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FACULTY OF ECONOMICS

MASTER'S THESIS

**EFFECT OF ATHLETE SPONSORSHIP ON BRAND EQUITY:
A CASE OF SLOVENIA**

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AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

I believe I was inspired to write a master thesis with the topic of issues of athlete sponsorship in Slovenia and how can athlete actually contribute to the company already long time ago. In my teenage years and early 20s I was a successful athlete, a runner. I am coming from middle class family, so my parents quickly realized they will not be able to give me sufficient amount of money I would need for all the training camps, sports equipment, etc. Consequently, they tried to find another source of money that would cover for all the expenses my sport endeavor devoted and were lucky enough to quickly find the right company. I could continue following chasing my running dreams and got a certain amount of money every month. In my teenage mindset, it seemed quite impossible that this was really happening to me. It was so easy, monthly support seemed like a “free money”. All I had to do in return for all the money was to sew the patch with firm’s logo and name on the club’s track suit and competition uniform. However, at the time I was young enough not to understand that I had a donorship, not a sponsorship contract signed. This explains no obligations I had in return for the money I received monthly.

Anyways, as I am still staying in the sport spheres today and most of my friends are, anyhow, connected with sport being either professional athletes, successful personal trainers or amateur athletes, I realized that athlete sponsorship in Slovenia is too many times not being managed properly. Not only that it is not being managed properly, the public opinion and general perception about it is already wrong. If an athlete is trying to find a sponsor for his or her sport endeavor, he or she too many times run into a closed door. Companies support their behaviour with stating they did not have additional source of money for sponsoring an athlete and are barely supporting themselves. The other very much possible scenario is that the company signs a contract with the athlete but this is where it all ends. Athlete receives money, has no or few obligations in return and the link between the two parties is pretty much concluded.

The current situation in Slovenia is not prosperous; if properly managed, sports sponsorship is absolutely a win-win strategy. Sport is expensive activity and a full-time job, and with sponsorship, athlete can continue with his or her sporting activities. Additionally, companies, can on the other hand gain even more. It doesn’t matter if the talk is about the big company supporting a national or even international athlete celebrity, like Tina Maze or Filip Flisar, or we are talking about the small company who is supporting a local athlete who is not necessarily being popular on the national scale. With sport sponsorship, companies get involved with the public, do something for welfare of community and, if they properly manage sport sponsorship, indirectly interact with the public. These all can lead to the greater brand awareness and positive brand association what absolutely leads to a higher sale. But in order for athlete sponsorship becoming more spread in Slovenia, the general public opinion about it needs to change first.

Sport sponsorship in Slovenia needs to do a step forward, if we want to continue building outstanding sport celebrities. Here, it is not referred only to the sponsoring already nationally or internationally known stars. If we are careful, it is easy to find an article in the media about the professional athlete who got just a little media exposure and is just starting his or her career at the biggest competitions, but is already concluding his or her sports profession because of the money issues, lack of source of the income. Looking at the system broader, there are even more local stars and young talented athletes who did not experience media exposure yet, but are already switching their bright sport future for either schooling or working, because their families simply cannot afford for them to continue sport career. If the sport sponsoring in Slovenia does not change, if the

companies do not see the positive contribution of the athlete, we will, ourselves, work toward losing our greatest national proud and trademark, outstanding athletes.

This is why my purpose is to research if athlete sponsorship can have impact on brand equity and later to provide general information on branding and guidelines on athlete sponsorship that can be beneficial for Slovenian companies. Companies allocate some of their yearly budget to marketing anyways, so why would they not market their products and services through athlete sponsorship. And if companies then decide for sponsorship, they need to carefully prepare for it and understand where the gains of linking with the athlete are hidden. They need to be aware of how sponsorship will affect them, what are their responsibilities and duties and set the goal for the sponsorship. Only then, the sponsorship is not a “thrown away money”. So, my goal is to research and understand the **main issues** of athlete sponsorship in Slovenia, find the **level** our athlete sponsorship is at and **perception** companies and professional athletes have about sponsorship. I will also research where are still possible and potential **improvements** of athlete sponsorship in Slovenia.

Research begins with the overview of branding in general and of brand equity. First part provides information on brand that are crucial for understanding link between the brand and athlete sponsorship described later in the research. Research continues with the part about the athlete sponsorship and advertising. It defines what athlete sponsorship is and provides information on how to build brand through it, how to pick the right athlete, social media effect on it and risk management techniques that can be applied to it. Next part talks about evaluation of athlete sponsorship, halo effect in athlete sponsorship, steps for successful sponsorship and measuring techniques of sponsorship effect. Following is the part about the research itself, research problem, purpose of the study, hypothesis development, description of methodology and, lastly, limitations I encountered through the study. Next chapter are my own survey results and implications. Separately, I introduce findings deriving from the conducted interviews and the ones from the online survey. Interviews’ findings let me into forming three different types of sponsorships, while under the survey results demographic characteristics, general perception about the sponsorship and statistical testing are presented. Part continues with results and discussion of five hypotheses. In the end, implications for managers and implications for future research are suggested.

1 BRANDING

1.1 Overview and History

To fully understand how athlete celebrities can contribute to the positive association when the specific brand is connected to them through sponsorship, one first needs to understand the general terms of branding, brand and brand equity, etc. The nature of the word “brand” lies in the North Germanic language, Old Norse. Old Norse’s word “brandr” means “to burn”, signaling that the owners of livestock made mark in their cattle’s hide for the same reason brands are in use today, for identification (Keller, 2003). Branding is actually a strategy for a particular trademark which public associates exclusively with a business entity (Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014). It is like the statement of ownership which distinguish the good of one producer from those of another one (Keller, 2003). History of branding goes back to the Ancient Greek Times, back to 7th century before Christ. It was a way how tradesmen protected themselves and buyers of their wine and olive oil from inferior imitations by placing a trademark on their Greek pots (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003). It was also an act of building reputation in the eyes of their buyers (Kapferer, 2008).

Until Industrial revolution, majority of trade was primarily dealt on the local scale, by local craftsmen, who usually knew their customers. Soon after, the efficiency of manufacturing and shipping improved dramatically allowing products to be sold further away from where they were actually produced. At that time, brands grew for the same purposes as already in Ancient Greek times, to build and retain trust of the products, when the relationship between the manufacturer and a consumer was no longer personal one. Wertime (2012) states that this brought about a shift from commodities (unbranded goods) and custom ware to the branded goods. With increased trade, growth of the image creation business also appeared.

But, the real concept of branding is actually a recent phenomenon (Wertime, 2002). The period after World War I acted as a birthplace for brands (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003). Advertisement became prevailing and while companies were working on perfecting their assembly lines, new branches of industries grew as well to create and spread mass message that would support the assembly line's products. Brands and the image creation business are therefore connected ever since, as by-products of the consumer society (Wertime, 2012). Consequently, from then on people wanted Ford and not any other motor car anymore as acquisition of brands became a sign of success and development (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003). With the spread of the brands after the World War I, small locally available products spread to a national and international extend. Low-quality, regionally distributed products were replaced by the high-quality mass market (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003). It was then when brand management became accepted practice acting as an addition to sales and marketing departments. The over-abundance of products and brands, development of shopping centers and emergence of television advertising happened pretty much over the night in time of 50s economic boom. People never had so much before and brand management acted as a hope that would reduce confusion introduced with emergence of prosperity. By 1967, 84 percent of a large consumer packaged goods manufactories in the United States already had their own brand managers (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003).

Brand management system still prevails today. But branding got a whole new meaning in the recent years. It is a key marketing mix element to obtain sustainable competitive advantage and to fully utilize available resources (Su & Tong, 2015). It consists of properly managing brand's name, term, sign, symbol, design or combination of couple of them, and not just managing the product itself, like it did in the past. The aim is staying the same: to identify the good and service of one seller, and differentiate them from those of competition. On one side, for consumers, brands must convey trust and certitude. They are time and risk reducers as consumers know what to expect and are in return for quality and functionality prepared to pay premium price (Kapferer, 2008). But on the other hand, for many managers, brands are much more than just a source of information and identification. What information brand provides is different from market to market, and from time to time. Products can provide information about their user's lifestyle, wealth, fashion (examples: cars, clothes and accessories), while others stress the reliability or familiarity (Wertime, 2012).

1.2 Brand definition

“Brand is a set of mental associations, held by consumer, which add to the perceived value of a product or service. These associations should be unique, strong and positive.” (Kapferer, 2008)

Today the potential for brands became limitless as it seems that with a great content behind, anything can be branded. It doesn't matter what industry you are in, branding is always important and provides a competitive advantage (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003). Companies today brand everything, from food, to clothes, shoes, electronics, cigarettes, etc. But with its high presence in everyday life, it is first important to understand what brand actually is (Keller, 2003). Well-

accounted marketing academic, Phillip Kotler, defined a product as anything that could be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a need or want. However, brand goes a step beyond (Keller, 2003). It is everything that makes a product much more than just a product (Kapferer, 2008).

A branded product is having tangible as well as intangible attributes. Its intangible assets are the ones that bring additional advantage to the company (Kapferer, 2008). They add dimensions that differentiate branded product from some other, non-branded product that actually satisfies the same consumers' needs (Keller, 2003). Consumers today do not just buy the brand's name; they buy branded products or service that promise tangible and intangible benefits created by the company. Brands cannot exist without their support. Product or service that carry the brand becomes an embodiment of the brand, through which brand becomes real (Kapferer, 2008).

There are many definitions of a brand. Some recognize importance of brand's rational and tangible assets, related to product's performance of the brand. And the others stress more on the symbolic, emotional and intangible assets that relate to what brand represents (Keller, 2003). Internationally agreed legal definition of brand is: "A sign or set of signs certifying the origin of a product or service and differentiating it from the competition." (Kapferer, 2008). But nowadays it seems that more appropriate definitions would address intangible assets that influence buyers (Kapferer, 2008). Bennett (n.d.) provided two examples of such definitions. First one is: "The intangible sum of a product's attributes: its name, packaging and price, its history, its reputation, and the way it is advertised". The second definition stresses similar attributes of the nowadays brand: "A person's gut feeling about a product, service, or company... It's a person's gut feeling, because in the end the brand is defined by individuals, not by companies, markets, or the so-called general public. Each person creates his or her own version of it." So, brands are driven by and created in the minds of consumers. They are about their hearts. This is exactly what is stressed above with the second and the third definition. Brands are physical as well as psychological. Brands today became a promise and they have to deliver this promise. Selling actually became believing, because the seller has to strongly believe in his selling product. Moreover, people buy the products they believe in and trust will satisfy their needs. So, branding only works, because consumer belief in brand is selling the product (Wertime, 2012). In other words, branding is about getting into people's mind and about what impresses them (Majgaard, 2016).

Expressing the brand is much more than just communication with the consumers and flagging logos and slogans (Majgaard, 2016). Consumer decides on the brand in a millisecond. Consequently, it is on brand management to play on the right attributes of the brand. Even though the primary goal of branding is high conscious awareness, the decision for purchase is not made in consciousness. We are rational beings, so when deciding, we seek for a brand that will satisfy our goals, emotional needs, maximize reward and minimize risk, cost and efforts. At the end, we make a brand influenced decision (Valvis, 2012). So, branding starts when all the needs of consumers are covered, and only afterwards, consumers develop an impression about a particular brand (Majgaard, 2016). With branding, visual and verbal identity of the brand need to be covered. Visual identity such as logo, style and color should be visible on the product, website, selling stand, etc. However, explanation of who company/brand is, what it does, what it wants to achieve and what it is good at are necessary for verbal identity (Majgaard, 2016).

Companies, for example Coca-Cola or McDonalds, work incredibly hard to implement customer's association in their mind through the above mentioned visible and verbal ways of association. For example, McDonalds wants their customers to think of their restaurant as a fun place to be, yellow and red color, McDonalds clown, and their slogan, "I am loving it". These are all association

McDonalds worked hard for, for many years, in order to place its brand among the top ten strongest brands (Rankings). Adamson stated that branding is about signals – the signals people use to determine what brand stands for since these signals later create associations (Bennett, n.d.).

Daily we encounter numerous brands, but keep in mind only the ones that sum all four pillars:

- **Uniqueness.** Brands are different from the other.
- **Relevance.** Brands give what consumer expects. Brands shouldn't overpromise and then under deliver.
- **Esteem.** Brands are trustworthy.
- **Knowledge.** Brands provide all necessary information to consumers.

Consequently, we remember only the brands we love and few brands that possess characteristics mentioned above (Speisser, 2012).

1.3 Brand Personality and Consumer's Self-Concept Connection with the Brand

According to Aaker, brand personality is a powerful component of a brand. It indicates consumer's perception of brand's characteristics and also contributes towards meaningful consumer – brand relationship. Similarly, consumer's self-concept connection with a brand is a dimension expressing **relationship between customer and brand** that indicates level at which brand contributes to consumer's values, goals and identity (Swaminathan, Page, & Gurhan-Canli, 2007). Consumers form strong relationships and loyalty with brands that have the same values and personal associations as they do. So, brands that are congruent with consumers' self-identity and self-concept and have similar personality, lead to favorable brand images, increased sales and enhanced value of brand equity (Su & Tong, 2015).

Benefit of having a strong consumer-brand relationship is mostly seen when brand perception and image are being challenged by a negative information. If, at the turbulent time, when brand is exposed to negative circumstances, consumer is still able to keep brand attitudes and association that were created by personal experience before, his or her relationship with a brand is strong. Relationship strengths can vary a lot and is dependent on the change of consumer's attitude towards the brand, so beliefs and meanings (Swaminathan et al., 2007.). For any company having a brand, it is always important to think about what are their targeted customers actually like and what do they want. Great example of this is what former Apple CEO, Steve Jobs, said when he was asked what market research Apple did before undertaking Ipad. Jobs answered that the best was always to think like a consumer. He stated that no research could be that powerful because it was not consumers' job to know what they want (Valvis, 2012).

1.4 Brand Equity

1.4.1 Constitutes of Brand Equity

In the past companies valued their business in terms of tangible assets (plant, equipment). But recently they came to realization that the real power and value lies outside, in the mind of consumers, in company's brand. This measure is so called brand equity (Kapferer, 2008). **Brand equity is actually the value of the brand.** The official marketing science definition of the brand equity is “the set of associations and behavior on the part of a brand's customers, channel members

and parents' corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it could without the brand name" (Gill & Dawra, 2010).

Gill and Dawra (2010) found out that many researches define the brand differently. Aaker, for example, defines brand equity as "a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers". Contrastingly, Keller defines a brand equity as "the differential effect of the brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand"

From company's point of view, brand equity is about the value brand generates and about the financial worth of it, such as, greater profit, more cash flow and greater market share, etc. From consumer's point of view brand equity reflects brand attitudes based on beliefs about positive product attributes and favorable consequences (Peter & Olson, 2002). It is highly related to **how customers see the brand** as it talks about their view. These attitudes are based on beliefs and meanings and are easily activated in the memory. They build foundation for the consumer-brand relationship which is core of brand equity and one of the most important assets company can own (Peter & Olson, 2002). More of this was already described in section 1.3. However, brand equity also refers to customers' recognition of brand name, mental and emotional association patent, trademarks and channel relationships (Kotler, 2001).

Building brand equity is important part of brand building, because strong brand equity delivers a firm competitive advantage like high brand-name recognition, high awareness, high perceived brand quality, image, strong mental association, consideration, and others (Kotler, 2001). High brand equity levels lead to high consumer preferences, their brand purchase intentions and brand choice behavior. Firms with strong brand (equity) also enjoy better product-market outcomes like brand extensibility and price flexibility (Su & Tong, 2015).

According to Kotler (2001), once companies establish strong brand equity they enjoy:

- Lower marketing costs because of the higher brand awareness and loyalty.
- Higher leverage in bargaining with distributors and retailers.
- Premium price because of the high perceived quality.
- Easier launching of extension because of high credibility.
- Defense against price competition.

Branding is strongly associated with the brand equity, as it is working towards its development, building, managing and measuring. There are many brands for which people have high degree of brand awareness. Bellow those are brands with high degree of brand acceptability, and brands enjoying high degree of brand preference. Only after them are brands that enjoy high level of brand loyalty (Kotler, 2001). So, when one is talking about the **brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality** and **brand association**, he or she refers to the brand equity (Arai et al., 2014). This are all sources of brand equity and attributes customer gains through the consumer decision journey. Aaker, for instance, asserted above mentioned attributes together with the **other proprietary assets as the five factors influencing brand equity** (see Figure 1).

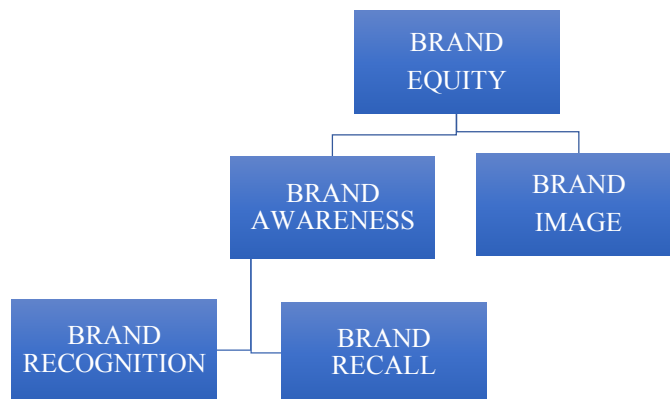
Figure 1. Aaker's Brand Equity Model



Source: adapted after D. Aaker and E. Joachimsthaler, *Brand Leadership*, 2000.

On the other hand, Keller stated constitutes of brand equity differently than Aaker. According to him, brand equity constitutes of brand awareness and brand image depicted in Figure 2 (Gill & Dawra, 2010).

Figure 2. Keller's Brand Equity Model



Source: adapted after K.L. Keller, *Strategic Brand Management*, 2003.

1.4.2 Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is general communication goal for all promotional strategies as not knowing the product, consumer cannot buy it (Peter & Olson, 2002). Brand awareness is often undervalued asset. Marketers need to understand that people like and will buy what is familiar to them (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2008). Keller stated that brand awareness consisted of **brand recognition** performance, consumer's ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when exposed to a brand as a cue, and of **brand recall** performance, consumer's ability to retrieve the brand from memory when exposed to certain product category, needs fulfilled by that category or usage situation (Keller, 2003). For example, a person has to actively seek the brand and retrieve it from the memory, for instance, Alpsko mleko, when he or she is thinking of the milk category, of what to enjoy for breakfast

To build awareness, it is often desirable that company creates a **slogan**, **logos**, and **symbols**. **Characters** and **packaging** can help with the brand recognition as well. So, brand awareness is

built through increasing the familiarity of the brand through constant exposure and strong associations with appropriate product category (Keller, 2003).

1.4.3 Brand Image

Brand image is a “**perception about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in memory**”. To build a strong brand image, companies have to thoroughly think how their marketing strategies can form a strong, favorable and unique association to the brand in the memory of consumers (Keller, 2003). Brand association can be anything that links customers and brand together (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). When using athlete in advertising, associations are influenced when brand becomes linked with an athlete through sponsorship or endorsement (Honglei, Kyung, Yung, Sang, & Siqing, 2015). Whether associations are linked strong enough to the brand depends on consumers' experiences of the brand. The more in depth person think about the product information, like slogan, the stronger his or her association with the brand is (Keller, 2003). Furthermore, if a company is able to put its value proposition and stress its competitive advantage in its slogan, it is well of, because it associates unique and meaningful points of differentiation from the competitor brands. With value proposition in slogan, brand tells consumers why they should buy it and builds strong brand associations (Majgaard, 2016).

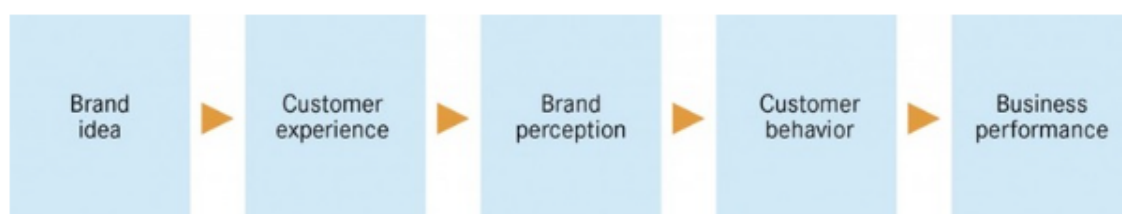
Since brand associations are dependent on the brand attributes and benefits, the strongest associations are made with the personal experience of the brand, or through referrals, word of mouth. Interestingly, as a source of information, company forms the weakest associations through advertising (Keller, 2003). So, it is always important to focus on the needs and wishes of consumers in order to make them satisfied with the product or service.

1.5 Brands and Business Performance

1.5.1 Effect of Brands on Business Performance

As already stated, brands help people decide among constantly increasing choices of products. For example, the number of brands in supermarkets have tripled since 1990, from 15.000 to 45.000. Having its own brand, companies want to make sure that its products or services are the preferred choice in the mind of the targeted audience (Bennett, n.d.).

Figure 3. How Brand Affects Business Performance



Source: A.G. Bennett, *The essentials of branding from The Big Book of Marketing McGraw-Hill*, 2010, n.d.

Business performance always depends on the act of customers, whether they buy the product or service, or not. This is where the brand comes into account. Customer's decision whether to buy a particular product or service is based on their own perception of the brand. Brand will help them differentiate the product or service from the other ones in the category and will determine how relevant product or service actually is to them. Brand perception derives from the customer

experience, and experience from the brand idea. So, companies have to figure out what customers want, need, value, etc., and create a brand its idea reflects and recaps all of it (see Figure 3). **Brand idea** should always state what brand states for and its promises. If brand idea is indistinctive to customers, and their interaction with and perception of the brand are irrelevant, the possibilities that customer's behavior will work towards reflecting positive business performance are low. Consequently, companies have to be careful creating, defining, managing and, later, valuing their brand as it all indirectly affects their bottom line (Bennett, n.d.).

1.5.2 From Brand Awareness to Financial Value

Brands are not founded but are instead created over a time. They have financial value because, over time, brands create assets in mind and hearts of customers. These assets have a profit potential and are mediated by the market strengths.

Brand assets are traits that influence brand's relationship with consumers. They are learnt mental associations affecting customers who get them from direct or vicarious interaction with the brand. Brand strength is evaluation of the current status of the brand. It is brand outcome at a specific point in time, within a specific market and competitive environment. Reflection of brand strength is mostly behavioral, like market share, growth rate, price premium, etc. However, it is brand value what, at the end, firms are interested in. Brand value is projection into the future and ability of brand to deliver profits. Brands have to produce economic value added to have value.

It is seen in Figure 4 that assets, strength and value are conditional consequences, not a direct one. For example, the same brand assets can deliver different brand strengths over time as the market is competitive and is constantly changing. Established assets also have no value for company if firm's commerce is not able to establish sufficient market share and price premium (Kapferer, 2008).

Figure 4. From Awareness to Financial Value



Source: adapted after J.N. Kapferer, *The new strategic brand management*, 2008.

1.5.3 How to Build a Strong Brand Equity?

Brands are a powerful weapon and among the great icons of the twentieth century. Every marketing activity works toward building, managing and exploiting brand equity (Su & Tong, 2015). Its real value is in the ability to generate cash flow. However, it takes time to build a really strong brand. Most of the brands first started because their founders simply just wanted to create a business. After some time, the name of the product or service became a brand and attention moved from the products or service's tangible assets towards its intangible assets. Slowly the values of the products were becoming important and became associated with imagery, intangible benefits and brand personality. Buyers started paying premium prices for branded products and services and with this they actually started purchasing positions in the mind of potential consumers. Brand awareness, image, trust and reputation are all built over years. Either way they are the best guarantee for future profits (Kapferer, 2008).

Any company owning a brand today is for sure working hard toward properly managing its brand equity. Rewards for it are clear, customer loyalty and company profitability (Keller, 2000). Most of the strongest and iconic brands today are American. One of the reason for it lies in geography. American companies had to primarily deal with a big homogenous market, compared to, for instance, European firms, having to deal with spread heterogeneous market (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003). But geography is not the fact supporting American dominance. Only few managers are actually able to assess their brand's strength and weaknesses; many times, they cannot find all the factors they should be considering and can name only few areas they need to work on. If we take a close look at the Table 1, that presents how the strongest three brands in several categories changed from 1923 to 1997 and then to 2015, we quickly realize that only few brands are listed in all three columns.

Table 1. Top Brands in 1923, 1997 and 2015

CATEGORY	1923 LEADERS	1997 LEADERS	2015 LEADERS
Cigarettes	Camel Fatima Pall Mall	Marlboro Winston Newport	Marlboro Newport Camel
Chewing gum	Wrigley Adams	Wrigley's Bubble Yum Bubblicious	Trident Orbit Stride
Motorcycles	Indian Harley –Davidson	Harley – Davidson Honda Kawasaki	Kawasaki BMW Ducati
Peanut butter	Beech –Nut Heinz	Jif Skippy Peter Pan	Jif Skippy Peter Pan
Razors	Gillette Gem Ever Ready	Gillette Bic Schick	Gillette Schick
Soft Drinks	Coca-Cola Cliquot Club Bevo	Coca- Cola Pepsi Dr. Pepper/ Cadbury	Coca- Cola Pepsi Red Bull
Candy	Huyler's Loft Page & Shaw	Hershey M&M/ Mars Nestle	Mars Mindelez International Ferrero
Shoes	Douglas Walkover	Nike Reebok	Nike Adidas Rebook

Source: adapted after K.L. Keller, *Strategic brand management*, 2003.; Ranking, *Interbrand*, n.d.

Many of these brands barely resemble what they originally stood for as they made many changes and were evolving over time. But these are the brands that survived. Contrastingly, the other firms that disappeared from the list lost their market leadership and some even existence. This is not surprising, because leading brands are always more likely to lose their leadership position than retain it. Brands that disappeared from top three in their category did not listen to their customers' needs and were managed by inappropriate actions of their marketers (Keller, 2003).

Referring to all above, one could easily say that branding, or brand management, is, actually, like a science fiction: "Mysterious and subtle art" (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003). It is a very sensitive thing as it needs to be finely balanced between the past and the future. Although the brand can be manipulated for the short run sales results, it still needs to be periodically refreshed. This change has to be small enough to keep its vitality and to still alienate with the loyal customers (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003).

In his article Keller (2000) stated ten managerial actions that can make any brand strong:

- Brand managers understand what the brand means to consumers.
- Brand is able to deliver promises and benefits customers desire.
- Brand stays relevant over the time.
- Brand makes use of and coordinates various marketing activities to build brand equity.
- Company monitors sources of brand equity.
- The brand is given proper support and this support is sustained over the long run.
- The pricing strategy is based on consumer's perception of value.
- The brand is consistent.
- Brand is properly positioned.
- Brand portfolio and hierarchy make sense.

For company's success, brands have to keep trying to understand customers and give them what they need (Speisser, 2012). As a brand manager, you always have to listen to your customers, he or she tells you everything, he or she is the king (Majgaard, 2016).

1.6 Why to Connect Brand with an Athlete

Celebrity endorsement, no matter if star is a singer, athlete, actor or a model, sells products. This is not a new idea in marketing anymore as 14 percent of advertisements in the United States of America (hereinafter: USA) already features celebrities (Carrillat & Astous, 2011). Celebrities are being idolized, so when people see them in advertisements promoting new product, they are encouraged to buy that product (Olenski, 2016). Sponsorship being the largest segment of spending on sport enhances brand image and increases brand loyalty (Honglei et al., 2015). Consequently, athlete celebrities have become a driving vehicles for marketing. Successful branding campaign with athlete influences the probability of buying a brand choice. It also results in consumers being willing to pay premium price, marketing effectiveness and positive word of mouth promotion (Arai et al., 2014).

In the USA, Germany and United Kingdom (hereinafter: UK) one of the preferred methods of advertising is celebrity endorsing a product. In these countries, the focus is on the celebrity him or herself, what reflects one of the five Geert Hofstede cultural dimensions, individualism. USA, Germany and UK are high individualistic societies, opposed to Slovenia being considered as a collectivistic nation (Geert Hofstede, n.d.) This collectivistic attribute is noticed in Slovenia's

advertisements featuring celebrities as well. In collectivist societies, if celebrities are involved, they rarely address the audience explicitly. They play more symbolic role with a purpose of their association with the product and not direct endorsement (Arnould, Price, & Zinkhan, 2004). This is exactly how celebrity advertising in Slovenia works; at the end of the commercial you see a star, but he or she doesn't address the audience explicitly. Recent example of this was advertisement for company Veriga k.f., d.o.o., which was depicting ski star Ilka Štuhec under the Christmas tree wrapping presents. However, with Americanization in Slovenia getting stronger, the role of the athletes in advertising will get more powerful in the future as well. They won't act only as a symbol anymore. They will more and more address the audience directly. This is also because it is a common practice for firms to leverage their brands by linking them to the famous athletes in order to improve their image, awareness, attitude or reputation (Carrillat & Astous, 2011).

Athlete celebrities promoting products or services have become important part of building brand awareness and credibility. Study shows that today we are overexposed to marketing and on average see around 3.000 advertisements across all media per day. The strongest idol attachments are having young people. Consequently, they may repeatedly buy their idol's product because they identify themselves with him or her. People possess motivation to incorporate idols in their self-concept. The more the idol is included in person's identity, the closer the emotional bond (Huang, Lin, & Phau, 2015). Advertisements using celebrity about whom general public already has positive feelings, grabs attention easier than standard ads (Hanks, n.d.). It works just the same as to how brands form relationship with the user and are included in their »self-concept« (topic was explained in section 1.3).

Brand can associate itself with unique personality, someone who brings their own attractiveness and possesses the brand's values. Brand personality here is again important because we form relationships with people, not products. Prototypes of this practice are basketball legend Michael Jordan and golfer Tiger Woods. Where would Nike be today without them (Kapferer, 2008)? Sponsored athletes have influence on the purchase decision of their supporters. In the past, athletes' fans would buy T-shirts, flags, caps and other clothing that would feature their idol and their team. Today, with the emergence of brand ambassadors and athlete sponsorships, athletes can, through previously explained expansion of product awareness, also impact the selling of products outside of the team structure. Examples are food, clothes, perfumes, etc. (Hanks, n.d.).

When company forms bond between its brand and popular name in sport, there is a high possibility the sales will boost dramatically. The effect is even bigger, if people believe athlete celebrity uses branded product or service him or herself (Bradič, 2015). According to the Marketwatch, just one athlete endorsement can result in immediate four percent sale increase. So, it would be foolish for any, small or large, firm not to promote its brand through athlete celebrity influencers (Olenski, 2016). "Celebrity athletes can also help to generate a positive impact on a company's stock return due to the positive perception that the company investment activities in their advertisements generates among investors." (Hughes & Shank, 2005). As soon as the news is made public, brands that link with an athlete can see their stock rise up to 0.25. The rise happens even though the products does not change at all. It is because in the eyes of consumers, being linked with the adored athlete product enjoys higher perceived legitimacy (Hughes & Shank, 2005).

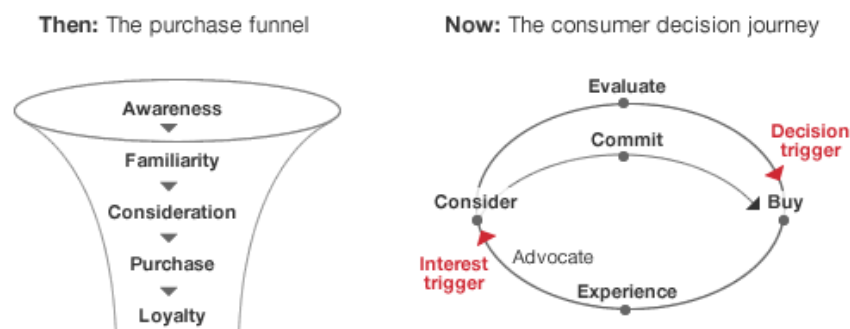
1.7 Athlete's Role Applied to Consumer Funnel and Consumer Model

It is true that different practices work in different cultures, but survey made by market researcher Mintel have found that 22 percent of French people are more likely to sample a product if it is endorsed by a celebrity (Crainer & Dearlove, 2003). Slovenia is very sporty nation. Athletes are

our national pride and we seem to be attracted by anything having to do with sport. Consequently, linkage with athlete can only positively contribute to the brand.

Positive brand equity is developed when customers have high levels of awareness and familiarity with the brand. Here athlete celebrities can have a major culprit, as their link with the company applies to exactly first two steps in the purchase funnel process depicted in Figure 5. Recently, especially online social networks are seen as a benefit for the audience, helping them make important social connections, share information and raise personal self-esteem (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010).

Figure 5. The Purchase Funnel and the Consumer Decision Journey



Source: D. Court, S. Mudler, O.L. Vetvik, *The Consumer Decision Model*, 2009.

To gain customer loyalty, awareness and familiarity are the first two needs brand needs to satisfy in order for consumer to proceed further down the purchase funnel. For example, basketball star LeBron James is having signed contract with Nike which develops LeBron Nike shoes. His fans would be more aware of the brand Nike when buying for the new shoes, because they would be aware of the LeBron- Nike connection and would recall LeBron Nike shoes as their idol is wearing them. Traditionally, consumer would start the purchasing funnel metaphor with awareness of the set of potential brands and methodically reduce that number to make a purchase (Court et al., 2009). However, when there is a link between an athlete and a brand, step of awareness and familiarity are pretty much just skipped. Potential customer starts the purchasing decision what would normally be step three, consideration of buying the product.

Through each stage of the funnel, company's marketers are toughed to »push« their products toward consumers. But last few years, consumers are changing the way they research and buy products. Consumers today contribute to creation of the product; they are actively involved and »pull« information helpful to them. The conversation between company and consumer is, consequently, rather a two-way process what results in the whole decision journey becoming cyclical. As initial consideration of the product is now the first step of purchase decision, marketers need to find new ways to include their brands in that process (Court et al., 2009). Getting potential customers' attention through athletes has become a successful practice. People make their decisions to buy a product related to their initial set of considered products. The more accumulated impressions, exposures to the brand through advertisements, conversation, reports, TV or friends, the greater the chances person will narrow to the product (Court et al., 2009). The more often consumers see, for example, Nike ambassadors, the more willing they will be to reach for a brand Nike when buying for sport shoes. This way, consumers hold strong, positive and unique brand association in the memory.

2 ATHLETE SPONSORSHIP AND ADVERTISING

2.1 Presence of Athlete Sponsorship in Advertising

Companies today are not satisfied with large numbers of impressions their advertisements and content provided by athlete delivers. Their aim is on higher brand awareness, affinity and influenced actions (Weber, n.d.). “Advertisers actually pay for people, they pay for audience, they pay for eyeballs, they pay for attention, they pay for trust, they pay for influence.” (Skid & Hall, 2015). When company sponsors an athlete, success can only happen when the athlete - brand relationship is authentic and reaches targeted audience with the effective message (Weber, n.d.). Impact of sport starts on prospective customers can be extremely effective or extremely ineffective. Today, marketing is becoming more materialistic; firms are turning to celebrities because they need ambassadors (Meden, 2015).

Athletes are not superheroes; they are normal human beings who in the eyes of consumers seem to be more accessible and realistic than some celebrity singers or actors. Since the targeted audience identifies with athletes easier, athletes are also interesting for the marketers. Audience’s identification with the athlete is actually primary goal of any sponsor and leads to higher brand awareness and recall (Meden, 2016). Furthermore, different interests, habits, backgrounds or any other qualities not being connected with sport but athletes possess additionally affects fans’ attention. Conditionally, it also either make or doesn’t make the audience attractive for the brand (Weber, n.d.). The reason why so many companies today get involved in sponsorship lies in the fact they want to have the public see and remember their name. Companies want to use resources wisely since many times sponsorship is smaller expense than the regular type of advertising. Also, firms want targeted audience and general public to think of them as a caring business (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). We live in the world where everyone wants to know about the greater good being created. Social perspective playing a central role, brands need to choose partners that make sense also from philanthropic perspective and not only from content and creative perspective. So, athlete-brand partnership or so called sponsorship has to demonstrate the power of doing well by doing good, which is a mantra of Millennial consumers (Sommer, 2016).

There is no surprise anymore that sport industry has become a big business with projection of further growth. The reason for continuing growth derives from media rights deals, gate revenues, sponsorships and merchandise. Sport business report made in October 2015 by the PricewaterhouseCoopers actually revealed that only in North America sport market would be already worth 73,5 billion dollars by 2019. Roughly 25 percent of these revenues will be coming from sport sponsorship (Heitner, 2015). Also, sport sponsorship is a multi-dollar growing industry and since there are thousands of athletes looking for sponsorship, opportunities for companies are countless (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007).

Despite all the opportunities waiting, sponsorship is in the near future projected to benefit especially from the longer-term deals, higher renewal rates and enhanced inventory yields (Heitner, 2015). Athlete sponsorship has recently not become only more widespread, but also more intense. It became a base for the whole marketing strategy. “Sponsorship-linked marketing” is complementary to sponsor’s own positioning by associating with the athlete (Fahy, Farrelly, & Quester, 2004). With sport popularity and above projections of growth, many companies decide to get involved in athlete sponsorship. But as athlete sponsorship market is more and more saturated, sponsorship investment has to also be carefully managed in order for competitive advantage and sponsorship effectiveness to be achieved (Fahy et al., 2004).

2.2 Athlete Sponsorship

2.2.1 Definition

Athlete sponsorship is a strategic activity with ability to generate sustainable competitive advantage for sponsor in the marketplace (Fahy et al., 2004). Sponsorship could be explained as an exchange of something for something (Carrillat & Astous, 2011). It is a direct attempt by companies to position their brand with the sponsored athlete by having him or her testify on behalf of the company's product or service. By associating with the brand through various channels of mass media and word of mouth marketing, sponsored athlete becomes a brand ambassador (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). It concerns individuals whose athletic abilities are recognized, or are having a potential to be recognized in the future, and who get support from a company to pursue their athletic goals.

In its simplest form, sponsorship occurs when a company financially supports the other party, in our case athlete (Carrillat & Astous, 2011). Sponsored athlete receives either financial or in kind compensations to associate his or her image with the brand. This is true for the professional and world class athletes. Some ambassadors are also personal trainers or non-elite runners who do not get paid. On the other side of this partnership are companies that pay for intellectual rights of outstanding athletes. Once the athlete's rights are obtained, sponsoring firm can relate to the athlete. As a result, its product, service or brand enjoys advertising benefits and publicity (Carrillat & Astous, 2011). Athletes are expected to help their sponsoring companies obtaining their marketing goals of capturing attention, changing or reinforcing brand image, increasing brand loyalty and attractiveness of the product, etc. (Hughes & Shank, 2005). They also contribute towards attaining business objective of increased sales and goodwill of a sponsor (Fortunato, 2013). They do it by putting sponsors logo on their competition uniform, mentioning company in media, etc. (Cosper, n.d.). So, goal of any athlete sponsorship should be mutual, to reach the targeted audience, create exposure for the brand and develop associations by forwarding marketing messages (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007).

It seems to be a misconception that athlete sponsorship is only the point of consideration for big corporations with already reputable brands. This generalization is wrong as company of any size can benefit from having an athlete ambassador. Corporations with big marketing budgets can pursue faster exposure by sponsoring athlete, while small firms with limited budgets can save on marketing costs and labor when being linked to athlete ambassador. In both cases, companies are addressing the audience to make a purchase of their product or service (Cosper, n.d.).

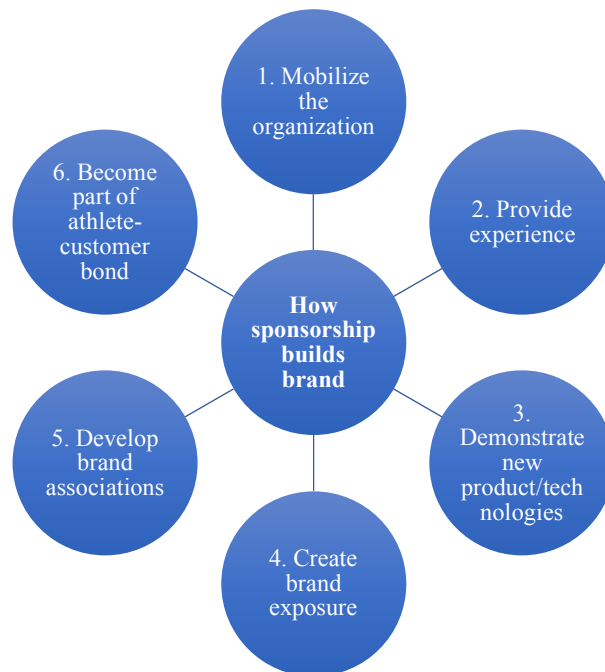
However, with sports popularity and the spread of social media, the word "sponsorship" might not be the right one to use anymore when referring to the connection between the athlete and the brand. Sponsorship evokes a feeling of flatness. Mentioning sponsorship, people think of traditional logos, slogans and exchange of money for impressions. But today sponsorship is much more (Sommer, 2016). With wisely thought strategy, the audience starts to identify themselves with the sponsored athlete and, consequently, to the business's brand. A good brand-athlete partnership coupled with the creative story telling through activation is the way to consumer's hearts, and wallets (Sommer, 2016).

2.2.2 Building Brand Through Sponsorship

Athlete sponsorship has the potential to contribute to the brand building what is further seen in Figure 6. By mobilizing the organization for brand building, employees, business partners and also customers receive benefits deriving from the pride of being associated with that sponsorship. Pride also comes from the link between the sponsorship and their values and lifestyle (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). For example, people working at company Ljubljanske mlekarne felt more excited when their sponsored athlete Ilka Štuhec won downhill race at the 2017 world ski championship.

Taking business customers to the sporting event of the company's sponsored athlete provide customers with additional experience and unique opportunity to develop bond between them, brand and organization. If that sporting event occurs yearly, it is also an incentive for customers to nurture their relationship with the brand and encourages them towards brand loyalty.

Figure 6. Sponsorship as a Brand Builder



Source: adapted after D. Aaker and E. Joachimsthaler, *Brand Leadership*, 2000.

Sponsorship can also contribute to building brand of a new products or technologies. Most commonly companies introduce their newly invention through publicity. Sponsorship can further elevate the value of the published news, since sponsored athlete can demonstrate usage of new product/technology more interestingly and vividly than it is expressed in publicity.

Furthermore, as already mentioned, through sponsored athlete companies achieve brand exposure and develop brand associations what are both dimensions of building a brand. Last but not least, any athlete has a group of their heavy fans. Fans strongly refer themselves with an athlete whose career is part of their lives. Fans' emotions can be an important driver linking them with the athlete. If the audience like the athlete, their positive feelings may get transferred to the brand and vice versa (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). This is how positive image of an athlete, gets transferred to the sponsoring brand and company. Consumer's involvement in sport and athletes absolutely contributes to the brand building and is positively related with sponsorship awareness. The more

the audience is involved in a particular sport and athletes, the more likely they will be exposed to sponsor's messages what will most probably result in higher sponsorship awareness (Walraven, Bijmolt, & Koning, 2014).

Sponsorships today are long-term investments demanding time and effort of sponsor to achieve consumer awareness, recognize and reap its benefits. There is a positive relation between sponsorship duration and sponsorship awareness (Walraven et al., 2014). Sponsorship contract that will be 3 -5 years long will strengthen the brand equity. Often they are expected to be renewed a number of times so that the sponsors can fully enjoy the benefits from a long-term association of athlete and the brand (Fahy et al., 2004). Consumer's brand knowledge is built over a time and this is why brand recall improves after a year, while awareness is measured to be the highest on the second year of sponsorship. In two years, sponsorship awareness reaches basic buildup point that approaches maximum potential. After basic buildup is created, firm can still improve brand's awareness by leveraging the sponsorship and forming higher quality of media exposure (Walraven et al., 2014).

Frequency of company sponsoring an athlete can also effect the brand knowledge. But study found that there is no notable difference in recall levels for sponsors who constantly sponsor an athlete and those that sponsor him or her less frequently. Actually, for repeat sponsors, brand recall levels do not necessary improve and can, in some instances, even decline. However, long-term sponsors seem to be associated with an athlete even after the contract already ends (Walraven et al., 2014). For example, if Žito's tea 1000 Cvet stops sponsoring winter sports, people will still associate it with skiers and ski jumpers. Moreover, study also found that brand awareness improves during the season. For instance, when Tina Maze was still a professional skier, more people associated her with chocolate Milka later in the season it came.

2.2.3 Sponsorship Activation

Activation is a fuel of sponsorship marketing. Successfully negotiated sponsorship contract is only the beginning of cooperation. Activation is a key for successful sponsoring partnership. Activation adds value to the sponsorship contract and the level of its investment determines success of a sponsorship. Since companies file sponsorship as an expense, goal of any sponsorship is reimbursement of the initial investment. But to receive reimbursement, sponsors have to further invest in activation to gain the full impact. Unfortunately, most of the sponsors are not aware of this (Koščak, 2014). Solely sponsorship is only acquiring the rights to be a sponsor and to use the name and image of an athlete while activation uses these acquired rights and integrates them into brand marketing communication strategy (Roy, 2016).

Creativity and imagination of sponsors are the only things that can limit activation. Sponsors receive certain rights from the sponsorship but it is their decision if they will create marketing programs aiming to connect target markets to a sponsorship (Roy, 2016). Possibilities for activation are countless, from sales promotions, additional brand exposure, stadium giveaways, fan experiences at the athlete's competition, online or digital fan interactions, fan contests, in-store-displays, tickets giveaway, tickets from athlete's competition used for discounts, appearances with athlete, product sampling, corporate social responsibility endeavor, ticket discounts for sponsor's employee, etc. (Fortunato, 2013). Sponsors can also activate athletes through promotions, packaging and some special events (Roy, 2016). For good activation, ideas need to be developed in the early stage of the sponsorship negotiation. Activation should already be part of the sponsorship negotiations. Sponsors should already have a vision of how they want to use athletes

to achieve their business goals and not just sign a contract and only then formulate an activation plan (Fortunato, 2013).

However, unfortunately, only few sponsoring companies grasp the full potential of activation. Many do not realize its potential impact. Study interviewing personnel of corporate sponsorship found out that 24 percent of sponsors had no additional money for activation after signing the sponsorship contract (Fortunato, 2013). This is a wrong approach. Sponsorship will not go a long way without activation as this articulates association with the athlete. Sponsorship is purely just a right. It is just like one don't buy a car to have it sit in a garage. He or she would drive with it to enjoy its benefits. This is what activation does, it allows sponsors to enjoy the fruits of sponsorship benefits.

So, spending more on activation than on the rights makes sense. Still, the highest fraction, 58 percent of the sponsors spent only 25 percent of the sponsorship value on the activation (Fortunato, 2013). Consequently, they cannot see the results and their sponsorship goals remain unattained. Without additional money for activation, companies should not undertake the sponsorship investment at first place. Or, they should go for less known and, consequently, cheaper athlete what would leave them money for activation.

There are many opinions about the optimal activation spent. One of its measure is **leverage ratio**. It is comparison of a dollar spent on a sponsorship marketing to the rights fees paid. On average companies spent 1.5 dollar towards activating the sponsorship for every dollar spent on the right fees (Fortunato, 2013). Haxthausen (2010) finds at least three possible scenarios for why activation spent is in general relatively low. One is that companies want to sponsor big sport names and spend most of their budget on rights. The other is that they do not measure activation's return on investment (hereinafter: ROI) and since they do not know what activation does for them, they spent little. The last one is that sponsors adjust their activation levels for optimal sponsorship ROI given the sponsorship objective. The last option is the only one where it makes sense not to spend a lot as activation objective is not on gaining associations, but, for example, on getting partners excited about doing business with the brand by having them interact with the athlete. Unfortunately, this is the case in few scenarios. Too many times low activation spend is driven by budget constraints and inability to measure activation effects. Additionally, studies show that 70 to 80 percent of sponsors don't have specific budget for sponsorship research and 25 to 40 percent don't spent anything on measuring sponsorship effects (Haxthausen, 2010). The last number being so high, it is not surprising that sponsors are unwilling to spend a lot on activation as they don't even know how to measure the value it creates. It would be interesting to see how much Slovenian companies invest for sponsorship research and measuring, but studies like this have not yet been made.

2.3 Sponsored Athlete

2.3.1 Checkpoints for Selecting Sponsored Athlete

In order to reach their marketing goal, firms all around the world see the appeal of athlete and try to establish associations with them (Hughes & Shank, 2005). The key for brand success seem to lie in the decision to connect with the right athlete who later endorses the product or service, somebody that will act as an opinion leader. Appropriate fit between the image of the product and the image of the athlete can significantly increase the positive evaluation of the sponsorship (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007), enhances brand loyalty and customer equity (Honglei et al., 2015). Companies may look for athletes with particular characteristics like their physical appearance, intellectual

capabilities or overall lifestyle, but it is more important that they find an athlete who will be able to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the brand (Bradič, 2015). Relatedness between sponsor and athlete significantly influences attitude towards sponsoring brand and purchase intentions of public. Studies proved that relatedness transfers from athlete to sponsor, sponsor recall, positive consumer attitude toward the sponsor and stronger propensity to purchase the advertised product or service (Honglei et al., 2015).

In section 1.2 is stated that people remember the brand if it is unique, relevant, trustworthy and knowledgeable. Athlete representing the brand has to pretty much possess the same qualities. So, marketers have to carefully study athlete's characteristics to find the right match that will form impressive influence for their brand campaign. Any campaign that will improve the relationship between athlete and his or her fans is also an opportunity for the brand to rise in the eyes of fans (Ways to get more out of sponsored athlete, n.d). But before deciding to get engaged in any athlete sponsorship, marketers need to do a market research with consumers and assess the image of the product, measure the image factors associated with variety of sport activities and only then decide for the athlete that most closely matches the image of the product (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007).

2.3.2 Authenticity

As they enjoy higher levels of trust with people, athletes are way more effective influencers and communicators than brand is (Ways to get more out of sponsored athlete, n.d). No matter star of what level sponsored athlete is, the crucial thing to consider is a natural fit of the athlete with the brand (Weber, n.d.). For a successful partnership, athlete needs to align with the values of the brand. These values which are then shared between company, brand and an athlete are key advantage for building esteem of the company. Study found that opinion leaders, in our case athletes, are most effective when consumers and targeted audience share the same values and attitude (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). The higher the synergy between the brand and an athlete, the better the results and the greater recall of the brand with the athlete's exposure.

Companies can also look at the values of the nation as a whole. Slovenians are big sport fans and patriots, so there is no such thing that would connect the brand with its origin better than the home athlete. Furthermore, the more authentic the relationship is, the more likely the athlete will agree to be part of the campaign. Even athletes confirm they work with the brands they feel aligned to. They are aware that with sponsorship they become ambassadors of that brand and are taking responsibility to present it in the best possible way. This is only possible if the relationship is not fake (Weber, n.d).

Authenticity is definitely the most important characteristics to consider. But when selecting sponsored athlete, companies should also care that he or she will be promoting something his or her fans have interest in. Even a big star cannot help, if he or she cares nothing about a certain product and then once from the sudden makes unauthentic statement about that product: "Go buy this." (Skid & Hall, 2015). That just would not work. If through promotion athlete's fame and adorability are not used accurately towards the potential users, the sponsorship will not bring success. For example, already mentioned basketball star LeBron James would not promote make up, but instead does Nike sporting goods. The same, Slovenian Peter Prevc would hardly promote Zlatarna Celje, but female star, Tina Maze, can much easier. So, for example, if the new Nova KBM's brand, Sveta vladar, is targeting young population, and encourages goal reaching, independency, and taking responsibilities for your life and money, then free skier Filip Flisar is the right pick for them. Flisar greatly possesses these values with his youth and relaxed energy. Yet, he is still having responsible view on the world (Kruhar Gaberšček, 2015).

2.3.3 Audience

Targeted consumers are always the focus of the campaigns, as they will be the one deciding whether to buy a product or service or not. Consequently, companies should not target just everyone with their brands. They should first identify their targeted audience and only then find the athlete that will deliver them a message. Picked athlete must connect with the targeted audience and be recognized by them as well (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007).

Knowing the brand's audience, it is wise to look at the additional characteristics of the athletes and not just at his or her values, interests, etc. Sponsor can look at the geography as well. High percentage of sport star's audience typically lives either near athlete's current home city, past city or current team's city (Weber, n.d.). Consequently, companies should focus on the audience that falls in the above three categories. However, since Slovenia is so small, geography is not a big influence as it seems that, especially, professional athletes are followed and trusted by the whole nation. It is true that internationally known stars, like Tina Maze, do have fans all around the globe, but large part of her fan base still resides in Črna na Koroškem, where she grew up, and Slovenia in general. Because of its smallness, Slovenia is not a case for the above three rules when sponsored athlete is already experiencing media exposure. But when he or she is a local star or a young talent it still does pertain. Small or medium sized local company that sponsor young prospect will start gaining respect of village residents. Since in Slovenian villages news spread around fast, sponsoring news would quickly reach its inhabitants. If local sponsored athlete's competitions are on local rank, company and brand will get even higher local exposure. Residents will know that company is doing something for welfare of their community, will be aware of the company or brand and will create a positive association about it in their minds.

Similarly, geography is a matter of fact also if sponsor is present in foreign market. There you want to have their local athlete as an ambassador. Exemplary company of good practice is Slovenian Elan. Elan believes that the right pick of sponsoring athlete for a particular region and its targeted audience can have greater effect toward goal reaching. They rather use local athlete than someone who enjoys higher media exposure and is, consequently, even more expensive. Therefore, Elan picks different sponsoring athletes separately for each of their 40 individual representative offices. Sponsorships are tied more to the local goals and through the local Elan branch, while the international team of ambassadors is led by Slovenian headquarter (Kruhar Gaberšček, 2015). This is why their ambassadors are ski legend Ingemar Stenmark, Davor Karničar, Glen Plake, etc., while sponsored athletes are from Filip Flisar, Bine Žalohar, etc. for Slovenia to Jules Bonnaire for France and Ben Brosseau for USA (Elan, n.d.).

2.3.4 Gender

Sponsoring company should definitely also consider gender of the athlete and if coincides with the product. However, days of making the difference between male and female athlete accomplishments are over. The difference is in its viewership and media coverage; men's sport has higher viewership, which for sponsors means more brand exposure, and also increased following on social media (Oh, 2017). For example, if a brand were to sponsor ski jumper Ema Klinec, they would not receive the same amount of exposure as if they sponsor her male counterpart Peter Prevc. More spectators and better media coverage also explains why male athletes still earn much more than female athletes (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007).

Even though there is a gender pay gap between male and female athlete sponsorship, marketing focus has recently turned toward female athletes (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). Brands now try to leverage

comparative advantage deriving from sponsoring female athletes compared to male athletes (Oh, 2017). Female athletes spend more time with fans and actually sign autographs what makes them more accessible and personable with consumers. They are also less prone to make negative publicity what means less risk for the sponsor (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007).

What is more, they are gaining advertisers interests because of their strong purchasing power. Female present 70 - 80 percent of consumer purchases (Oh, 2017). Study also found that they could be especially effective when targeting products that relate to their gender. So, it is not surprising that seven out of eight currently sponsored athletes by chocolate Milka are female (Milka, n.d.). This coincides with the product; female are more known to have sweet teeth than men and are more prone to purchase chocolate. Another example pertaining Slovenian company is Zlatarna Celje's partnership with Tina Maze.

So, before signing contract with any athlete, sponsors should think if their primary reason for sponsorship is higher brand exposure (viewership) or brand equity (potent purchasing power of female) (Oh, 2017).

2.4 Social Media Effect on Athlete Sponsorship

Social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, etc., have become a popular way for professional athletes to connect with their fans. At the same time, these networks act as the most effective way for brands to interact with their audience as well. So, both parties enjoy the best benefits, if they combine their partnership to leverage for greater audience's attention (Hambrick et al., 2005).

Until recently, with traditional media, such as TV, radio and print, interactions between sponsored athletes and customers were limited; brands and athletes communicated with fans but they could not communicate back. Contrastingly, digital tools changed the dynamics as now brands, sponsored athlete and the audience can all engage in communication. Social media is particularly effective for younger generation as this is their way of interaction. They interact through social media with friends, family, and read about the news, brands and also athletes, etc. Studies shows that interactivity is the reason for people to use social network. This is how they form ties (Hambrick et al., 2005). Consequently, to maximize positive effect of athlete on the brand, sponsoring companies should help athletes creating meaningful content and connections that will grab audience's attention. Social networks can actually help users increase their personal self-esteem and develop their personal identity (Hambrick et al., 2005). This is what strong brands are actually all about: forming strong values that coincides with the audience. If a fan is following and interacting with a particular athlete on social network to achieve values/goals he or she shares with that athlete, fan will be more prone to use brand's values in his or her personality building as well.

Successful athletes started seeing social media as a way to nurture their relationship with fans. Sponsors should see this as an opportunity to build their brand. For instance, professional biker Lance Armstrong once posted a message asking fans to join him for a bike ride at the specific location and time what resulted in more than 1.000 cyclists showing up to take part at it (Hambrick et al., 2005). Sponsors should use athlete-fan relationship and include their brand in it. The response on Armstrong's post was so high because athlete's posts on social media have very high reach (Kruhar Gaberšček, 2015).

Many influencers are reaching as many people, if not even more, as traditional publishers do every single day (Skid & Hall, 2015). For example, football star, Cristiano Ronaldo, has more Twitter

followers than Canada has inhabitants (Ways to Get More Out Of Sponsored Athlete Investment, n.d.). Their reach is so high because they provide information to customers through the original content (Skid & Hall, 2015). With great content and story behind, athlete can develop loyalty for the brand, provide fan's post-purchase behaviour, make recommendations for the other complementary products and discuss in what extend has a product improved his or her performance or lifestyle (Ways to get more out of sponsored athlete, n.d). So, company's focus when sponsoring athlete should be on the powerful content marketing which can reign the audience loyalty supreme (Skid & Hall, 2015).

Before signing a sponsorship with an athlete, firms should analyze in what way athlete communicates with fans on the social media. If his or her posts are not intrusive and present brands of already existing sponsors in interactive way, that athlete is a good pick. Sponsoring athletes that are active on social media him or herself and post about sport or private life in combination with the brand will be the most attractive in the future. Posts by sponsored athletes are the most effective, if they are pure and spontaneous. They instantly loss their effect on brand, if company forces athletes to endorse the product or business. Companies want from athletes to present actions that add to brand attractiveness and exposure.

But no matter how much athlete is active on social media, companies have to engage in promoting the brand and athlete on social media themselves. They can repost athletes post on their channels, tag athletes, give prizes among followers, etc. They have to promote athlete and brand in a good manner. They can also arrange with the athlete that he or she does not post picture, screen from competition or training on his or her social media profile, but instead send it to company who later post it itself. This is how company delivers added value to its followers and take care of audience engagement. This is a method that resulted particularity well for brand Alpsko mleko (Koščak 2014).

2.5 Risk Management Techniques in Athlete Sponsorship

Fans form special attachment with their adored athletes. They see athletes and the brands they represent as two different entities, even though the company always work hard that customers would see them as one. However, in some circumstances it is better that they don't (Ways to Get More Out Of Sponsored Athlete Investment, n.d.). When athlete is at his or her top form, wins a championship or breaks a record any product associated with him or her enjoys instant visibility. Sponsor of well-performing athlete or team might be more recalled simply because fans focus their attention during the broadcast on the athlete and are, consequently, also more able to identify sponsor's logo on athlete's competition uniform (Walraven et al., 2014).

Sponsoring partners are always happy if athlete is performing well as it contributes to higher brand awareness. However, there is always a risk. Whenever a scandal erupts around the athlete, he or she gets injured, acts unethically or is tested positive on the banned drugs, corporate brand suffers negative impact as well (Avoiding the Perils in Sport Sponsorship, n.d.). Firm's financial performance is negatively affected, measured by stock market return, when an athlete is involved in such undesirable event. Stock price drops as a reflection of negative perception of the future profits and growth. Negative cost appearance also comes from revenue loss, personnel costs (firing and hiring new staff), loss of sponsorship and consumer avoidance of product or service.

In case of negative publicity in sport sponsorship there are couple actions that sponsors can take to protect themselves. Depending on the perceived level of harm scandal may cause to the brand,

sponsors can decide on their own whether to drop the sponsorship completely, retain the sponsorship and publicly show support, or retain the sponsorship and distance themselves and brand from the scandalous athlete (Avoiding the Perils in Sport Sponsorship, n.d.). Either way, negative publicity has such a strong influence on consumers that it is definitely wise for sponsors to rethink severing their ties or failing renewing the contract (Hughes & Shank, 2005).

Sponsors today react to the athlete's scandal immediately as they do not want to be linked to the athlete with negative publicity (O'Reilly, 2016). This is because the lower the evaluation of sponsoring athlete, the lower the evaluation of brand by consumers will become. Timing of the release of negative information is important as well. Negative endorser's information prior to the brand-athlete pairing has a greater effect on the corporation and brand itself than if the negative athlete information comes to public after the pairing (Ways to Get More Out Of Sponsored Athlete Investment, n.d.). This is supported by the study that shows consumers have relatively short term memory when it comes to companies responsible for the inappropriate actions of an athlete endorser. Public tends to be quite forgiving of companies that sponsor athletes incurring negative publicity (Avoiding the Perils of Sport Sponsorship, n.d.). Consequently, companies should check the background of the athletes before they decide to sponsor them.

There is always a risk connecting with the third party and risk management techniques have to be done upfront. To reduce the possibility of potentially damaging publicity, firms should develop some kind of hiring and recruiting measures that emphasize the background and characteristics of athlete before proceeding to sponsorship negotiations. This way firm proactively protect its brand and organization from signing a contract with athletes that are more prone to engage in future activity resulting in scandal. With precaution, unanticipated event can still occur, but chances are significantly smaller (Avoiding the Perils of Sport Sponsorship, n.d.).

Sponsorship contracts can have special clauses to cover instances in which athlete is involved in scandal (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). One of them is **moral clause**. It is provision in the sponsorship contract allowing sponsors to terminate the relationship with the athlete, if he or she tarnish his or her image and, consequently, the image of the company and the brand. So, sponsors always have to think a step ahead and be prepared on any scenario. An example of a typical moral clause would be: "If an athlete/team commits any act that tends to bring him or her into public dispute, contempt, scandal or ridicule, or tends to shock, insult or offend any class or group of people, ..." (Avoiding the Perils of Sport Sponsorship, n.d.).

However, in the worst scenario, if the scandal with sponsoring athlete does occur, organization is best off hiring/employing an experienced representative to deal with the media during the occurrence of scandal. With effective risk management techniques, corporation can effectively manage and potentially mitigate the impact of disgrace on organization. Some recent examples of the sponsoring athletes' unethical behavior are golfer Tiger Woods and tennis star Maria Sharapova. In 2009 media announced Wood's sex scandals. Immediately after many of his sponsors broke contract with him for the purpose of having fear for negative image on the products tied with him (Hanks, n.d.). Two companies that retained agreement with him, Nike and EA Sports, suffered from the greatest cumulative stock loss, 5.55 percent. So, they were worse off at the eruption of scandal than companies that drop their ties with Woods. But as consumers tend to be forgetful they recovered from those initial losses soon after (Avoiding the Perils of Sport Sponsorship, n.d.). At the beginning of 2016 negative publicity of a failed drug test by Maria Sharapova came to public. Her sponsor Nike was the first one to suspend its deal which was worth at least \$12,5 million a year (O'Reilly, 2016).

Not only scandal, athlete's injury or bad performance can have negative impact on sponsor as well. ROI of the sponsorship in this case is limited because the season ends sooner than expected. This means shorter publicity period and, consequently, fewer associations sponsor can gain through the athlete (Avoiding the Perils of Sport Sponsorship, n.d.).

But, even if the times are bad, company can always twist their strategy around so at the end they still benefit from the athlete sponsorship and endorsement. Company just needs to be flexible and respond immediately. Good example of this is partnership between Adidas and American basketball star Derrick Rose. Rose was Adidas spokesperson and key player of his team. When he got injured in 2012 just two month after signing the contract, his team, Chicago Bulls, could not proceed to further championship and Adidas was not able to use his basketball court success to further generate sales of new basketball shoes. However, Adidas marketers did not cry over their bad luck but instead put their heads together and decided to use Rose's recovery as a way to keep interest for the brand. They created a series of YouTube videos inviting fans to be part of Rose's emotional recovery progress. The series enjoyed an instant interest; it generated more than 6.5 million views, 68 000 subscribers, 39.000 likes, 12.00 favorites and 7.500 comments on the Adidas basketball channel. Fans response was dramatic and Adidas twisted their campaign in the way they still received brand exposure. At the end, they benefited even more. Adidas could later use each comment, favorite, like and subscription for further engagement with fans (Ways to Get More Out Of Sponsored Athlete Investment, n.d.). It is true that it would be difficult to turn athlete's doping scandal in company's advantage, but if sponsored athlete is having a bad season or he or she gets injured, company just has to be creative to keep the targeted audience attached. So, sport sponsorship can generate great benefits but companies have to recognize the potential risk that comes with it as well. Financial rewards can be high, as long as risk is managed appropriately (Avoiding the Perils of Sport Sponsorship, n.d.).

3 EVALUATION OF ATHLETE SPONSORSHIP

3.1 Challenges of Athlete Sponsorship Evaluation

Although sponsorship is a pervasive marketing activity and its global spending continue to rise, there is a lack of credible methods to measure and compare sponsorship outcomes. Challenges for sponsorship performance are primarily created due to the different objectives for which athlete sponsorship is undertaken. Because of the different objectives, just one universal way of measurement cannot be used. For example, company that sponsors professional athlete aims for achieving brand awareness, while company sponsoring local young talent works toward fostering community goodwill and enhancing brand image. These are two completely different goals for which's achieving different measurement tactics are needed (Vance, Raciti, & Lawley, 2016).

Brand value added by celebrity is immediate and palpable (Olenski, 2016), but sponsorship marketing frequently still delivers less than optimal result for marketer. To increase marketing value of the brand, sponsors should look beyond the typical objective of reach and affinity. Sponsorship should be evaluated also on its role of activating and motivating consumer behavior. People's passions have endless possibilities for engagement, content, value and sharing. Only capturing them builds successful brand and business (Rosen & Minsky, 2011).

3.2 Halo Effect in Sponsorship

Not many people would think but studies have already found that sponsorship also creates and can benefit from halo effect. Halo effect is an opportunity for sponsors to increase customer traffic and the pricing, which are both the main sources of revenue growth (Halo Effect, n.d.b). In general, halo effect is defined as a “tendency for consumer’s beliefs about one dominant brand association to influence their other belief about a brand.” (Vance et al., 2016). It is a concept driven by the brand equity (Halo Effect, n.d.b). For example, if a person likes the appearance of the product, he or she then with the halo effect transfers these positive feelings to the other product characteristics, like usage, performance, taste, etc. (Halo Effect, n.d.a).

In sponsorship, halo effect is created through consumer awareness and goodwill for sponsor’s support of their favored athlete. If a person likes an athlete, he or she will transfer positive feelings to the brand as well. Consequently, his or her impression of the brand is strengthened. Halo effect will help putting out the rest, people just need to have one positive association about the relationship between the brand and an athlete. If halo effect causes transfer of positive feelings from athlete to the product/service of sponsoring brand, these positive feelings can also then transfer from a sponsoring product/service to the other product by the same company (Halo effect, n.d.b). This is also why marketers say halo effect is a foundation of the modern concept of brands (Frederiksen, 2016). It is true that significantly higher brand awareness is created by more commercial sponsoring of a professional athlete then it is by community oriented sponsorship if supporting local talents. However, the later creates the higher halo effect because when engaged with the local community more positive impact on sponsor’s brand attributes is created (Vance et al., 2016).

3.3 Steps for Successful and Effective Sponsorship

Success for sponsorship program will to large extend depends on how it is implemented, to its activation (Fortunato, 2013). In 80 percent of athlete-sponsor relationships people remember the celebrity, but forget about the brand (Avoiding the Perils of Sport Sponsorship). Consequently, content of the activation has to be carefully thought because sponsorship is successful in a way that sponsors can see the return of their investment, if consumers can connect the brand to the sponsored athlete. According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), there are seven key factors that determine the effectiveness of sponsorship experience. Seven factors are presented in Figure 7.

Sponsors should:

- **Have clear communication objectives for the brand**

There are three different objectives firms can work towards achieving that are important driver of sponsorship strategy: visibility/awareness, association development and relationship development (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Sponsors should claim what current goals and objectives can athlete sponsorship help them achieve. They should also consider if they can create new goals and strategies for them (Rosen & Minsky, 2011). These objectives should be then reflected in the communication strategy of the brand. However, clear communication objectives start with understanding brand’s value proposition and brand’s core identity. Knowing the goal of sponsorship and associations that are needed for this goal should drive the sponsorship (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

- **Be proactive**

Sponsors should be proactive and develop a list of criteria for the ideal athlete sponsorship. They should not go just for what is being offered to them. The biggest global companies get thousands of sponsorships requests each year (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Red Bull, as an example, sponsors around 500 athletes (Carrillat & Astous, 2014). But these firms do not just accept every offer. Instead, they are proactive. They know that proactivity will increase their likelihood of original sponsorship that will stand out of today's numerous athlete-brand relationships. For effective sponsorship, companies should also obtain and evaluate target audience and associations of the potential sponsorship (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Figure 7. Seven Keys to Effective Sponsorship



Source: adapted after D. Aaker and E. Joachimsthaler, *Brand Leadership*, 2000.

- **Look for an exceptional fit**

Sponsors should never agree partnering with an athlete who doesn't align with the brand. Athlete should be able to reach brands target audience and communicate over what the brand stands for (More in section 2.3.3) (Rosen & Minsky, 2011). Sign of a great fit is the fact that the product can be demonstrated in a way that is integral to the core principle of the sponsorship. Exceptional fit between the athlete and the brand is a jumpstart for athlete sponsorship, while lack of fit, or its force are significant handicap (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Sponsors should notify the right fitted athlete with the values and advantages sponsorship will bring to them. Sponsors should also negotiate the opportunities, otherwise, they will overpay for obtaining the athlete's rights (Rosen & Minsky, 2011).

- **Own sponsorship**

Main goal of any sponsorship is to connect the brand to the associations public has about the athlete. When brand and athlete are inseparable, achieving also other goals becomes much easier and more cost-effective. The real success is when the associations are made also after the sponsorship contract is done or after the athlete finishes the season. For example, the real success for Milka was when people on their summer vacations were reading news about Tina Maze preparing for the new skiing season and at the same time recalled Milka chocolate in their mind. To achieve it, it is better for companies to focus on few sponsorships than forming loose associations with many athletes. Also, sponsors should aim for long-term contracts and be aware that if the athlete will perform well, and their sponsorship will work out great, competitor firms might try to move into their place (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

- **Look for publicity opportunities**

Publicity contributes to effective and efficient brand building. Activation of the sponsorship is the one that will actually connect the brand to the athlete and fully exploit athlete's potential (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

- **Consider multiple sponsorship payoffs**

Knowing all ways audience moves towards buying the product or service, sponsors can utilize the sponsorship to create value and drive key behavior. Sponsors should engage their sales force, retailers, distributors, internal departments, etc. to gain the wished ROI (Rosen & Minsky, 2011). Sponsorship can build brand by interjecting the brand into the athlete-fans relationship by providing experience at the athlete's competition and by demonstrating the new product (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

- **Actively manage the sponsorship**

For effective sponsorship, its goals need to be set, strategy formulated and its results measured (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Data collection, constant measurement and optimization sponsors can quantify and improve ROI of athlete sponsorship (Rosen & Minsky, 2011).

3.4 Measuring Sponsorship Effect

Corporations have to ask themselves how much value they actually generate from sponsoring an athlete and for these reasons measure and evaluate their sponsorship. Analysis by Association of national advertisers uncovered that 65 percent of marketers do not consistently measure the impact and effectiveness of their sponsorship activities and, consequently, do not know impact of their expenditure (Association of National Advertisers, 2013). Marketers should know where their money goes and what is created with it. Therefore, as part of the sponsorship, marketers need to create a complete marketing ROI program with fundamentals in five metrics (Jacobs, Jain, & Surana, 2014). These five metrics are discussed below.

- **Cost per reach**

Cost per reach describes the number of people exposed to the sponsorship live or through media like TV, radio or printed advertisements. It should be evaluated quarterly and should include the

costs of right fees and activation costs and advertising. Also, reach calculations should be made on the exposure to the target demographic group over total numbers (Jacobs et al., 2014).

Outcomes of cost per reach will be different from sponsorship to sponsorship, as some sponsorships are going to have high costs (with premier athlete) while the others will deliver low reach (local athlete). However, with cost per reach any company can evaluate and if necessary relocate its sponsorship money.

- **Unaided awareness per reach**

Unaided awareness per reach reflects missed opportunity to magnify a sponsorship impact on sales or awareness by allocating financial resources wrongly. Many corporations spend a lot to acquire athlete sponsorship rights or offering big money for signing ambassador rights but very little for activation. Companies that will spend more for activation will enjoy higher unaided awareness and higher brand recall (Jacobs et al., 2014).

- **Sales/margin per dollar spent**

There are two approaches that help directly linking sales to sponsorship. First approach connects sponsorship spending to the main marketing measures such as unaided awareness, propensity to buy and willingness to consider. Later it tracks effect of each of these measures on the short and long term sales. By collecting such data, companies will be able to identify sponsorship that really drives people's willingness to consider the company's product and links it to the final sales.

The second approach bases on econometrics and uses data on sponsorship reach and spending over a certain period to form connections between sponsorship and sales. This approach also isolates the impact of sponsorship on sales from impact on sales from other activities like marketing (Jacobs et al., 2014).

- **Long term brand attributes**

Sponsorship has all the potentials to establish long term sales that strengthens brand identity. Brand strength actually contributes 60 to 80 percent to overall sales and is therefore crucial for long term sales growth. So, in order to assess attitudes deriving from sponsorship, marketers are using qualitative analysis to find out which sponsorships are reinforcing a common brand theme. With surveys, entities determine what athlete's images are aligned with brand attributes. Some of athlete sponsorships deals actually do not carry the message around and result in a negative ROI (Jacobs et al., 2014).

- **Indirect benefit**

Companies often tend to neglect or overestimate revenues coming from indirect benefits when calculating ROI. Indirect benefits come, for example, from indirect sales when sponsor takes part at the athlete's competition. Another example are covered organizational costs of particular event such as charity golf tournament sponsor is organizing. Just athlete's presence at the event can result in cost covering (Jacobs et al., 2014).

4 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

4.1 Description of the Problem

The problem this study focus on is the lack of companies' awareness of how athlete can contribute to successful promotional campaign and can add value to the sponsoring company and promoted brand. Nowadays, marketing has become a big business. Spending on a paid media in 2016 was projected to reach 606,90 billion dollars worldwide what was 6,5 percent more than in 2015 (Total media ad spending growth slows). Outstanding athletes have a great influence on the purchasing decision of their supporters. Fans always want to relate to their favorite athlete and are, therefore, an excellent target for advertiser that uses athlete celebrity to endorse the product (Hanks, n.d.).

Building a strong brand has always been any companies' goal as it leads to high product awareness and, later, loyalty. The presence of athletes in advertising and their sponsoring is lately becoming a worldwide trend which is popular also in Slovenia. Roots go back to early 90s. In the time of action "Podarim dobim" (ang: Give and get) strong link was built between Žito's brand 1001 Cvet (Eng: 1001 Flower) and winter sports. Winter is high season for drinking tea and this is how a strong emotional link and association was built between skiers, ski jumpers and their supporters on the other side. Skiers and ski jumpers have become "heroes" of the 1001 Cvet's Mountain tea. Today we would simply call them ambassadors (Kruhar Gaberšček, 2015). Trend continued in 2000s with wholesaler Spar sponsoring runner Jolanda Čeplak but is becoming even more and more present in recent years. Companies of all sizes are sponsoring athletes of any range, from worldwide stars like Peter Prevc and Tina Maze, nationally known athletes like Filip Flisar, Ilka Štuhec, Tim Gajser, Maja Mihalinec, to local stars, amateurs and even personal trainers.

This is where the problem arises. Not many companies who invest in sport and athletes hire specialist and have knowledge of sport industry and sport marketing. They are not aware of what sponsoring an athlete can actually bring to their business. They simply follow the trend that it is a popular thing to sponsor an athlete or a personal trainer. Also, I believe there are many more companies that were considering athlete sponsorship but decided not to as they were simply unaware of the impact it can have on their organization. Many times, sponsorship contract between athlete and the company is signed but, afterwards, there is no or little activation, no measurement of returns and no evaluation of returns which are actually keys to successful sales partnering. Problem of athlete sponsorship in Slovenia is the general perception that this is help and not investment which, as any other, requires its nurturing through activation.

4.2 Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to provide general information and guidelines for Slovenian companies that already sponsor athletes and for those that are considering to do so in the future. Study wants to give firms knowledge of what can they gain from the link with the athlete, how to appropriately consider the right athlete and promotional strategy to have a positive impact on the strength and awareness of the brand, and, consequently, the levels of sales. The goal is also to research and understand what is the main issue in Slovenia regarding athlete sponsorship: on what level athlete sponsorship is in Slovenia, what more can be done, do companies constantly cooperate and are in touch with the sponsoring athlete, etc.

In order to get broader scope of the above problem, I let the investigation develop by itself, while researching. It was difficult to predict the outcomes due to the uniqueness of the study's problem.

So far, no research like this has been developed in Slovenia yet. However, I believe that the conducted interviews and questionnaire lead me to the preferred direction which is also supported with the literature at the beginning of the study.

4.3 Hypothesis Development

Brands are driven by and created in the minds of consumers (Wertime, 2012). Majgaard also stresses that when marketers brand a product or service, they do it to push the product into people's mind, to impress them (Majgaard, 2016). The more mindful consumers are going to be about the brand, the greater the chance they are going to know about brand's philosophy, its values and goals. And, once they possess the same values and associations as brand does, they form a strong self-concept connection with the brand which leads to high loyalty and increased sales (Swaminathan et al., 2007). Nowadays, marketers are trying to find new ways how to move their brands closer to consumers. They found out that stars have always gained people's attention. So, they started market their brand through idols, singers, actors and, also, sport icons as people identify themselves with them (Olenski, 2016). When companies form bonds between their brand and popular name in sport, there is a high possibility the sales will boost dramatically (Bradič, 2015). Once audience identifies with sponsored athlete, which is primary goal of any sponsor, higher brand awareness and recall can be expected (Meden, 2016). Therefore:

H1a: Sponsored athlete has positive statistically significant effect on awareness of sponsoring company.

H1b: Sponsored athlete has positive statistically significant effect on brand awareness.

H1c: Sponsored athlete has positive statistically significant effect on customer loyalty toward the brand.

The simplest form of sponsorship occurs when a company financially supports picked athlete. Sponsorship is an exchange of something for something. Athlete's return for financial support is primarily in advertising benefits sponsors possess. Sponsors try to position their brand with the sponsored athlete by having him or her testify on behalf of the company's product or service. But this is already marketing activity, sponsorship activation, which leads to sponsorship's success (Roy, 2016). Activation is the activity that adds value to the sponsorship. Level of money invested in it determines investment's success. Solely sponsorship is only acquiring rights to use athletes name, picture, etc. (Koščak, 2014). But without further activation, sponsorship investment cannot be returned.

After conducting interview with an Olympian, well-known personal trainer and a company that currently sponsors Slovenian mountain climber and other sport clubs I realized Slovenian companies often do not invest in further activation. But if they do, they rarely discuss it with the athlete. This way sponsors cannot enjoy all the fruits of the athlete sponsorship. Therefore,

H2: Based on the frequency of the activation discussion among sponsor and sponsored athlete, there is a statistically significant difference in athlete's awareness of the goals and in sponsor's measurement of sponsorship and goal reaching.

As already stated, companies around the globe, also in Slovenia, see the appeal of athletes and try to establish associations with them to reach their marketing goals (Hughes & Shank, 2005). If fit between sponsored athlete and the brand (product/service) is congruent this can increase the positive evaluation of sponsorship in the eyes of consumers (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). For example,

companies should first identify their brand's target audience and only then find athlete who will deliver them a message. If fans of picked athlete fall into the category of brand's targeted group, this is a big plus for the company. Brand will get more exposure and its awareness among the target group will increase (Weber, n.d.).

Also, if sponsored athlete's endorsements on social media are pure, spontaneous and not forced, they reach the highest amount of audience. It is very important for companies to find an athlete who will be able to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the brand (Bradič, 2015). Therefore,

H3: There is statistically significant positive correlation between congruent athlete-brand relationship on one side, and idol attachment and brand loyalty on the other side.

For a successful partnership, athlete needs to align with the values of the brand (Weber, n.d.). The key for brand success seem to lie in the decision to connect with the right athlete who later endorses the product or service (Bradič, 2015). Through the interview with personal trainer I found out that her current sponsoring firm was looking for an ambassador and decided on her, simply, because they knew her partner. Similarly, interviewed athlete confessed she knew of athletes that got sponsorship because of their personal ties. What is more, interviewed business to business (hereinafter: B2B) company who sponsors athletes confessed the reason for some of their sponsorships lied in the nature of their business and not their interest into the athletes/sport itself. This again proves that to get a sponsor in Slovenia it is more important who you know than who you are (your values, philosophy, beliefs). Constrastingly, the other interviewed company did not mention anything about importance of athlete's personal ties inside their company for sponsorship pursuing. They claimed they have the same regulations for all and a special committee that gets through each sponsorship request. Therefore,

H4: Among the methods of pursuing sponsorship there is statistically significant difference in athletes' opinions whether companies decide on the sponsored athletes based on their personal ties, networks and connections.

Talking with Slovenian professional athlete and personal trainer I realized they both feel responsible to present their brand in the nicest and positive way. They feel it is their obligation and they like doing it. Athlete's posts have very high reach. So, for success sponsors should use this athlete-fan relationship and include their brand in it (Kruhar Gaberšček, 2015). Similarly, in interviewed company Petrol do not force sponsored athletes to expose them in media. Authenticity is the most important characteristics to consider (Skid & Hall, 2015). At Petrol, they prefer authentic and unique occasional posts which sponsored athlete wishes to make him or herself over posts under constraint. In their words, if athlete felt good about the sponsoring company and made genuine brand/company exposure in the media, customers could sense his or her authenticity what had indirectly positive effect on the success of sponsorship. Therefore,

H5: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between athlete's inner feeling of obligation presenting sponsoring brand and athlete's good feeling/mood when presenting the brand.

4.4 Methodology

4.4.1 Used Methods

To conduct the study, I used primary and secondary data. Secondary data is data that has already been collected by some other parties. These are books, electronic journals and articles used in the study. In the research, I used it to validate the primary data that I collected myself. Since secondary data did not provide sufficient information needed to answer hypothesis and material for theoretical facts, I collected primary data as well. I used two commonly used methods:

- Interviews
- Questionnaire

Both methods combined lead me to hypothesis results and, also, some additional findings. I discussed implications for these findings and provided final conclusion of the research together with the recap of recommendations for managers and recommendations for further analysis of the problem.

4.4.2 Interviews

To get the full understanding of the problem and the sponsorship situation of athletes in Slovenia I, in total, conducted four semi-structured interviews. One interview was made with professional athlete who competed at the 2016 Summer Olympic games and is being sponsored by few companies. The other interview was performed with a well-known personal trainer who is ambassador for retailer of sporting clothes. Lately, personal trainers have become more and more involved in sponsorship as companies sees them as people's motivators for healthier lifestyle. Interview was also made with a leading Slovenian B2B who is currently sponsoring athletes. The last, fourth, interview was made with the marketing director of Slovenian company Petrol who has a strong presence in sport industry sponsoring over 30 athletes from different sports.

I believe with these interviews I gained broad understanding of the topic from all the parties that are involved in athlete sponsorship. Gained information first helped me to develop hypothesis and later served as a valuable source of information when forming questionnaire and deriving conclusion statements.

4.4.3 Survey

Questionnaire was developed only for athletes who have sponsor, or had it in the past, and athletes that are on the high enough level that are trying to get the sponsor but had no luck. In order to achieve the most relevant information from both groups, survey was designed differently for athletes having sponsors than for those that tried getting them but were not successful (consequently, do not have sponsor). You always get the clearest understanding of the topic/problem if you look at it through the different prospective, and since I want this master thesis to be a guideline for companies considering sponsorship, athletes are "the other side" of the sponsoring partnership and can give me the greatest insight into the problem. I wanted the survey to reach athletes from different sports, winter and summers sports, individual and team sports, just so that no generalization will be made.

Survey consisted of three different parts. Focus was put on the part designed for athletes who have or had a sponsor. They provided me with their personal insights and experiences regarding sponsorship. Their answers gave me clear picture of what is currently being made for athletes and how they perceive sponsorship, if they are proud and feel obligated to promote the brand, if they know the values brand stands for, if these values are congruent with their personal beliefs, etc. The second part was designed for athletes that tried getting a sponsor but were not successful. This part was short and researched the barriers and reasons for their turndown by the companies. However, in final part both groups of above mentioned athletes were asked general sponsorship questions and about their perception towards sponsorship. Consequently, recommendations and finding derive from responses of both groups.

Through above mentioned topics, survey will try to justify the theoretical part of building the strong brand through sport involvement. All tests and analysis of the survey's data were made in SPSS software.

4.5 Limitations, Validity and Reliability

When distributing the survey, one of the obstacles was finding athletes who would fall into the survey's target group. Relatively few athletes are on such high level that they have or had a sponsor or tried to get one. Before distribution I already knew the final representative sample was going to be small. I got myself a goal of getting over 80 surveys solved what I achieved. The survey was solved by 97 professional athletes of which 44 have or had sponsor in the past. I did my best to get in touch with Slovenian professional athletes from different sports but most of them were busy, what contributed to the fact that not all of them responded my request. Survey was active in December 2016 and early January 2017. I, for example, tried to get in touch with skiers, snowboarders and ski jumpers but as they were all busy in the middle of competing season I was not lucky. I also got a smaller response from athletes (track and field) as I predicted. I am assuming this is because in December they are preparing for the indoor season which starts right after New Year's in training camps either in Spain, Portugal or South Africa.

The other limitation emerged even before that when I was still developing questionnaire. I tried to find marketing scales regarding sport sponsorship in different books, but all without luck. I looked for scales under promotions, fans, sport, sport sponsorship, brand name, brand awareness, etc. At the end, I found two questions suitable for my topic. I also helped myself with some other questions and twisted them around so they suit my topic.

However, due to the nature of distributing questionnaire my sample is not random. Respondents were reached by me, my friends, acquaintances, sport physiotherapist and coaches, so, I believe the representative sample is valuable and reliable. Survey was solved by athletes from 17 different sports what I count as a big accomplishment. Athletes come from indoor and outdoor sports, sports who get media attention and those that don't, individual and team sports, winter and summer sports. Moreover, I can confirm it was solved by World Cup/Championship holders, by more than five Slovenian Olympians, and even one Olympic medal holder what gives the results higher significance.

5. RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Interviews Results

5.1.1 Main Findings

In total, I conducted four semi/structured in-depth interviews. With gained information, I recognized repeating patterns and characteristics that lead me to formatting three types of sponsorships emerging in Slovenia, based on how sponsors execute it. Observed three types of sponsorship with their main characteristics are described below. I also stated some other general interview findings, while the full scripts of interviews can be found in the appendix.

- **Sponsorship type 1: “Athlete is the king/queen”**

This kind of sponsorship is enjoyed by top Slovenian athletes. For them it is relatively easy to get sponsorship. They only need to proclaim some self-motivation for sponsorship pursuing. Many times, sponsorship is arranged by athlete’s managers. Sponsors are big firms like Petrol, Ljubljanske mlekarne, Amicus, etc. They do sponsorship seriously as they want their money to be invested wisely and want to see return on it. Those firms sometimes also hire sport marketing agencies. Sponsorship contracts are toughly executed and well developed (activation is included, athlete’s obligations are mutually agreed and clearly stated). Sponsors are aware of importance of fit between them and the athlete. Also, they do not put a lot of pressure on athlete in terms of promoting the brand and posting on social media. Those companies are understandable and let athletes know sport is their main focus. Promoting and obligations towards the company comes only after sport. Sponsors wish that when sponsored athlete exposes their company on social media this is authentic. The athlete needs to feel the urge for it. Furthermore, when athlete is present at the company’s events, his presence should not interrupt his or her training, competition or recovery session. If athlete is pressured and would be in bad mood at the event, sponsor rather see them not taking part.

- **Sponsorship type 2: “Go with the flow”**

Professional athletes who are not among top ones on international level or are still seeking for their performance break through and additional media exposure many times struggle to get a sponsor. When they do, they usually find themselves in the second type of sponsorship.

For athletes, to get sponsorship, personal ties and connections can usually be the matter of sponsorship’s request success. Without personal connections with someone inside of a wished athlete’s sponsor, athlete needs to be very active and write many requests addressing companies. Usually, it goes for small or medium sized companies that are not very involved in the sponsorship and activation. They do sponsorship themselves and do not hire agencies, no matter the level of their sport industry knowledge. Typically, athletes do not know their obligations as they are not stated. It happens that companies even do not expect anything from the athlete in return. Companies are often not aware of potential benefits sponsorship could bring them. Also, they do not think of importance of congruence in values between them and the athlete. Companies that sponsor athletes and fall into this category are the least in touch with athlete. Because of lack of communication, athlete’s feeling of belonging and owing to the company develops only with athlete’s self-motivation. The tie between the athlete and sponsor is usually not strong.

- **Sponsorship type 3: “Work hard, get nothing”**

The kind of sponsorship is performed by small firms and newcomers on Slovenian market. Many times, their product/ service is somehow related to the sport industry. Consequently, their interest for being connected with the athlete is very high. Examples of such are companies whose products are sporting clothes, compression socks, food supplements, recovery drinks, etc. Sponsorship contract is not thoroughly thought, sometimes athletes also only have oral agreement with the company. Activation can be stated in the contract or not at all. Many times, athletes need to put pressure back on the company so that things get done. For example, interviewed personal trainer had to constantly remind sponsor about the contract signing and ask about her obligations. Similarly, interviewed athlete had to prepare activation plan herself as one of her sponsors did not know what and how to do it.

In sponsor's wish for exposure, which probably grows out from wish for their business to survive and grow, they either put too much pressure on athlete, or, in excess of work, do not give athlete any obligations leaving them lost. So, some companies expect from athletes too much and tell them the required number of social media posts athlete cannot meet. Contrastingly, the other companies do not state activation and do not agree on athlete's obligations leaving them wonder what should they be doing in return (again, divergence from focus from sport). However, in both occasions athletes are not familiar with company's values, unless through own research, as companies do not put importance on fit between the athlete and their brand.

5.1.2 Other Findings

When conducting interviews, I come across some other interesting findings. In some occasions, especially for top athletes, managers arrange all formal obligations before sponsorship signing instead of the athlete.

Even though athlete sponsorship in Slovenia has only become more popular in the last few years and many companies still avoid it as a marketing tool, marketing director of Petrol d.d., Rok Cuderman said there were great differences between companies in Slovenia and the sport sponsorship knowledge level of their employees. Many companies avoid athlete sponsorship just because of the lack of knowledge. But Cuderman said: “Whoever wants to do things seriously and professionally, he or she can do it. Each company can work with sport agencies. We worked for years with agency Sport Element and occasionally with Sport Media Focus.” There are of course also other sport marketing agencies that can cooperate with sponsoring firm. Some of Slovenian companies that do cooperate with sport marketing agencies are Mercator, Garmin, Spar, Petrol, Telemach, Diners, Kompas, Generali, Sberbank, Hervis, Tilia, Triglav, Omv, Uni CreditBank, SKB, Telekom Slovenije, etc.

5.2 Survey Findings

5.2.1 General Statistics (Age, Gender, Education, etc.)

Survey was constructed in online portal lka.com and was active from 26. December 2016 until 13. January 2017. Survey was partially finished by 652 people and completely finished by 97 persons which was the number taken into the further analysis. Out of 97 respondents, 44 have or had a sponsor in the past.

Survey was fully completed by 97 respondents out of whom,

- **60 percent were male** and 40 percent were female.
- The **most represented age group** of respondents, **36 percent**, was **25 – 29,9 years** and the second most represented with 24 percent of respondents was age group 20 – 24,9 years.
- The majority of respondents – **50 percent have completed undergraduate education**, 10 percent had master degree and 1 percent even PhD.
- Occupation of respondents: **36 percent- students**, **31 percent – full-time employed**, 22 percent – self-employed, 8 percent – unemployed, 1 percent – half-time employed
- Respondents came from **17 different sports**: winter and summer sports, individual and team sports. Additionally, five of respondents were also personal coaches.
- Sports: Athletics, Tennis, Table tennis, Judo, Karate, Triathlon, Flatwater kayak racing, Ski boarding, Cycling, Football, Volleyball, Handball, Hockey, Mountain climbing, Sport climbing, Kitting, Roller Derby.

5.2.2 General Perception about the Sponsorship

All respondents were asked to describe in their own words how they see and perceive sponsorship themselves. Out of all the answers I could identify two major opinions athletes have. Both major opinions are possessed by the approximately the same sized group of athletes.

Athletes either see sponsorship as a help for athlete, or as a mutual and reciprocal agreement between two parties. Athletes in whose eyes sponsorship is only **one-way benefit** stated sponsorship was help for covering expenses of sport equipment, entry fees, hotels, travelling, training camps, help for achieving goals, etc. This group of athletes did not state any obligations towards sponsor they might have in the definition.

Some of the definitions of sponsorship that falls under this group are:

- “Help offered perspective athlete for achieving outstanding performances, or relieving financial burden athlete has so he or she can be completely focused only on training and competing.”
- “Momentum for talented athlete.”
- “Help for athlete so he or she can focus on his or her sport career and not think about getting another job just so he or she will be able to deal with financial burden.”
- “Help for activity of talented team or individual, so it is easier for them to achieve their goals.”
- “Sponsor’s care for athlete, in financial and media sense.”

The other strong opinion is that sponsorship is a **mutual benefit and cooperation between the brand and sponsored athlete**. Respondents stated that in return for support, he or she promotes the brand and company.

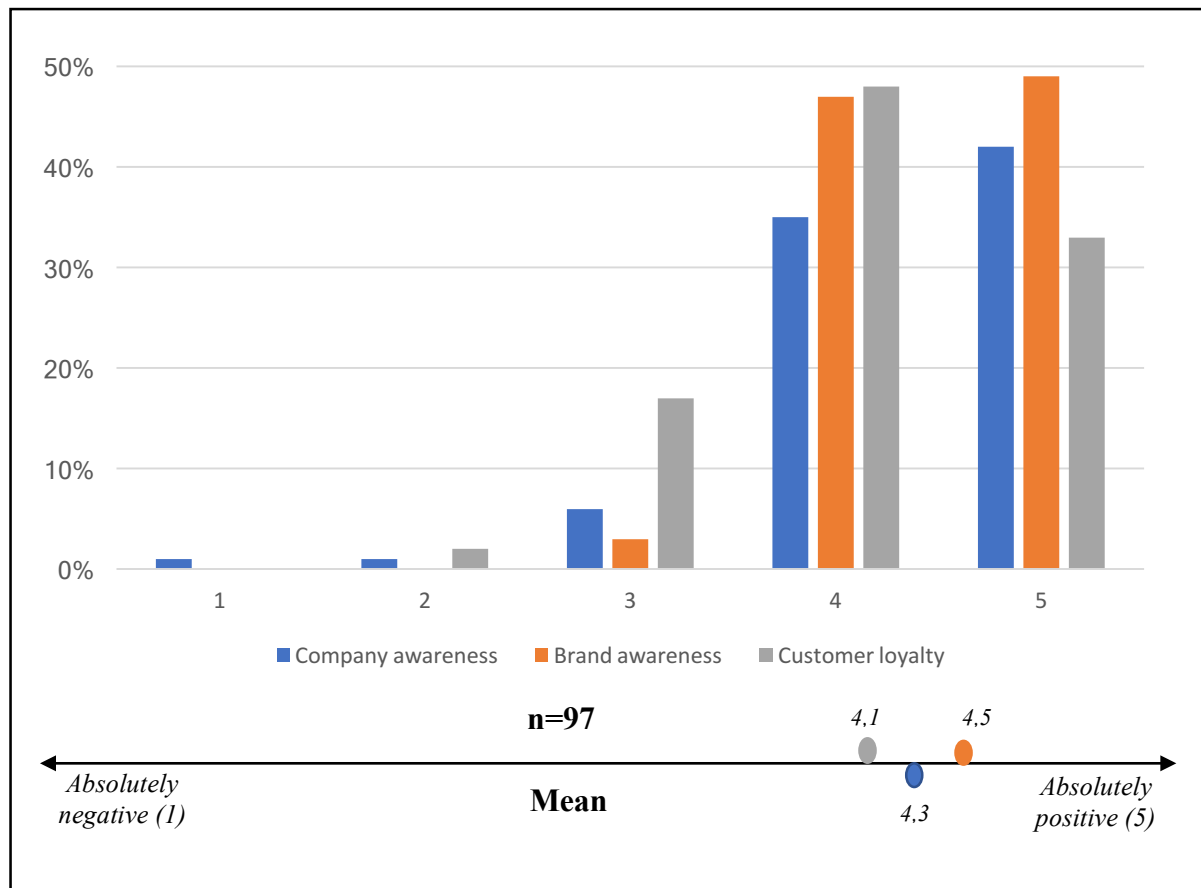
Respondents from this opinion group see sponsorship as a:

- “Business partnership.”
- “Non-refundable means (money, products or service) which company gives to athlete who, in return, wears their logo on his or her clothing.”
- “Win-win situation from which both parties enjoy benefits.”
- “Help for athlete and higher awareness for company.”
- “Particular item in return for promotion.”

The other interesting finding was that 47 percent of respondents believe congruency between athlete and sponsor is quite important for sponsorship success. Adding to this another 44 percent who believe relatedness is very important for success, I can conclude that athletes are aware of importance of fit between them and the company.

Athletes play main role in their sponsorship. Therefore, I wanted to know their opinion how much they contribute towards building brand equity. Visual representation in Figure 8 bellow shows that majority of respondents believe athlete has the greatest effect on brand awareness (average 4.5), followed by company awareness (average 4.3) and customer loyalty (average 4.1).

Figure 8. Suvey Answers: Effect of Athlete Sponsorship on the Constitutes of Brand Equity



94 percent of respondents believe it is difficult for a professional athlete in Slovenia to get a sponsor. Main obstacle (identified by 75 percent of respondents) was found to be unawareness and lack of interest of companies for sponsoring athletes as they do not see benefit in it for themselves. Table 2 bellow presents opinions of athletes about different segments of sponsorship in descending order of mean values, from the highest to the lowest.

Table 2. Opinions of Athletes About the Sponsorship

Opinions of Athletes About the Sponsorship (N=97)	Mean (Scale 1-5)	Standard deviation
Brand which is connected with athlete is enjoying higher exposure than the brand that is not connected with athlete.	4,32	0,71
Congruence (values, vision, philosophy) between brand and athlete is important	4,23	0,75
In general, athletes having sponsors feel obligated to present the brand.	4,22	0,87
Sponsors should always prepare activation plan whose realization would follow contract signature.	4,10	1,08
Connection of athlete with the brand has positive effect on sales.	4,08	0,81
When shopping, people rather buy product / service that is connected with athlete.	3,90	0,96
Before signing of the contract, sponsor inform itself whether athlete coincides with the vision/values of the brand and with the product / service itself.	3,89	1,02
Companies decide for sponsoring an athlete based on their “connections / personal networks” and based on the business development.	3,79	0,97
Sponsors are aware how important are well-developed and well-executed marketing actions for the positive effect on their company.	3,67	1,08
Companies are aware of advantages they get once their customers start connecting their branded product / service with athlete.	3,59	1,09
Personal networks (knowing someone working) in the sponsoring company are more important than congruence of athlete and brand.	3,35	1,11

5.2.3 Survey Results: Athletes without a Sponsor

Survey showed that none of the athletes who tried to get a sponsor and were not successful in their attempt was denied because company would not have money. 43 percent of them received response company was not interested in athlete sponsorship, while 39 percent did not receive any answer at all. The rest, 18 percent, was told the company already sponsors other athletes.

From results, we can conclude that companies lack knowledge about how to implement athlete sponsorship. Each company has a specific money intended for marketing. Knowing how to do it, companies would not deny athletes in their offers anymore and would grasp the opportunity as athlete sponsorship can be the cheapest way of advertising.

5.2.4 Survey Results: Athletes with a Sponsor

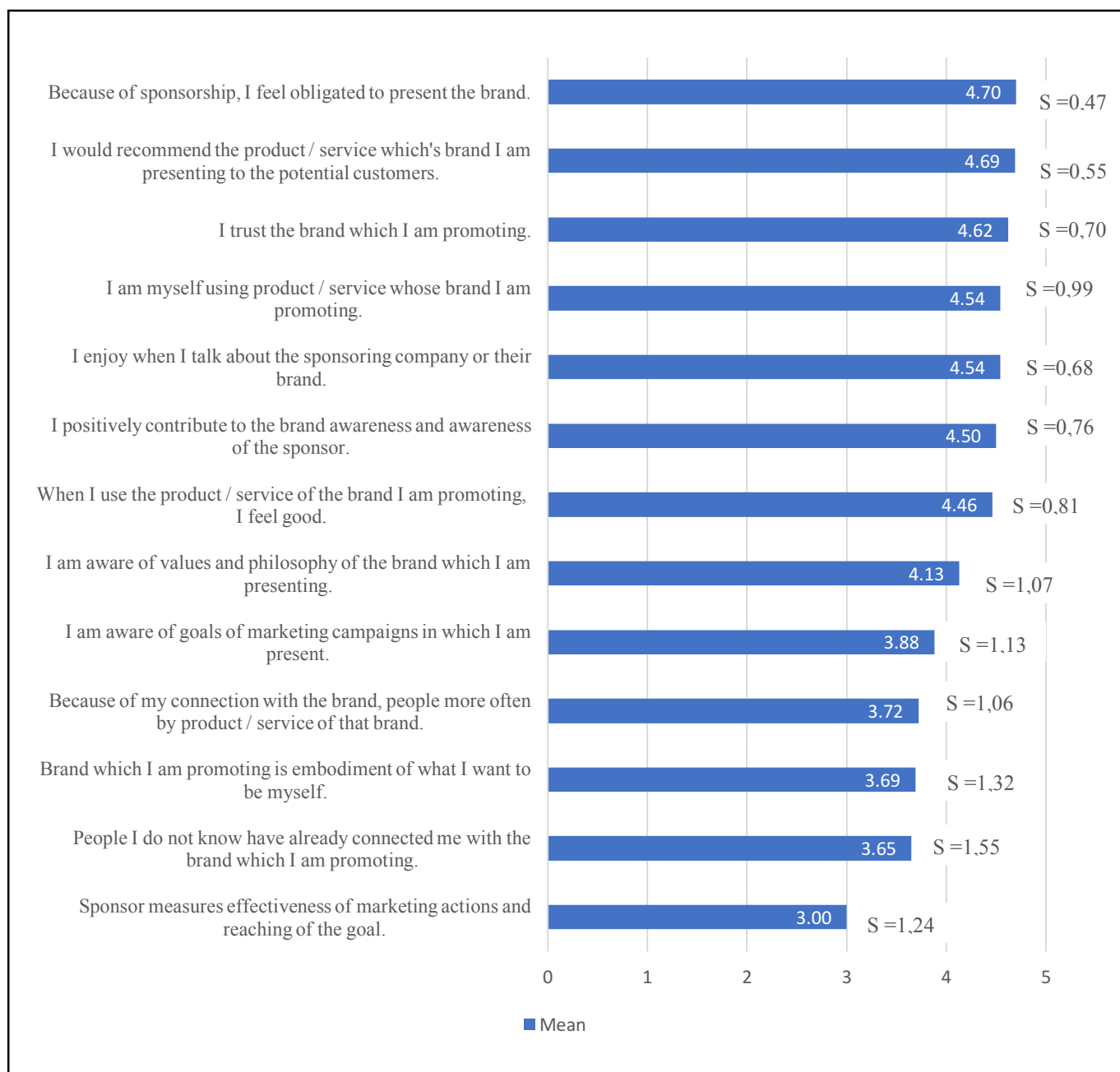
46 percent of all respondents claimed to have a sponsor or had it in the past. Their survey included additional part of questions with which I wanted to find out what kind of sponsorship they have,

if they know brand's values, if they like sponsoring brand, if they are in touch with the company, if take part at their events, etc. Results proved that even though athlete sponsorship situation in Slovenia is not very prosperous in last years while many companies are still recovering from Economic crisis, 70 percent of athletes with sponsors are having a written contract. Thinking that the rest, 30 percent, are having only an oral agreement is quite high number. From results, I can conclude that the athletes usually have one sponsor, 34 percent of them, or two, 27 percent of them, sponsors. However, 20 percent of respondents are sponsored by five or more companies. I assumed this percentage goes to top notch athletes that solved my questionnaire, while any other professional athlete competing on the international level but not being among the top ones is having either one or two sponsors. When asked what kind of sponsorship they have, 42 percent of respondents replied they receive product/service they sponsor, 36 percent receives money and the product/service, while 21 percent of athletes with sponsors receives money but no product/service.

Survey found out that 85 percent of athletes with sponsor knows their obligations towards sponsor. However, 67 percent does not have these obligations stated in contract as it does not contain activation plan. Knowing activation is vital part of sponsorship, this is alarming. When respondents were asked when activation (oral or written agreement) was formed they stated that in 45 percent of occasions it was formed by sponsor before the contract signature, and in the same, 45 percent of occasions, it was prepared by athletes and sponsor's engagement together. The rest 10 percent got it done by a manager. Similarly, when asked about how often they discuss their activation plan, 33 percent, stated they had activation agreement for a year in advance. Quite high, 27 percent of sponsorships determine activation plan on a weekly basis, while 21 percent do not discuss and agree on activation at all.

Another interesting fact was brought when respondents were asked about how they got sponsorship. Results prove importance of networking channel and connections, as 36 percent of respondents got their sponsorship through either family members or acquaintances who work in the sponsoring company. Since 21 percent of them got sponsorship themselves with sending out requests, athletes are quite self-imitative. Results also revealed importance of good manager in sport (in 12 percent sponsorship was arranged by manager) and supportive parents (in six percent arranged by parents). I was surprised, but at the same time happy to see, that two respondents answered sponsor found him or her itself. It is great to see that some companies in Slovenia are willing engage themselves in sport spheres. Furthermore, athletes with sponsors were ask to evaluate their agreement with several statements on the 5-likert scale (1- absolutely disagree, 5- absolutely agree). Results are seen in the Figure 9.

Figure 9. Survey Answers on How Much Respondents Agree with Asked Statements (5-likerd scale)



5.3 Hypotheses Analyses

5.3.1 Hypothesis 1

Reviewing literature, I develop general assumption that if a particular company sponsors an athlete this positively contributes to its brand equity. I wanted to see if this assumption is true also in Slovenia. So, the first hypothesis is stated as:

H1a: Sponsored athlete has positive statistically significant effect on awareness of sponsoring company.

H1b: Sponsored athlete has positive statistically significant effect on brand awareness.

H1c: Sponsored athlete has positive statistically significant effect on customer loyalty toward the brand.

In the survey, respondents were evaluating on the 5-likerd scale (1- completely negative, 5- absolutely positive) how much, in their opinion, sponsored athlete affects three different things: awareness of sponsoring company (H1a), brand awareness (H1b) and customer loyalty toward the brand (H1c). All surveys answers were taken into analysis, no matter if respondents have/had a sponsor or not (N=97).

SPSS analysis of survey results showed that average influence on the two out of presumed constitutes are above 4 thresholds. 4 was a level that I assumed to be a milestone for positive contribution. As seen in the Table 3, averages are at 4,41 for brand awareness, 4,24 for awareness of sponsoring company and 4,10 for brand loyalty. The values of t are positive for all three constitutes what put us on the right side of t-distribution (see Table 4). Since p-value is smaller than 0,005 for awareness of sponsoring company (p= 0,008) and brand awareness (p= 0,000), we can accept H1a and H1b. However, we cannot accept H1c as p-value for customer loyalty toward the brand is not statistically significant, p= 0,240.

Since p-value is smaller than 0,005 for two out of three constitutes of brand equity, awareness of sponsoring company with 0,008 and brand awareness 0,000, we can reject the H0 hypothesis and prove that athlete sponsorship in Slovenia has a positive contribution to the brand equity.

Table 3. One Sample Statistics (Hypothesis 1)

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Awareness of sponsoring company	97	4,25	0,783	0,092
Brand awareness	97	4,41	0,604	0,073
Customer loyalty toward the brand	97	4,10	0,721	0,088

Table 4. One-sample Test (Hypothesis 1)

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Awareness of sponsoring company	2,71	71,00	0,008	0,25	0,07	0,43
Brand awareness	5,62	67,00	0,000	0,41	0,27	0,56
Customer loyalty toward the brand	1,19	66,00	0,240	0,10	0,07	0,26

Based on sample data, we can accept H1a and H1b stating that sponsored athletes have positive contribution to the awareness of sponsoring company and brand awareness. Similarly, we have to reject H1c. Analysis showed that sponsored athletes do not have effect on customer loyalty.

5.3.2 Hypothesis 2

After interviewing sponsored athlete and sponsored personal trainer I quickly realized they do not discuss activation with company's manager. Since I learned that activation is activity that determines success of sponsorship I predisposed that the frequency of its discussion also affects athlete's awareness of goals and sponsor's measurement of this goal reaching. Consequently, I stated second hypothesis as:

H₂: Based on the frequency of the activation discussion among sponsor and sponsored athlete, there is a statistically significant difference in athlete's awareness of the goals and in sponsor's measurement of sponsorship and goal reaching.

For testing hypothesis, I used three questions seen in Table 5 that were solved only by athletes that have or had a sponsor (n=44). In one question respondents were asked to list the frequency of activation discussion with their sponsor. Regarding the frequency, they stated in their answer, athletes were formed in different groups. For the other two questions respondents were evaluating on the 5-likert scale their level of agreeing with the statements "I am aware of the goals of the marketing campaigns in which I am present" and "Sponsor measures effectiveness of marketing campaigns and reaching of the goal" (1- absolutely disagree, 5-absolutely agree).

Since the data of two statements was ordinal and relies on the ranking, I performed non-parametric tests. I looked at the differences in the mean ranks between the different groups (based on the frequency of activation discussion) with the Kruskal-Wallis H test. With mean ranks we can compare the effect of athlete's goal awareness and of sponsor's measurement of sponsorship success to the different groups based on their discussion frequency (see Table 6). We can see that the mean ranks are much higher for athletes who do discuss activation than for those who don't what signals they give discussion higher awareness. Mean rank results for sponsor's measurements of goals varies a lot for all groups of athletes (grouped by the frequency of activation discussion). If groups have different scores is further assessed in Table 7 which actually presents the results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test. With this test, we proved that there is not a statistically significant difference in scores with p-values of 0,513 and 0,295.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics (Hypothesis 2)

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am aware of the the goals of marketing campaigns in which I am present.	44	3,88	1,13
Sponsor measures effectiveness of mareting campaigns and reaching of the goal.	44	3,00	1,24
Do you and your sponsor discuss activation (marketing activities) regularly, or do you have yearly / monthly plan?	44	3,16	1,59

Table 6. Ranks (Hypothesis 2)

Ranks		
Do you and your sponsor discuss activation (marketing activities) regularly, or do you have yearly / monthly plan?		Mean Rank
I am aware of the the goals of marketing campaigns in which I am present.	Regularly, from week to week.	17,00
	We have agreement for a month in advance.	13,50
	We have agreement for 6 months in advance.	15,50
	We have agreement for a year in advance.	17,80
	We do not discuss it.	10,86
Sponsor measures effectiveness of mareting campaigns and reaching of the goal.	Regularly, from week to week.	13,72
	We have agreement for a month in advance.	8,00
	We have agreement for 6 months in advance.	22,50
	We have agreement for a year in advance.	17,83
	We do not discuss it.	12,86

Table 7. Test Statistics (Hypothesis 2)

Test Statistics ^{a,b}		
	I am aware of the the goals of marketing campaigns in which I am present.	Sponsor measures effectiveness of mareting campaigns and reaching of the goal.
Chi-Square	3,276	4,922
df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	0,513	0,295

Legend:a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Do you and your sponsor discuss activation (marketing activities) regularly, or do you have yearly / monthly plan?

Based on the sample data we cannot accept H1. We cannot say that frequency of activation discussion between athlete and sponsors has statistically significant different effect on athlete's awareness of sponsorship goal and on sponsor's measurement of goal reaching.

5.3.3 Hypothesis 3

As fit between athlete's and brand's values and philosophy is a must for successful implementation of sponsorship, I predisposed the relevancy has positive effect on brand equity as well. So, the third hypothesis is stated as:

H3: There is statistically significant positive correlation between congruent athlete-brand relationship on one side, and idol attachment and brand loyalty on the other side.

To test this hypothesis, I used two questions answered by all respondents (N=97). In the first one respondents were asked to pick the level of importance athlete's identification with the sponsoring brand has on the sponsorship success. One the second one, respondents were asked to evaluate on the scale from one to five how much they agree that congruence (values, vision, philosophy) between brand and athlete is important.

With collected data, I performed SPSS analysis of Spearman correlation coefficient. Correlations means closeness/connectedness and is researching how is one variable related to another. It clarifies whether with the increase of one variable the other variable increases as well. My variables were athlete's identification with the brand, and identification with philosophy, values, vision of the brand. With hypothesis, I tested the attitudes of athletes towards their identification with the brand as this data could have implication for final recommendations to managers related to the importance of athlete-brand fit on the sponsorship success. Analysis showed that Spearman correlation coefficient is statistically significant with p-value 0,029 (see Table 8). We can talk about the positive correlation between variables. Since the p-values between 0,20 and 0,39 mark low correlation, our correlation is positive, however low. The more the respondents identify themselves with the brand, the more they feel relatedness with its philosophy is important as well.

Table 8. Correlations (Hypothesis 3)

Correlations				
			In your opinion, how important for a sponsorship success is the fact that sponsoring athlete identify him or herself with the brand?	Congruence (values, vision, philosophy) between brand and athlete is important.
Spearman's rho	In your opinion, how important for a sponsorship success is the fact that sponsoring athlete identify him or herself with the brand?	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	0,272*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0,029
		N	97	97
	Congruence (values, vision, philosophy) between brand and athlete is important.	Correlation Coefficient	0,272*	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,029	
		N	97	97

Legend:*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Based on Spearman correlation coefficient, we accept H1 at p-value 0,029. Since p-value is less than 0,05, I can state at five percent risk that statistically significant correlations do exist. Consequently, I can conclude that fit between athlete's and brand's values has a positive influence on brand equity.

5.3.4 Hypothesis 4

Throughout the interview with the professional athlete and sponsored personal trainer I noticed they had different tone of voice, mimics when speaking and also different opinion when asked about the importance of personal connections when acquiring sponsors in Slovenia. Surely, this is

because one got sponsorship herself sending request, while the other got sponsor because of the personal ties her partner has. Consequently, I formed fourth hypothesis as:

H4: Among the methods of pursuing sponsorship there is statistically significant difference in athletes' opinions whether companies decide on the sponsored athletes based on their personal ties, networks and connections.

I included two survey questions in hypothesis analysis. One survey question answered by all respondents (N=97) was asking respondents to evaluate their degree of agreement with the statement on the 5-likert scale (1- absolutely disagree, 5- absolutely agree). The other question was solved only by athletes who have/had sponsor (n=44) asking them how they pursued it. Testing hypothesis, I performed non-parametric tests. I looked at the differences in the mean ranks between the different groups (based on the method of pursuing sponsorship) with the Kruskal-Wallis H test. Mean rank column in Table 10 can be used to compare opinions about the importance of athlete's connections/personal networks when pursuing sponsorship. It is seen that two groups of athletes, the ones that got sponsorship through acquaintance or a family member working in sponsor's company and the ones for which parents arranged sponsorship have significantly higher mean values. This signals they think connection and personal networks have high importance when pursuing sponsorship. Whether the groups have different scores is further assessed using test statistics seen in Table 11, which actually presents the results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test. Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that the difference in scores between different groups is statistically significant with p-value of 0,002.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics (Hypothesis 4)

Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Std. Deviation
Companies decide for sponsoring an athlete based on their "connections / personal networks" and based on the business development.	97	0,97
How did you get your sponsor	44	1,50

Table 10. Kruskal-Wallis Test (Hypothesis 4)

Kruskal-Wallis Test		
Ranks		
How did you get your sponsor?		Mean Rank
Companies decide for sponsoring an athlete based on their "connections / personal networks" and based on the business development.	I got it myself with writing and sending out requests for sponsorship.	6,75
	I got it through acquaintances/ family who works in sponsor's company.	15,00
	Manager got a sponsor for me.	4,00
	My parents got a sponsor for me.	15,00
	Other	16,60

Table 11. Test Statistics (Hypothesis 4)

Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	Companies decide for sponsoring an athlete based on their "connections / personal networks" and based on the business development.
Chi-Square	17,020
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	0,002

Legend: a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: How did you get your sponsor?

Based on the above description and data, we can accept H₁ with p-value of 0,002. There is a difference in opinions between the groups of athletes about the importance of connections/personal ties when pursuing sponsorship. Athletes who got sponsorship because of parents or acquaintances in the sponsored company give »connections/personal ties« higher importance for successful pursuing of sponsorship than the athletes who got sponsor themselves or through their manager.

5.3.5 Hypothesis 5

People always like to talk about the things they enjoy and make them happy. I predisposed that it goes the same for the sponsored athletes; if the athlete is going to have inner motivation to present sponsored brand him or herself, he will most likely also feel good about the product/service and when presenting this. I realized this would be important information for Slovenian company so they would be aware how the fit and authenticity of athlete can have indirectly effect also on all after aspects of athlete sponsorship. Therefore, I stated fifth hypotheses as:

H₅: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between athlete's inner feeling of obligation presenting sponsoring brand and athlete's good feeling/mood when presenting the brand.

To test this hypothesis, I again used Spearman's correlation coefficient just as for testing the third hypothesis. Fifth hypothesis relates to two survey questions that were answered by athletes having sponsors, currently or in the past (n=44). For both questions respondents were asked to evaluate on the scale from one to five how much they agree with the statements. One statement was: "Because of sponsorship, I feel obligated to present the company." The other statement was: "When I use the product / service of the brand I am promoting, I feel good." I wanted to find out if there was connectedness with athlete's personal obligation to present the sponsor, and athlete's identity and likeness of the brand on the other side.

Hypothesis three already proved that congruent athlete-brand relation positively affects brand equity. Taking this into account forming fifth hypothesis, I predisposed that if athlete has the motivation to present the brand, he or she will feel good when doing so what will indirectly positively affect sponsoring brand equity. In the Table 12, we can see that Spearman correlation coefficient is statistically significant with p-value 0,001. We can talk about the positive correlation between variables. The value of Spearman coefficient is 0,595 which signals medium correlation strength. Medium correlation strength lies for the coefficients between 0,40 and 0,69. So, the more

athletes feel good when using sponsoring brand, the more they feel obligated to present the brand and vice versa. Since the literature already proved that athletes feel good about the brands with which they fit, this fit will lead to their personal obligation to promote the brand, what additionally leads to increased brand equity.

Table 12. Correlations (Hypothesis 5)

Correlations				
			Because of sponsorship, I feel obligated to present the company.	When I use the product / service of the brand I am promoting, I feel good.
Spearman's rho	Because of sponsorship, I feel obligated to present the company.	Correlation	1,000	0,595*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0,001
		N	44	44
	When I use the product / service of the brand I am promoting, I feel good.	Correlation	0,595*	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0,001	
		N	44	44

Legend:* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Based on sample data we can accept H₁ with p-value of 0,001. We can say that athletes' feeling of being obliged to present the brand and their good inner mood when presenting the brand are positively correlated what all indirectly leads to increase of brand equity.

5.4 Implications for Managers

When engaging in sport sponsorship, managers should first set a **clear objective** of what they want to achieve with the sponsorship. With clear objective, they will later know whether their goal is reached or not. Also, the goal should be mutual for the firm and the athlete. It should be achieved by reaching targeted audience, creating exposure for the brand, and developing associations by forwarding marketing messages. Managers should not go for any athlete based on their fame or sport results at the time of the start of the campaign. Instead, they should study them. Sponsored athlete should be an opinion leader who forms an impressive influence for the brand campaign. Managers should research on social media beforehand if athlete's lifestyle and values fit with the brand. If athlete coincides with the brand image and shares the same values the product or service presents, sponsorship will most likely result in success. Consequently, careful consideration of the sponsored athlete is always advised.

Managers should also be in constant touch with the athletes. From interviews, it is seen they are but they do not discuss activation. Activation of sponsorship is a key element of each project and demands additional investment to build added value for a consumer. It aims for higher brand awareness, new customers, higher website turnover, higher sales profits and brand image (Koščak, 2014). Companies do not know that their goals of sponsorship can only be reached with the further investment, activation (Sport Element). Moreover, managers should keep in mind that they should develop activation plan before contract signature. Also, to enjoy the returns of sponsorship, they should **spend on activation more than on sponsorship**, 1.5 dollar on every dollar spent on sponsorship rights. Furthermore, managers should always think about the sponsorship as a long-term investment and partnership. Brand knowledge and awareness are built over time, so managers should be patient and not give up as the results of sponsorship will be seen only after year one. Moreover, having longer contracts, managers will still be gaining associations even after the end of the sponsorship.

Stronger attention to the youth sport is another aspect managers should pay stronger attention for.

Youth sport gets hardly any media coverage, but it can still be a great tool to spread awareness of the brand and to gain attention of young athletes, and, consequently, also of their parents, friends and coaches. This is especially true because younger population is heavy social media user who follow influencers on various social media platforms. Sponsoring youth athlete or team is available to any company, also to medium sized and small firms, as it is not so expensive as sponsoring an athlete celebrity. However, it still has a great value for the company in general and for brand image itself, as people encourage and are impressed by positive contribution of sponsoring company to their local community and for supporting young stars.

Most of all managers should show self-initiative to get knowledgeable about the athlete sponsorship. Online they can find articles to read it in their own time. I recommend following the website **“The Sponsorship Consultants”**, <http://www.thesponsorshipconsultants.com>. Website provides information to business entities and athletes on how to get successfully engaged in sponsorship. On their website, managers can listen to free podcasts, read articles and actively participate in the blog discussions. Podcasts can be especially valuable source of information as they talk about anything from “Launching business with brand ambassador” to “The business benefits of sponsoring athletes”, etc. Additionally, managers can also purchase their book “The ultimate guide to sponsoring athletes” that teaches anything from how to create powerful marketing campaigns to how to get incredible financial return. Moreover, book about the sponsorship is accessible also in Slovene. “Uspešne sponzorske strategije” (Eng: Successful sponsorship strategies) by Jadranka Jezeršek is actually a handbook for systematic, creative and effective sponsorships.

Perhaps managers of Slovenian firms can also sign up for **free online courses on Sport sponsorship** being offered through massive open online courses, Courseera. Sign up for the courses can be found on: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/sport-sponsorship>. Classes cover information on fundamentals of sponsorship, the relationship between the brand/event and the sponsor, types of sport sponsorship, objectives of the sponsor and much more. It is led by instructor from Johan Cruyff Institute that is specializing only in sport management. Its online course of sport management has been for the second consecutive year ranked number two among the world’s best online programs. Ranking was made by Sportbusiness international magazine 2016 (Johan Cruyff Institute - Educating Sport Leaders, n.d.).

Another implication for manager is to set together and push on the **Slovenian sport agency Sport media focus**. This is the biggest Slovenian sport marketing agency whose clients are firms like Mercator, Hervis, Tilia, Triglav, Petrol, Omv, Unicredit bank, brands Frutabela and Pernaton, etc. Agency also takes care of personal relations for several biggest Slovenian sport events, sport federations and athletes themselves. Since Sport Media Focus also organizes **Sporto conference**, the leading regional annual sport marketing and sponsorship conference, managers can talk them into having a lecture particularly on athlete sponsorship on the conference in Fall 2018.

Managers should also pay a great attention to **technological advancements and convergence** which has been enormous in recent years and has transformed marketing practices. With new emerging trends, such as “sharing economy”, omnichannel integration, content marketing, social customer relationship management, etc., managers should adopt to the customers’ path in the digital economy. Today’s hyper-connected fans urge brand to deliver them high-tech engagements with their athletes. The more high-tech customers are, the more they want things that are made just for them. Moreover, with big data analysis products can become more personalized and services more personal (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017). More about the marketing approaches in this transitional era between traditional marketing outgrowth and digital marketing boom is written

in the book Marketing 4.0. by Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan. Since the book was released in 2017 it really follows all the trends and can be valuable source of information for all managers dealing with athlete sponsorship.

As already mentioned above, technology is now driving more activity also in athlete sponsorship. In high technology era, social media already has a big impact on customers/athlete's fans, but its role is predicted to even further increase. It is reported that 30 percent of people who connect with the sponsor that supports their favorite athlete by liking or following the brand on social media buy one of sponsor's products (Sport Sponsorship Trends 001, n.d.). So, managers should look for the ways to further engage with the people, especially by **valuable content marketing** which is distributed by athletes. Sponsors should **create their own story** and not simply just put the athlete at the end of the commercial for gaining attention and increasing the reach of commercial. Creation of a particular story builds passion for the brand (Bennett, n.d.). With an evocative story, sponsoring firm will help athlete creating meaningful content he or she can relate to and, furthermore, connections on social media platforms. Athlete sponsorship reassures consumer about the true quality of the product. So, with the great content and story behind, the athlete can develop loyalty, provide fans' post-purchase behavior, make recommendations for the other complementary products and discuss in what extend has the product improved his or her performance or lifestyle (Ways to get more out of sponsored athlete, n.d).

Another prediction for 2018 that can be valued for marketers is that, due to the high number of social media platforms, there will be less physical sponsorship activation which relates to the presence of sponsored athlete at a particular event, and **more digital sponsorship activation**. Managers should prepare their activation plans according to this trend. With the numerous social media platforms, sponsors will be receiving even more likes and followers on their channels. **Effective usage of this data** will become more and more important and managers should be aware of it. Data analysis can have profound impact on sponsorship, from the evaluation, selection, activation and measurement of partnership between company and athlete to the selling (Yardley, 2016). So, including data to the sponsorship activation the idea of exposing brand to the crowd is still present, but the aim to identifying, understanding and communicating one to one with brands best target customers. Data usage also allows managers higher ability to effectively measure return on objectives of sponsorship and on its investment. Technologies delivering personalization drive the most actionable results and the deepest insights on sponsor's customers. What is more, the costs of delivering personalization has recently decreased what makes it more approachable for sponsors. (Yardley, 2016).

5.5 Implications for Further Research

Analysis presents fundamentals of athlete sponsorship, experiences and testimonies of Slovenian athletes. In my research, we know companies' perspectives on athlete sponsorship only from two in-depth interviews. So, for further analysis, I recommend distributing similar questionnaire I did among professional athletes among Slovenian companies. With this, the researched problem would gain the point of view from both sides of partnership and gain on credibility. For example, my research showed that 33 percent of athletes do have activation plan stated in their contract while some also only have an oral agreement on it. Being in contact with firms, one could find out what is the reason beyond that companies are committing only to oral agreements and not signing formal contracts. Further research would also find answers to what is the leverage ratio of activation spend in Slovenia, how, if, companies measure sponsorship effect, do they even set themselves objective, etc.

Slovenian economy was majorly affected by 2008 economic crisis. Many companies closed or went bankrupt, while others were restricting their budgets and stop investing in any expansion or modernization. Professional athletes that solved the survey were contacting companies in the years of their recovery after the economic crisis. Perhaps this might be the reason many confronted companies' closed doors. Since Slovenian economy has been improving last years, companies spend and invest more again. They are also more open to foreign cooperation, it would be interesting to distribute the same questionnaire among professional athletes again in one or two years. Situation can change dramatically. So, since athlete sponsorship is becoming more and more popular and there are no additional research about it made yet, there is still more to explore in the future to gain full picture of athlete sponsorship situation in Slovenia.

With the increasing role of data collection and analyzation in athlete sponsorship I would suggest to include this to the further research. It would be interesting to see if Slovenian companies are actually using customer's information they receive through social media or are they simply satisfied with seeing engagement on their social platforms.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this master thesis was to research and understand athlete sponsorship situation in Slovenia and based on the findings provide possible improvements and recommendations to the managers. In order to get theoretical base of the topic I reviewed literature on branding, brand equity and athlete sponsorship. I supplemented this knowledge with the investigation of athlete sponsorship in Slovenia through four interviews and survey distributed to the professional athletes. Altogether, it led me to the results described below.

My analysis showed that the main obstacle for athlete sponsorship to be more spread in Slovenia lies in companies' un-interest, and companies' managers' unawareness of the potential benefits/opportunity of growing their customer pool. They do not see sponsorship as a benefiting activity for themselves. Consequently, it is not surprising that 94 percent of the survey respondents believe it was difficult for professional athlete in Slovenia to get a sponsor. The problem was further revealed with the fact that most of professional athletes that wanted to get a sponsor but were unsuccessful at their attempt were denied because of the lack of company's interest. Some didn't even receive any response at all.

As worldwide, sport industry has become such a big business, I am predicting that marketing managers in Slovenia will gradually become more willing to invest into athlete sponsorship as well. This will be easier when possessing knowledge about how to build brand equity through sport engagement and sponsorships. If managers will execute athlete sponsorship correctly, they will, through athlete's exposure, enjoy the cheapest source of marketing.

It was not surprising to see that among professional athletes in Slovenia, there are two major different perceptions on athlete sponsorship. Some athletes see it as a one-way benefit from which only they benefit (financial or/and material "help"), while the others see it as a mutual and reciprocal agreement between two parties. Consequently, marketing managers should always introduce sponsorship to the athlete as a **two-way partnership** from which they will both benefit. They could never know what is athlete's perception on the sponsorship. So, it is wise to introduce athlete with his or her obligations. Only this is how the stereotype of sponsorship being a "free money for nothing in return" could be refuted in the future. Both parties have to be aware of two-sided partnership! Sponsorship has to start becoming recognized as a company's investment and not a pure expense.

Athletes get familiar with their sponsorship obligations in activation plan. Consequently, Slovenian companies that practice sponsorship should give it higher importance, prepare it beforehand together with the athlete and include it in the sponsorship contract. With the survey, I found that 85 percent of athletes are aware of their obligations towards sponsors. However, 67 percent does not have activation plan which generally states these obligations in their sponsorship contracts what is alarming. From other survey findings, I can conclude that percentage of activation plan presence is so low because many time athletes only have informal oral agreement with their sponsors. This is a reflection of Slovenia sport industry which is still in its early stages. Activation adds value to the sponsorship contract and its investment determines success of sponsorship (Koščak, 2014). Activation and its marketing campaigns are, as previously stated, fuel of sponsorship with which sponsor, with a help of athlete's figure, builds brand equity and receives return on its investment. But to receive reimbursement, activation is required and not many sponsors are yet aware of this (Koščak, 2014).

In the survey, I wanted to see if the frequency of activation discussion between the athlete and sponsor affects athlete's awareness of sponsorship goal and sponsor's measurement of goal reaching. I was surprised to see activation discussion frequency does not affect them. Trying to understand survey founding I once again reviewed conducted interviews. I came to the conclusion that athlete's awareness of sponsorship goals and sponsor's measurement whether these goal is reached or not are more a matter of fact of the manager's athlete sponsorship knowledge than of the activation discussion frequency. Companies that perform athlete sponsorship seriously inform athletes about the goals at their firsts meetings, frequency of activation discussion is not relevant factor.

Statistical analysis of survey results proved that athletes themselves are aware they positively contribute to the awareness of the sponsoring company and to the brand awareness. This is also proved by female athlete of the previous year and Sporto brand in female category for 2017 Ilka Štuhec, who in one of the interviews after receiving Sporto brand award testified: "Athletes competing on such high level simply are brand themselves. We are aware of our responsibility towards sponsors and our fans." (Sporto konferenca, 2017). However, even though athletes are aware of their positive contribution on the brand and company awareness they do not have effect on customers' loyalty towards the brand.

But if we add to this another survey finding showing there is statistically significant positive correlation between congruent athlete/ brand relationship on one side, and brand loyalty and idol attachment on the other side we can understand why the fit between the athlete and the brand is of such importance. Appropriate fit between the image of the product and the image of the athlete can significantly increase positive evaluation of the sponsorship (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). Fit additionally positively affects customer's attachment to the idol. Also, it gives us clear understanding that just any athlete sponsorship does not have effect on customer's loyalty towards the brand. But, the sponsorship that is congruent does have it. Talking about brand loyalty and athlete attachment, social media plays important role as well. professional athletes more and more see social media as a tool to nurture their relationship with the fans. So, sponsor sponsors should see social platforms as an opportunity to build their brand (Hambrick et al., 2005).

Another statistically confirmed finding is that if the athlete feels good when presenting the brand, he or she will have motivation to do so what will indirectly positively affect sponsoring brand equity. Surely, he or she will be more likely to present the brand if there is a fit between them already described above. Many athletes in Slovenia also pursue their sponsors through the

connections of their parents or acquaintances. Statistical examination of survey results proved that athletes who got sponsors because of their personal networks and ties give ties and connections higher importance as a tool for successful pursuing of sponsorship than the athletes who found sponsor themselves or through the manager.

Lastly, I would like to point out three things that can after deciding for athlete sponsorship limit its success. These are lack of creativity, imagination and flexibility (Roy, 2016). Too many companies in Slovenia completely avoid them. Many of sponsoring companies only go for big sport stars like Tina Maze, Peter Prevc, Ilka Štuhec, etc. These athletes are big names and bring companies an instant success. Fans know them already, so sponsors do not need much creativity and imagination to build a big story behind the whole campaign. Customer's attention will be guaranteed, due to the presence of the athlete star. Moreover, as a reflection of Slovenian collectivistic society athletes are also only playing symbolic role and rarely address the audience explicitly (Arnould et al., 2004), like they do in individualistic societies, for example USA, where the focus is on athlete and his or her endorsement of the product (Geert Hofstede, n.d.). Furthermore, sponsors too many times lack flexibility. For instance, none of Ilka Štuhec sponsors twisted their strategy around after her injury just before the start of the new ski season in October. Brand Ford created a advertisement in which Ilka is driving new Ford Kuga model (Ford Slovenija, 2017) and brand Veriga was the whole December broadcasting commercial in which Ilka is shown by the Christmas three wrapping presents (Veriga k.f., 2017). Being flexible and responding immediately, they could instead make a commercial or series of YouTube videos about her emotional road to injury progress. Such commercials have already proved to be more successful in similar occasions and keep even higher fans' interest for the brand while receiving brand exposure.

So, to sum up, instead of using big sport names, sponsors in Slovenia have to start educating their personal about brand equity building and activation of sponsorship. Slovenian companies are not yet, but should be prepared to create their own marketing story themselves, also with less recognized athletes. Only then, the real effect of athlete sponsorship will be seen and companies will realize that the results can be achieved also with perspective young talents and athletes who are not top notch. I believe that once small firms see the results big businesses are getting with athletes also they can afford, they will be encouraged to get engaged into athlete sponsorship as one of their marketing strategies as well.

POVZETEK

Dandanes trženje postaja vse bolj materialistično. Podjetja potrebujejo ambasadorje in se zato vedno bolj zatekajo k znanim osebnostim. Športniki so v očeh množice navadni smrtniki, s katerimi se je lažje identificirati, in so zato boljši ambasadorji kot, na primer, znani igralci ali pevci (Meden, 2015). Podjetja po celem svetu v njih vidijo potencial za doseganje svojih ciljev trženja (Hughes & Shank, 2005). Zaradi izjemne note naših športnikov, ki nas kot narod največkrat združijo in pravzaprav predstavljajo naš nacionalni ponos, njihov potencial v oglaševanju še posebej drži za Slovenijo. S podpisom sponzorske pogodbe in odkupom športnikovih pravic, športnik postane ambasador podjetja, na katerega se le-to nato lahko nanaša preko različnih kanalov množičnih medijev.

Sponzoriranje športnika je strateška aktivnost, ki za sponzorja na trgu pomeni trajnostno konkurenčno prednost (Fahy et al., 2004). Aktivnost lahko razložimo tudi kot zamenjavo nečesa za nekaj. V najpreprostejši obliki podjetje športnika finančno podpira, lahko pa mu nameni materialno nadomestilo (Carrillat & Astous, 2011). Cilji partnerstva so večja prepoznavnost blagovne znamke, naklonjenost kupcev k blagovni znamki ter spodbuda potencialnih kupcev k interakciji z blagovno znamko (Weber, n.d.). Povezava ima tudi potencial za nadaljnjo gradnjo blagovne znamke (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Športno sponzoriranje je tako direktni poizkus podjetij, kako pozicionirati svojo blagovno znamko skupaj s športnikom in na ta način direktno vplivati na moč blagovne znamke (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007).

Preden se podjetje odloči za športno sponzoriranje, si morajo managerji zadati jasno predpostavko kaj s sponzorstvom želijo doseči. Iz predpostavke bo kasneje razvidno, če je bil cilj dosežen. Podjetje in športnik morata imeti skupen cilj, zato je celotni proces izbire športnika izjemno pomemben. Ustrezna povezava med podobo športnika in podobo blagovne znamke lahko izjemno vpliva na pozitivno vrednotenje sponzorstva športnika (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007) ter izboljša lojalnost blagovne znamke (Honlei et al., 2015). Športnik mora pri ljudeh vzpostaviti kredibilnost blagovne znamke (Bradič, 2015) in gojiti iste vrednote, ki jih predstavlja tudi znamka sama. Večja kot je sinergija med sponzoriranim športnikom ter blagovno znamko, boljši so rezultati športnega sponzoriranja in višja je prepoznavnost blagovne znamke. Skupni cilj športnega sponzoriranja je dosežen s posredovanjem trženjskih sporočil, ki dosežejo ciljno skupino, izpostavijo blagovno znamko ter generirajo asociacije.

Ključ do uspeha vsakega sponzorstva se prav gotovo skriva v aktivaciji. Zgolj sponzorstvo je le pridobitev športnikovih pravic v namen oglaševanja, aktivacija sponzorstva pa je tista, ki te pravice uporabi in jih vključi v komunikacijsko strategijo blagovne znamke. Aktivacija sponzorstvu doda vrednost in se lahko pojavi v različnih oblikah, na primer kot so promocija prodaje, posebno pakiranje produkta, zasloni v trgovinah, degustacija produkta, dodatna izpostavitve blagovne znamke, digitalna interakcija navijačev, organizacija ogleda športnega tekmovanja za navijače, darilne karte za ogled tekem, uporaba kart iz tekem za popust pri nakupu, popust pri nakupu kart za ogled tekmovanj za uslužbence sponzorja, itd. (Fortunato, 2013). Višina investicije v aktivacijo določa sam uspeh sponzorstva športnika (Roy, 2016). Da bi dosegli poslovni cilj, morajo managerji razviti ideje o kreativni aktivaciji že v prvih fazah pogajanja o sponzorstvu. Na žalost podjetja največkrat ne izkoristijo potenciala aktivacije, saj kar 24 odstotkov sponzorjev po podpisu pogodbe s športnikom nima več denarja, ki bi ga zanjo namenili. Za doseg donosa morajo sponzorji v aktivacijo pravzaprav investirati več kot v sponzorstvo: 1.5 dolarja za vsak dolar, ki je šel za nakup sponzorskih pravic (Fortunato, 2013).

Sponzorji morajo partnerstvo s športnikom vedno obravnavati kot dolgoročno investicijo. Zavedanje in prepoznavnost blagovne znamke se namreč gradi dlje časa. Rezultati sponzoriranja športnika bodo namreč vidni šele po prvem letu. Dodatna prednost daljših sponzorskih pogodb je tudi ta, da bo blagovna znamka tudi po preteku pogodbe v očeh množice še vedno povezana s športnikom.

Razlog, da se zadnje čase vse več svetovnih podjetij odloča za športno sponzoriranje, je želja po graditvi prepoznavnosti njihove blagovne znamke. Športno sponzoriranje je za podjetje manjši strošek kot običajna oblika oglaševanja. Prav tako si podjetja želijo, da jih ljudje prepoznajo po skrbnem poslovanju in družbeni odgovornosti (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). Športno sponzoriranje v zadnjem času ni postalo samo bolj popularno, temveč tudi bolj intenzivno. Postala je osnova celotne strategije trženja številnih podjetij (Fahy, Farrelly, & Quester, 2004). Danes ni več presenečenje, da je športna industrija postala pravi posel, kateremu se napoveduje nadaljnja rast.

Žal pa je v Sloveniji sponzoriranje športnikov še vedno v prvotni fazi razvoja in se največkrat ne upravlja pravilno. Ne samo, da se uporablja napačno, tudi javno mnenje o njem je zmotno. Množica ga največkrat vidi kot "denar, ki pade z neba", podjetja pa kot "denar, ki se vrže stran". To je vsekakor zmotno; športnik ima namreč svoje naloge, ki so navedene v aktivacijskem planu sponzorske pogodbe. Podjetja pa na splošno preprosto niso izobražena o potencialnih koristih sponzorstva in se ga zato ne poslužujejo kot enega izmed orodij trženja. Posledično slovenski, športniki, ki želijo pridobiti sponzorja za nadaljevanje svojega športnega udejstvovanja, največkrat naletijo na zaprta vrata.

Ravno trenutno, ne najbolj cvetoče, stanje sponzoriranja športnikov v Sloveniji me je vzpodbudilo k pisanju magistrske naloge s to tematiko. Glavna problematika je pomankanje zavedanja in znanja podjetij o tem, kako obrniti sponzoriranje športnika v profitabilno obliko trženja. Če se situacija sponzorstva ne bo spremenila in podjetja ne bodo spregledala potencialnega prispevka športnikov k moči njihove blagovne znamke, bomo izgubili naš nacionalni ponos in osebe, ki besedo o Sloveniji največkrat ponesejo v svet - naše športnike. Zato je moj namen raziskati, ali ima sponzoriranje športnika lahko vpliv na sponzorjevo blagovno znamko. Prav tako želim podati za slovenska podjetja koristne splošne informacije o grajenju blagovne znamke in poskusiti oblikovati navodila o izvajanju sponzoriranja športnikov.

Podjetja delež svojega letnega proračuna namenijo trženju. Zakaj ga torej ne bi namenila za sponzoriranje, od česar bi poleg njih imeli korist tudi športniki. Vsako podjetje, ki se odloči za sponzoriranje, bi moralo dobro poznati in razumeti, kje se skriva dobiček od povezave s športnikom. Biti mora seznanjeno o vplivih sponzoriranja na poslovanje in o obsegu njihovih dolžnosti. Posledično sem si zadala cilj, da bom preko že zbrane literature, lastne ankete, ki sem jo razmnožila med profesionalne športnike, in s pomočjo štirih intervjujev (s profesionalno atletinjo in olimpijko, ambasadorico blagovne znamke Reebok, prokuratorjem večjega podjetja, ki podpira naše športnike, ter marketinškim direktorjem podjetja Petrol d.d., ki je izjemno aktivno v slovenskem športnem sponzoriranju) odkrila glavno težavo sponzoriranja športnikov v Sloveniji, v nadaljevanju pa opredelila, kakšno je trenutno stanje sponzoriranja in kakšna je dejanska percepcija. Zadala sem si tudi, da managerjem podam ideje in priporočila o možnih izboljšavah trenutne situacije.

Raziskava je pokazala, da je glavna ovira, ki preprečuje razširitev sponzoriranja športnikov v Sloveniji, prav nezanimanje podjetij in neznanje managerjev o možnosti grajenja bazena potencialnih kupcev, ki ga sponzorstvo lahko prinese. Prav zato kar 94 odstotkov anketiranih profesionalnih športnikov verjame, da je v Sloveniji težko pridobiti sponzorja. Zaradi njene

majhnosti mnogi športniki pridobijo sponzorja preko staršev ali svojega kroga znancev. Športniki, ki pridobijo sponzorja preko različnih vezi in poznanstev, le-tem pripisujejo večji pomen za uspešno pridobitev sponzorske pogodbe. Ugotovila sem, da med športniki vladata dve različni mnenji o sponzoriranju športnikov. Nekateri sponzorstvo vidijo kot enosmerno aktivnost, od katere imajo korist le oni (v obliki finančne ali materialne pomoči), medtem ko se drugi zavedajo dvosmernega vzajemnega partnerstva. Prav zato morajo sponzorji še pred podpisom pogodbe športnika vedno seznaniti z dejstvom, da je to dvosmerno partnerstvo, od katerega imata korist oba. Le na ta način bo sponzoriranje športnikov postalo tretirano kot investicija podjetja in ne zgolj kot strošek.

O pomenu aktivacije za uspeh sponzorstva sem že pisala zgoraj. Prav zato je zastrašujoče, da kar 67 odstotkov profesionalnih športnikov nima aktivacijskega plana, v katerem bi bile navedene športnikove dolžnosti do sponzorja. V Sloveniji ima veliko športnikov neformalne ustne dogovore s sponzorji in so pravzaprav seznanjeni s svojimi nalogami do sponzorja, nimajo pa aktivacijskega plana. Takšnih je kar 85 odstotkov anketirancev. Zanimivo je, da sem s statističnim testiranjem anketnih rezultatov med drugim ugotovila, da pogostost komunikacijskega stika, vezano na samo aktivacijo med športnikom in sponzorjem, ne vpliva na športnikovo zavedanje skupnega cilja in na sponzorjevo merjenje dosega tega cilja. Predpostavljam, da sta ta dva dejavnika bolj odvisna od samega znanja managerja vezano na sponzoriranje športnikov.

Rezultati pa so med drugim potrdili že pridobljeno teoretično znanje, da je ujemanje športnika z blagovno znamko izrednega pomena. Analiza je pokazala, da športniki statistično značilno pozitivno vplivajo na prepoznavnost podjetja in blagovne znamke, česar se tudi sami zavedajo. To pa ne drži za njihov vpliv na lojalnost kupcev blagovni znamki. Če temu dodamo ugotovitev, da obstaja statistično značilna pozitivna korelacija med skladnim partnerstvom športnika ter blagovne znamke na eni strani, ter lojalnostjo kupcev blagovni znamki in navezanost na idola na drugi strani, lahko hitro pridemo do zaključka, da je ujemanje športnika z blagovno znamko res izrednega pomena. Ustrezno ujemanje med podobo športnika in in podobo blagovne znamke lahko pomembno vpliva na pozitivno vrednotenje sponzorstva (Pitts & Stotlar, 2007). Njuno ujemanje dodatno pozitivno vpliva tudi na navezanost kupca na idola, v tem primeru sponzoriranega športnika. Sponzorstvo športnika ima torej vedno pozitiven doprinos k prepoznavnosti podjetja ter prepoznavnosti blagovne znamke. A le sponzorstvo, pri katerem se podoba športnika ujema s podobo blagovne znamke, pozitivno vpliva tudi na lojalnost kupcev k blagovni znamki.

Ugotovila sem tudi, da bo športnik, ki se bo ob predstavljanju blagovne znamke počutil dobro, motiviran za njeno promocijo, kar bo posredno vplivalo na moč blagovne znamke. Vsekakor pa bo motivacija športnika večja, če bo predstavljal blagovno znamko, s katero se poistoveti in katera predstavlja iste vrednote, ki tudi njemu predstavljajo strast.

Nekateri izmed glavnih elementov, na katere sponzorji pri kreiranju strategij trženja s športnikom, ne smejo pozabiti, so prav gotovo kreativnost, domišljija in fleksibilnost (Roy, 2016). Žal se teh večina domačih podjetij ne poslužuje. Preprosto se odločijo za sponzoriranje najbolj znanih in uspešnih športnikov, kot so Tina Maze, Peter Prevc, Ilka Štuhec, itd., s čimer se izognejo potrebi po kreativnosti in grajenju celotne zgodbe, ki stoji za kampanjo. Prisotnost znanih športnikov jim že sama po sebi prinese uspeh, saj jih ljudje prepoznajo. Odraz slovenskega kolektivizma je tudi dejstvo, da športniki v celotni kampanji igrajo le simbolično vlogo in občinstva ne nagovarjajo direktno (Arnould et al., 2004). Direktni nagovor s strani športnika, je namreč fokus kampanj pri individualističnih nacijah, kot na primer v Združenih državah Amerike (Geert Hofstede, n.d.).

Slovenska podjetja, ki se trenutno poslužujejo sponzoriranja športnikov, največkrat tudi niso prilagodljiva za hitro reagiranje in spremembo aktivacijskega plana v primeru nepričakovanih dejavnikov, kot so na primer poškodbe. Trenutno aktualen ter odličen primer tega so sponzorstva Ilke Štuhec, športnice preteklega leta. V primeru poškodb je bilo v preteklosti že dokazano, da bo sponzor prejel večji odziv navijačev in izpostavljenost blagovne znamke, če bo fleksibilen, spremenil plan tako, da bo vanj vključil športnikovo rehabilitacijo. Le-ta v danem trenutku najbolj pritegne pozornost navijačev.

Po pregledu primarnih in sekundarnih virov informacij slovenska podjetja pozivam, da se bolj vključijo v sponzoriranja mladih in lokalnih perspektivnih športnikov, ki so še velik neizkoriščen potencial za širjenje prepoznavnosti in pridobitev pozornosti mladih športnikov, njihovih staršev, prijateljev in trenerjev. Prav tako imajo tudi družbeno odgovornost, saj ljudje radi vidijo, da podjetja skrbijo za dobrobit mladih ali/in lokalne skupnosti. Sponzoriranje perspektivnih športnikov ni dostopno le velikim podjetjem, temveč tudi majhnim in srednje velikim. Odkup športnikovih pravic namreč ni drag. Pomembo vlogo pri tretiranju sponzoriranja mladih športnikov ima tudi dejstvo, da je mlajša populacija najbolj aktiven uporabnik različnih socialnih platform. Le-ta bodo v prihodnosti igrala še večjo vlogo pri aktivaciji sponzorstva, saj bo digitalna aktivacija postala pomembnejša kot pa dejanska fizična prisotnost sponzorancev na različnih dogodkih (Yardley, 2016).

Da se bo situacija sponzoriranja športnikov v Sloveniji spremenila, morajo podjetja izobraziti delovno silo o grajenju blagovne znamke s pomočjo sponzoriranja športnika. Slediti morajo trendom tehnologije ter digitalizacije in svojim (potencialnim) kupcem omogočiti visoko tehnološko interakcijo s športniki preko socialnih omrežij. Pridobljene metapodatke morajo uporabiti v lastno dobrobit in čim bolj personalizirati tako produkte/storitve, kot tudi posredovana sporočila uporabnikom (Kotler et al., 2017). Sponzorji morajo iskati kreativne možnosti, da se preko kvalitetnega vsebinskega trženja, ki ga bodo posredovali športniki, čim bolj povežejo z že obstoječimi in tudi novimi potencialnimi kupci. Pripravljeni morajo biti kreirati zgodbo tudi z manj znanimi športniki in ne le pozicionirati zvoneča športna imena na koncu reklam. Prav zgodbe namreč v trženju gradijo strast do blagovne znamke (Bennett, n.d.), športnik pa s posredovanjem sporočil kupcem zagotavlja pravo kvaliteto blagovne znamke, gradi lojalnost, posreduje nasvete o nakupu komplementarnih produktov in deli mnenje, kako je uporaba blagovne znamke vplivala na njegovo življenje in tekmovanje (Ways to get more out of sponsored athlete, n.d). Le na ta način bo razviden dejanski vpliv sponzoriranja športnikov na blagovno znamko, pri čemer bodo podjetja spoznala, da je željeni cilj možno doseči tudi z manj znanimi mladimi/lokalnimi športniki. Prepričana sem, da se bodo tudi mala in srednje velika podjetja začela v večji meri odločati za implementacijo sponzoriranja športnikov, ko bodo videla rezultate trženja, ki jih dosegajo velika podjetja s športniki, katerih pravice bi lahko kupili tudi sami.

Sama raziskava predstavlja dodano vrednost dosednji literaturi, saj kakršnakoli raziskava o športnem sponzoriranju v Sloveniji še ni bila opravljena. Analiza predstavlja temelje sponzoriranja športnikov, izkušnje ter pričevanja profesionalnih športnikov. Slednje je koristno predvsem za podjetja, ki se že poslužujejo sponzoriranja športnikov ali o tem razmišljajo, saj sami rezultati in predlogi usmerjajo managerje k pravilnemu pristopu k sponzorstvu in razumevanju konkurenčnih prednosti, ki jih samo sponzorstvo prinaša.

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Appendix A: Visual Representation of Brand Creation

Figure 1. Creation of Brand in the Mind of Consumer



Source: C. Majgaard, *9 parameters reviewed*, 2016.

Appendix B: In-depth Interview with Professional Athlete

Name and Surname: Maja Mihalinec
Interviewee: Professional athlete - sprinter
Age: 27
Gender: Female

Who are your current sponsors?

The greatest sponsors are still my parents. It is sad, but true. I have sponsors Nike and Vitamin Well water. From Nike, I get all sports clothing twice a year. That is it for the moment. But once at the higher level, athletes also get a certain amount of money. One of my friends from Slovenian athletics federation who was in the finals at Rio Olympic games gets 5.000 EUR per year. I can imagine that for elite athletes the number is much higher.

As I already mentioned, my other sponsor is Vitamin Well water with which I have a sponsorship contract signed for a year. I used to cooperate with sports nutrition company Proteini.si., but had to turn down their sponsorship offer after two weeks. There was no money involved and my obligations towards them were really high. They only gave me couple of their products and in return I should have taken pictures or videos and upload them on the social media every day. I quickly realized every day is too much. So, as you see I do not really have any “real” sponsor from which I would get higher amount of money that would get me through the month. This is why I am so happy; just today I signed an employment contract with Slovenian army force – sports unit. Life is going to be so much easier now.

Last 2 years your performance improved dramatically. Being the fastest Slovenian women and competing at the European, World championship and Olympic games you also got more media exposure. Is this when it all started and you became attractive for sponsors?

Yes, I could say this was when it all started. It was also when I realized I needed money. Before my results improved, I was studying in the United States of America and I actually did not need money as I was provided with the full-scholarship. In the first year after my return to Slovenia it was really difficult. All the financial burden was on my parents. At that time, I even got a student employment so I could get through the month.

Who was your first sponsor?

It was company Proteini.si, but as I said we quickly cancelled our cooperation.

Did sponsors contact you themselves or you wrote an offer for sponsorship to them? Where they instantly interested in sponsorship with you?

Nike sponsorship is going through my manager. He arranges everything for me. But for Proteini.si and Vitamin Well water it was me who wrote request for sponsorship. I remember once I stopped at the gas station and bought Vitamin Well water. I really liked it, so I decided to check its ingredients. Afterwards, boyfriend and I contacted them. They were interested right away. But as they just started their business in Slovenia and are a small company also their sponsorship is small. I get a little bit of money and their products.

Did you get any of your sponsorships because you knew people working there, your parents/friends knew them or because you were simply recommended to them?

Actually, no, I contacted them myself.

However, I was present in one of the campaigns of Ljubljanske mlekarne, Ego Quark, because boyfriend of one other Slovenian athlete instantly thought of me. He works at Slovenian marketing agency whose client is company Ljubljanske mlekarne. When he got a brief for campaign, he saw he needed two runners and he thought of me. This was only for one campaign; it was paid work but this was not a sponsorship. But I believe this is how things go also for the sponsorships.

How does your sponsorship look like? Is there money involved or do you only receive products? Do you have written contract or just oral agreement? What are your obligations in return – social media?

With Nike, I only get equipment, but with Vitamin Well water I get money as well. I have written agreement with both sponsors and my obligations are stated in the contract.

Are you in touch with the sponsor? If yes, how and how often. Is there any talk about the further promotions at some events, etc.?

With Nike, I am not in contact at all because everything is arranged by my manager. He arranged everything before signature and is also now. I literally just signed a sponsorship contract. But with Vitamin Well water we are quite in touch. We talk through the phone or email every month. We talk about current sponsorship success, set photography sessions and decide on the meetings.

You were also in campaign for Alpsko mleko “Okus po domu” right before Rio Olympic games. What about that?

Ljubljanske mlekarne are sponsor of Slovenian Olympic committee. It is in athlete's contract with Olympic committee that if any of the sponsors picked him or her for their campaign, he or she needed to participate. It was more a coincidence they picked me. Sure, I was happy. I little media exposure never hurts anybody (laughs).

Do you think you have any chances to cooperate with Ljubljanske mlekarne also in the future? Are there chances they would sponsor you?

It is difficult to say this. I don't know.

Do you and sponsor have any marketing plan how to promote the plan to gain media exposure?

Everything is stated in both contracts. For Nike, my obligations were already stated and I just signed. With Vitamin Well water sponsorship I had to be more involved. I actually had to propose the activation and state my ideas. They had absolutely no ideas what to do. All the burden fell on me and I was lucky that I had knowledge from this field as I pertained bachelor degree from journalism in United States and also started master program in marketing on Faculty of Social Science in Ljubljana. So, I wrote down activation plan and then we sat down and they agreed on it.

Do you think that once a sponsorship contract is signed, there should be a marketing plan for marketing campaigns?

Yes, there should for sure be an activation plan stated once sponsorship is signed. I believe that sponsored athlete and the company should work together towards achieving business goal. It should not be all just athlete's responsibility.

Do you know values of the brand and vision of the sponsoring company? If yes, did sponsor notify you about it to check if you value the same things and have the same philosophy as a brand/product does? Or did you look for it yourself?

They did not notify me about it at all. All I know I researched by myself.

Do you as ambassador feel you are responsible to present the product to people in a positive way?

Yes, I do feel it is my obligation to represent the product. But this is because of my personality and morality. There are not many athletes who would be as self-initiative as I am. Most of sponsored athletes do not care. They do what sponsors tells them to do and that is it. They do not put any effort in it.

You said you got sponsors when you were good enough to compete on the higher / international level. Do you believe that in Slovenia only top level athletes can pursue sponsorship?

Yes, for sure. Companies see benefits and profit only in well-known top athletes. They do not appreciate athletes competing on a little bit lower level.

Companies in Slovenia want to sign a sponsorship contract with a well-known athlete who is already recognized by the public and would instantly bring them higher awareness and product recall. They are not prepared to create their own story with less known athlete. They should get more engaged in the activation of sponsorship themselves and only then they could see results also with the less known athletes. Actually, I believe that with sponsor's engagement, results of the sponsorship with less known athletes would be even greater than with the recognized elite sports figure.

Is athlete sponsorship in Slovenian often? What are experiences of your friends that do professional sport as well? What are the barriers they are experiencing?

I would say that the top 10 percent of Slovenian athletes are well provided and have no problems with sponsors. The other 90 percent have less chances to get a sponsorship. Also, their sponsors are smaller and they most often provide just material things, no money; just like my Vitamin Well Water sponsorship.

It sometimes seems that it would even be easier for some girls that workouts regularly to get a sponsor than for professional athletes. It is just because they post their provocative pictures and men like to follow them. This makes me mad, because it is so wrong. Companies do not realize that the quality of the followers on social media is very important. These girls, for example, do not have quality followers, their followers do not care about sport. But mine do. It is about quality and not quantity of the followers. Also, my followers more likely fall into the target group of the sponsored products.

The problem of athlete sponsorship in Slovenia is that companies are not knowledgeable how to perform sponsorship. For example, I constantly need to prove my sponsors what my social media posts do. They do not know how to evaluate them. I need to prove to them that my reach was high. Some companies really do not know how to evaluate the sponsorship.

In your opinion, do you think that professional athletes in Slovenia have hard time finding a sponsoring company? Why? Why companies do not want to get involved as one of their promotional strategies.

90 percent of them have difficulties. This is because sponsors don't appreciate them and are not willing and knowledgeable to create a marketing campaign that would build high awareness. They want to take shortcuts and have top stars in their advertisements because that kind of advertisements will instantly get people's attention. The problem is also that sponsoring companies are not knowledgeable about the activation. They do not know how important it is for success.

What firms get engaged with athlete sponsorship? Is there any sector that is more exposed and involved in sport sponsorship than others?

Most commonly sports nutrition firms or sport retailers. But really company from any industry can be athlete's sponsor.

In your opinion, do you think that athlete/personal trainer contributes to brand awareness and greater brand recall? Do you think this for yourself? Has it already happened to you before that people stopped you and told you are representing your sponsoring firm.

Yes, athlete contributes to the higher awareness and higher recall.

People on the streets started recognizing me after the Rio Olympic games.

I was just recently in Kranjska Gora and there was a group of teenagers. I could feel they were all staring at me and then one girl said: "Look, this is Maja Mihalinec. She was on the advertisement for Alpsko mleko." This was the first time for me, but it happens more often now.

Examples of Maja's exposures on social media:

Figure 2. Maja Mihalinec on Social Media #1



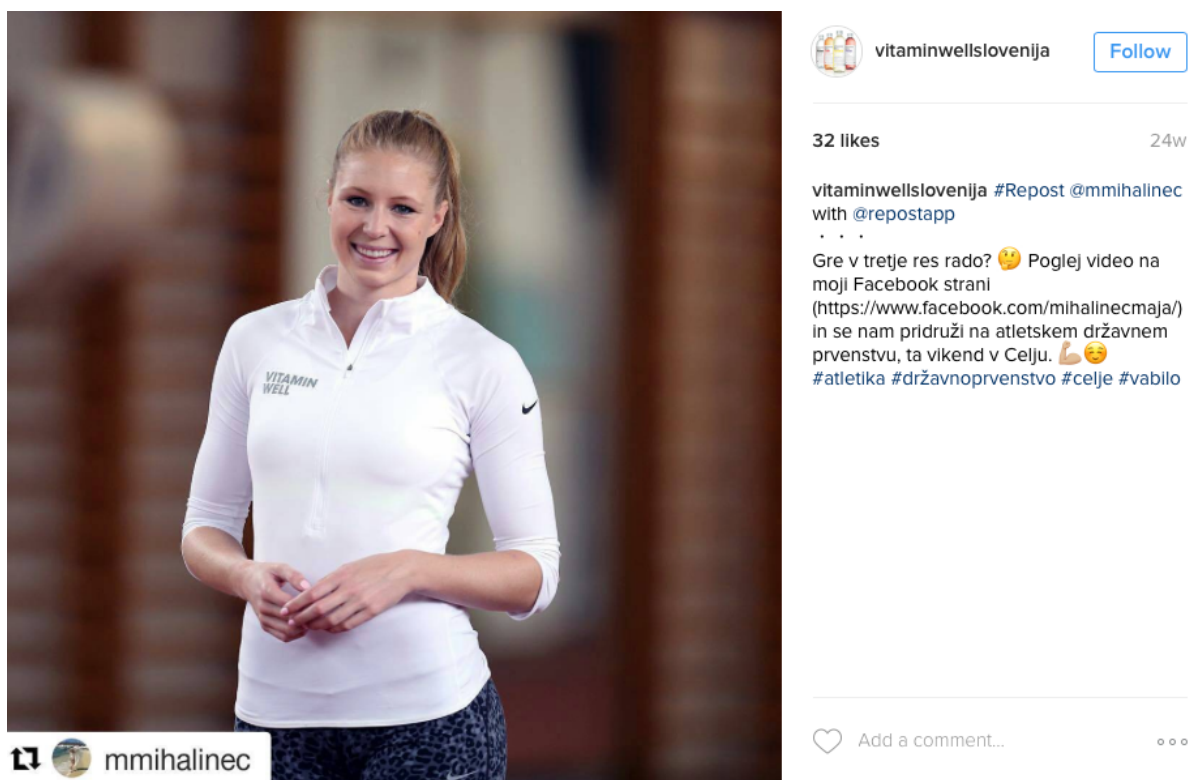
Source: Maja Mihalinec, 2016

Figure 3. Maja Mihalinec on Social Media #2



Source: Vitamin Well Slovenia, 2016

Figure 4. Maja Mihalinec on Social Media #3



Source: Vitamin Well Slovenia, 2016

Figure 5. Maja Mihalinec on Social Media #4



Source: Maja Mihalinec, 2016

Appendix C: In-depth Interview With Personal Trainer

Name and Surname: Rebeka Fink

Interviewee: Personal Trainer, Group Exercises Trainer, Rebook ambassador

Age: 25

Gender: Female

Did you take part at any Sport before you became a personal trainer?

Sport has always been part of my life. I started with gymnastics as a child and then at age 10 started training handball. I quitted handball only when studying at the Faculty of Sport in Ljubljana.

While training handball, have you ever tried to perceive any sponsors?

No I haven't. In handball, sponsorship practically doesn't exist, especially not for female. If there are any sponsorships, they are for the whole team/ handball club or for male team.

Many times, firms could be sponsors but they are not. For example, club would buy clothing from a particular brand but it has to be paid. It is not a sponsorship.

Do you currently have any sponsors? If yes, who?

Yes, I have it. I am an ambassador for sport retailer brand Rebook.

I also got an offer to be sponsored by a sports nutrition company Nanox. They are smaller firm so no sponsorship money was included in contract negotiation. They would give me one product per month and I would take videos and pictures and upload them on my social media profiles. In return for promotion they would help me with the advertising for personal training. However, in my work contract there is a clause stating I shouldn't be exposed so I had to turn the offer down. If there was money involved I would take the offer, but this way, no.

Is sponsorship of personal trainers in Slovenian often? Do you know of any examples? What firms get engaged with sponsorship?

It is quite often practice, or better said, it is getting more and more common that personal trainer is having a sponsor as well.

Most of the time its sports nutrition companies who sponsors personal trainers. Less often, it is sport retailer's brands; but every personal trainer actually wants that kind of sponsorship contract for him or herself. I know of personal trainers in Slovenia having a contract with Nike, Adidas and of duo with Underarmour contract.

How has your sponsorship started? Have you contacted them yourself? How was their response, where they instantly interested in sponsorship with you?

They actually contacted me themselves because one of their employees knew my partner. They called me if I was interested and said to come to the meeting in Zagreb office. Of course, I went and they immediately confirmed they wanted to work with me. They asked me where I worked and they checked how much I am involved on the social media. They did not want a popular and well known athlete. They wanted to cooperate with a "normal human being" so people can easier relate to him or her. They wanted someone who works hard, maybe from time to time has some blisters because of hard training. They wanted someone who will motivate their audience.

How does your sponsorship look like?

As I stated, I am ambassador for the sport retailer brand.

It was oral agreement made six months ago. After half a year, I still haven't signed a contract. I don't get money from them but twice a year I get a full athletic clothing and shoes which I should wear and promote the brand.

Have you tried to get any other sponsorship before? If yes, how have you contact them (email, snail mail, telephone)? What was their main reason to deny partnership with you?

I haven't done anything to get a sponsorship before, but I wanted to be an ambassador. I know personal trainers are looking to get a sponsorship, but most of the time they are turned down. Sometimes they do not get any respond. It is really difficult to get in touch with companies.

Do you and sponsor have any marketing plan how to promote the plan to gain media exposure?

There is no plan. After six months, I still haven't signed a contract where my obligations will be stated, so, actually, I don't know what I have to do for promotion.

I do what I feel is the right thing to do. I often wear sponsor's brand when I coach and at that times I take picture and upload it to Facebook or Instagram and mark the brand with the hashtag.

I know the company sent email to their partners to notify them I am brands ambassadors. When I got the collection, they took some pictures and put them on Facebook but that is it.

Do you think that once a sponsorship contract is signed, there should have a marketing plan for marketing campaigns?

Yes, for sure! I would love this.

Do you know values of the brand and vision of the sponsoring company?

Hmm, it values hard work and hard training.

After the response, I read brand' vision to interviewee:

...“We envision a future where humans return to their roots. A future where we recognize that each of us is a living, breathing, walking, talking, running, climbing, jumping, laughing, caring miracle—a miracle that happens only once.

Through tough fitness, we will push each other to honor the body we've been given, because we have only one body to honor. We will endure sweat, tears and even a bit of blood. We will flip tires, sprint hills, and do push-ups until we can't do them any longer. Why do we do this? We certainly aren't flipping tires to be better tire flippers. We're doing it to be better, period. Better leaders; better parents; better stronger, more determined humans—capable of anything. We do it to honor our bodies and sharpen our minds—to be more human” (Source: Official Reebok website).

Yes, I guess I was not quite aware of it, even though I was not that far from point. They value hard work, sweat. I was never introduced to these values by sponsors.

Do you as ambassadors feel you are responsible to present the product to people in a positive way?

Yes, I do. I expose the brand myself when I wear it. My clients know that I am brand ambassador. I noticed they already have few pieces of their clothing because they see I wear them. Probably they like the clothes and go buy them themselves as well.

Are you in touch with the sponsor? If Yes, how and how often. Is there any talk about the further promotions at some events, etc.?

I am in touch with them through the email. We will talk twice a year regarding the new clothing I will receive. I guess I will get to know more about the marketing plan once I receive the contact. I know for now they are checking my involvement on social media, but they never get any feedback from them. They never say what I should post.

In your opinion, do you think that athlete/personal trainer contributes to brand awareness and greater brand recall? Do you think this for yourself?

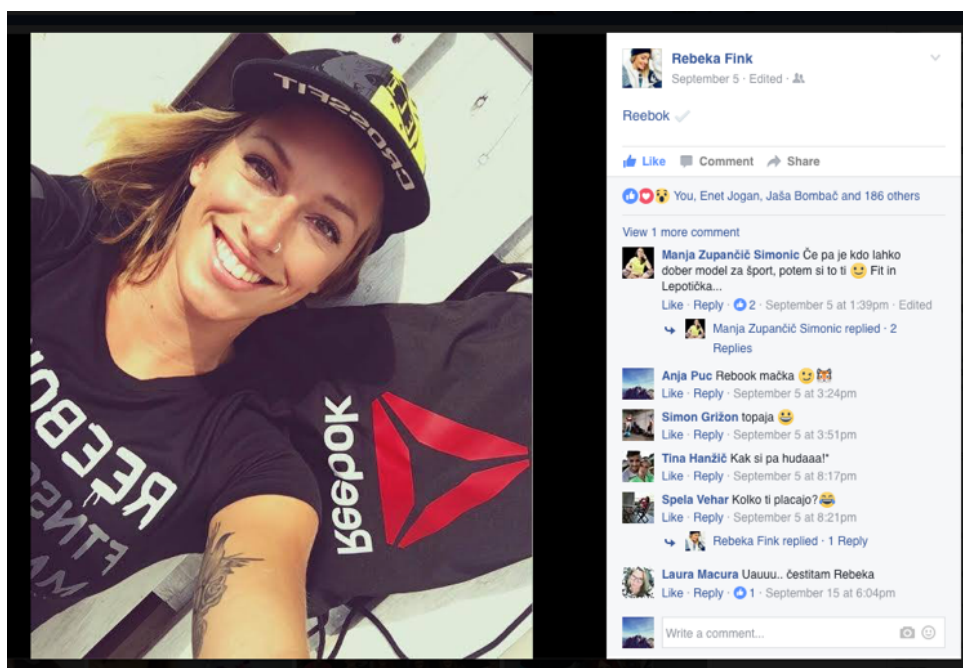
Yes, I believe it does help with promoting a brand. Complete strangers' haven't stopped me on the street saying: "You are XY brand ambassador." However, it happens many times that acquaintances and people that know of me say "Oh you, and XY (stating the brand)" when they see me. They know I represent the brand. Also, as I stated, my clients started to wear my sponsoring brand more so, obviously, they are more aware of it.

Do you think athletes and personal trainers have hard time finding a sponsor?

I think well known professional athletes do not have problems. But less known athletes without media exposure, and young talents are for sure experiencing difficulties. The same goes for personal trainers.

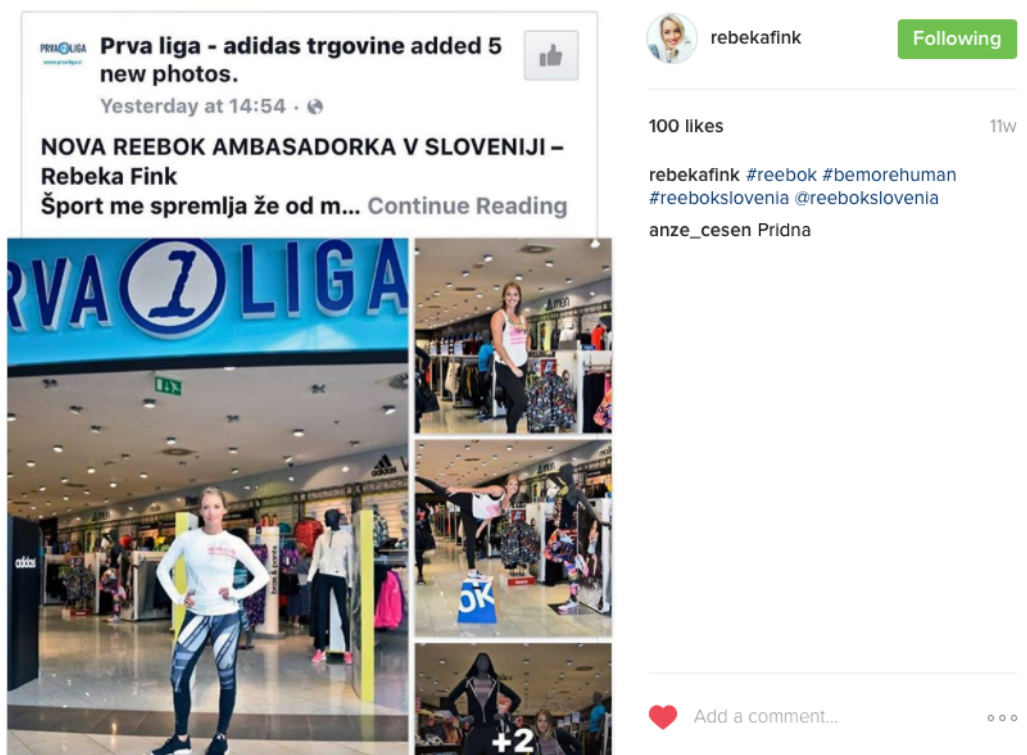
Examples of Rebeka's exposures on social media:

Figure 6. Rebeka Fink on Social Media #1



Source: Rebeka Fink, 2016

Figure 7. Rebeka Fink on Social Media #2



Source: Rebeka Fink, 2016

Figure 8. Rebeka Fink on Social Media #3



Source: Rebeka Fink, 2016

Appendix D: In-depth Interview With B2B Company That Sponsors Athletes

Interviewee: Procurator of Slovenian B2B company

Sponsoring athlete: Alpinist/mountain climber

Age of sponsored athlete: 51

Gender of sponsored athlete: Male

Who is you company sponsoring?

We sponsor a lot of clubs, organizations. From sport spheres, we sponsor one Basketball club, Golf club and Handball club. We are also sponsor of mountain climber who already got three alpinists “Piolet d’Or” awards.

However, we also pursue to our local community by donorship of local cultural organizations, firefighters, basketball club, etc. We support outstanding performers in many areas of society. We support innovation, originality, and above-average human achievements.

How did all this sponsorship start? Did athletes contact you themselves, or...?

It is sad to say this, but sponsorship is mostly being done because of the business we do. In Slovenia, it still goes through connections and networking. “I give me business, in return, you sponsor our athletes.”

Our only individual athlete we sponsor, mountain climber has been with us for more than 10 years. This sponsorship has nothing to do with the connections. He is a great friend of a CEO who helped him with money support ever since company gained first successes.

However, for donorship, we get request from individuals or organizations themselves.

Do sponsored athletes/ clubs knows about company’s values and vision? Do they share the same ones?

Only sponsored mountain climber knows about them and he shares the same values and passion for perfection and excellence, purpose and goal as company does.

How do your sponsorships look like?

Athletes or clubs sign a sponsorship contract. They send a bill for “the service” – advertising the company and we file this as an expense. Consequently, our yearly profit is lower and we pay less tax. Obligations of sponsoring clubs are written in the contract. They have to wear our name and logo on competition uniforms, stated the company in yearly club publications or bulletins, have our advertising board in all of their events, etc. We don’t advertise club’s sponsorships ourselves. The only sponsored athlete we expose is maintain climber.

Do you have any marketing plan for activation with sponsored mountain climber?

No.

How is then mountain climber involved in the company’s story?

As stated we have sponsoring contract with him for more than 10 years already. At first sponsorship went through local mountain club, now he is sole proprietor as he is also a photographer and mountain guide so he can issue bills for sponsorship himself.

His sponsorship is mentioned on the company’s website. He also shown and mentioned in most of the videos presenting the company. We want that our current and potential future partners know that we are engaged in the community and that we care for people’s welfare. Return is mutual for

both; we promote him and he promotes us. Company gives sponsorship and also donorship money for good cause.

However, last few years we also published his calendar at the end of the year and give it to partners as a New Year's gift. Photography is his passion and he always takes great pictures when he goes to climbing exhibitions. The idea started when he prepared PowerPoint presentation from one of his mountain exhibition for the company's employees. We were all impressed by his pictures. This year we will publish his calendar again; it is already a well-known and common praxis. Business partners are asking us in advance if we will have his calendar again because they always love it. From all the calendars sales people get in December, ours is indeed unique. I guess know we are doing this to make our business partners excited to work with us as well. But this activity is not stated in his sponsorship contract. It all just started out of the blue and is oral agreement renewed every year.

So, you mentioned you partners knows that you sponsor one of the greatest mountain climber? Did you ever get any business because of him and his advertising?

Yes, they do know. We actually got one business partner due to our exposure through sponsored athlete. Once we were at the trade show in Switzerland and one salesmen came to our stand. Our representatives said he was very enthusiastic about our company because we sponsored one of his idols, mountain climber. Salesperson of that company was amateur alpinist himself with a great passion for climbing. It turned out he was salesman of one of the greatest pharmaceutical company and this is how we started out cooperation. It seems quite unreal but you never know where the opportunity is waiting for you.

In your opinion, do you think that athlete/personal trainer contributes to brand awareness of your company?

A little it does for sure, but it would be difficult to say how much. It is always good if your company is exposed in the community. It is even better if we and our sponsored athlete share the same values and have common goals. It is just easier to communicate with that kind of person; you are on the same page and I believe that kind of sponsorship can only gain a success.

In your opinion, what are the greatest barriers and downturns of athlete sponsorship in Slovenia?

I believe more companies would be willing to engage in sponsorship if it would be less complicated by law. Law declares that if you sponsor an individual he or she has to pay 25% income tax on it. So, he or she give one quarter of the money to country. If company really wants to sponsor an outstanding athlete and help him or her, with individual sponsorship, country is really taking a high percentage. You as a company start thinking if it was even worth it. The other option is that you sponsor an athlete through his or her club, but there it gets complicated as well as his coach and club want certain percent of amount as well.

The other problem is that companies sponsor an athlete they either known, was referred to them or is son/daughter of one of their employees. Connections, connections, connections; they can for sure help athlete when pursuing a sponsorship. The other problem is that even sport sponsorship is a bit corrupted and agreed when business of the two companies having nothing to do with sport is agreed. Without influential family or athlete's personal connections current situation does not look prosperous.

Company's calendar with pictures taken by the sponsored alpinist:

Figure 9. Collage of Companies Yearly Calender with Pictures made by Sponsored Athlete



Appendix E: In-depth Interview With Marketing Director of Petrol d.d.

Interviewee: Rok Cuderman

Position: Marketing director at Petrol d.d.

I found out that Petrol is sponsoring many Slovenian athletes who form Team Petrol: Andrej Šporn, Aleks Humar, Blaž Kavčič, Gal Jakič, Dejan Zavec, Jakov Fak, Staš Skube, Žan Kranjec, Žan Kosir, Miha Hrovat, Ana Drev, Anja Drev, Miran Stanovnik, Simon Marčič, Tit Stante. These ones are named on your website. Are this all athletes you sponsor, are is there more? Do you sponsor also any Slovenian federation team or young talent?

Athletes you named are actually just few. In total, we sponsor 19 or 20 individual athletes (I don't know the exact number because some sponsorship contracts are in renewal process).

Do you sponsor also any Slovenian federation team or young talent?

Yes, we do. Right now, the most exposure have Slovenian ski and biathlon team.

We also sponsor Slovenian football team, handball, basketball, tennis team and also hockey team in smaller extend. Not to forget, we are Big sponsor of Slovenian Olympic team.

We sponsor also young tennis player Kaja Juvan, etc. We started sponsoring her already in youth age category. When we sponsor young athlete, our sponsorship is completely without expectations. The purpose is more financial help than serious partnership from which also Petrol would benefit. We don't want to put burden on their shoulder. However, we look at such sponsorship as a long-term investment

How do you pick athlete you decide to sponsor? Do you have any selection process you follow or do you pretty much sponsor just any athlete that would write a request to Petrol? Are you as a company more interested to sponsor individual athletes or the whole teams, like for example Slovenian football team, biathlon team, etc.?

We really do receive many sponsorship requests. In Petrol, we have a special committee for sponsorship and donorship who meets every week for an hour and a half. For us, athlete is more interesting if we already are present as a sponsor in his or her sport category. This way it is easier for us to combine marketing activities than starting in completely new sport field. However, there are exceptions.

In selection process, we do not look only sport results. School grades and their involvement and activity on social media are important as well. We always want to meet athlete in person before signing contract as well, so that we get to know him or her better.

In case Petrol is interested to sponsor a particular athlete, do you also contact him or her themselves and offer your sponsorship?

It is not a rule that we would look after athletes. However, it of course also happens. If athlete is particularly interesting for us, we think: "Yes, maybe we want to go in this sport as well."

On your website, I noticed that sponsored athletes write their blog what I found really interesting. What are some other obligations sponsored athletes have in return for Petrol's sponsorship?

In contract, we state number of days the athlete should be available to us. These days we use for athlete's meeting with employees, business partners or other events. For example, if we organize

sport games we invited sponsored athlete to come give away awards. Also, when we do blood donor session, athlete can be an ambassador.

As you already mentioned, sponsored athletes represent Team Petrol. Once a year we meet with all of them in info day with entertainment note. We prepare for the educational workshop we think they need what can be anything from public speaking, doping, psychological preparation, etc. There we tell them our expectations. However, there is no need to do something, if they do not feel like it. We at Petrol are very understandable. Their main role is to do sport. For example, if athlete would come to our event in the bad mood, we rather see them not coming.

Is activation plan stated in Petrol's sponsorship contracts? If yes, how is it formed? Do you prepare it yourself or together with athlete?

Yes, it is stated. It is prepared together with an athlete as this is a matter of coordination.

What are Petrol's actions for including sport fans in your own promotions and brand building (for example organized bus to go cheer for sponsored athlete on the competition, contest, etc.)?

We do many different actions. Just recently we organized action: "With Petrol coffee on the World Ski Cup in St. Moritz". We did similar for handball fans before World Handball cup at the beginning of this year (2017). Hockey players were once cleaning windshields at the gas stations and at the same time gave away tickets. Another action was before one of Dejan Zavec's match. He had candid camera and was also giving away tickets.

However, one action that it seemed quite unimaginable for fans was when we took a person to Australian Open to be companion of Blaž Kavčič. In selection process, fans were playing tennis match with Kavčič so more fans were involved in it, but just one was a lucky winner. He got exclusive entry to Australian Open, it was not a regular ticket what gives this prize added value.

When researching, I find out that Petrol' mission is preservation of the planet and endeavor for collective responsibility of preservation and intact/unspoiled nature. Petrol's values are respect, trust, excellence, creativity and boldness. Are you looking for these in athletes?

We do not sponsor only sport results. We sponsor athlete's values. For example, we would not go into boxing if it was only for boxing. We started sponsorship with Dejan Zavec on a small extend. But since our collaboration was good and we liked Dejan's personality, it all developed into much broader extend. So yes, values of athletes are important.

Is it important for Petrol that sponsored athlete possess the same values as sponsoring company?

Yes, absolutely.

What would you say from your personal experiences, does sponsored athlete feel obligated to present the and expose his or her sponsor?

We rather see that athlete does not post anything on social media, if this is not pure and authentic. If he or she feels like posting and exposing our company, he or she should do it. If not, we do not force anything. Of course, we encourage them to stop at our gas stations and not to buy at the competition. It is up to them.

Can you say that athletes Petrol is sponsoring positively contribute to your brand equity (awareness, recognition, etc.) and spread the voice of your company also outside of Slovenia?

It would be difficult to say either yes or no. For example, snowboarding in Russia is very popular, more than skiing. When Žan Kranjec got medal at the Sochi Olympic Games this probably brought

some recognition. Also, when Matevž Lenarčič did his flight around the world, our media exposure was for sure higher. However, we never concluded business deal because of our athletes.

How long are usually your sponsorship contracts (one year, two years or longer)? Are you generally happy with athletes are renew their contract after it expires?

The longest length is four years – Olympic cycle. But our contracts are anything from one to four years long. However, all of them have purpose of long-term partnership.

How do you plan budget for when you decide for sponsoring new athlete? Do you include in expenses only the cost stated in sponsorship contract, or do you add to this the amount you will spend in time of sponsorship for marketing purposes (for activation)?

We plan sponsorship and also activation. However, it is different from contract to contract. If in one sport we already have high exposure, we do not put so much in activation. So it varies a lot. We do not have any rule.

For example, for Olympic games we sell hats and T-shirts. In this case activation is bigger and it is through sales of these hats and T-shirts.

What about measuring the effectiveness of sponsorship, does Petrol do it? If yes, what are the methods you use?

We score how important this sponsorship is for our customers, business partners, employees. Also, what is the potential from ticket sales, media coverage and margin (where it is subject of rights we receive). For instance, if we have exclusive for ticket sale, the big part of sponsorship expense is already reimbursed.

We use more soft approaches as well like meeting with our employees and their feedback on this event.

What do you think are advantages for company if it sponsors athletes? What are disadvantages sponsors have- if any?

I see sponsorship as a plus for a company. This is not a “thrown away money”. Some advantages of sponsorship I would like to expose are:

- Use of sponsorship for sale purposes (where this is possible, for example, for tickets sales)
- Company’s return to the environment in which it operates
- Easier address of the customers
- Values that are passed on the company’s employees

Do you think athletes in Slovenia enjoy enough support from companies or is here still space for improvement?

I think athlete’s self-activity is a must. Somebody who is self- initiative, addresses companies with a sponsorship requests and tell them what he or she is prepared to do in return will get sponsor.

Do you think Slovenian companies have employees who are knowledgeable and capable of formulating sponsorship contract and later effectively implement also marketing campaigns that include sponsored athlete?

There are great differences between companies in Slovenia. Some do not perform sport marketing at all. However, whoever wants to do things seriously and professionally, he or she can do it. Each company has chances to work with sport agencies. We worked for a year with agency Sport Element and did occasionally with Sport Media Focus. Other than that, we do things in house.

Examples of exposure of Petrol's sponsored athletes on social media:

Figure 10. Petrol's Exposure of Sponsored Athlete on Social Media #1



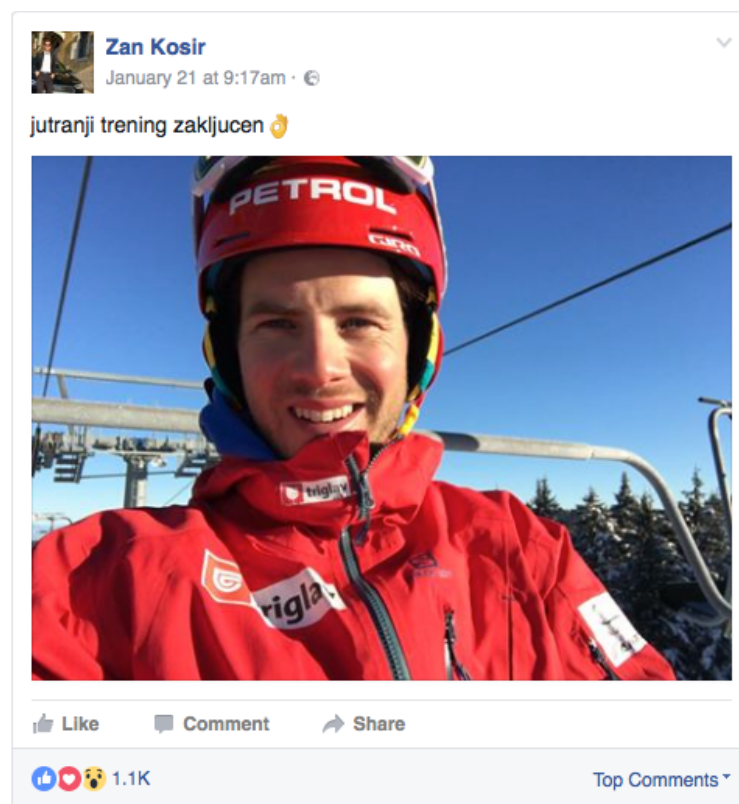
Source: Petrol d.d., 2017

Figure 11. Petrol's Exposure of Sponsored Athlete on Social Media #2



Source: Petrol d.d., 2017

Figure 12. Sponsored Athlete Showing Sponsors on his Social Media Profile



Source: Žan Košir 2017

Figure 13. Sponsor's Exposure of Team Petrol on Corporate Website

Energija za življenje

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[EPOSLOVANJE za podjetja](#)
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[Petrol in okolje](#)
[Ekološki projekti](#)
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[Družbena odgovornost](#)
[Standardizacija](#)
[Team Petrol](#)

Team Petrol Blog

Preberite kako naši športni favoriti doživljajo svoje tekme ter kaj se dogaja v zakulisju tekmovanj in priprav na športne dogodke.

Miran Stanovnik, motorist

*Vročina do 50 stopinj in naslednji dan 11 Celzijevih stopinj pod ničlo, neurje, toča, dež, blato, megla, trikrat smo prečkali skoraj 5000 mnm **Beri naprej***

Andrej Šporn, alpski smučar

*Moja žena me dostikrat draži, da še v trgovini tekmujem, če bom stehal zelenjavo hitreje kot ostali... **Beri naprej***

- › EuroBasket
- › Fair Play
- › Potuj z Blažem na Australian Open
- › Q Max Zabijanje
- › **Team Petrol Blog**
 - › Andrej Šporn, alpski smučar
 - › Aleks Humar, državni prvak v reliju
 - › Blaž Kavčič, tenisač
 - › Gal Jakič, ekstremni športnik invalid
 - › Dejan Zavec, svetovni prvak v boksu
 - › Jakov Fak, biatlonec
 - › Staš Skube, Petrolov rokometaš meseca
 - › Žan Kranjec, alpski smučar
 - › Klemen Kosi, alpski smučar
 - › Žan Košir, deskar na snegu
 - › Miha Hrobat, alpski smučar
 - › Ana Drev, alpska smučarka

Source: Petrol d.d., 2017

Appendix F: Survey Questions

NOTE: This survey is designed to be solved by professional athletes and personal trainers that have a sponsor, they had it in the past, or they tried to get one, but were not successful.

1. Do you train professionally?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 2. How long have you been already training your current sport for?
 - a) 0 - 1,9 years
 - b) 2 – 3,9 years
 - c) 4 – 5,9 years
 - d) 6 – 7,9 years
 - e) 8 years or more
 3. Do you believe that it is difficult for professional athletes in Slovenia to pursue sponsor?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 4. In your opinion, what is the main problem of athlete sponsorship in Slovenia?
 - a) Athletes do not put effort into getting sponsors.
 - b) Slovenian legislation (taxation of sponsorship).
 - c) Companies do not have money.
 - d) Companies are not interested in sponsoring athletes because they are not aware of advantages it can bring.
 - e) Other. _____
 5. How do you understand sponsorship? Shortly explain.

 6. Do you have a sponsor or did you have it in the past?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 7. How many sponsors do you have?
 - a) 1
 - b) 2
 - c) 3
 - d) 4
 - e) 5 or more
-

NOTE: If you had sponsors in the past, please solve the next section of questions based on the time of your sponsorship.

8. What kind of sponsoring agreement do you have with your sponsor?
 - a) Written contract
 - b) Oral contract
 - c) Other. _____
9. What kind of sponsorship do you have?

- a) I receive money
 - b) I receive product / service whose brand I promote.
 - c) I receive money and product /service whose brand I promote.
 - d) Other. _____
10. Are you aware of your obligations toward your sponsor (marketing activities in which you are included, mentioning sponsor on social media, etc.)?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
11. Do you and your sponsor discuss activation (marketing activities) regularly, or do you have yearly/monthly plan? **H2**
- a) Regularly, from week to week.
 - b) We have agreement for a month in advance.
 - c) We have agreement for 6 months in advance.
 - d) We have agreement for a year in advance.
 - e) We do not discuss it.
 - f) Other. _____
12. Is activation plan (marketing activities in which you will be included) stated in your sponsorship contract?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
13. How was activation plan formed?
- a) Sponsor prepared it itself BEFORE the signing of contract.
 - b) Sponsor prepared it itself AFTER the signing of the contract.
 - c) I prepared activation plan myself
 - d) Sponsor and I prepared a plan together
 - e) Plan was prepared by my manager.
 - f) Other. _____
14. How did you get your sponsor? **H4**
- a) I got it myself with writing and sending out requests for sponsorship.
 - b) I got it through acquaintances/ family who works in sponsor's company.
 - c) Manager got a sponsor for me.
 - d) My parents got a sponsor for me.
 - e) Other. _____
15. How strongly do you agree with the following statements?
(Scale from 1 – 5: Absolutely disagree | disagree | Neither disagree nor agree | Agree | Completely agree)
- a) I am aware of the goals of marketing campaigns in which I am present. **H2**
 - b) Sponsor measures effectiveness of marketing actions and reaching of the goal. **H2**
 - c) I am aware of values and philosophy of the brand which I am presenting.
 - d) Because of sponsorship, I feel obligated to present the company. **H5**
 - e) I have positively contributed to the brand awareness and awareness of the sponsor.
 - f) I trust the brand which I am promoting.
 - g) I am myself using product / service whose brand I am promoting.

- h) People I do not know have already connected me with the brand which I am promoting. (Bruner, James& Hensel, 2001)
 - i) Brand which I am promoting is embodiment of what I want to be myself.
 - j) When I use the product / service of the brand I am promoting, I feel good. (Bruner, James& Hensel, 2001) **H5**
 - k) I enjoy when I talk about the sponsoring company or their brand. (Zarantonello & Pauwels-Delassus, 2016).
 - l) I would recommend the product / service which's brand I am presenting to the potential customers. (Zarantonello & Pauwels-Delassus, 2016).
 - m) Because of my connection with the brand, people more often by product / service of that brand.
-

16. Have you tried getting a sponsor.

- a) Yes
- b) No

17. Please state the main reason why you were not successful at getting a sponsor?

- a) I didn't get company reasons at all.
 - b) Company does not have money.
 - c) Company is not interesting in athlete sponsorship at all.
 - d) Company is already sponsoring other athletes.
 - e) Other. _____
-

18. In your opinion, how important for a sponsorship success is the fact that sponsoring athlete identify him or herself with the brand? **H3**

- a) Very important
- b) Important
- c) Neither important nor not important
- d) Not important
- e) Completely not important

19. What is athlete's effect in the following statements? Please rank. **H1**

(Scale 1 – 5: Completely negative | Negative | Neither negative nor positive | Positive | Absolutely positive)

- a) Awareness of sponsoring company
- b) Brand awareness
- c) Customer loyalty toward the brand
- d)

20. How strongly do you agree with the following statements?

(Scale from 1 – 5: Absolutely disagree | disagree | Neither disagree nor agree | Agree | Completely agree)

- a) Brand which is connected with athlete is enjoying higher exposure than the brand that is not connected with athlete.
- b) Connection of athlete with the brand has positive effect on sales.
- c) Before signing of the contract, sponsor inform itself whether athlete coincides with the vision/values of the brand and with the product / service itself.
- d) Congruence (values, vision, philosophy) between brand and athlete is important. **H3**
- e) Personal networks (knowing someone working) in the sponsoring company are more important than congruence of athlete and brand.

- f) Sponsors are aware how important are well-developed and well-executed marketing actions for the positive effect on their company.
 - g) Companies decide for sponsoring an athlete based on their “connections / personal networks” and based on the business development. **H4**
 - h) Companies are aware of advantages they get once their customers start connecting their branded product / service with athlete.
 - i) When shopping, people rather buy product / service that is connected with athlete.
 - j) In general, athletes having sponsors feel obligated to present the brand.
 - k) Sponsors should always prepare activation plan whose realization would follow contract signature.
-

21. Gender:

- a) Male
- b) Female

22. Age:

- a) 15 – 19,9 years
- b) 20 – 24,9 years
- c) 25 – 29,9 years
- d) 30 – 34,9 years
- e) 35 years and more

23. What is your highest achieved formal education?

- a) Elementary school
- b) Secondary vocational school
- c) High school
- d) Undergraduate studies
- e) Postgraduate studies
- f) PHD studies

24. Your current occupation:

- a) High school student or student
- b) Employed – full time
- c) Employed – half time
- d) Self-employed – sole proprietorship or limited liability company
- e) Unemployed

25. Sport:

- a) Personal trainer
- b) Track and field (athletics)
- c) Tennis
- d) Judo
- e) Swimming
- f) Skiing
- g) Snowboarding
- h) Cross country skiing
- i) Ski jumping
- j) Biathlon
- k) Cycling
- l) Basketball
- m) Football
- n) Volleyball

- o) Golf
- p) Other. _____

26. If you receive sponsoring money, does this represent primary monthly income?

- a) Yes
- b) No

27. What amount of sponsoring money would you need to cover your monthly expenses?

- a) 0 – 199 EUR
- b) 200 – 399 EUR
- c) 400 – 599 EUR
- d) 600 – 799 EUR
- e) 800 – 999 EUR
- f) 1000 EUR and more

28. If you receive sponsoring money, please state approximate monthly amount received.

- a) I do not receive sponsoring money.
- b) I do not want to state.
- c) 1 – 199 EUR
- d) 200 – 399 EUR
- e) 400 – 599 EUR
- f) 600 – 799 EUR
- g) 800 – 999 EUR
- h) 1000 EUR and more

USED REFERENCES:

Bruner, G., James, K. & Hensel, P.J. (2001). *Marketing Scales Handbook of Brand Management Scales*. Chicago: American Marketing Association.

Zarantonello, L. & Pauwels-Delassus, V. (2016). *The Handbook of Brand Management Scales*. Oxford: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Appendix G: Hypothesis Tested with the Survey

H1a: Sponsored athlete has positive statistically significant effect on awareness of sponsoring company.

H1b: Sponsored athlete has positive statistically significant effect on brand awareness.

H1c: Sponsored athlete has positive statistically significant effect on customer loyalty toward the brand.

H2: Based on the frequency of the activation discussion among sponsor and sponsored athlete, there is a statistically significant difference in athlete's awareness of the goals and in sponsor's measurement of sponsorship and goal reaching

H3: There is statistically significant positive correlation between congruent athlete-brand relationship on one side, and idol attachment and brand loyalty on the other side.

H4: Among the methods of pursuing sponsorship there is statistically significant difference in athletes' opinions whether companies decide on the sponsored athletes based on their personal ties, networks and connections.

H5: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between athlete's inner feeling of obligation presenting sponsoring brand and athlete's good feeling/mood when presenting the brand.