to face an indefinite number of companies with no rights and acting on the borderline of ambush marketing and struggling for the perception of viewers (Datko, 2012, pp. 475–476; Gualti, 2016; Mikołajczyk, 2009, pp. 244–245). Brand recognition is a first step to the hearts and minds of fans who have a better opinion about sponsors and at least declare that they are more willing to buy their products (World Football Report, 2018).

The article is an analysis of selected forms of advertising communication of companies that actively competed on the occasion of World Cup 2018, referring to the football theme. The analysis of sponsoring communication will include the most common themes on which both sponsors and brands with no rights base their campaigns. This will be combined with the effects of communication activities, one of the measures of effectiveness is recognition of brands as sponsors of championships or national teams. Also sponsorship goals will also be presented, which companies declare in Poland and abroad as well as experts' and theoreticians' opinion in this matter. The article will also present the role of football and football world cup in the world of sport as well as the main categories of market players and the rights they have.

The aim of the article is to define the most common motives and emotions used by sponsors and advertisers in Poland on the occasion of the football World Cup and what means of expression they use in communication and what characters they use in their advertising campaigns, and how their communication affects fans. The author also puts forward the thesis that the 2018 World Cup was a time of wasted opportunity to be recognised among fans, and the communication of most companies was based on the same schemes. Among other things, for this reason, both the recognition of the sponsors of the most popular representation in Poland and the World Cup itself is at a very low level.

The author used own quantitative research on sport sponsors in Poland conducted in the second half of 2017 (Kończak, 2018), in which 35 companies from among the biggest sponsors of Polish sport took part. It was supplemented by qualitative research (Kończak, 2018) conducted by the author at the turn of 2017 and 2018 – *Komunikacja sponsoringowa i trendy w sponsoringu*¹ [Sponsorship communication and sponsoring trends]. It took place in the form of ten interviews with experts who for many years have been active not only in Polish sport, but also have long connections with sports sponsorship and other business aspects of sport. The author also carried out an analysis of selected brands that most intensively communicated in Poland their relations

¹ Author's own research *Komunikacja sponsoringowa i trendy w sponsoringu*. Completed at the turn of 2017 and 2018. The study included: Andrzej Kraśnicki, president of the Polish Olympic Committee; Robert Korzeniowski, a multiple Olympic champion, world and European champion in racewalking; Michał Listkiewicz, the former president of the Polish Football Association; Andrzej Placzyński, CEO of Lagardere Sports Poland; Przemysław Sypniewski, CEO of Poczta Polska S.A.; Szymon Dobrzyński, the owner of a sports marketing agency Xbrand Sponsorship; Dariusz Pućka, marketing director of Polish Basketball Association and Polska Liga Koszykówki S.A.; Tomasz Cieślak, owner of Between Sports; Piotr Pietrzak, a former marketing director of Nike Poland and the founder and CEO of Polish branch of Havas Sports & Entertainment; Michał Gradzik, managing partner in Sponsorship Insight. The survey was conducted in the form of interviews on sponsorship communication and the sponsoring market.

with the Polish football team and the World Cup itself. They were not only sponsors of the event or national team, but also companies with no rights but acting on the borderline of ambush marketing. Own research has been supplemented by the analysis of sports sponsorship literature and juxtaposed with business reports and research of other sponsors, regarding the purposes of sponsorship and recognition. The whole was supplemented with reports and research related to the World Cup in 2018 and industry netography, which regularly reports the relationship between the event and sponsorship.

Sports sponsorship goals

Sponsorship is today primarily a marketing and communication tool (Bruhn, 1986; Datko 2012, pp. 33–41; Knecht, 2002; Wojcik, 2009;). Cornelissen (2010, p. 50) places it as one of the areas of corporate communication. Sports sponsorship is rarely seen exclusively as the sponsor's logotype exhibition. In practice, it includes a number of communication activities supporting both the sponsor's brand and its products and services. Among the company's goals, most often implemented by sponsorship, they declare the building of brand recognition and its image, as well as the promotion of products and services, sales support, corporate social responsibility and the construction of emotional relations with stakeholders. Similar goals result from both Polish research (Havas Sports, 2017; Kończak, 2017; Sport Win, 2011) and international research (IEG, 2013 and 2017). Experts with many years of experience in sports sponsorship also agree with companies' declarations.

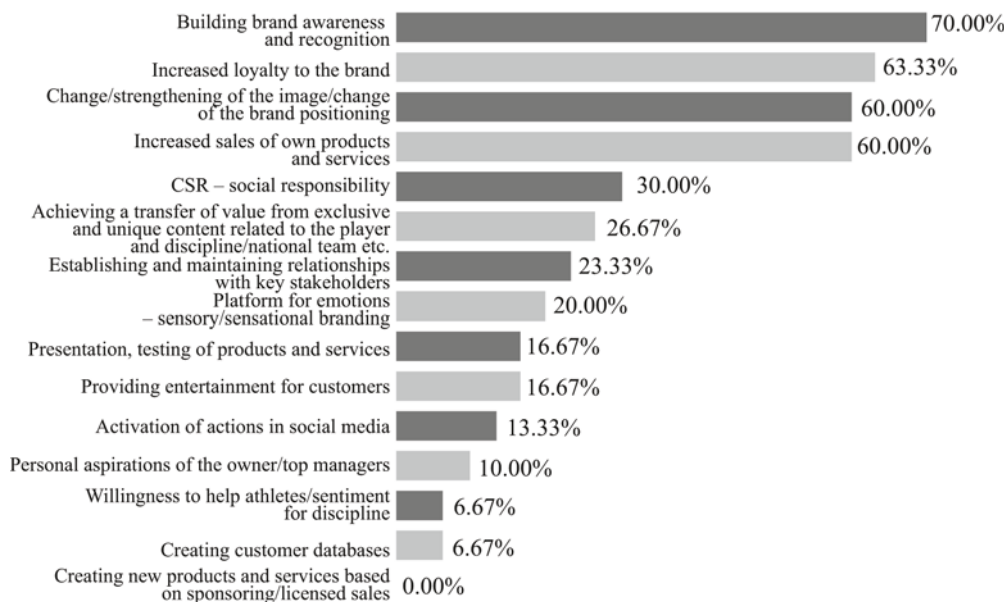


Chart 1. Goals of sponsoring activities according to sponsors in Poland*

Source: own study, *Sponsoring sportu i komunikacja sponsoringowa w Polsce – 2017* [Sports sponsorship and sponsoring communication in Poland – 2017], Warszawa 2017; *the choice of max. five answers (N = 35)²

² 35 companies from among the largest sponsors of Polish sport took part in the survey.

Different theoretical goals are also noticed by the theoreticians. Amis (1999) includes those related to increasing the brand's, company's and its products' recognition as well as changing their image and reputation. Gratton and Taylor (2000), in turn, point to building brand awareness/recognition, creating its image, supporting product sales and building relationships. However, Dolphin (2003) identifies eight goals: boosting sales, increasing brand awareness, improving the image, corporate reputation, changing public perception, building relationships, creating friendliness and increasing employee motivation. Jobber (2007) defines the main goals of sponsorship activities as follows: chance to gain publicity through the popularity and media of sport, creating promotional opportunities, supporting the brand and transferring positive associations from the sponsored to the sponsor, improving relations between social groups considered in the context of corporate social responsibility and ensuring entertainment for stakeholders. There are eleven goals in a different typology, and they include: sales goals, presentation of unique product features, creation of competitive advantage by association or exclusiveness, changing or strengthening public perception of the brand, identifying the company with individual market segments, increasing brand awareness in society, building good will among decision makers, creating company involvement in the community, generating media benefits, gaining unique opportunities to provide entertainment or hospitality, as well as securing rights (Mullin, William, Stephen, & Sutton, 2007). Andreff and Szymański (2006) see this differently, distinguishing two groups of goals: direct, where the sponsor expects quick changes in customer behaviour, and indirect, which aim to increase brand and product recognition, increase sales in long terms and establish and maintain relationships with selected stakeholder groups. Among Polish researchers, Sporek (2007) indicates main categories of goals as those related to building of the image, increasing loyalty, motivating employees and their relationship with the environment, enabling to reach customers and the area related to broadly understood corporate social responsibility. Datko (2012, p. 301) describes image-related, communication, sales and personal goals.

Football – the most attractive sports discipline for sponsorship

The number of people watching football matches is estimated to be 4 billion in the world (The Most Popular Sports in the World), and the World Cup alone has 3.5 billion viewers (New Perspectives...). Football dominates not only in terms of the number of viewers of broadcasts on television, but also (taking into account the presence in traditional and social media) engagement of both genders, availability worldwide and the number and value of sponsorship contracts (25 World's Most...). What is more, it also records the highest increases in sponsorship contracts (Commercial Trends..., 2016). Just like in the world, also in Poland football is the most popular, the most media-covered sports discipline, considered the best for sponsorship and the most often sponsored (Kończak, 2018; MMA trzecim..., 2017; Sponsoring Insight..., 2017).

Among the most important events in the world football calendar, both in clubs and national teams, the most important event is the Football World Cup (The 11 Best Soccer/Football Events Around the World), which is also the most viewed among all sports events on World (10 Most-Watched Sport...).

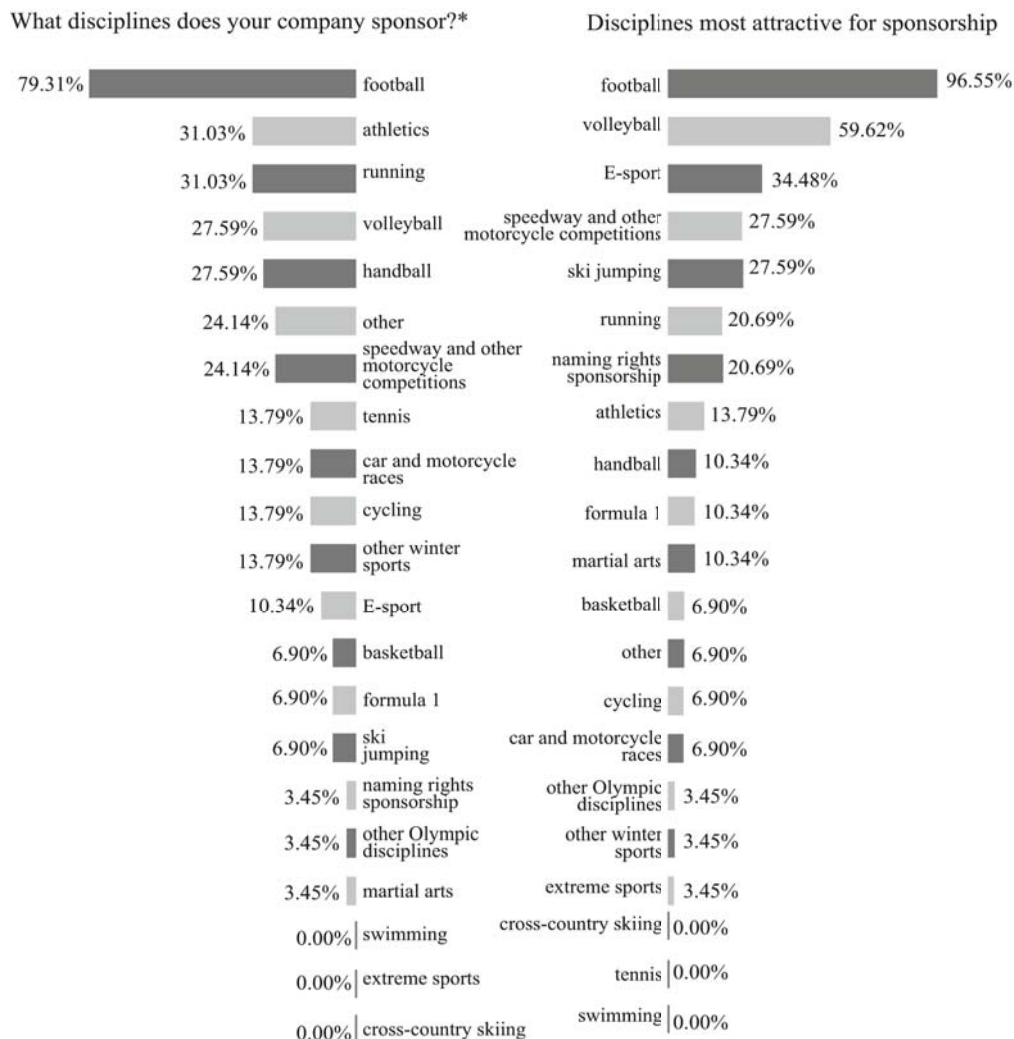


Chart 2. The most popular and most sponsored sports in Poland

Source: own study, *Sponsoring sportu i komunikacja sponsoringowa w Polsce – 2017* [Sports sponsorship and sponsoring communication in Poland – 2017], Warszawa 2017 (N = 35)³

Participants of the market game during the Russia 2018 World Cup

The last football World Cup took place in Russia in June and July 2018. In addition to the players and 32 national teams, the attention was paid to the sponsors of the cup, sponsors of individual teams, as well as companies unrelated to sponsorship contracts and using football themes in their communication. The marketing aspect, according to many, has become more important than the spirit of the rivalry or the essence of the competition on the field. According to

³ 35 companies from among the largest sponsors of Polish sport took part in the survey

Marketing Charts (2018), as many as three-quarters of respondents believe that during the World Cup more marketing aspects than football is important. Fierce competition of brands for the viewers' attention is evidenced by the very estimated number of entities with sponsorship rights. Assuming that each of the national teams has several to a dozen sponsors and partners in their country, several hundred companies communicate their links with the World Cup at one time.

In each country, local sponsors compete primarily with FIFA partners and sponsors of the world cup itself (Table 1), and in 2018 there were 16 of those⁴ (Fifa.com). The sponsors of the World Cup in Russia in 2018 have the advantages in the form of packages of rights purchased from FIFA, among which the most important is the right to use sponsorship titles, the ability to use visual identity of the championships in their communication, including the cup, logotype, mascots, as well as the display of own logos on match bands and other FIFA advertising and information media (including sponsor walls, interview walls, press conferences, exhibitions in Fan Zones, promotional and informational materials). They also gain the right to use in communication and promotion tickets and VIP packages, both received under the contracts, as well as purchased from a pool, as well as to organise special accompanying events in cooperation with FIFA. World Cup sponsors also have an exclusive branch in the field of global sponsorship, but in each country they can compete with a company from their industry that is a sponsor of a given national team.

Table 1. 2018 World Cup sponsors

FIFA partners	Adidas, Coca-Cola, Wanda Group, Gazprom, Hyundai-Kia, Qatar Airways, Visa
Global sponsors	Budweiser, McDonald's, Hisense, Mengniu, Vivo
National sponsors (Russia)	Rostelecom, Russian Railways, Alrosa, Alfabank, Living Football FIFA* and FIFA.com*

Source: own study based on 2018, FIFA World Cup Russia, <https://www.fifa.com/worldcup/organisation/partners/>

* National sponsors of Euro 2016 have rights only in the country of the organiser of the cup, i.e. Russia in this case.

In Poland, the sponsors of the Polish national team competed primarily with global sponsors (Table 2), and owned, among others, rights to the titles and the sign of the Polish football federation, the right to use images of the national team, advertising rights on the clothes (not applicable to matches), advertising rights, among others for matches except for the 2018 World Cup and the right to buy tickets, but without using them to promote products and services.

Table 2. Sponsors of the Polish national team during the 2018 World Cup

Main sponsor	Lotos
Official equipment supplier	Nike
Official sponsor	Biedronka, Alior Bank, Leroy Merlin, Ustronianka, Cinkciarz
Official partner	99rent, Wiśniowski, Blachotrapez, STS Zakłady Bukmacherskie, Fakro, Oshee, Vistula

Source: own study based on www.pzpn.pl and corporate websites of sponsors and partners of PZPN

⁴ The own brands of the world football federation have not been included here: Living Football FIFA* and FIFA.com. They are the monopolistic brands of the event organiser and according to the author there is no question of any direct or indirect competition from any other product or corporate brand.

Sponsors of the World Cup and sponsors of the national team, both in Poland and in other countries, were competed by the largest group of companies, which, similarly to other football events, without any rights and no formal sponsorship relationships, conducted communication suggesting their relationship, among others with the World Cup itself, with football, players, stadiums, fans and their emotions (Kończak, 2016). The phenomenon called ambush marketing is, however, difficult to define and to prove, especially that legislation in this area is not uniform (Mikołajczyk, 2009).

Football communication of brands in Poland during the 2018 World Cup

A typical element of communication before every football cup are numerous competitions and lotteries in which one can win tickets, VIP packages, and event travel packages. Among others, Coca-Cola, Visa, Carrefour, Hyundai and Kia carried out such communication. In theory, this is a unique element of communication as only world cup sponsors have the rights to take such actions. In practice, before the last World Cup, thanks to the possibility of winning a trip to Russia, non-sponsoring entities also promoted themselves: Totolotek (Wacław, 2018) and LV Bet (Kręcina, 2018). This is not the first such situation, since in 2004 similar activities were conducted by Telekomunikacja Polska S.A., having no rights to the event.

Just like during the previous World Cup, most brands in Poland used national and football values, various lotteries and promotions supporting sales as well as people directly or indirectly connected with the national football team. These themes are much safer to use than tickets, as it is relatively easy to get into customers' awareness with communication, having no rights to the event or national team, without exposing to possible legal consequences on the part of FIFA. It is enough to be creative and to build relationships with the World Cup through a sense of pride, being Polish, unity, rivalry, emotions, love of football etc. Building relationships with such a multidimensional event, which is the most important football event in the world (Most Valuable...) can be done at many different levels today, and modern ambush marketing is focused on balancing on the border of the law and so far in Poland there have been no loud court proceedings associated with such activities.

The imagination of the creators of advertising campaigns in the construction of communication around the World Cup in 2018 seems surprisingly similar. One can see a large convergence of activities of sponsors of the World Cup, sponsors of the Polish national team, as well as companies that did not have any rights related to the above-mentioned ones. Brands from each of these groups employed similar visual symbolism, similar associations, often used the same characters to communicate their own relationships with football. The visual communication of companies in Poland was dominated by national colours, most often placed on flags, scarves, T-shirts and other items of clothing, as well as red and white product packaging. All companies preparing football communication specifically for the Polish market used at least one red and white element emphasising national and patriotic associations. The exception was LV Bet ad with Zdzisław Kręcina (long-time secretary general of PZPN) in the main role, where there were no patriotic accents, but rather stylization for don Vito Corleone. For obvious reasons, the red-and-white motives were also missing in the global advertisements of companies such as Pepsi, Kia or Coca-Cola, because as the name suggests, this communication was universal throughout the world. But here also the global brands had geolocalised campaigns using national and even regional accents, such as for example in the Coca-Cola campaign "Ready for excitement" (Polska gotowa na...). The similarity was also evident in the use of football accents in commercials, including pitch, stadium, fans, balls, whistles and choral singing.

Table 3. Ways to communicate relationships with the World Cup, national team and football

Tickets and travel packages for the 2018 World Cup	Coca-Cola, Visa, Carrefour, Hyundai, Kia, Totolotek
Lotteries and direct promotions for fans	Neonet, Lotos, Warka, Harnaś, Biedronka, Lidl, Orlen, Rexona, Carrefour, Hyundai, Kia, Coca-Cola
The use of visual national identification (including national colours, anthem, eagle, etc.)	All brands with communication on the Polish market, with the exception of LV Bet and brands with global communication
The use of visual football identification (fans' outfits, pitch, ball etc.)	All brands communicating with the use of football motifs during the World Cup
Footballers and trainer as faces of the communication	Huawei, Oshee, Head & Shoulders, Warka, 4 Move, Berlinki, Leroy Merlin, Fakro, Samsung, Manta, Venol, Turbo Soccer VR, Turbo Grosik Energy Drink in ads od Żabka and Freshmarket, Lotos, Lays, Pepsi, Rexona, Blachotrapez, Milik
Former players, coaches, activists and sport journalists as faces of the communication	Tyskie, Play, Harnaś, LV BET, Kia, LG
People unrelated to football as faces of the communication	Play

Source: own study

Among the traditional forms of communication of brands before major events there are lotteries and promotions and promises typical of this type of events, especially made by large chain stores, that they will refund part or all of the money spent on selected products. Neonet in 2018 promised to return half of the money for purchased televisions to customers if Polish national team reaches semi-finals (Media Markt carried out a similar campaign before Euro 2016). Rexona in the action "Our boys play, money come back" returned within a specific pool and category of products the entire sum spent on shopping (Nasi grają..., 2018). In Biedronka, on the other hand, it was possible to buy not only fan collections, but also half-price tickets to the Fan Zone at the National Stadium, where fans of the national team were to experience emotions together. Points from Lotos could be exchanged for limited edition T-shirts for fans. The mass promotion was prepared by Warka, who, in the lottery, gave for free 4 million cans of beer and two million red and white scarves signed by Adam Nawalka. It was a direct reference to the action of Tyskie, in which the competitive brewery gave free flags and beer cans at the past World Cup. A consistent campaign promoting its products was conducted by Play, supporting the "eleven champions". After the defeat of the red and white team, the company only focused on products, thus somehow separating itself from the defeated national team in favour of the champion offers of Play.

A relatively new tendency that can be seen in recent years during important football events is the so-called *real-time-marketing* manifested by the rapid response of brands to events. That was also the case during the Russian World Cup, where most of this type of communication activities was spread mainly through social media. "Let's drink for mistakes and other good games;" said Ballantine's after the defeat, Wyborowa presented "Rozchodniaczek", referring to the traditional last shot of vodka for goodbye, and Sobieski vodka reported "the first half without losses", and "Kropka nad i domu" was mockingly summarised by For Bet. This specific advertising discussion after the Poland-Japan game was also joined, among others, by Faktoria Win, Nivea, pizzaportal.pl and Cydr Lubelski (World Cup 2018: top reakcji...). Communication in this area focused on ongoing compassion with the fans, tuning in to their emotions and commenting on reality.

“Faces” of the World Cup in brand communication

A significant part of the brands showing their connections with the World Cup used in their communication recognisable people belonging to three clearly different groups: current players and coach; former players, coaches, presidents and football activists; people who are normally not associated with football. From among the first group, a number of brands opted for Adam Nawalka, coach of the national team (Warka, 4 Move, Berlinki, Leroy Merlin, Fakro, Samsung), who has not been widely advertised so far and was considered a safe choice (Goczał, 2018). Paradoxically, this choice proved to be risky, because the coach was considered one of the main culprits of the defeat in Russia and resigned immediately after the World Cup. This caused gradual muting of communication with the image of the coach. It is possible to put forward the thesis that the brand of Warka achieved the most using the Nawalka’s image, as Warka carried out the first large-scale communication in Poland. Warka launched the campaign with Nawalka before Easter, in March 2018, almost three months before the World Cup, and changed its accents later, and the coach has already been discounted in earlier months.

The person used much less frequently than during Euro 2016 (Kończak, 2016) was Robert Lewandowski, perhaps because the fans were already overly tired, and as much as 37% of fans before the World Cup believed that there is too much of him in advertisements (Goczał, 2018). Just as in 2016, Arkadiusz Milik (Tymbark) and Grzegorz Krychowiak were exposed, in 2018 Kuba Błaszczykowski appeared most often (including in the international Pepsi campaign with football stars - Leo Messi, Marcelo, Toni Kroos, Carla Lloyd, Dele Alli) along with Kamil Grosicki, as well as Kamil Glik. Also in the case of the latter, the choice turned out to be risky, because the player was injured immediately before the World Cup. Injuries are relatively easily predictable and recognised risk-for individual contracts, but in this case, the slogans of brands using a national team’s defender have become risky (Kontuzja Kamila Glika..., 2018). “Only thanks to durability...” ad of Blachotrapez and Rexona’s “Reliable protection...” in combination with the injury showed that neither durability nor reliability can be associated with Glik, which showed some risk in the selection of slogans. A separate reflection that comes when choosing athletes or other people was their combination with products that do not suit them completely. The best example of that is employing old-fashioned Jacek Gmoch to advertise the modern range of LG TVs.

Table 4. The most commonly used faces in the World Cup

Adam Nawalka (national team’s coach)	Warka, 4 Move, Morliny (Berlinki), Leroy Merlin, Fakro, Samsung
Kamil Grosicki (national team player)	Manta, Venol, Turbo Soccer VR, Turbo Grosik Energy Drink in ads of Żabka and Fresh Market
Robert Lewandowski (national team player)	Huawei, Oshee, Head & Shoulders
Kuba Błaszczykowski (national team player)	Lotos, Lays, Pepsi
Kamil Glik (national team player)	Rexona, Blachotrapez
Zbigniew Boniek (president of PZPN)	Tyskie, Play

Source: own study

On the eve of the World Cup, the Poles recognised from the ads Robert Lewandowski (85%), Jakub Błaszczykowski (50%), Adam Nawalka (35%), Zbigniew Boniek (22%), Kamil Glik (20%) and Kamil Grosicki (17%), and only less than one tenth did not associate any player (World Cup 2018: advertisements and gadgets).

The second group of people used in communication campaigns of brands are players, coaches, football activists and journalists associated with football. Zbigniew Boniek, president of PZPN, appeared in Tyskie and Play advertisements, former secretary general of football federation Zdzisław Kręcina advertised bookmaker company LV BET, Tomasz Hajto, former national team player advertised Harnaś, and his teammate Artur Boruc appeared in For Bet ads and Tyskie ads. In the communication of the latter brand, there was also a former national team player, Sebastian Miła, and former coach of the national team, Kazimierz Gmoch, became the face of LG. The campaign of the sponsor of the World Cup, Kia, featured a well-known sports reporter – Tomasz Zimoch.

What is much rarer, there were also non-footballers in football communication around the 2018 World Cup. In this way, Adam Małysz advertised for Play, and artists and celebrities Margaret, Sarsa, Agnieszka Dygant, Kuba Wojewódzki, Karolina Malinowska and Olivier Janiak advertised together with Zbigniew Boniek who gave the ad a football nature.

Recognition of brands related to the World Cup

Before the World Cup, 61% Poles could not identify any brand associated with the event (spontaneous consciousness). The most frequently mentioned were Coca-Cola (13%), Adidas (7%) and Visa (4%), who were sponsors, and Pepsi (5%) and Nike (5%), who were not sponsors (Coca-C, Adidas..., 2018). After the World Cup, only 51% respondents were unable to spontaneously identify at least one brand related to the 2018 World Cup. Adidas (from 7% to 11%) and Visa (from 4% to 8%) gained the most, along with Biedronka (from 3% to 8%) and Lotos (from 1% to 5%) both being sponsors of the national team. In turn, Coca-Cola increased its share by only 1%, but maintained its leading position, and Pepsi, despite the campaign, fell by 1% (World Cup 2018: Marki adidas...). With the prompted brand awareness, Coca-Cola took the highest position (from 50% to 59%), followed by: Adidas, VISA, Nike, McDonald's, Hundai/Kia, Gazprom, Qatar Airways, Wanda, Lotos, Vivo, Budweiser, Mengiu, Hisense, Alior Bank, so mostly brands that had rights to the World Cup and national team. It is worth noticing the high positions of such brands as Wanda, Mengiu, Gazprom or Hisense, whose increases resulted not from advertising communication, but from the frequency of appearing on match bands during the transmission. The frequency of their showing proved to be more effective in building brand awareness than advertising activities.

Considering the spontaneous knowledge of brands related to the Polish national team, it turned out that as much as 65% respondents were unable to identify at least one, and only 8% mentioned Biedronka, 7% indicated Coca-Cola (which became a sponsor after the World Cup, but announced this fact before the event), 4% mentioned Nike and 3% identified the main sponsor of the national team – Lotos (Coca-Cola, Adidas..., MŚ 2018). After the World Cup, the percentage of people who did not know any national team's sponsor dropped to 58%, Biedronka gained 6%, Lotos – 5%, Nike – 1%. Among the companies unrelated to the national team, Tyskie gained profits (from 1% to 3%), but Warka's position did not increase despite the large campaign (3%), and Coca-Cola dropped from 7% to 4%. In the prompted awareness, Biedronka was the leader (from 52% to 59%), followed by Lotos, Ustronianka, Alior Bank, Cinkciarz.pl, Leroy Merlin, Blachotrapez, Fakro, Wiśniowski, STS, Coca-Cola, Nike, Visa, McDonald's, Adidas (MŚ 2018: Marki Adidas...), which shows that Poles often confuse current sponsors with former ones and with World Cup sponsors. The list included four brands that had nothing to do with the team (Coca-Cola, Adidas..., MŚ 2018).

Although the recognition of the sponsor and building the brand awareness is not the only measure of the effectiveness of sponsorship, it is the first step to build more close associations with the event, discipline, fans and their emotions. Nearly as much as 57% people interested in

football think that companies involved in sponsorship are gaining popularity, and 51% prefer the sponsor's product (World Football Report, 2018).

Summary

Since in Poland football is the most popular, the most media-oriented sport discipline, considered the best for sponsorship and in fact the most-sponsored one, our national team is the most valuable football team and the World Cup is the most important event, then why most Poles do not know sponsors? Not only during the World Cup, but long before it, every day, in a significant part of the media, we watched the communication of sponsors of the World Cup, national team and other companies unrelated in terms of the rights. However, spontaneous knowledge of most of them oscillated around several percent, both before and after the World Cup.

The 2018 World Cup seems to be wasted opportunity to appear with own communication among fans. In over twenty years of the history of sports sponsorship in Poland, creative concepts that still dominate are almost identical to each other. They are characterised by white and red colours, patriotic slogans, football gadgets and often excessive exploitation of the same football stars. Common patterns, imitation of activities from past years and promotions and marketing campaigns similar to each other during the events can be perceived as safe for brands, predictable, but do not give birth to the emotions they show; they do not arouse the unity they appeal for and they do not inspire the fans. There are no spectacular campaigns, that would push the brand way ahead the competition. So we have similar levels of recognition of the most-communicating market players, while some paradoxically show decrease in seemingly the most favourable time for them (Pepsi, as World Cup sponsor and Coca-Cola as the sponsor of the national team – although none of these brands had rights at that time).

This may be affected not only by the lack of expressive and original creative concepts, but also by the information noise that is the result of communication of many brands at one time. Just employing celebrities or the best footballers or coaches does not guarantee success in the short term if the fans cannot see something completely new, convincing or if they do not connect the company with football. Therefore, one way to become recognisable is long-term communication of brand sponsorship, consistently building associations with specific emotions, situations, fans, players, teams or cups. The aim is for the fan to find – in the jungle of similar messages, similar visualizations, slogans and characters – a story that is important to him/her, close to his/her views and emotions, and at the same time would be more expressive than the actions of competitors.

In the era of ever greater expenditures on football, more and more new club and national team competitions (for example – the UEFA Nations League debuting in 2018), one can expect an increasing number of companies with packages of rights to a certain sector of the football world and football emotions. This will cause not only a steady, growing number of entities competing in the field of communication, but also a difficulty for fans to find out who sponsor whom and why it is worth to buy some company's products. Already today people are confused in this area, and ambush marketing is known mainly to industry experts. For example, Robert Lewandowski is today a European football star, a Polish national team player, a Bayern Munich player and a private person. Although he is one man, in sponsorship communication he can operate on different levels, cooperate with different brands – as a private person, a club player or a national team player. This may cause some confusion among the fans and provoke a question: which image of Lewandowski deserves their support and which products that he advertises deserve attention, support and should be bought? Sponsors of cups, national teams, clubs, leagues and players competing with these brands have the same problem competing with brands that did not buy any rights, perhaps knowing that their clients will not be able to recognise and remember them.

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