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*K. Yahelska,*

*Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor, Professor of the Department of Marketing,  
State University of Trade and Economics*

*ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3760-003X>*

## **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF SPORTS INDUSTRY BRANDS: STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR AND MARKETING SOLUTIONS**

*K. Ягельська,*

*д. е. н., професор, професор кафедри маркетингу,  
Державний торговельно-економічний університет*

## **СОЦІАЛЬНА ВІДПОВІДАЛЬНІСТЬ БРЕНДІВ СПОРТИВНОЇ ІНДУСТРІЇ: СТРАТЕГІЧНА ПОВЕДІНКА ТА МАРКЕТИНГОВІ РІШЕННЯ**

*The article raises the issue of the formation of socially responsible behavior of enterprises in the sports industry and its coordination with strategic business goals. The purpose of the article is to reveal the meaning of social responsibility in the sports industry and to deepen the theoretical basis of the formation of a model of socially responsible strategic behavior of sports industry brands. Based on the methods of scientific analysis, synthesis and logical generalization, the article formulates the key theses of social responsibility as an ethical concept. The*

*conceptual apparatus of the sports economy has been developed due to the substantiation of the category “sports landscape”, which eliminates the interchangeability of concepts similar to the city, takes into account all derivatives of sports and their interaction on quasi-markets. The sports industry is characterized as a branch of functioning of socially responsible brands and the main features of social responsibility in its sectors are defined. It was established that the complex structure of the sports industry requires different models of strategic behavior, approaches and tools for the implementation of social responsibility. Based on the systematization of the main directions of social responsibility in the sports industry sectors, a conclusion was made about the different strategic behavior of its participants, in particular, in the aspect of social responsibility. Alternatives of strategic behavior for sports industry brands by types of basic strategy are determined. The work proposes an adapted algorithm for making marketing decisions regarding the choice of the trajectory of strategic behavior and the direction of social responsibility. As part of the algorithm, a template for systematizing alternatives to strategic development guidelines and a template for summarizing identified guidelines into alternative directions of movement and choosing strategy options are proposed. The algorithm will allow sports industry organizations to effectively align their business goals with public expectations and market trends.*

*Стаття окреслює проблематику соціальної відповідальності, зміст якої формується в залежності від специфіки галузі, що впливає на напрями та інструменти її реалізації. Соціальна відповідальність в комплексній структурі спортивної індустрії викликає значний науково-практичний інтерес через її різноплановість та використання спорту як інструменту соціальної відповідальності підприємствами інших галузей.*

*Мета статті – розкрити зміст соціальної відповідальності в спортивній індустрії та поглибити теоретичний базис формування моделі соціально відповідальної стратегічної поведінки брендів спортивної індустрії. На основі методів наукового аналізу, синтезу і логічного узагальнення у*

*статті сформульовано ключові тези соціальної відповідальності як етичної концепції. Розвинуто понятійний апарат спортивної економіки за рахунок обґрунтування категорії «спортивний ландшафт», що усуває взаємозаміну схожих за змістом понять, враховує всі похідні спорту і їхню взаємодію на квазіринках. Методи порівняння та уявного експерименту дозволили охарактеризувати спортивну індустрію як галузь функціонування соціально відповідальних брендів та визначити основні риси соціальної відповідальності в її секторах. На основі систематизації основних напрямів соціальної відповідальності в секторах спортивної індустрії зроблено висновок про різну стратегічну поведінку її учасників, зокрема, в аспекті соціальної відповідальності. Визначено альтернативи стратегічної поведінки для брендів спортивної індустрії за типами базової стратегії. Прийняття маркетингових рішень щодо вибору траєкторії стратегічної поведінки та напряму соціальної відповідальності запропоновано здійснювати з дотриманням адаптованого до особливостей галузі алгоритму, який дозволяє обґрунтувати модель соціально відповідальної стратегічної поведінки брендів спортивної індустрії. Алгоритм передбачає використання аналітики даних і відгуків стейкхолдерів для визначення ключових сфер, де зусилля компаній щодо соціальної відповідальності можуть принести найбільший вплив. Цілісна система прийняття рішень може допомогти передбачити та зменшити потенційні ризики, пов'язані з ініціативами соціальної відповідальності, гарантуючи, що вибрані стратегії є життєздатними та впливовими в довгостроковій перспективі.*

**Keywords:** *social responsibility, sport, brand, strategy, stakeholders, strategic marketing, strategic behavior, marketing decision-making.*

**Ключові слова:** *соціальна відповідальність, спорт, бренд, стратегія, стейкхолдери, стратегічний маркетинг, стратегічна поведінка, прийняття маркетингових рішень.*

***Statement of the problem in a general form and its connection with important scientific or practical tasks.*** In recent years, the concept of social responsibility (SR) has gained significant popularity in various industries, including the sports industry. Brands of the sports industry have a unique influence on society, which can be used to stimulate positive social change. In turn, the pressure of social changes and society's demands determines the revision of business priorities and actualizes the search for a balance of the interests of the enterprise and its stakeholders. This exacerbates the problem of forming socially responsible behavior of enterprises and its alignment with strategic goals.

***Analysis of recent research and publications.*** M. Porter & M. Kramer [1], P. Heikkurinen [2], D. Baron [3], G. Boesso, F. Favotto and G. Michelin [4], N. Dentchev [5], A. Ganti [6], C. Flammer [7], Filyppova [8] and other researchers devoted their attention to SR in business, in particular, the issue of integrating SR into the strategic management of the enterprise.

Recent studies of SR in the sports industry [9-15] have revealed its multifaceted nature, highlighting complex strategies that solve social, environmental and economic problems and go beyond simple philanthropy, integrating SR into core business practices to create a positive impact on society, while increasing brand value and sustainability. However, the complex structure of the sports industry requires different models of strategic behavior, approaches and tools for the implementation of SR, which requires deeper research into the SR of various participants in the sports landscape.

***Formulation of the goals of the article.*** The purpose of the work is to reveal the content of SR in the sports industry and to deepen the theoretical basis for the formation of a model of socially responsible strategic behavior of sports industry brands.

***Presentation of the main research material.*** The study of the SR of sports industry brands requires a primary definition of its content, taking into account the specifics of the industry. The most complete interpretations, in our opinion, are highlighted in works [6, 16-17], the key theses of which are the following. SR is an

ethical concept that involves individuals and companies taking action and being responsible for actions that benefit society and the environment. The main signs of SR include: ethical labor practices, charity, promoting volunteerism, donations, using ethical hiring procedures, making changes for the benefit of the environment, building relationships, contributing to the community, valuing diversity, participating in rational discussions, advocating environmental sustainability. As for the specifics of the industry, which leaves an imprint on the features of the SR, we note that F. Schaaf was one of the first to use the concept of “sports industry”, understanding by it the production relations that develop between people in the process of production, distribution, exchange and consumption of those specific products, which are produced in this field [12]. Ya. Leonov, developing the topic, suggests distinguishing the concepts of “sports industry” and “industry of sport”, including in the first not only types of activities that are directly related to the physical activity of people, but also to production, trade, medicine, betting, etc. By the industry of sport, the researcher understands exclusively that part of the relations that arise in connection with training and competitions [13, p. 22]. We could not find such analogues in foreign scientific works, on the contrary, American colleagues believe that the sports industry is a market in which the products offered to customers are related to sports, fitness, recreation or leisure and can be activities, goods, services, people, places or ideas. That is, products in the Sport Industry Include: participation; entertainment; equipment and apparel; promotional items; sport facilities; marketing research; management services. It is important to recognize that products can be goods, services, people, places, or ideas [18, p.2].

The idea of a domestic colleague to distinguish between the concepts of sports industry and sports industry is quite logical, however, it seems to us that the difference between them can be seen due to the peculiarities of the Ukrainian language, and when translated into English, both concepts are often translated as “Sport industry”. In order to avoid confusion, it is advisable to replace part of the relations that arise in connection with training and competitions with another term that would emphasize intangible characteristics, for example, the sphere of physical

culture and sports (according to the legislation of Ukraine). In addition, modern researchers refer to the sports industry as quasi-markets that use the sports industry for profit: the entertainment industry (sports betting, etc.), the beauty industry (bodybuilding, etc.), the nutrition industry (biosupplements, fat-absorbing products, etc.), the service industry (training, online constructors, etc.) [19]. Of course, they are tangential, but quite independent. It can be said that all together they form a kind of “sports landscape” – a complex socio-economic space that has a single basis – sport, and was formed as a result of the complex and long-term interaction of all effective components and their development, which are guided by the same principles: health, beauty, leisure, etc. In this case, the sports industry has a leading role.

All components of the sports landscape are strongly interconnected. For example, professional sports teams rely on broadcast media for revenue, while sponsorship deals enhance the marketing efforts of both athletes and corporations. Governing bodies establish standards and rules that affect the operation of leagues, teams and athletes. Sports medicine is essential to maintaining an athlete’s health and performance, and technology is constantly influencing training methods and fan engagement.

Understanding the specifics of sport as a product and the original basis of the sports industry with its many derivatives involves recognizing the interdependencies and the role of all components that each component plays in contributing to the overall landscape. Also, the sports industry can be divided into three main sectors: public, private and voluntary. Obviously, each of them has distinct SR programs with different goals and means of achieving them (Table 1).

The complex structure of the sports industry determines the different strategic behavior of its participants, in particular, in the aspect of SR, because it, in turn, is influenced by business goals, consumers and other stakeholders, as well as competitors. Thus, matching the business goals of a ball manufacturer with the expectations of its stakeholders within the scope of SR will differ from the business goals of a fitness club and its stakeholders.

**Table 1. SR in the public, private and volunteer sectors of the sports industry**

| Characteristic  | Basic essence  |
|---|--|
| Public sector   |  |
| <p>SR is mainly financed from the state budget and state funds. Focuses on public welfare, health and community development. Accountability to the public and state bodies.</p> | <p>1. Goal: community health and improvement.<br/>           Programs: public sports facilities, public sports programs.<br/>           Result: Facilitates wide access to sport and physical activity.<br/>           Example: local self-government initiatives regarding the construction of public parks and sports complexes</p>              |
|   | <p>2. Goal: accessibility.<br/>           Programs: Initiatives aimed at making sports accessible to all socio-economic groups.<br/>           Result: Ensures equal opportunities for participation.<br/>           Example: subsidized sports programs for low-income families.</p>  |
|   | <p>3. Goal: youth development.<br/>           Result: supports the physical and social development of young people.<br/>           Example: State-sponsored after-school sports programs.</p>  |
|   | <p>4. Goal: environmental sustainability.<br/>           Programs: Sustainable construction of sports facilities, environmental measures.<br/>           Result: Reduces environmental impact through public policy.<br/>           Example: municipal sports facilities using renewable energy sources.</p>                                       |
| Private sector  |  |
| <p>Funded by private investment, sales and sponsorship. Profit motives and market competition. Accountability to shareholders and consumers.</p>                                | <p>1. Purpose: to promote health and well-being.<br/>           Programs: corporate wellness programs, public fitness initiatives.<br/>           The result: improved brand image and customer loyalty.<br/>           Example: Nike's global initiatives to promote physical activity.</p>   |
|   | <p>2. Goal: environmental sustainability.<br/>           Programs: sustainable product lines, environmentally friendly production.<br/>           The result: appeal to environmentally conscious consumers and compliance with regulatory requirements.<br/>           Example: Adidas' commitment to use recycled materials in its products.</p> |
|   | <p>3. Goal: economic development.<br/>           Programs: local employment, investment in the community.<br/>           The result: supports the local economy and builds goodwill.<br/>           Example: Under Armour creates manufacturing facilities in economically disadvantaged areas.</p>  |
|   | <p>4. Goal: social integration and diversity.<br/>           Programs: Diversity and inclusion initiatives within the company and marketing campaigns.<br/>           The result: SR increases brand equity and broadens market appeal.<br/>           Example: inclusive marketing campaigns involving diverse athletes</p>                       |
|   | <p>4. Goal: youth development.<br/>           Programs: sponsorship of youth sports leagues, scholarships.<br/>           Result: Builds future customer base and community support.<br/>           Example: Under Armour's sponsorship of youth sports events.</p>  |

| Characteristic  | Basic essence   |
|---|---|
| Public sector   |   |
| Voluntary sector  |   |
| Funding through donations, grants and volunteer efforts. Focus on social welfare, community support and advocacy.<br>Accountability to donors, volunteers and beneficiaries | 1. Goal: community involvement.<br>Programs: volunteer-run sports programs, community outreach.<br>Result: Strengthens community ties and provides opportunities for engagement.<br>Example: Local sports clubs run by volunteers offer free or low-cost activities.  |
|   | 2. Goal: accessibility.<br>Programs: programs targeting marginalized groups, adaptive sports for people with disabilities.<br>Outcome: Provides opportunities for participation for all, regardless of ability or background.<br>Example: Nonprofits providing sports equipment and training to underserved communities |
|   | 3. Goal: youth development.<br>Programs: mentoring, training and youth development programs.<br>Result: supports personal and sports development of young people.<br>Example: Organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs that offer sports as part of their youth development programs.                                |
|   | 4. Purpose: advocacy and awareness.<br>Programs: Campaigns on social issues related to sport, such as anti-doping, fair play and mental health.<br>Result: Raises awareness and drives policy change.<br>Example: human rights groups campaigning for a safe and inclusive sports environment.                          |
|   | 5. Goal: environmental initiatives.<br>Programs: Grassroots efforts to promote the sustainability of local sports events.<br>Result: mobilizes community action to protect the environment.<br>Example: volunteer organizations that organize environmental sports events and clean-up campaigns.                       |

*Source: formed on the basis of [1-7; 10-15].*

The sports industry, as a market, is subject to the influence of five forces of competition (according to M. Porter) and requires the timely formation of strategic behavior of the organization and marketing decision-making appropriate to the market situation. That is, the formation of strategic behavior takes place under the influence of a combination of factors of the market environment, starting conditions of development and potential opportunities of the enterprise. The main trajectory of strategic behavior will be determined by the basic strategy of the development of the organization (brand) (Table 2).

**Table 2. Alternatives of strategic behavior for sports industry brands**

| <b>Growth strategy</b>   |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Main trajectory: transition to another / better attractor  |  |  |
| Aim  | Form of behavior   | Example  |
| <b>Market penetration</b>  |  |  |
| increasing share in existing markets   | aggressive (aggressive marketing campaigns; promotions and discounts; expansion of physical and online presence, etc.)   | Nike launches intensive advertising campaigns during major sporting events to increase brand awareness and sales                               |
| <b>Market development</b>  |  |  |
| entering new markets or sports segments  | research-territorial (expansion to developing markets; preparation of a sports product for local tastes and preferences; establishment of partnerships with stakeholders)  | Adidas expands its presence in Asia, opening new stores and adjusting product lines for the Asian market                                       |
| <b>Product development</b>   |  |  |
| presentation of new sports products or improvement of existing ones  | exploratory (investment in research and development of innovative products; launch of new product lines; cooperation with technology companies for smart sports equipment) | Under Armor designs high-tech fitness apparel and integrates technology to improve athletic performance  |
| <b>Diversification</b>   |  |  |
| introduction of new business areas / entry into related sports or health sectors   | parent (acquisition of brands in related or unrelated industries; launch of new divisions or subsidiaries; entry into additional sectors, such as health care, etc.)       | a sports brand acquires a fitness company to integrate digital fitness solutions into its product offerings                                    |
| <b>Position holding strategy</b>   |  |  |
| The main trajectory: maintaining balance with the aim of building up and qualitatively improving the initial basis of development for the further change of the attractor of development to a better one |  |  |
| <b>Increasing customer loyalty</b>   |  |  |
| strengthening relations with existing customers, increasing the loyalty of fans  | incentive (loyalty and rewards programs; personalized marketing and customer service; engagement through social networks and brand communities)                            | implementation of a loyalty program in which customers earn points for purchases that can be exchanged for discounts or exclusive products     |
| <b>Improving the quality of goods and services</b>   |  |  |
| support of high quality sports product   | reflective (regular update and improvement of products and services based on feedback; strict quality control measures; customer feedback loop for continuous improvement) | regular release of updated versions of popular products with improved functions and ecological materials; professional growth of coaches, etc. |

| <b>Growth strategy</b>  |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Main trajectory: transition to another / better attractor   |   |   |
| Aim   | Form of behavior  | Example   |
| <b>Increasing brand equity</b>  |   |   |
| strengthening the image and constant maintenance of the brand's reputation  | reproductive (consistent brand message; sponsorship and support; corporate social responsibility initiatives)   | partnering with famous athletes and teams to maintain a strong brand presence in the world of sports  |
| <b>Operational efficiency</b>   |   |   |
| optimization of operations to maintain competitiveness  | inactive (optimization of supply chain management; training of trainers; development of new / balancing sports programs; introduction of economical technologies) | implementing advanced inventory management systems to reduce waste and improve product availability   |
| <b>Reduction strategy</b>   |   |   |
| The main trajectory: a change in the motion vector with a probable decline  |   |   |
| <b>Cost reduction</b>   |   |   |
| reducing operating costs to increase profitability  | eliminative (reduction of overheads; outsourcing of non-core activities; implementation of lean production processes)   | outsourcing of production to regions with lower labor costs and implementation of energy-saving measures at production facilities                         |
| <b>Rationalization of the product line</b>  |   |   |
| directing resources to ensure the efficiency of priority subsystems   | neutralization (stopping the production of inefficient products; focusing on bestsellers and highly profitable products; simplifying product variations)          | discontinuing less popular product lines to focus resources on top-performing categories such as sneakers or fitness apparel                              |
| <b>Alienation</b>   |   |   |
| sale of non-core or low-performing assets   | compression (identification of non-core divisions or assets, sale or separation of these divisions; reinvestment of income in key areas)                          | sale of non-athletic apparel subsidiary to focus exclusively on sports and fitness products   |
| <b>Reduction</b>  |   |   |
| increasing the volume of potential for survival and sustainability due to the reduction of the size of the organization | anti-crisis (reduction of the workforce; closure of inefficient stores / sports clubs or other facilities; consolidation operations)                              | downsizing of sports clubs / closing underperforming retail stores and cutting staff to cut costs and focus on online sales and more profitable locations |

Source: formed on the basis of [20, 21]

By adopting these strategic behavior patterns, sports industry brands can effectively manage growth, maintenance, and decline scenarios. Each strategy requires an

individual approach that aligns with the brand's overall goals, market conditions, and internal capabilities.

Making marketing decisions within the chosen trajectory of strategic behavior and relevant areas of SR can become an important competitive advantage. In the process of making a marketing decision, the problem is first diagnosed, then external and internal information is collected, decision-making criteria are formed, alternative strategic options are determined and chosen [22, p. 56, 58]. The algorithm for making marketing decisions on choosing the trajectory of strategic behavior and the direction of social responsibility, adapted to the specifics of the sports industry, includes several stages:

1. Situational analysis.

- 1.1. Analysis of the external environment (PESTLE analysis / TEMPLES analysis to determine external factors affecting the brand and the sports industry as a whole).

- 1.2. Market analysis:

- a) determination of current trends in the sports market, new opportunities, preferences of fans, consumers;

- b) assessment of market share, competitive environment and growth potential, analysis of Porter's competitive forces, formation of a competitive map of the market.

- 1.3. Analysis of the internal environment:

- a) analysis of key business indicators of the organization's internal environment diagnostics system;

- b) analysis of target strategic indicators;

- c) summarizing the results of the analysis of the organization's external and internal marketing environment (SWOT / TOWS).

- 1.4 Stakeholder analysis (identification of key stakeholders (fans, athletes, employees, community, investors), conclusion regarding their expectations, needs and influence on the brand).

2. Definition of strategic goals.

2.1. Defining short-term and long-term business goals (e.g., increase fan base, increase athlete support, increase participation in events, brand awareness).

2.2. Setting clear goals for social responsibility (e.g., promoting youth sports, improving community health through sports).

3. Determination of strategic options as a result of the use of strategic analysis tools (for example, Tables 3, 4).

**Table 3. Template for alternatives of strategic development guidelines**

| Strategic steps | Model                        |           |                   |      |       |     |
|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|------|-------|-----|
|                 | I. Ansoff – “goods – market” | ADL Model | Porter’s 5 forces | TOWS | SPACE | BCG |
|                 |                              |           |                   |      |       |     |
|                 |                              |           |                   |      |       |     |

*Source: formed by the author*

**Table 4. A template for summarizing the identified landmarks into alternative directions of movement and choosing strategy options**

| Direction 1       | Direction 2       | Direction 3       | Direction 4 |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Landmarks         | Landmarks         | Landmarks         | Landmarks   |
| <i>Strategy 1</i> | <i>Strategy 2</i> | <i>Strategy 3</i> |             |

*Source: formed by the author*

4. Evaluation and selection of strategic options regarding:

- compliance with goals (assessment of how each strategic option is consistent with business goals and goals of SR of the brand);

- feasibility (assessment of the practicality of each option based on resources, opportunities and market conditions);

- impact assessment (analysis of potential impact on financial indicators, brand reputation and stakeholder satisfaction);

- potential risks (identification and assessment of potential risks associated with each option and development of steps to minimize them).

5. Determination SR areas.

5.1. Identification of key areas (promoting health and well-being through sport; environmental sustainability in sport; economic development through sport events and infrastructure; social inclusion and diversity in sport; education and youth development through sport, etc.).

5.2. Coordination of the chosen direction of SR with the chosen strategic variant of behavior.

6. Development of an implementation plan.

6.1. Setting specific measurable goals for the chosen strategy and direction of SR.

6.2. Allocation of resources (allocation of necessary resources (budget, personnel, technologies) for implementation).

6.3. Timeline (developing a timeline with key milestones and deadlines for sports initiatives).

6.4. Monitoring and evaluation:

a) setting KPIs to track progress and measure success in the sports industry;

b) implementation of feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement.

7. Implementation and monitoring.

7.1. Implementation of the strategic plan and social responsibility initiatives.

Checking the awareness and commitment of all stakeholders.

7.2. Monitoring (regular review of progress against KPIs).

7.3. Adjust strategy and actions based on performance data and feedback.

The adapted algorithm will allow companies to effectively align their business goals with public expectations and market trends. Using data analytics and stakeholder feedback, companies can identify key areas where their SR efforts can have the greatest impact, thus fostering a more sustainable and inclusive growth model.

*Conclusions and prospects of further investigations in this direction.* The sports industry is a multifaceted and dynamic sector consisting of various interrelated components that together form the sports landscape. All components of the sports landscape have excellent social responsibility programs with different goals and means of achieving them. The complex structure of the sports industry determines the different strategic behavior of its participants, in particular, in terms of SR. The choice of the trajectory of strategic behavior within the framework of the basic strategy of brand development will allow to effectively managing the scenarios of

growth, maintenance and reduction of the organization in the sports industry. Making marketing decisions regarding the choice of the trajectory of strategic behavior and the direction of SR can be carried out according to an adapted algorithm, the implementation of which involves the use of strategic marketing tools. The choice of strategic orientations of SR and the formation of socially responsible behavior in accordance with the basic strategy can contribute to improving brand reputation, increasing consumer loyalty and strengthening competitive advantage, ensuring that marketing strategies are not only profit-oriented, but also ethically justified and socially useful.

Since as an indicator of marketing efficiency it is most often recommended to use various indicators of profit, which is in conflict with the principles of SR, the formation of a system for evaluating social responsibility in the sports industry is considered promising in a scientific and practical direction.

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