

Jarosław Kończak¹ 

An image of a man in a sports advertisement

¹ Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

Sport is an attractive business platform for communication not only with customers, but also with all stakeholders. It can be observed not only in advertising communication of the producers operating on the broadly understood sports market, sponsors or companies using ambush marketing. It is also used in brand marketing by companies which, despite their lack of connotation with sport, willingly benefit from a number of sports attributes, values and connotations.

The study aims to present the image of a man in marketing communication based on sports motives. The selected aspects subjected to analysis will help to define the role of a man in advertising sports communication and verify the declarations of the companies that pursue their goals using this level of communication. The author analysed selected advertising campaigns (audio-video format) containing sports accents. Communications of 1,270 advertisements representing 254 brands were analysed. The analysis covered six different areas: image and product advertising, share of sports disciplines, sports accessories, the man's attitude, an area of the sports involvement, and the valued presented.

The analysis showed that the man presented in a sports advertisement is multidimensional, just as sport is. Traditional areas connotated with sport, such as competition and team support, are not the only ones to penetrate the advertising's contents. While the former area is very common in general, this is one of the least frequently used sports motives. Much more often, sport appears as an element to build man's identity, his inner strength, heroic spirit. The sport spirit and values underlying such an identity appears to be more important than most of the sport disciplines presented in advertisements. Exception to the rule is football, which continues to be the number one, regardless of whether it concerns the man's image promoted by a male sports star or by an anonymous man.

Keywords: sports star, sport advertising, sponsorship advertising, man in advertising, communication, brand building and communication

Introduction

Sport is an attractive business platform for communication not only with customers, but also with all stakeholders. The most important sport attributes include uninhibited, sincere and intensive emotions that come with sport regardless of active or passive involvement. Communication based on sport can create opportunities for a brand to establish closer ties not only with customers, but also with other stakeholders (Kwak et al. 2011, Kończak 2020; Biscaia et al. 2012.). The sport image and its inherent attributes are relatively easy to transfer to almost every brand, and the number of emotions, values associated with sport

¹ Jarosław Kończak, e-mail: j.konczak2@uw.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1690-4333

as well as other sport motives offer a wide range of attractive communication possibilities. They do not only bring out largely positive connotations, but are also easily transferable to the video advertising language and approachable for the average recipient. The advantage of sport-based communication can be sought in its wide media coverage (Ostrowski 2021). Sports motives are used not only by companies directly related to the sports market, such as manufacturers of sports equipment, sports clothing, drinks, nutrients and supplements. Sport is obviously also used for communication by sponsors, as well as companies using ambush marketing, i.e. impersonating sponsors (Rosner et al. 2011; Crompton 2014; Gulati 2016). This results from at least five types of objectives pursued through sponsorship, i.e. corporate, relationship and sales goals, building brand awareness and building its image. This was noted by theorists (Andreff et al. 2006, Jobber, 2007) and revealed in research of sponsors not only in Poland, but also in Europe and the USA (Nielsen 2018; IEG 2018; Swiss 2014; Kończak 2021; Sponsoring Insight 2019) Sport is also an attractive communication platform for other companies that are neither related to sport nor use ambush marketing. This is because sport has a number of attributes, values and associations that are conducive to business on account of their positive connotations.

The declared objectives of sport-based communication can be verified with different methods, including by analysing advertisements, especially video campaigns, which are believed to have the greatest impact on the audience. This study aims is to present the man's image in advertising communication based on sports motives. The advertisements selected for the analysis will help to describe the role of a man in sports advertising and verify the declarations of the brands using sport as motive to communicate with their customers.

The author argues that the sport, perceived through the prism of the man's image depicted in advertisements, is very diverse and focused not only on competition or pursuing medals on one hand, or on the elements of support culture, on the other, as a substitute for war (Ostrowski 2021). The sport of the 21st century has definitely much more diversity to offer; the number of connotations it brings, attracting the marketing world, goes beyond the categories of rivalry and support culture.

Material and method

The author has analysed selected TV, internet and cinema advertising campaigns (audio-video format) containing sports accents. The communication of 254 brands were analysed (5 films per each). In total, the study covered 1,270 advertisements, whereby each of them came from a different advertising campaign. Companies representing different industries, particularly international European and American as well as large Polish companies whose activity covers more than one country, were analysed. Both the most famous sport sponsors and companies that use ambush marketing were surveyed. Among the analysed brands there were also those not bound by sponsorship contracts, but using sports motives in their advertising campaigns. Most of the ads come from the second and early third decades of this century and only a few are older than 2000.

For the purposes of this publication, the author has identified and described brands in which the main characters of the advertisement were two groups of men: anonymous characters of the advertisement and stars of men's sports. Out of 1,270 commercials in 174

films, the main character was an anonymous man, and in 275, a male sports star. In this way, 449 advertisements containing sports accents, in which a man plays the dominant role, were distinguished. They were examined according to seven different areas: share of sports disciplines, characters, the man's attitude, image and product advertising, the area of sport involvement, sports accessories used and the values presented.

Sports advertising characters

The examined 1,270 advertisements most frequently presented a group of anonymous characters both men and women. These categories were not taken into account in the further part of the study. An anonymous male appears less frequently in sports advertising (174) than an anonymous female (203); whereas the male sports star plays the main character almost three times more often (275 ads) compared to the female sports star (104).

The woman ranked third in the group of advertising characters, displacing the man. Noteworthy is a certain disproportion between the gender role with regard to anonymous characters and with regard to sports stars. While the male sports stars (275 ads) are almost three times more frequent than the female sports star (104), the anonymous women (203) are more frequent than the anonymous men (174).

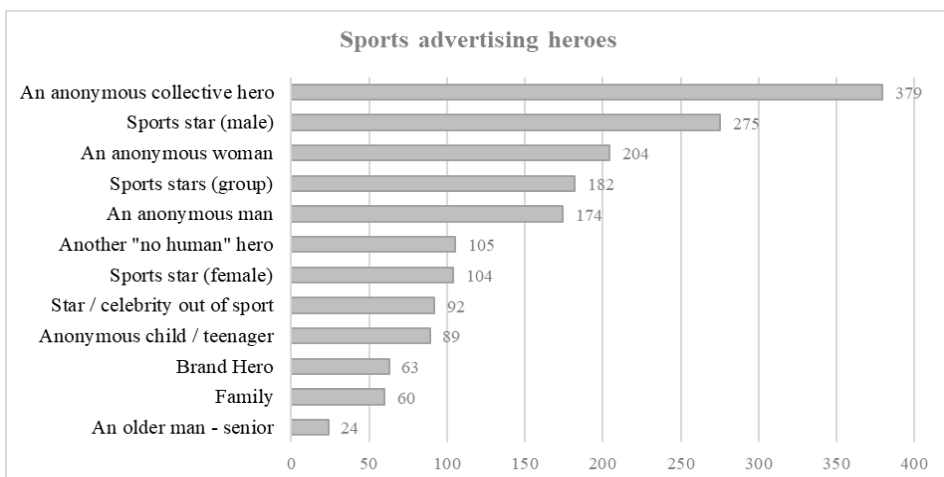


Figure 1: The heroes of sports advertising
Source: Own study. (n=1270; max. 3 answers)

A man in image and product advertising

In both categories of the examined advertisements, among both anonymous men and male sports stars, a clear advantage of image advertisements over product advertisements can be observed. In the first group, there were 67 campaigns with image advertisements where the products, placed in the background, played secondary role; 51 image advertisements based on the values, emotions, vision and mission of the brand, where the product was not exposed at all, and only 56 direct product advertisements. As regards male sports stars, the advantage is even more explicit: in the same categories there were 120 image

advertisements with products in the background, 83 purely image advertisements and 73 product-oriented ones.

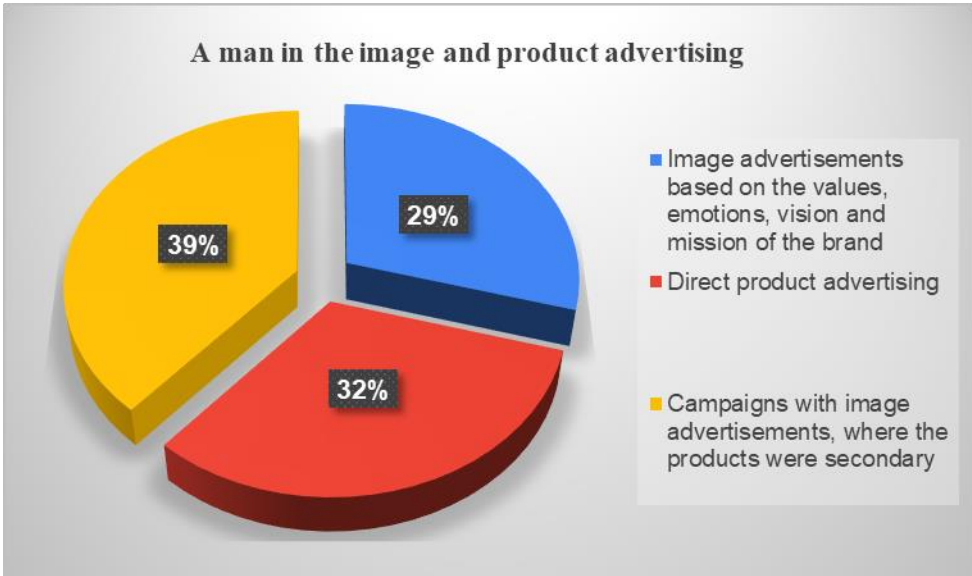


Figure 2: Brand building vs product sales in ads on sports themes – a man
Source: Own study (n=174)

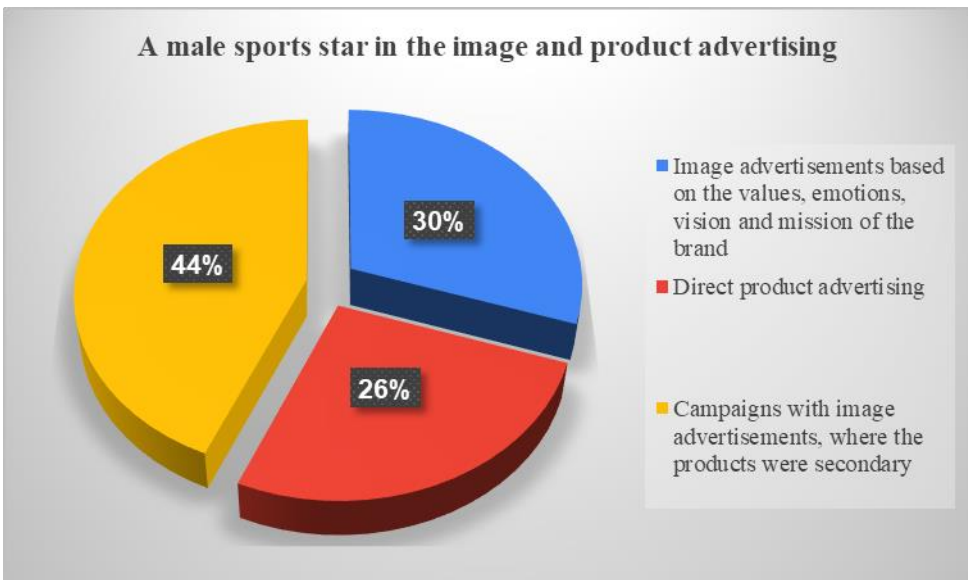


Figure 3: Brand building vs product sales in ads on sports themes – male sports stars
Source: Own study (n=275)

The share of sports disciplines

In advertisements featuring anonymous men, the most frequent sport discipline is football (26 advertisements). The same applies to advertising campaigns promoting sports spirit, yet having no clear reference to any discipline (26), and not much reference to all-development sport (17). These are followed by cycling (14), moto racing (14), mixed sports (13), golf (11), extreme sports (11), running (11) and kitesurfing / windsurfing / surfing (11).

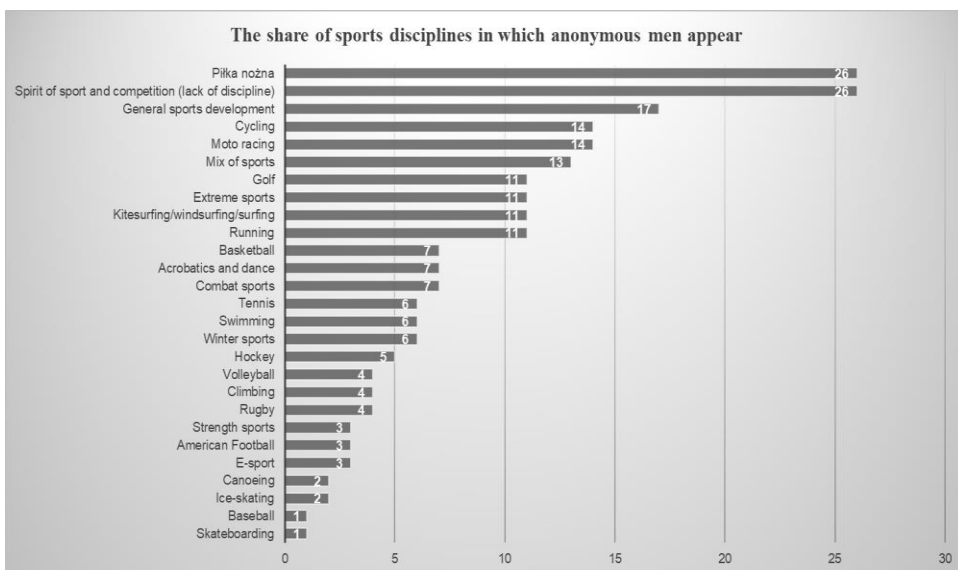


Figure 4: The share of sports disciplines in which anonymous men appear

Source: Own study (n = 174; max. 3 answers)

On the other hand, among the male sports stars, the most popular discipline was football (61), which surpassed moto races (33), tennis (29) and running (23). Lower ranked disciplines included mix sports (19), martial arts (19), basketball (18) and cycling (13).

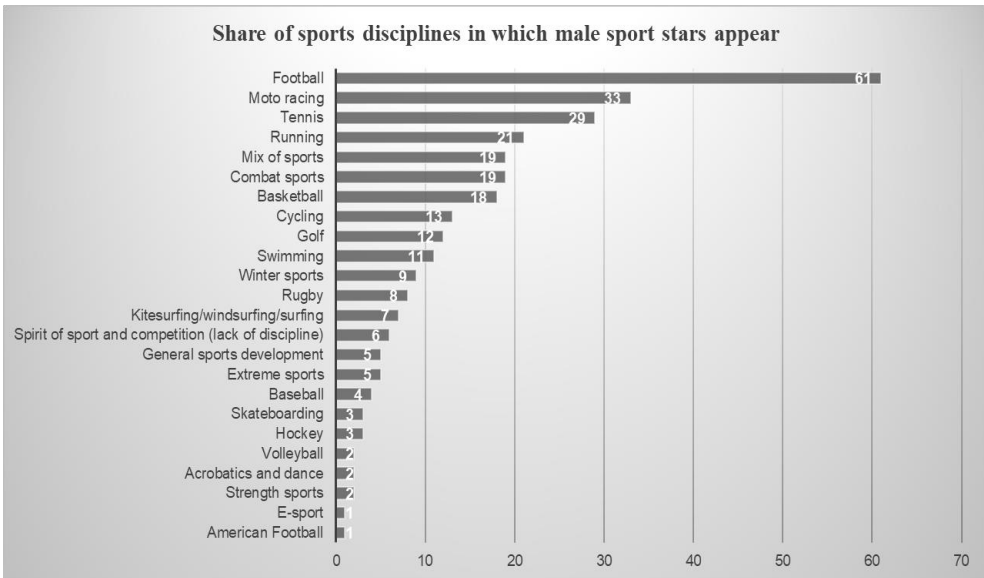


Figure 5: Share of sports disciplines in which male sport stars appear
Source: Own study (n = 275; max. 3 answers)

Sports accessories presented in the ad

The most common among both anonymous men (116) and male sports stars (223) were traditional sports accessories. The second place was taken by various sports arenas in which men (57) and sports stars (141) worked out. On the other hand, the accessories of support/fan culture were relatively rare among anonymous men (25 cases) and sports stars (35 cases).

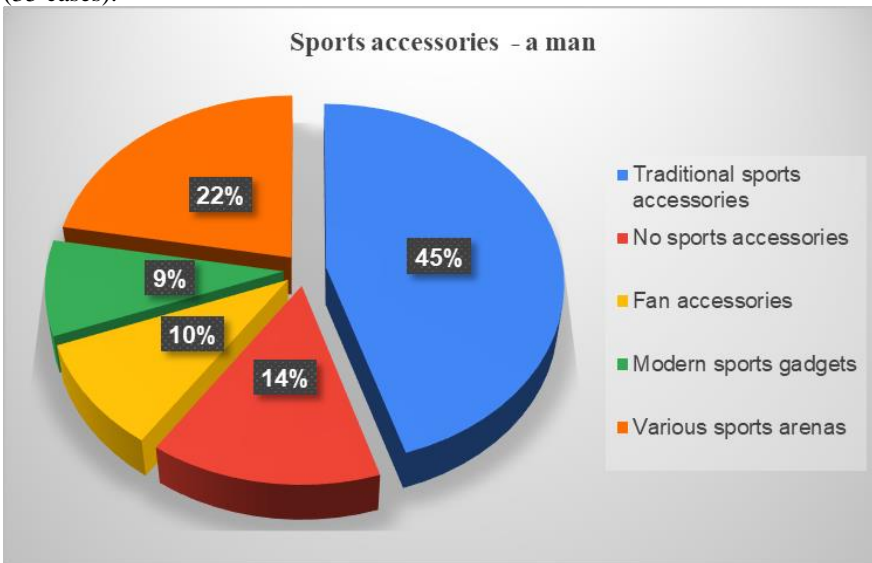


Figure 6: Sports accessories presented in the ad - anonymous man
Source: Own study (n = 174, max. 3 answers)

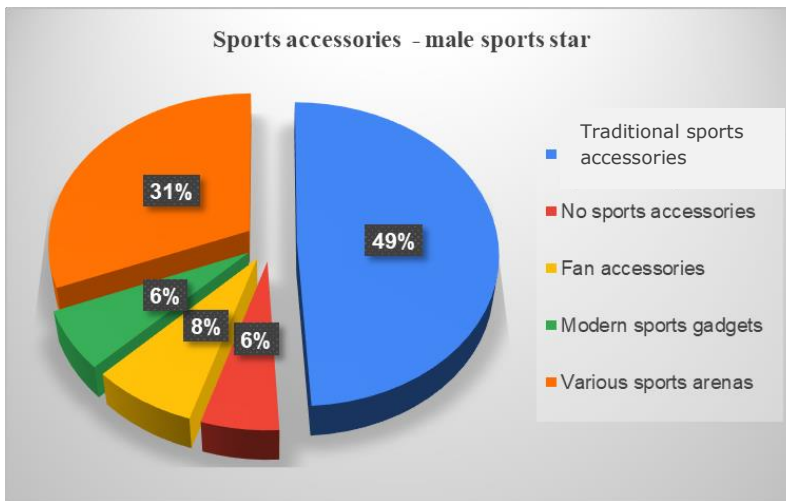


Figure 7: Sports accessories presented in the ad - male sports star

Source: Own study (n = 275, max. 3 answers)

The attitude of a man in sports advertising

Taking into account the attitudes of men in advertising, they see sport, first of all, as good fun and enjoyable activity (58), aspiration to a fashionable, sporty lifestyle (37) and an opportunity to become a charismatic leader and role model to follow (45), the champion and winner (33). The frequently addressed category of a lost, weak man who still loves what he does (37) also draws attention. The so called man's story, which is popular in storytelling advertisements, usually proves to be good in the sport-based communication (Jin-Ae et al. 2020; Kończak 2017). The club-level support aspects occurred in 32 cases, which gives them sixth place in the ranking, whereas patriotic support manifesting itself in taking pride in national colours and cheering the national team appeared only in 12 cases.

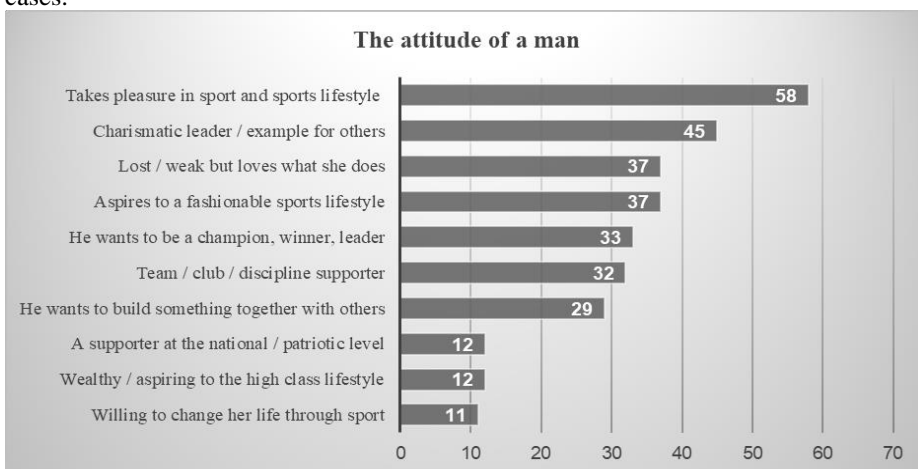


Figure 8: The attitude of the main character - an anonymous man

Source: Own study (n = 174, max. 3 answers)

Definitely the most frequently presented attitude of a male sports star was a charismatic leader / role model to follow (142) and a man who devotes his time and life to become a leader and/or winner, to pursue medals (96). The prevalence of leaders in sports advertising certainly indicates that the advertisers' main focus is on sports success as an attractive source of communication. The dimension of sport play and sports life was also evident in advertising campaigns (75). The remaining categories appeared much less frequently and accounted for a maximum of 10 percent of all advertisements.

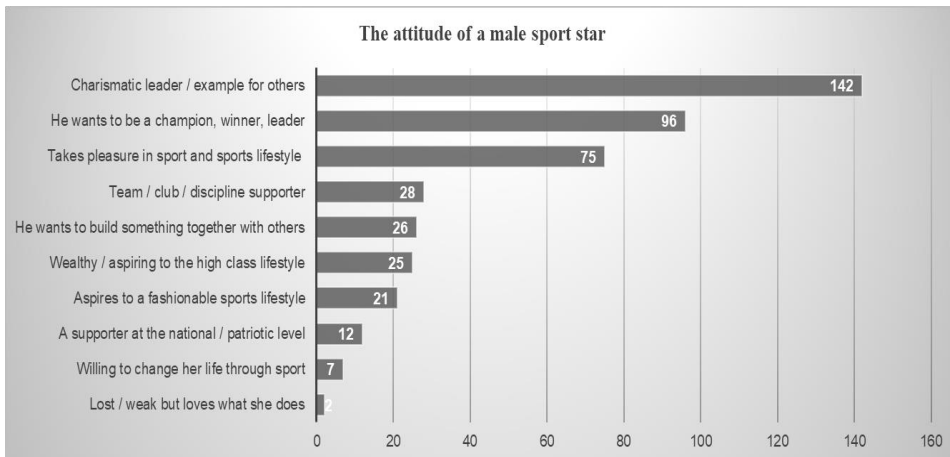


Figure 9: The attitude of the main character - a male sports star

Source: Own study (n = 275; max. 3 answers)

Areas of sport involvement

Sport involvement takes a number of forms which can be divided into categories for analysis. In an international study of football fans, eight categories of involvement were distinguished (Havas 2014). From the point of view of people actively involved in sports activities, categories such as passion and type of commitment can also be found in the scientific literature (Jowett et al. 2011; Lafrenière et al. 2008). For the purpose of this study, due to its broader dimension, ten categories of sport involvement were formulated.

Most often, sport was perceived as an attractive carrier of universal values (74 advertisements). Transfer of these values to the brand is attractive from the point of view of both company itself and its recipients. Sport was less often portrayed as a lifestyle element, where it is not the effort, effect or competition that matters, but the style and enjoyment (63). The next to go in the ranking was building one's own inner strength and hero's spirit (44) and building social relations through sport (39). Interestingly, two categories related to cheering turned out to be the least popular: building the identity, identification, pride of fans (15) and the role of advertising as an advocate of fans' passion, supporting the fan's spirit (8).

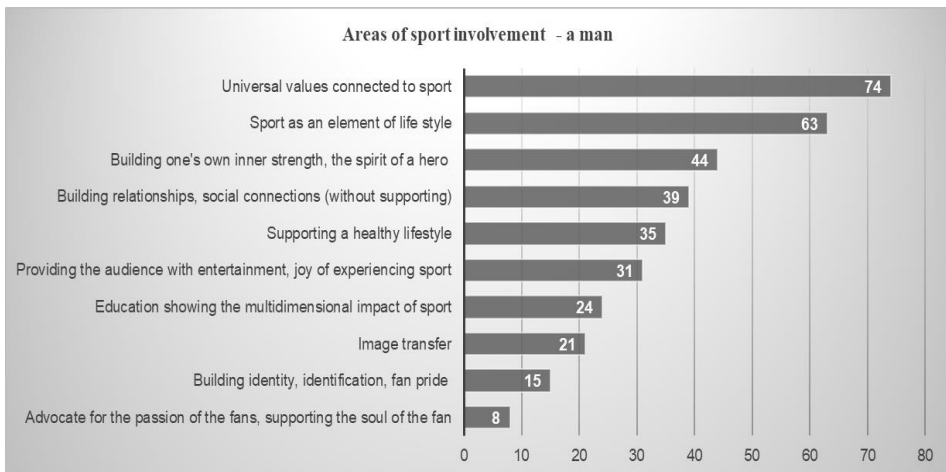


Figure 10: Areas of sport involvement – an anonymous man

Source: Own study (n = 174, max. 3 answers)

The most important levels of commitment from the point of view of a male sports star are also universal values connected with sport (115), building one's own inner strength and hero's spirit (111) and image transfer (82), i.e. using a positive image of the player sponsored or used in advertising, including his features, to shape an image of the sponsor or advertiser (Kończak 2020, Alonso-Dos-Santos et al. 2016; Groh 2004.).

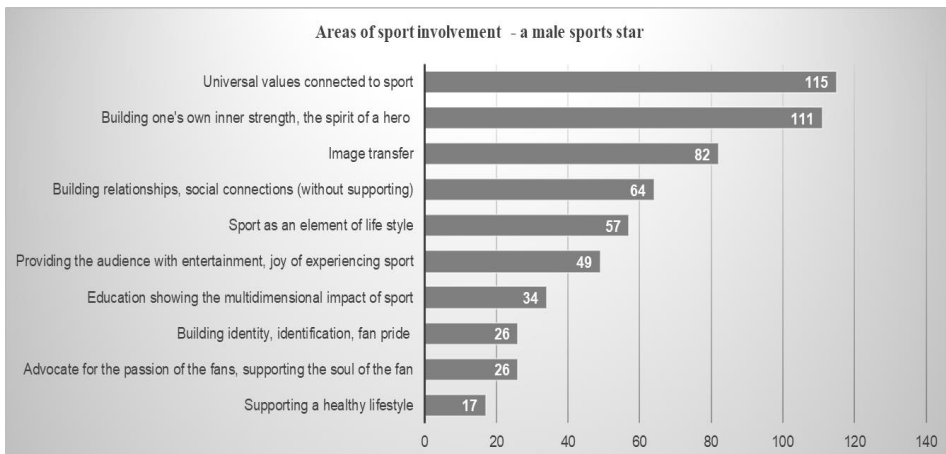


Figure 11: Areas of sport involvement – a male sports star

Source: Own study (n = 275, max. 3 answers)

Values presented in a sports advertisement

Values are one of the most widely declared attributes of Olympic sport. They are considered to be a set of timeless principles that do not require any additional external justification. These include friendship, the pursuit of excellence, respect (IOC 2022) and fair play (PKOL 2022). Values are also used by companies as a building block of their

communication with stakeholders (Aaker 1997, Wang 2004; Zhang 2011). When making decision about service or product, the customers look at them through the prism of the values they offer. It is not only about physical aspects and functional features of the products. The added value is also the manifestation of its own self, which by choosing other brands also builds its own personal brand. Identity building process implies reference to those deeply rooted values and beliefs that underpin communication with stakeholders (Bylicki et al. 2018, Urde 2003, Louro 2001).

Among the advertisements featuring an anonymous man, the most frequently mentioned were: effort, persistence and fighting weaknesses (68) as well as inspiration and role model (63). The next ones include: health and well-being (52), friendship (48), courage (44), teamwork (43), risk and lack of barriers (42).

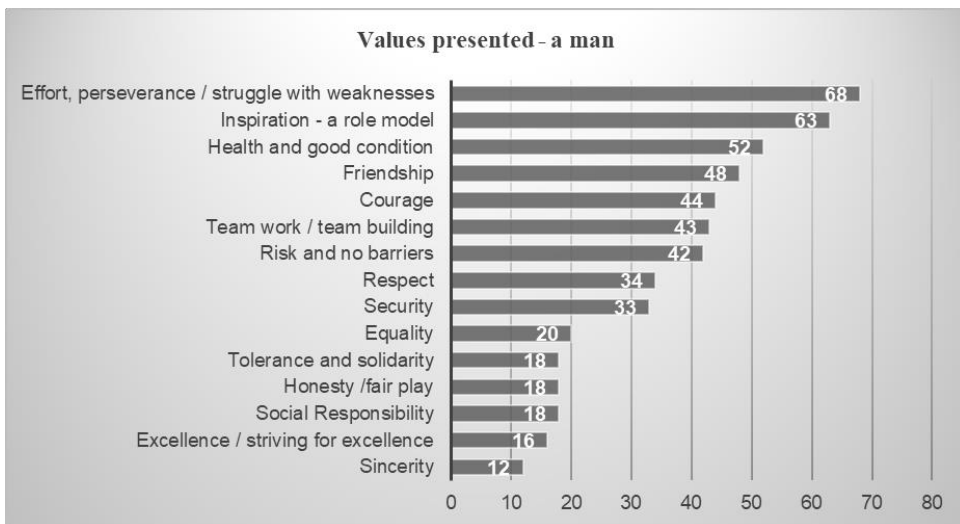


Figure 12: Values presented – an anonymous man

Source: Own study (n = 174, max. 3 answers).

As regards male sports stars, the most frequently depicted images included: inspiration - a role model (149), effort, perseverance and fighting weaknesses (134). The next in the ranking were: courage (85), respect (63), teamwork (59), risk and lack of barriers (58), as well as health and well-being (53)

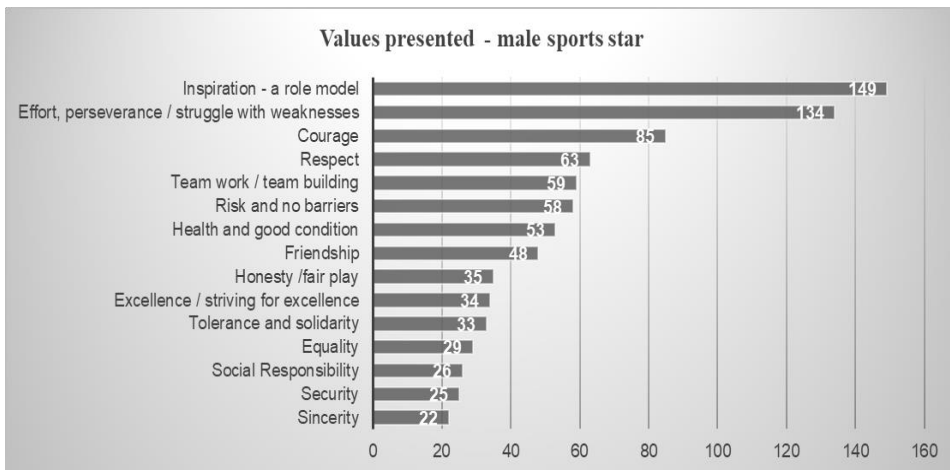


Figure 13: Values presented – a male sports star

Source: Own study (n = 275, max. 3 answers)

Discussion and conclusions

The sport presented in the advertisements featuring male characters is mainly utilized for image-building purposes, brand building, and to a lesser extent direct sales purposes. This is especially visible in ads featuring male sports stars. This overlaps with the objectives of sports sponsorship, where, apart from sales, majority of the ads are oriented towards brand building, which cover aspects such as building brand awareness, building brand image, and pursuing relational and corporate goals (Dolphin 2003, Andreff et al, 2006, Amis 1999, Kończak 2021; Jobber, 2007,). This pattern can also be seen in surveys carried out with sport sponsors (IEG 2018, IEG 2022, Sponsoring Insight 2019, Kończak 2021). The convergent communication of sports sponsors can be observed once again not only with companies using ambush marketing, but also with other brands that use a wide range of sport-based motives. It is understandable because sport offers universal values and universal connotations that are common to people of different nationalities, and evokes emotions widely known to all human beings.

This sport spirit was particularly evident in advertisements featuring anonymous men, where it appeared more often than other sport disciplines except football. The most popular sport discipline worldwide is also the most popular sport discipline in sports advertising. Apart from football, however, there is no clear correlation between the general popularity of a given discipline and its incidence in advertisements. While moto racing or cycling, which were common in advertising, are popular, whether due to active participation or popularity in the media, golf, extreme sports or kitesurfing / windsurfing or surfing also relatively often addressed in advertising are not commonly practiced or watched sport disciplines. It should be added at this point that the ads in question were mainly targeted at the European or American market. Therefore, no references, e.g. to cricket, which is the second most popular discipline in the world in terms of its number of fans, were found (Worldatralas 2022),

Taking into account the attitudes of men or their levels of involvement, there is a surprisingly small number of aspects related to support culture, be it at the club or national team level. A man, first of all, comes off as a person who wants to enjoy sport, which is considered to be a fashionable style of life. He also has a strong need to be a leader, a winner and a role model. A man in an advertisement usually does not have a fan's spirit, or the spirit is much less exposed in an advertisement than other levels of commitment or attitude. In terms of the number of exposures in the surveyed advertising campaigns, a supporter is even lower ranked than the lost, weak man who tries to change his life through sport. This is a popular motive in advertising in which sport is a catalyst for changes in a man's life and an element of shaping the spirit of hero and his inner strength. In the sport-based advertisement, a man no longer has monopoly on being the main character of the campaign any more, and sometimes even gives way to women, who appeared as anonymous characters more often than anonymous male character. In the case of sports stars, however, men definitely prevail, appearing almost three times more often than female sports stars. This somewhat reflects the structure of sports stars, where men account for the vast majority.

The man presented in a sports advertisement is multidimensional, just as sport is. Traditional areas connotated with sport, such as competition and support, are not the only ones to penetrate the advertising's contents. While the former area is very common in general, the latter is one of the rarest sporting motives. Much more often, sport appears as an element to build man's identity, his inner strength, heroic spirit. The sport spirit and values underlying such an identity appears to be more important than most of the sport disciplines presented in advertisements. Exception to the rule is football, which continues to be the number one, regardless of whether it concerns the man's image promoted by a male sports star or by an anonymous man.

References

- Aaker J. L. (1997), Dimensions of Brand Personality, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 34, 08. pp. 347-356.
- Alonso-Dos-Santos M., Vveinhardt J., Calabuig-Moreno F. & Montoro-Ríos F (2016), Involvement and Image Transfer in Sports Sponsorship. *Engineering Economics*, , 27(1), p.79.
- Amis J. (1999), Sport sponsorship as distinctive competence. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 33 nr. 3/4, pp. 250-272.
- Andreff W., Szymanski S., (2006) *Handbook on the Economics of Sport*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Biscaia R, Correia A, Rosado A, Maroco J, & Ross S. (2012), *The effects of emotions on football spectators' satisfaction and behavioral intentions*. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 12, pp. 227–242.
- Bylicki P i Kończak J (2018), *Marka korporacyjna i jej komunikacja*, Warszawa, Public Dialog, pp. 158-168.
- Crompton J.L. (2014), *Potential negative outcomes from sponsorship for a sport property*, *Managing Leisure*, 19 (6), p.17.
- Grohs R., Wagner U.M. & Vsetecka S., (2004), *Assessing the effectiveness of sport sponsorships-an empirical examination*, *Schmalenbach Business Review*, T. 56, p. 123.

- Gulati S. (2016), *Ambush marketing: the unofficial free riding*, International Journal of Research – Granthaalayah, Vol.4.
- Havas (2014), *Fans, passions, brands.*, Havas Sports & Entertainment & USC Annenberg Innovation Lab., Paris.
- IEG (2018), *What sponsors want and where dollars will go in 2018*, IEG Sponsorship Report ESP Properties LLC.
- IEG (2022), *Decision makers 2021. How Brands & Properties Can Realize Sponsorship's Full Potential*, IEG Sponsorship Report.
- Jin-Ae K., Sookyeong H., Glenn T.H., 2020, The role of storytelling in advertising, Consumer emotion, narrative engagement level, and word-of-mouth intention, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*.
- Jobber D. (2007), *Principles and Practice of Marketing*, McGraw-Hill, pp. 653-655.
- Jowett S, Lavalee D (2011) Social psychology in sport, T. 10. *Human Kinetics*.
- Kończak J. (04.2021), Sports themes in advertising, *Journal of Physical Education and Sport (JPES)*, Vol 21 (Suppl. issue 2), Art 149 pp. 1179 – 1184..
- Kończak J (2017) , *Storytelling – komunikacja sponsoringowa w sporcie*, *Quality in Sport*, 4 (3), pp. 57-68
- Kończak J (2020), *Komunikacja sponsoringowa w sporcie XXI wieku (Sponsoring communication in sport in the 21st century)*, SBP Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Dydaktyczne, Warszawa, p.128.
- Kwak D.H., Kim Y.K., & Hirt E.R., (2011), *Exploring the role of emotions on sport consumers' behavioral and cognitive responses to marketing stimuli*. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 11, pp. 225–250.
- Lafrenière M.A, Jowett S., Vallerand R.J., Donahue E.G, Lorimer R (2008), *Passion in Sport: On the Quality of the Coach–Athlete Relationship*, *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 30, 541-560 .
- Louro, M.J. & Cunha, V.P (2001), *Brand management paradigms. Journal of Marketing Management*, 17.
- IOC (2022), *Olympics values*, International Olympic Committee <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic-values> (09.04.2022).
- Messner M.A.: *The Life of a Man's Season. Male Identity in the Life Course of the Jock*. In: *Changing Men. New Direction in Research on Men and Masculinity*. Kimmel M.S. (ed.), Newbury-London-New Delhi: Sage, 1987, 56.
- Nielsen (2018), *Global interest in women's sport is on the rise*, Report, Nielsen Company.
- Ostrowski A. (2021), *Telewizyjne imperium sportowe. Prawdy i fikcje.*; ATUT – Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, pp.29-76 i pp.207-212.
- PKOL (2022) *Nasza misja i wartości*. Polski Komitet Olimpijski, <https://olimpijski.pl/pkol/o-nas/nasza-misja-i-wartosci/> (09.04.2022).
- Rosner S.R., Shropshire K.L. (2011). *The business of sports*, Johnes & Barthlett Learning, Canada, pp. 181-182.
- Sponsoring Insight (2019) *Rynek sponsoringu sportowego (Sports sponsorship market)* Warszawa .
- Swiss Corporate Communication and Public Relations Practice Monitor (2014)*, 2013 Report, Swiss Corporate Communication and Public Relations Observatory 2013, c/o Universitf della Svizzera italiana, Lugano Switzerland.
- Urde, M. (2003), *Core based corporate brand building*. *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8).
- Wang Y.(2004), *Study on the Brand Core Values*. Jilin University, Changchun.

- WordAtlas (2022) The most popular sports in the world, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-are-the-most-popular-sports-in-the-world.html> (12.04.2022).
- Zhang X.Y. (2011), Analysis on the Realization of the Core Values of the Brand. Medium and Small Business Management and Technology, pp. 7, 9-10.