

Social responsibility as a marketing communication tool. Slogan or change?

Case study of Falco-Vulcano Energia KC Szombathely Crucial Catch campaign

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Abstract: In our study, we examined the impact of the CSR campaign of the five-time Hungarian basketball champion Falco-Vulcano Energia KC Szombathely. It can be shown that since the 2010s, social responsibility has been a frequently used marketing communication tool of Western European sports clubs. In the 2020s, due to pandemics, wars and irresponsible corporate governance, people, potential consumers, are becoming more and more aware of CSR. At the same time, commercially based sports clubs have a very

important role in shaping society. Three research questions were asked to investigate the CSR activities of the basketball club in Szombathely.

- What impact does it have on the marketing communication of the team? - ***The "campaign-themed" content shared during the campaign triggered a total of 2607 interactions.***

- Can it shape the awareness of the fans? - ***88.3% of respondents knew what problem the campaign was highlighting***

- Do the fans support the CSR actions of the team? - ***85% of respondents said that repeating such a campaign regularly helps to raise awareness and raise awareness of the problem.***

1 Introduction

It can be pointed out that in the 2010s, a new marketing communication tool was the social responsibility of sports companies, especially professional sports clubs [1]; [2]; [4]; [11]. "Under the concept of corporate social responsibility, companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental considerations into their business operations in addition to their legal obligations and shape their relations with the groups (consumers, employees, suppliers, etc.) that affect their activities along these principles. A consciously formed attitude is different from a purely profit-oriented attitude towards employee rights, the enemy of corruption and business ethics..." [5]. Nowadays, researchers agree that the main motivation of (sports) companies are to do well because being identified with a good cause is also good business [1]; [2]; [4]; [6]; [7]; [8]; [9]; [10]; [11]; [12]. It can be observed that firms that are actively involved in CSR are those that are profitable or see CSR as an investment and want to sustain it in the long term [3]; [6]. In the 2020s, due to the impact of pandemics, wars and irresponsible corporate governance, people, potential consumers, are becoming more conscious of the perception of CSR and a new concept, greenwashing, has emerged. Greenwashing already existed in the 2010s, but in sports organisations, fans and analysts have now realised this negative trend, whereby the business outcome has become more important than the cause itself when it comes to CSR activities. Several researchers have contrasted the 'business argument' with the actual CSR case [3]; [8]; [9]. CSR programmes are more sketched by today's people and consumers, so sports companies now need to not only communicate but also act for their chosen cause. If both communication and actual action take place, CSR programmes can spark true consumer engagement between the company and its people.

On the other side of the issue, professional sports clubs, the business-based sports enterprise, have a very important role in shaping society. The operation of a sports club has an environmental, economic and social impact. In the case of Hungarian sports clubs of all kinds, both terms of responsibility and communication strategy, CSR is a blank spot. This may be because it requires a long-term and large capital

investment, which not all companies can afford [1]; [2]; [3]. In Hungarian sports companies, CSR is also rarely manifested because short-term profit-making is more important [10]; [11]; [12]. However CSR, like storytelling, has the potential to personalise the relationship between consumers and the sports company and to create empathy and a sense of belonging to the community. From a marketing communication point of view, it is very important to know the consumers' perspective, as they are the "target" of CSR programmes. The Szombathely basketball club Falco-Vulcano Energia KC Szombathely, the focus of our research, did exactly that. With a smaller marketing budget, they try to convey as much value as possible in their communications. I wonder how a Szombathely basketball team's Crucial Catch campaign - a movement known from the American Football League (NFL) to raise awareness of screening programmes that play an important role in cancer prevention - can deliver value and exceed its communication goals. What do team fans say about standing up for a cause? These are some of the questions we sought to answer in our research.

2 Method

Our research can be divided into two parts. In the first stage, we carried out a documentary analysis of CSR and its role in the communication strategy of sports clubs and federations. We also conducted a case study in Hungary, where we investigated the Crucial Catch campaign of the Hungarian basketball team Falco-Vulcano Energia KC Szombathely, its effectiveness and short-term effects. We evaluated the team's communication strategy and used a questionnaire with fans to find out how effective a CSR programme initiated by a sports company can be in a local market in Hungary.

3 Results

The total reach (total number of posts reached) during the almost 3-month campaign was 41,167 (29 pieces of content shared), which was 17,748 on Facebook and 23,419 on Instagram. The average reach of the content shared by the team was 1,419, which is roughly in line with the reach average for the Yellow and Black. Based on engagement data (number of reactions to content), the campaign "performed better" than match-related content illustrated in Figure 1.

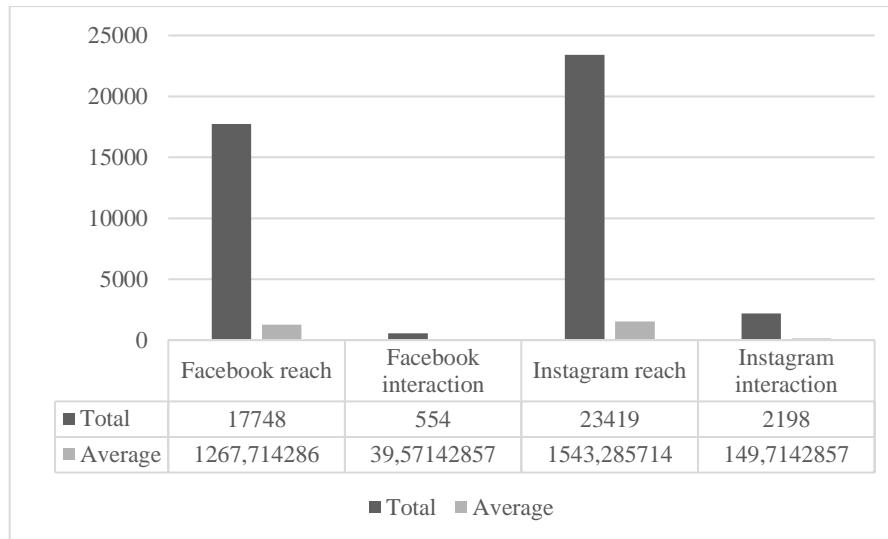


Figure 1.
Social Media Reach & Engagement Rate data

The "campaign-themed" content shared during the campaign generated a total of 2,607 interactions from people. During our analysis, it was striking that Instagram pages had a significantly higher engagement rate (interaction/reach). The average engagement rate for the 15 posts published on Instagram was 9.7%, while the same rate for the Facebook page was 3.1%. The team's social media communications were average and above average in terms of reach and engagement rate. It can be seen that the team put sufficient effort into getting the message out to people. However, in addition to social media, they also communicated elsewhere, which, as the questionnaire showed, helped a lot in getting the message to people and fans who do not use social media. The team used the following platforms:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Website
- Other online newspapers (bb1.hu, sportsmarketing.hu)
- Printed media
- At home matches, loudspeaker

76.7% of respondents said that they heard about the team's action on Facebook, while 73.3% said that they heard about the team's action from a message at the match. The impact of the campaign was assessed using a self-designed questionnaire. The average age of respondents was 43.4 years and the standard deviation was 15.8. The youngest respondent was 18 years old and the oldest was 77 years old! In all cases, we wanted to see if a campaign launched by a sports team could get the message across - in our case, it was the sponsor and the problem. 91.7% of those surveyed knew that the beneficiary of the fundraising was the

Alpokalja Foundation for Children with Cancer. Perhaps more important in the longer term was the following question: What problem does the Crucial Catch campaign raise awareness of? 88.3% of the respondents knew the answer, which was that the problem the club in Szombathely wanted to raise awareness about was the importance of screening for cancer. We also had a third question to get the message across, asking respondents to write down the motto of the campaign. 51.7% of the respondents could accurately recall the slogan **NOT ONLY BUY IT, WEAR IT TOO**. 32.8% noted the printed I helped you text on the T-shirt as the campaign slogan, while 14.5% of respondents could not remember the slogan. Respondents were also asked about team involvement and its importance. 85% of the respondents said that repeating such a campaign regularly helps to raise awareness and raise awareness of the problem.

Conclusions

In terms of the results presented, the conclusions can be divided into three main parts: achievement, problem recognition, and understanding of the importance of the problem. The first aspect is supported by the engagement rate of 9.7% on Instagram and 3.1% on Facebook. The higher-than-usual interaction also means that the message has triggered an emotion in the readers of the post, which is the basis for a CSR campaign. It can be concluded that the club has formulated its message with sufficient depth, explaining the problem accurately and, as a result, has created a sufficient emotional impact on consumers. Similar matchday and Facebook reach (73.3%-76.7%) for awareness of the campaign could be observed, which could mean that those attending the match were aware of the Facebook platform as well as the venue, thus developing an emotional connection with the club that allows them to be part of the club's events not only on matchdays but also beyond, in the online space and thus in their everyday lives.

The most important "yardstick" for CSR-based marketing campaigns is that the message they are trying to convey is understood by the target audience. The Falco-Vulcano KC Szombathely's "Crucial Catch" campaign raised awareness of the importance of cancer screening, and the Alpokalja Foundation for Children with Cancer was named as a supporting partner. The questions on this issue were equally accurate, with 91.7% of respondents identifying the beneficiary of the collection and 88.3% recognising the problem identified by the campaign (the importance of screening). The feedback suggests that a clear and successful marketing communication was carried out, conveying both the key message and the rationale of the campaign. The high figures for respondents' interactivity, reach, and understanding of the problem and the message reflect that they were emotionally attached to the campaign, and therefore aligned with their values and were on board with the initiative taken by the club.

An important aspect is to identify the campaign slogan, which describes the details of the outreach. More than half of the respondents correctly remembered

the slogan, indicating a deep immersion in the campaign, as they remembered a less strong detail after the "on the surface" and first information, i.e. they understood and accepted the details of the initiative. The most important indicator of the alignment between the club and the supporters was the response data on the regular repetition of the campaign. The policy started by Falco, in which they are a strong advocate of CSR campaigns, is an important hallmark of a modern-day professional sports company, but it says a lot about the club from the opinions expressed by the supporters about the campaign. The confluence of values is shown by the fact that 85% of respondents would support a regular repetition of similar campaigns, making CSR an important topic for them, which could provide the club with a lot of extra opportunities to involve its audience in future CSR campaigns, thus raising awareness of the cause and issue it presents.

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