

UDC 659.126:[091.33:796

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32782/1814-1161/2024-1-13>

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## BRAND OF STUDENT SPORTS DEVELOPMENT AS A TOOL TO INCREASE THE COMPETITIVENESS OF HEI

## БРЕНД РОЗВИТКУ СТУДЕНТСЬКОГО СПОРТУ ЯК ІНСТРУМЕНТ ПІДВИЩЕННЯ КОНКУРЕНТОСПРОМОЖНОСТІ ЗВО

*In the context of building a reputation of higher education institutions, one of the tools to increase their competitiveness is comprehensive support for the realization of the achievements of higher education students, in particular in the development of student sports. The field of sports is one of the most favorable in the context of building a personal and collective brand, personality growth, acquiring leadership qualities, popularizing traditions, values, and achieving communication goals of an educational or propaganda nature. Student sports, in turn, is a successful combination of ambitious intentions, building one's own trajectory of personal growth, opportunities not only to gain experience, knowledge, lay the foundations for a successful future, but also to form one's own brand, relying on the support of the institution (institution of higher education). The generation of such initiatives by a higher education institution is extremely relevant and justified, because the positive reputational and communication effect from such a symbiosis of parallel growth of the brand of an individual and the institution has a very long-term perspective. Mentioning the name of the university in an interview with athletes is one of the best elements of the PR activity of a higher education institution, because it can potentially attract the attention of an applicant who loves sports, but did not even know or considered the option of a particular higher education institution. The dynamism of increasing the role of self-realization is increasingly forcing applicants to search for a multifunctional innovative higher education institution. The demand for educational services is increasingly generating the relevance of building a strong reputation for the brand of an educational institution to attract students, increase competitiveness and maintain market positions. The modern information environment is maximally tuned to the strategy of differentiation, highlighting the positions of the leader among the main competitors. Entrants, as a specific segment of the target audience, actively respond in their requests not only to the quality of education, but also to the possibility of comprehensive development, in particular sports. The article deals with the issue of the impact of student achievements in sports on the popularity of the brand of a higher education institution.*

**Keywords:** brand, higher education institution, sports, marketing, brand management.

*В умовах побудови репутації закладами вищої освіти, одним із інструментів підвищення їх конкурентоспроможності є всебічна підтримка реалізації досягнень здобувачів вищої освіти, зокрема при розвитку студентського спорту. Сфера спорту за специфікою своєї діяльності є однією із найсприятливіших у контексті будівництва особистого та колективного бренду, зростання особистості, здобуття лідерських якостей, популяризації, традицій, цінностей, досягнення комунікаційних цілей просвітницького чи пропагандистського характеру. Студентський спорт, у свою чергу, є вдалим поєднанням амбіційності намірів, будівництва власної траєкторії особистого зростання, можливостей не лише здобуття досвіду, знань, покладення підвалин для успішного майбутнього, але й формування власного бренду, спираючись*

на підтримку установи (закладу вищої освіти). Генерування таких ініціатив закладом вищої освіти є надзвичайно актуальним та виправданим, адже позитивний репутаційно-комунікаційний ефект від такого символічного паралельного зростання бренду особистості та установи має дуже довготривалу перспективу. Задування назви університету в інтерв'ю спортсменів є одним із найкращих елементів PR-активності закладу вищої освіти, адже потенційно може привернути увагу вступника, який любить спорт, але навіть і не знав чи не розглядає варіант того чи іншого ЗВО. Динамізм підвищення ролі самореалізації все більше змушує вступників до пошуку поліфункціонального інноваційного закладу вищої освіти. Попит на освітні послуги все більше генерує актуальність формування сильної репутації брендом закладу освіти для залучення вступників, підвищення конкурентоспроможності та збереження ринкових позицій. Сучасне інформаційне середовище максимально налаштоване на стратегію диференціювання, виокремлення позицій лідера серед основних конкурентів. Вступники як специфічний сегмент цільової аудиторії у своїх запитах активно реагують не лише на якість навчання, а на можливість всебічного розвитку, зокрема і спортивного. У статті розглянуто проблематику впливу студентських здобутків у спорті на популярність бренду закладу вищої освіти.

**Ключові слова:** бренд, заклад вищої освіти, спорт, маркетинг, бренд-менеджмент.

**Statement of the problem.** Student sport is a driver and at the same time a lever of influence on the development of the nation's health, as well as an important element in building a brand by a higher education institution. In the context of increasing supply and demand for educational services, society is changing its perception of the world when choosing an educational institution, which leads to competition for applicants.

From year to year, quality education is a promising area of economic development, and student life is an indicator of the improvement of progressive youth's own soft skills. In addition to the educational component, modern applicants are interested in the possibility of self-improvement, and most of them pay attention to the conscious role of developing their sports ambitions. The high level of popularization of student sports development by higher education institutions creates a halo of opportunities to strengthen the market position of the HEI brand, its competitiveness, and helps to attract potential applicants.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The problems of using branding policy to increase the competitiveness of higher education institutions, aspects of their implementation and coverage in the media are reflected in the scientific works of D. Fayvishenko [1], A. Dergousova [2]. In their works, O. Soroka and M. Kryvtsova [3] focus on the analysis of the components of building a brand by a higher education institution, which implies a positive image of the educational institution and a high level of corporate culture. Marketing research in the field of sports is covered in the articles by G. Akranglyte, R. Andriukaitienė, V. Bilohur [4], which outline the essence and role of forming the image of an athlete in the media.

The analytical aspects of the impact of the development of student sports as a tool for increasing the competitiveness of the brand of a higher education institution need to be deepened and substantiated as an important marketing category in the brand communication system.

**Objectives of the article** – to determine the impact of student achievements in sports on the popularity of the brand of a higher education institution within the framework of research on the current features of marketing activities in the field of sports.

To achieve this goal, we used such general scientific methods as synthesis, analysis, comparison and generalization; systematization, decomposition and graphical representation of the results to substantiate the impact of student sports development on the development of the brand of a higher education institution.

**Summary of the main results of the study.**

The development of own identification in symbiosis with the unique components of internal and external factors creates a range of competitive advantages, which are the embodiment of the concept of "brand". The high level of popularization of branding both in various areas of business and in social aspects determines the importance of this concept in the effective use of marketing tools to build a competitive brand of a higher education institution. Modern applicants pay attention to the brand, its image and reputation when choosing a higher education institution.

According to G.T. Pyatnytska, the "brand of a higher education institution" should be understood as a specific model of ideas and value characteristics about the HEI and its educational services in the minds of stakeholders, which is formed through the self-presentation of the HEI, the success of students, graduates, teachers and researchers of the HEI, the quality of the material and technical and educational and methodological base of the HEI, etc, and is associated with the name and/or logo of the higher education institution, which helps to position the higher education institution in the market of educational services [5].

From year to year, the State University of Trade and Economics takes care of building its own brand as the flagship of economic higher education in the country. The university with a rich history, founded in 1946, has been generating modern knowledge and providing its transfer for many years, which creates long-term values, forms, maintains and develops resources for future generations. According to the data provided in the analytical report "Analysis of the results of the admission campaign to higher education institutions in 2023 (as of September 30, 2023)" compiled by the Institute of Higher Education of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine, it has been proven that SUTE is a true leader, as it holds leading positions in many performance

indicators of higher education institutions in the recruitment of applicants and has one of the best positive dynamics [6]. This is a confirmation that the brand of the higher education institution maintains a high level and continues its transformation to build a multifunctional European innovative university with stable competitiveness in the country and the world.

The State University of Trade and Economics generates high-quality education, so it constantly cares about the practical importance of studying disciplines, as well as engages stakeholders to help students acquire useful skills. Among the main competitive advantages of building the brand of the State University of Trade and Economics is the comprehensive development of sports, as the university has all the conditions for personal development.

Today, both theorists and practitioners are increasingly talking about the dominant role of the nation's health. The State University of Trade and Economics is at the forefront of the youth sports movement among higher education institutions, in particular, it has great success in the most popular sport – football. The brand of SUTE's development as a football leader in student football has been attracting applicants for more than 10 years, as the team's success helps young people who are

interested in football to want to be in the team – to want to be SUTE students.

The Football Championship of Kyiv among higher education institutions traditionally contributes to the development of a healthy generation and the popularization of the student sports brand. Football Championship of Kyiv among higher education institutions, which is held under the auspices of the Football Association of Kyiv Students [8]. In 2013, FC Mercury-SUTE resumed its participation in the Kyiv Football Championship and for 10 sports seasons has been reaching the final part of the competition every year, becoming the most titled higher education institution [Figure 2].

Traditionally, the final matches of the championship take place at the legendary Dynamo Stadium named after Valeriy Lobanovsky. Before the period of quarantine restrictions and full-scale invasion, the fan sector was filled with several thousand supporters. The fans traditionally watched the final game from the stadium, and the broadcast of the matches on the YouTube media platform was provided by the event partners, HSPORT and Football Hub [9; 10]. According to the analysis of marketing communications by the Football Association of Students of Kyiv, in the period from 2018 to 2023, the last 5 finals were watched by more than 150,000 viewers, and more than 38 press releases were published by the media



Figure 1. Competitive advantages of the State University of Trade and Economics

Source: [7]

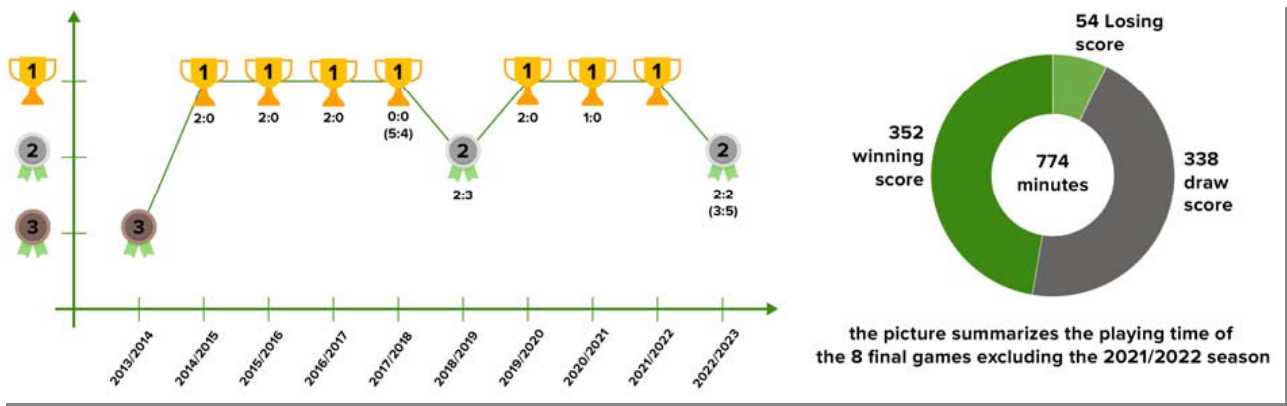


Figure 2. Achievements of FC Mercury-SUTE in the Kyiv Football Championship among higher education institutions in the period from 2013 to 2023

Source: developed by the author according to [8]

to promote student football in the capital and cover the results of the competition [8].

It is worth noting that the State University of Trade and Economics is a leader in training specialists in economics, so most of the team players have this particular profile of education, but this is their competitive advantage in the market of young professionals, as they receive high-quality education and develop themselves in their favorite sport. Among the graduates and students of SUTE's higher education, many players of the student team are professional footballers who play at the highest levels of the national championship, including players of the Ukrainian Premier League and the Professional Football League: The First League and the Second League; players of professional football clubs that play under the auspices of the Amateur Football Association of Ukraine.

In parallel with the capital's competitions, the State University of Trade and Economics annually participates in the Ukrainian Football Championship

among higher education institutions. The organizer of this championship is the All-Ukrainian Association of Students of Ukraine, which is a member of the Ukrainian Football Association [11]. SUTE sports youth actively train and win more and more victories for their native Alma Mater. According to the dynamics of performances in the Ukrainian Championship, the SUTE team is constantly fighting for high places and in most cases gets into the top three winners [Figure 3].

Having successfully overcome the challenges of the national championship, the student football team of the State University of Trade and Economics was given the opportunity to represent the country at the European University Games held in the Polish city of Lodz from July 21 to 27, 2022. More than 5 thousand students from 422 universities in 46 countries took part in the competition. Ukraine was represented by 234 students from 45 universities who competed in 20 sports [12].

In their debut football match, SUTE students won the first victory, defeating the students of the

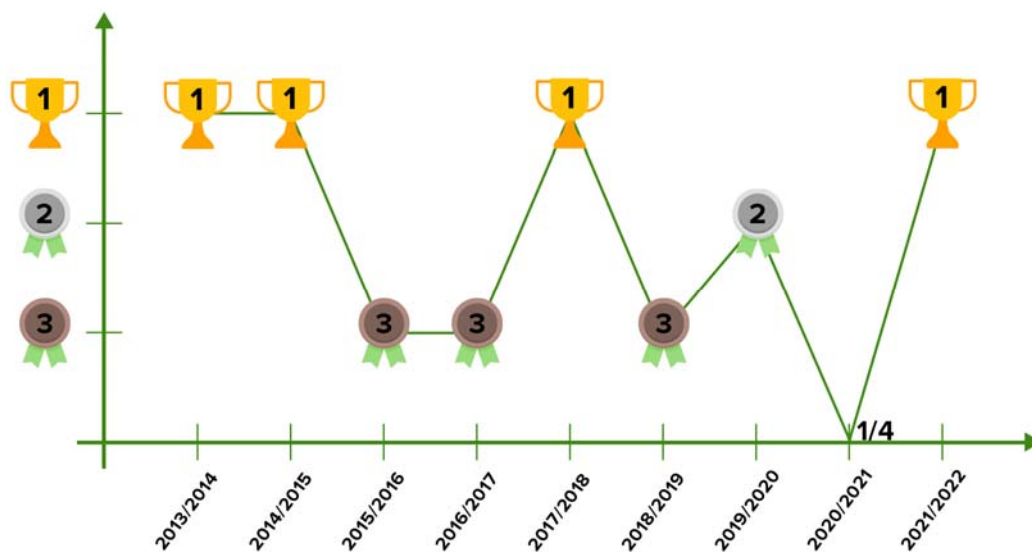


Figure 3. Achievements of FC Mercury-SUTE in the Ukrainian Football Championship among higher education institutions in the period from 2013 to 2022

Source: developed by the author according to [7; 9–11]

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University of Tübingen (Germany) with a score of 3:0. The second match of the group stage brought a 2–1 defeat to the Ukrainian team in favor of students from the University of Timisoara (Romania).

The flag of the university continued to fly to the accompaniment of the Ukrainian national anthem, and in the first playoff match, the Ukrainian football team defeated the team from the University of Sports Sciences from Budapest (Hungary) with a score of 1–0, and in the semifinals defeated the team from Ramon Llull (Spain). Regular time ended with a 1–1 draw, and in the penalty shootout, the Ukrainian team won 5–4. In the final match, the main game time ended with a score of 0:0, and in the 11-meter penalty shootout, the representatives of the Romanian University of Timisoara were stronger by a minimum margin – 8:7. Football club Mercury SUTE is the silver medalist of the European University Games 2022 [Figure 4].

This sporting achievement attracted the attention of the Ukrainian community, which supported and cheered for the athletes. This historic result

increased the number of searches for the university in the information space, which increased the interest of young people in applying to the university.

From year to year, the State University of Trade and Economics has been at the forefront of the youth sports movement among higher education institutions. Its sporting horizons are growing exponentially. A year after its success in the European arena, the student team of the Mercury-SUTE football club went to Tirana (Albania) for the European University Championship, which took place from June 24 to July 3, 2023 [13].

During the group stage, the Ukrainian team won three out of three games: 4–0 against the Norwegian School of Economics, 2–0 against the University of Rouen Normandie from France, and 6–1 against the University of Fribourg from Switzerland. At the next stage, in the quarterfinals, SUTE's representatives had the opportunity to take revenge on the students of the Romanian university West University of Timisoara, and the Ukrainian team won a convincing



Figure 4. Achievements of FC Mercury-SUTE in the European University Games in Lodz, Poland

Source: developed by the author according to [12]

5–0 victory. In the semifinals, fortune smiled on the representatives of the University of Würzburg from Germany after penalty kicks. In the bronze final, Ukrainian athletes defeated the students of the French University of Rouen Normandie with a score of 5:0. [Figure 5].

The university's credo is to comprehensively develop each personality, which, in symbiosis with the perfect mastery of unique skills by higher education students, is a prerequisite for the development of leadership skills.

Positive performances in the European arena paved the way for the SUTE student team to participate in the FISU University World Cup Football in the Chinese city of Jinjiang [14; 15]. The SUTE team made a stunning entry into the 12 teams that had the opportunity to represent their country at the World Cup among higher education institutions. In the group round, the team won two victories: 6–0 over Western Sydney University from Australia and 2–1 over Myongji University from South Korea.

The geography of the Ukrainian football team's rivals expanded to unusual latitudes and brought a team of students from Universidad Nacional de La Matanza Argentina to the quarterfinals, which they eventually defeated with a score of 3:0. In the semifinals, SUTE's representatives competed with the Universidad de la Republica from Uruguay, where they also won a convincing 2–0 victory. In the final game, the Ukrainian team outperformed its rivals in all respects, the game ended with a score of 1:1 in regular time, and in the penalty shootout, the rivals, the Brazilian team from UNIP (Universidade Paulista), were lucky. A historic medal for Ukrainian student sport [Figure 6], [16]. The results were popularized in many media outlets, as well as covered by many football clubs and the athletes themselves, which expanded the brand awareness of the State University of Trade and Economics.

It is worth noting that the Ukrainian team did not lose a single minute of regular time during the World Cup! The organizers of the competition highly



Figure 5. Achievements of FC Mercury-SUTE in the European University Football Championship, Tirana, Albania

Source: developed by the author according to [13]

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appreciated the team players and gave all the main individual awards to SUTE representatives: the best scorer – Denis Khrul; the best goalkeeper – Yaroslav Protsenko; the best player – Oleg Liga [Figure 7].

Student sport is much more than standing in the spotlight of an event with sports records, victories and medals, it is a titanic work for the improvement

and development of the individual. According to Alex Ferguson, a legendary personality in the football world, a star coach, "each next generation raises the level of the game because it stands on the shoulders of the previous one" [17]. This opinion confirms the mission of SUTE: "We work for the current and future generations" [7].



Figure 6. Achievements of FC Mercury-SUTE in University World Cup Football

Source: developed by the author according to [11; 14; 15]



Figure 7. Individual achievements of FC Mercury-SUTE players in University World Cup Football

Source: developed by the author according to [11; 14; 15]

The State University of Trade and Economics is the flagship of sports achievements among the country's higher education institutions and pays enough attention to developing the student sports brand as a tool for increasing competitiveness among higher education institutions.

**Conclusions.** A powerful brand of a sports student club has a positive impact on the formation of a competitive advantage of a higher education institution. The modern world is an era of digitalization of everyday life of every member of society, which undoubtedly engraves and shapes social value orientations and determines the way of life! The brand of a higher education institution in symbiosis with the development of student sports and successful performances on the world sports scene increases the zone of influence on potential applicants. The symbiosis of the personal brand of each individual team member with the subsequent coverage of the results in their own social networks motivates students to think about choosing an educational institution.

We see the prospect of further research in the systematization of scientific and methodological foundations and the development of a strategy for socially responsible marketing of enterprises in the field of sports.

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