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**Sports Governance. Modern
Methods and Practices**

Customer Relationship Marketing in Martial Arts

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Abstract: The present paper reviews good practices in modern management and marketing for sports clubs, especially in the Martial Arts. **Objectives:** to study how modern management and especially marketing should impact the development of martial arts clubs in Romania, by comparison to good practices identified in the USA. **Prior Work:** most available data is from USA, and relevant literature has been thoroughly reviewed, with an emphasis on modern marketing practices; **Approach:** for the purpose of clearly identifying marketing and management influence, a survey has been submitted to all known martial arts clubs registered in Romania; **Results:** survey results highlight the importance of modern marketing in attracting new practitioners, while modern management should make the sports activity lucrative and profitable; **Implications:** present findings and their interpretation are meant to provide academics and researchers with a foundation for further studies, as well as to send a signal to the policy-makers in charge; **Value:** according to our knowledge, this is the first study on this subject in Romania, and its' importance is relevant as a significant part of the health system and policies.

Keywords: sports management; sports marketing; martial arts; health policies

JEL Classification: A120

1. Introduction

It is important for professionals in the martial arts industry to try to understand how contemporary marketing initiatives affect martial arts both as a culture and the business aspect of it. A proper understanding and evaluation of how the martial arts field is affected by modern marketing, it is vital to take on an evaluation of the historical development of the field in the United States. It is also important to understand how marketing is applied when it comes to popularizing martial arts (IBISWorld, 2021). Several questions need to be asked in order to fully understand the subject in question (McNamara, 2008). These include questions such as:

- i. How has modern marketing impacted or influenced the perception of non-practitioners on martial artists?
- ii. Has marketing led to the redefinition of 'martial arts'?

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- iii. How has marketing affected the standard of quality in schools as well as among practitioners?
- iv. Does commercialized marketing have any impact on the cultural traditions of martial arts?

The information gained from answering these questions is useful for various reasons.

- i. Practitioners who intend to take the entrepreneurial route of martial arts will have the necessary information on what they need to do in order to not only attract but also retain customers.
- ii. This information is also important for people who want to gain a better and more in-depth understanding of martial arts.
- iii. Most importantly, this information will be useful to scholars to help them understand the effects of commercializing and monetizing a traditional recreational activity (McNamara, 2008).

2. Modern Martial Arts

Before going into the deeper aspects of the subject in question, it is first important to define the term martial arts. However, this term has proven a difficult one to define due to its cultural significance (Connor, 2019). In the traditional aspect of the practice, martial arts are performed by the military. This is not the definition used by most martial arts practitioners today. The specific activities of an individual martial art will depend on the centuries the tradition has been practiced as well as the country of origin (McNamara, 2008).

2.1. Martial Arts Education

There are several modern definitions of martial arts, all of which attempt to create a clear distinction between contemporary practices and those practiced in combat systems. Some critics argue that modern practices of martial arts are nothing but a watered-down version of the original practices that existed centuries before them. This kind of criticism has triggered a new level of tumult over the past decade (IBISWorld, 2021). ‘Modern Wushu,’ for example, is a combination of martial arts, dance, and gymnastics. This practice was set to replace Taekwondo in the Olympic Games in 2008. In the United States, most modern schools that teach martial arts focus on recreation and cognition. This is in opposition to the previous focal point of martial arts – self-discipline. Judo and karate, both different forms of modern martial arts, tend to link ‘nominally physical techniques with well-defined philosophical and spiritual ideas.’ Today’s martial arts education is more on the sport and entertainment aspect, and this provides a clear distinguishing characteristic from what is a more traditional definition of the practice (McNamara, 2008).

2.2. Globalization of Martial Arts

The world has experienced the rapid globalization of Asian martial arts. This phenomenon can be attributed to popular movies as well as the acceptance of martial arts as a global sport. For these reasons, more people outside Asia are participating in amateur, recreational, as well as professional levels of the practice (IBISWorld, 2021). Over the years, this growth has helped in creating its awareness and interest.

3. Marketing and Martial Arts

The general definition of marketing refers to the process of planning and executing the formation, pricing, promotion, and distribution of goods, services, as well as ideas to facilitate exchanges that meet both individual and organizational objectives. There are several principles and concepts of marketing (Ko & Kim, 2010). One of the most basic concepts of marketing highlights the importance of customer orientation. Customer orientation toward marketing almost guarantees an organization's success. This will best determine the wants, needs, and perceptions of target consumers. Marketing that is centered on the consumer requires that an organization studies the wants, needs, preferences, and perceptions of its customers systematically. In other words, marketing planning must always start with the consumer rather than the organization (Ko, 2003).

Marketing – advertising and promotions – have changed a lot in the past decade and is still expected to continue to change with time. Marketing martial arts needs to be done in a way that suits this modern generation (IBISWorld, 2021). There are numerous ways individual professionals or organizations can use to promote their martial arts schools. Some may be quick and easy to fulfill, while others may require more time, patience, and inputs. These are:

4. Developing a Powerful Martial Arts School Website

Technology has changed a great deal today, and most businesses have gone digital. For this reason, creating a website may be one of the most important aspects of martial arts marketing techniques. This is because the website will be the endpoint of most of the professional's advertising. In most cases, a website creates the first impression on prospective students who want to take martial arts classes. Websites today need to be varied and dynamic. Marketers employ the use of text, images, as well as videos to communicate to the public about what makes a particular business stand out and persuade the viewers or listeners to contact them. Trust is, of course, a vital element of advertising, and so testimonials and reviews may serve to boost the potential client's trust and loyalty.

For the website to achieve its objectives, it must always be easy to navigate so that people may have an easy time locating the information they need. Most people today own smartphones, and so the website must be mobile responsive so that all contents are displayed perfectly on phones. Additionally, the marketer's or advertiser's contact information should be easy to find. Not only that but also the call to action needs to be clear.

There is no need to make the website fancy. It should be functional, simple, and, most importantly, professional. The content needs not to be too much as this may discourage people from reading through all of it. It should instead be concise and clear (Marketing 360, 2019).

4.1. Developing a Strong Reputation

There should be testimonials from satisfied and happy clients. On top of that, the website should also provide links to Google reviews where people can view and also leave reviews. Such activities entail smart marketing (PerfectMind, 2020). The marketers need to be proactive in how they present positive comments, ratings, and reviews. In the market today, consumers want to know what they are 'getting themselves into' by seeking the opinions of other people who have tried a particular good or service. For this reason, customers will always look for reviews and make a decision from their evaluation. By having a generally positive review profile, the advertiser is able to convince people that they keep their

promises and deliver what they say they will.

On top of that, it is not wise for advertisers to assume that all customers will be satisfied by the product or service. They should not ignore negative reviews and comments, and they should also not try to defend themselves or ‘correct’ the customer. They should always have an open mind and must be able to respond politely to both positive and negative comments. They should always be keen to monitor what is being said about their business on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, among others. Once they spot a negative comment or review, they should express their sincerest apologies and promise to make things better the next time. Otherwise, they can ask the best students to give them good reviews (Marketing 360, 2019).

4.2. Dominate Search Results

As said earlier, websites form the cornerstone of advertising in today’s world. Many other professionals and entrepreneurs have discovered this trick and have also set up their websites to attract as many potential customers as they can handle. For this reason, the consumers have too many choices and sometimes end up clicking on a particular website by sheer chance. This means that the marketer should increase traffic to their website. They can achieve this by making sure that their brand shows up in all searches related to martial arts in their area. This should also include searches for more specific disciplines such as judo and Taekwondo. That said, there are three main routes one could take to increase traffic to their websites.

i. Pay-per-click advertising

Such advertisements are run through auction-based systems like Bing Ads and Google Adwords. The biggest advantage here is that the advertiser shows up on the top positions, which are reserved for paid ads. From there, they are able to control the landing page and the ad copy. For example, they may want to run an ad for children’s birthday parties. Their ads, together with the page they (ads) go to on their website, could match that offer.

ii. Google My Business

Next, it is important to set-up for Google My Business. This is the review platform and maps listing Google uses in the case of geo-targeted searches. This is a free listing, and optimization can be achieved with the descriptions of the marketer as well as getting customer reviews.

iii. Organic website listings

With the organic website listings, one is able to enjoy free clicks. The ranking is gained through the optimization of the website for gaining links, keywords, adding content to their blog, and getting social media traffic. Inorganic optimization, one should state city names among various geographic areas that people are most likely to search on. The keywords should be composed of the region and the martial arts style in the advertiser’s on-page content and meta tags. Most of the new prospective students are likely to begin their search for a martial arts program on Google. For this reason, it is highly advantageous for marketers to appear on the first page for both smartphones and desktops (Marketing 360, 2019).

4.3. Social Media Marketing

The power of social media to society can no longer be ignored. Social media today has evolved to become more than a means of communicating with friends and family or meeting new people. Martial arts schools need to take advantage of these platforms. On top of having an official website, these schools should also create social media accounts such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat. They should first start using these platforms as a means of sharing what is going on in their schools by using videos, storylines, and images. Being active on these platforms helps the creators to connect with people who have particular preferences. For instance, parents or older adults are most likely to be on Facebook, while children and adolescents are most likely to be on Snapchat. Social media is so diverse today that there is a limitless pool of marketing opportunities (PerfectMind, 2020).

The marketer can choose to share martial arts techniques through short videos, highlight present or former students' success, or even create content based on fitness and health. In other words, anything that the audience finds interesting or useful is always worth the try. During this time, it is important to have the staff always with their phones in hand to take cool shots to be posted on these platforms. They should also check their comment sections to identify the most asked questions and answer them in one conclusive post or several posts.

Generally, people should have a feel of what it is to be in the marketer's classes. When other people share this content, the owner gets free brand exposure (that is, they do not have to pay them). Since most of the potential students are children, teenagers, and young adults, parents and friends will be ready to share posts that show their young ones in action.

Snapchat is known for its filters, and creators may create a geo-filter for their martial arts. They should then ask their current students to mention their lessons as well as their newly acquired skills in their Snapchat stories. By doing this, the creator will be accelerating the rate at which their brand is exposed to their students' friends through images and videos.

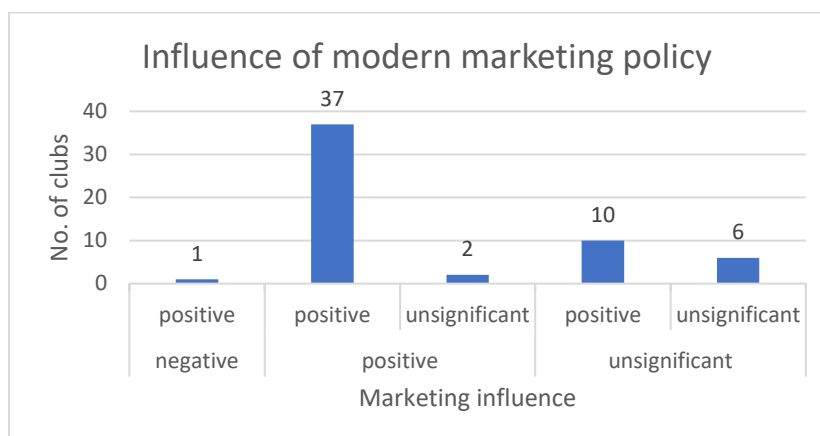
With time, the creator will gain a significant amount of following, and then they can start churning out targeted paid ads that are intended to reach people who are willing to take the lessons at a fee (Marketing 360, 2019).

4.4. Creating a Video

For this kind of activity, the video format is not only an appropriate but also an effective way to illustrate one's passion for martial arts. Through video, one can give a tour of their martial arts practice, explain their teaching philosophy, illustrate students in action, and also include testimonials. So much could be accomplished in a matter of minutes. Through editing, the message is conveyed to include only the most important parts, making the marketing effective (Marketing 360, 2019).

5. Survey

A survey comprising 20 questions has been sent to all no.60 Martial Arts clubs identified in Romania, returning 56 valid answers. The focus was on the influence of modern marketing and management on attracting and retaining people interested in Martial Arts. As expected, most of the participants declared a positive influence, as illustrated in Table 1 hereunder:

Table 1. Survey Results Regarding the Influence of Modern Marketing over M.A. Clubs

According to the National Institute of Statistics from Romania, the number of Martial Arts practitioners has decreased to one third compared to 1992 on the national level. Still, in recent years, a handful of clubs have absorbed and internalised some good practices from western countries related to marketing and management in sports. These clubs have succeeded to attract every year more practitioners and retained them.

5. Conclusion

In general, the field of martial arts suffers because there has been inadequate management and marketing of the martial arts practices. By using the techniques mentioned hereabove, individual professionals or organizations will be able to reach out to more people. It is not that people have lost interest in martial arts. It is the lack of marketing and management that fails to inform people of its existence. People need to be reminded of the possible opportunities that they would be interested in.

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