

**FOOTBALL CULTURE AND SPONSORSHIP
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WORLD CUP CONCEPT**

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ABSTRACT

The World Cup, which was firstly organized in 1930 by the efforts of Jules Rimet, the head of International Football Federation (Fédération Internationale de Football Association - FIFA) and became a significant event in the world agenda from the date of first organization, is one of the most important events of the football background. The world cups taking part among the most important sportive activities together with the Olympics Games, are supported by the comprehensive marketing communication campaigns of today and attract great attention of people. The World Cups that capture the imagination power of a world, once of every four years thus promise a great pleasure of watching which can be assessed as the most important proof representing that the football can not only be considered as a football activity. Since the world cups which based on presenting the world football to the masses and are organized depending on a planned schedule is such a current event, they also become an effective tool involved in the sponsorship activities. In respect of such meaning, it can be possible to qualify the World Cups that is taking part among the most excitement events of the world as a platform enabling the organizations to reach the potential and present customers through an effective communication tool as well as an effective concept towards the sponsorship activities.

Key Words: World Cup, Sport, Football, Sponsorship, Marketing Communication.

ÖZET

Uluslararası Futbol Federasyonu (Fédération Internationale de Football Association - FIFA) Başkanı Jules Rimet'in girişimleriyle ilk kez 1930 yılında düzenlenen ve o günden bu yana dünya gündemini meşgul eden Dünya Kupaları, futbol tarihinin en önemli etkinliklerindedir. Olimpiyat ile birlikte en

önemli spor organizasyonları arasında yer alan Dünya Kupaları, günümüzde kapsamlı pazarlama iletişimi kampanyaları ile desteklenmekte ve kitlelerin yoğun ilgisini uyandırmaktadır. Her dört yılda bir dünyanın hayal gücünü esir alan ve izleyicilere büyük bir seyir keyfi vaad eden Dünya Kupaları, futbolun sadece futbol olmadığına en önemli kanıtı olarak değerlendirilebilmektedir. Dünya futbolunu örgütlü bir şekilde pazarlama ve kitlelere sunma temeline dayanan Dünya Kupaları'nın bu denli gündemde olması, sponsorluk faaliyetlerine yönelik etkili bir araç olarak kullanılmasını beraberinde getirmektedir. Bu anlamıyla dünyanın en heyecan verici olayları arasında yer alan Dünya Kupaları'nı, örgütlerin farklı ve yoğun ilgi çeken bir kanal aracılığıyla mevcut ve potansiyel müşterilere ulaşmalarına olanak veren bir platform olarak nitelerek ve sponsorluk faaliyetlerine yönelik etkili bir açılım olarak ele almak mümkündür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dünya Kupası, Spor, Futbol, Sponsorluk, Pazarlama İletişimi.

INTRODUCTION

The World Cup, which is deemed as the greatest and the most attractive tournament of the football history, involves significant marketing efforts regarding the world football besides the fact that it's also qualified as a big watching arena. The adventure of the World Cup, which started in 1930 in Uruguay, became the commencement of a new era in the world football. The fact that football is a mass sport and that it has turned into a social rhetoric, has increased the importance of World Cups and as a result they attract the interest of the organizations acting with capitalist approach. In this context, the World Cup, which can be evaluated as an important issue regarding sponsorship, is used as an effective channel by the organization managements who intend to reach the target groups and gain the competitive advantage.

I. AN ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION INVESTMENT: SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship can basically be described as a person or corporate body that supports a work, an activity or a program. The achievements and the returns of the sponsorship activities are parallel to the perception levels by the public, contribution rates to any corporate body or the brand image and the respective potentials to create the awareness. Today, one of the most important and the most precious features of the sponsorship is that it provides the brands with the new and updated advertisement platforms. In this sense, it is possible to qualify the sponsorship as an alternative communication investment.

“Sponsorship is an agreement between a company and an event organizer where the company gives money -or the equivalent in kind- in exchange for the rights to associate the company name with the event. This association can include the company name on team shirts, on advertising banners, in press advertisements or whatever is agreed in order to improve the awareness or image of the company” (<http://www.sportsmatch.co.uk/Schol.pdf>, 14.10.2004).

“Sponsorship entitles the advertiser to a mention as the program’s sponsor, and to a specific amount of commercial time throughout the program, depending on the time of day, the type of program -local vs. network-, and the station’s regulations” (Toffler-Imber, 1994: 494). The organizations intending to have a significant effect and to be distinguished in the intense competitive business environment are inclined to do sponsorship activities through which they intend to improve and strengthen the company and brand images. Sponsorship, which is considered as the first among the most preferred marketing tools excluding advertisement within the scope of communication mixture, draws the attention as an effective tool promising the competitive advantage.

“Sponsorship is an important tool of marketing communication that seeks to achieve favourable publicity for a company and/or its brands within a certain target audience via the support of an activity not directly linked to the company’s normal business” (Bennett, 1999: 291). In this respect, the sponsorship means a work arrangement, which is implemented between the supporter and the one to be supported and also becomes an issue enabling us to reach the specified goals easier.

Also the specific objectives of emerging into a sponsorship agreement vary with desires and resources of individual firms. These may include the forging of links with local business and political communities, the entertaining of corporate customers, the personal objectives of decision-makers, such as interest in a particular sport, improving employee relations or the testing of potential product under *real life* conditions. The most commonly cited goals of sponsoring firms however are: increasing public awareness of the company or brand, and changing or enhancing the company’s or brand’s image (Amis – Pant – Slack, 1997: 83).

“Sponsorship has become a core issue in sport marketing and a critical concern for event management” (Brown, 2000: 71). In this context sport events have become a vital component of the marketing mix for tourist destinations. Events play two roles. First, they can attract participants and spectators, thus boasting the number of visitors to the host destination during the time that the

event takes place. Second, the attention that events receive through advertising and news coverage constitutes added exposure for the host destination. The economic impact of the event relies primarily on these two aspects. Visitors' spending brings money into the local economy, the event's advertising and news coverage can enhance the destination's image, thus helping to build visitation at other times of the year (Chalip – Green – Hill, 2003: 214).

Growth in sponsorship expenditure has been significant and the particular suitability of sponsorship as a global communications medium has ensured its worldwide diffusion. Therefore sponsorship, long associated with global events such as the World Cup in soccer and the Olympic Games, is increasingly taking on a global perspective. Major developments in global communications, particularly television, coupled with multinational ambitions for the globalisation of markets and products has encouraged this development. Sponsorship, in turn, particularly of sports can provide the global media to reach these audiences in a manner which is universally understood (Meenaghan, 1991: 7).

II. FOOTBALL SUMMIT: THE WORLD CUP

“The Football World Cup is one of the largest and most popular sporting events. The FIFA World Cup features the best technical skills and tactics to be found in soccer and influences millions of amateur and recreational soccer players around the world” (Junge – Dvorak – Graf-Bauman, 2004). The World Cup, which was organized initially in 1930 with the contributions of Jules Rimet and has been deemed as an important entertainment source since that day, is accepted as one of the biggest events in the history of football.

The World Cup organized by the International Football Federation and repeated every four years has an undeniable significance as a platform where there is no discrimination of religion, language, race and culture and which all football supporters around the world are interested in. In this sense, World Cup as being a sporting event which draws the intense attention of masses and sticks the watchers to the screen all over the world, can be qualified as the summit of football. As David Beckham, famous English player, stated, playing in the World Cup is a privilege, it is making your dreams true and every player knows that, all his career and his life may completely change during the month tournament held (Beckham – Watt, 2004: 223 – 224).

It is also possible to say that the World Cup attracting more attention each year in parallel to the developments in the communication technology and increased acceleration of the globalisation process begins to be deemed as a tool that serves to the economical growth and animates the consumer demand

besides the sportive anxieties as well. And “the impact of hallmark events such as the World Cup is usually measured on a multitude of indices including economic, tourism/commercial, physical, socio-cultural, psychological and political impacts” (Ritchie, 1984: 2).

The World Cup, which is the biggest proof indicating that football is not just football, is supported by a comprehensive marketing communication campaign and attracts intensive attention. The FIFA World Cup today not only reaches a massive sportive and economical dimension, it also has an important social value. FIFA wants to emphasize the multi-layered social components of the event and target, beyond the football fans, people of all different kinds of backgrounds so that they can identify with the World Cups. Therefore, FIFA established a broad marketing program for the World Cups” (<http://www.fifa.com/en/marketing/concept/index/>; 14.10.2004). At this point, the World Cup should be examined in terms of the historical background of football, its evolution as a social concept, its origin and its integration to the capitalist period.

III. WORLD CUP: AN EFFECTIVE PLATFORM FOR THE SPONSORSHIP ACTIVITIES

The particular suitability of sponsorship as a global communications medium has ensured its worldwide diffusion. Sponsorship, long associated with global events such as the World Cup in soccer and the Olympic Games, is increasingly taking on a global perspective. Major developments in global communications, particularly television, coupled with multinational ambitions for the globalisation of markets and products has encouraged this development.

“The forces of globalization have both positively and adversely affected many facets of post-modern culture, including the sport industries” (Toohey – Taylor – Ki Lee, 2003: 167). As football is getting a world-wide sport branch with an increasing importance, and since it is deemed as a fact of a culture, an increasing attention results towards the world cups. In this sense, the World Cup is the world’s biggest sporting event, with a television audience larger than of the Olympics.

It is possible to point out that the increasing number of people is captured because of the magic of this mega events taking part among the most excitement events of the world by the effects of the globalization process and the new communication technologies. “Few television events can rival the appeal of the World Cup, pulling in an audience comprising not only avid fans of the sport but also pretty much anybody with a pulse” (Barrand, 2002: 7).

Indeed, the reasons that makes the World Cups, which are based on marketing and presenting football to masses in organized methods, to be much on this agenda and to be used as an effective tool in sponsoring activities can be summarized as follows:

- The World Cup presents the most attractive, exciting and famous football players in a different arrangement. Taking into account the fact that football is a game based on competition, the combination of the football players from various teams attracts the watchers intensively. A football team, as emphasized by Platini, represents a style of existence, a culture. It is also possible to express that the National Teams have their own culture and improvement trend. At this point, it is known that the star football players show a different game and football understanding in their teams when compared with their performance in the national teams. One of the facts that attract the watchers to watch the World Cup mostly is that they get the chance to see the famous and successful football players from various clubs who would, except normal conditions, never come together in a team format. Furthermore, watcher's feeling of affinity with the star football player i.e. if the star football player has played in watcher's country before or is currently playing, increases the excitement in such respect.

- Since the football is a highly active and exciting sport, it provides group acceptance. Football, being a group entertainment beyond-classes, has a great dynamism and indefiniteness requiring for the ball's dialectic as the main subject of the game. At this point, it is possible to suggest that the magic of football, occurs due to such indefiniteness and high power of watching. Any other concern giving the meaning to the World Cup, is the tournament qualification. The playing arrangement of football represents a completely different understanding from the league and the cup -by other words, it is mostly different from the organizations that we have watched for four years-. A team understanding extended to a long season and adjusted according to the fluctuations of the physical forms of the players is not valid in this case. It requires everything to happen and end within one month. Long term efforts and preparations are carried out for only a short period of time. What's more, to correct a wrong decision can only be possible after four years. Therefore, the technical directors do not have the trial and error possibility here. Thus the football player should prove his capabilities during the match involved in the World Cup, since he will not have the chance to get away with it in the biggest window of the football market, that is the World Cup (Gültekingil, 2002: 16).

- Besides being a sport activity, football is a very comprehensive fact and though becoming a major element of industrial world. Football still

preserves its carnival characteristic, it is perceived as the most significant element of the entertainment industry. By this means, it becomes possible to claim that the World Cup is the biggest show on the world and that it constitutes an important component of the show society. The show society, as a phenomenon qualifying the contemporary society, is accepted as the extension of the capitalist economy and the object's circulation. In this context, "the show is initially an ideology; because it exhibits and proves the essence of all ideological systems in scope of its own integrity: becoming poor, reducing to slavery and excluding the real life" (Debord, 1996: 113). The show society that is qualified as both the result and the design of the current production style intersects with football on the semantic plane.

"Capitalism, removing football from its collective-human being characteristics that make football what it is, has converted it into a hard economic sector of the show society producing only *stars and idols*. So the football which is converted into a religious ceremony in this field, has been reshaped by the monopoly sponsors depending on the needs of the consumer society" (Demirer, 1989: 185–186). Even if the World Cup became effective in parallel to the commercialism and popularity of football, it still keeps attracting the masses in addition to the fact that it is exposed to the criticisms due to its being qualified as a reflection of show society.

- The World Cups can also be assessed as a mass communication event for individuals of each age, sex and social group intends to participate and follow. At this point it is possible to suggest the World Cups has widened the target group of football and it also includes the football supporters, who consider football as an attractive event only during the World Cup, into the process. From the capitalist point of view, it represents the diversity and the increase in the number of watchers and consumers.

"The popularization of *professional football* by the media and football clubs -both at national and international levels- based on commercialization is a period that has been going on for years and has reached its peak in the World Cups. The fundamental thought lying beneath the efforts to convert football into a life style and the World Cup into a pop festival is that a wide range of consumers can be attracted." (Ayata, 2002: 32-33).

Even if the difference between the temporary watchers who consider the World Cups as an ordinary event that may be followed up during the course of their routine life and the real football supporter is represented by the information and interest level of the people related to the football, it is not assessed as a disturbing approach from the view of the organization management and the marketing communication activities. However, it is even

possible to suggest that the superficial interest of the World Cup followers is desirable for the success of the marketing communication activities that are carried out in such scope.

- Football, which is deemed as a system offering the one, who is stronger and playing better, the chance to win, represents winning and succeeding hopes of the people who live in a world where a significant inequality exists in terms of economic, politic and socio cultural issues. “Thanks to television, the World Cup that can be qualified as an ideal stage has become the best way of ranking nations. The national income per person of the countries is very difficult to compare in such an attractive arena visually. In the World Cup, the USA gains no advantage over any other country and small countries can also have a chance in this tournament” (Kuper, 1996: 213).

- The fundamental principles of the society are taken as the basis intensively in football and the maintenance of the mentioned principles are ensured. Football, which offers a comprehensive view in theatrical style to today’s world, is based on two fundamental concepts; Competition and success. It is possible to say that the desire of achievement along with the international competition and the excitement is realized through the World Cup organized once in four years since 1930.

“The football team can also be considered as part of the competition in addition to the geographical, ethnic, religious and economical difference to be defined as a code of the personality or the identity expressions of the supporters. The football teams are described as the media making the other sub-districts involved in the same city or the other cities or the other nations different as well as the struggle field of the social, economic, religious differences and the competition” (Uztuğ, 2001: 126). At this point, the World Cups can be evaluated as criteria for being a part of the global world and being present in the international arena.

- It is possible to mention that there is a semiotic relation between the football and politics. “Football can be assessed as the argument ensuring the discussions in respect of the economic, military and diplomatic issues, which can not be solved by the national governments in scope of the respective international relations in today’s world, to be continued in any other arena as well. Through this meaning, by establishing a direct relation between the football and the current political issue, it may be seen that such twenty-two persons, who are struggling on the pitch, often leave their sport identities and the sportive effectiveness aside and act as the assigned persons carrying their own national identities and a tool of the current political issue” (Gökdemir, 1999: 29–30).

By pointing out that the football encourages the collectivist emotions by focusing on the nationalistic issues, it can be suggested that the fact, which underlies why the World Cup attracts such intense interest, is that it triggers the emotions pertaining to personality, identity and belonging. The national codes as the manifested identity expressions of the watchers are exposed and transferred by means of the National Team. At this point, the Football National Team representing the Turkish football in international arena “exceeds the club concept by removing the club differences and ensures the integration by creating a collective conscious” (Yamak, 2002: 11-12).

- The World Cups are the arenas where the new techniques, new stars and new teams put to stage for the first time, or legalized in the international area. To see the new stars, teams, systems, alignments and variations is attractive for the watchers as a whole. Since the football includes its the past and the future together in its body, the attraction of the World Cup increases and attracts the football lovers.

If we consider the events that are being sponsored are representing a message-platform, it is obvious that the football and the World Cup are in binding position for the organization managements. “In respect of the commercialization processes within the framework of the professionalism and mass media marketing, football removes the title of being considered as the *proleter sport* and becomes a leisure time activity welcomed by the society. Although football has been detached form its social roots, it hasn’t lost its attractiveness in respect of the social layers. Football as a sport has now caught up with the relation network of television, sponsorship and advertisement.” (Klose, 1993: 376). At this point, it is possible to point out that the discipline of football and marketing communication became integrated by way of a functional activity relation.

CONCLUSION

Considering football only as a sport branch would mean denying the strategic importance of an event with increasing worldwide significance and as well as attracting the millions. As being a ritual of the consumer society, football has converted into a mass communication entertainment from a sub-cultural participation. At this point, the aphorism indicating that football is not just football becomes effective. The World Cup, the summit of football which turned into an industry and is qualified as an event welcomed by all football lovers in the world, represents an appropriate atmosphere for the sponsorship activities because of attracting great attention of the current and potential target group. The sponsorship practices that are realized in respect of the World Cup, promising the groups a magic world and great pleasure of watching, enable the

organizations to reach the current and potential target groups and provide them with the competitive advantage in such scope. The point not to be forgotten is that everything is *for the good of the game*.

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