

IN THE FLOW OF CHANGE  
**YOU WON'T GET  
BORED. NEW  
DIMENSIONS  
OF AMATEUR  
SPORTS**

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**Russia witnesses changes in the perception of amateur sports. Previously focused primarily on young people, now sports pick up new trends towards taking pleasure in exercises, esthetics, mental health support, social impact and sustainability. Brands can benefit from this situation by ensuring audiences' strong engagement and enhancing their social dimension.**

In the history of our country, the Soviet period was a major stage of active and well-established propaganda of physical culture and sports. There was an entire system of sports clubs, swimming pools and other facilities to engage people and choose the best of them to side with professional sportspeople. As a result, the country used to repeatedly score victories at the World Championships and the Olympic Games.

This system was partially lost during the Perestroika<sup>1</sup>, but strong sports schools in many athletic disciplines, namely – rhythmic gymnastics, figure skating, hockey and others, have survived. The Russians are still proud of their fellow citizens' victories in professional sports, however, their attitude to amateur physical culture is transforming.

## **FROM FOCUS ON ACHIEVEMENTS TO FOCUS ON PLEASURE**

The Soviet system of mass sports was focused on choosing the best of the best for a sports career from a young age. Children got engaged in many sports at the age of five, as it was believed that it would be too late

to do that at a later stage. Coaches focused on professional sports paid attention primarily to “promising” children who could win competitions. Others received much less attention and motivation. Therefore, an entire

generation of post-Soviet people (Generation X and older individuals) grew up with the feeling that “my time has passed, I’m not made for sports.”

Now their self-image and perception of sports activities is changing: people aged 35+ years get engaged in sports.

More and more activities and coaches emerge for mass mixed-age audiences who do sports not only for the sake of victory but also for their own pleasure.

## **FITNESS CLUBS DID NOT BECOME ATTRACTION CENTERS AND SPORTS ENGAGEMENT DRIVERS**

Fitness clubs became the first ones to focus on people who were doing sports “for themselves.” The oldest fitness club chain in Russia is World Class launched in the early 1990s. Subsequently, democratic Planeta Fitness entered the market.

Fitness clubs filled the need for physical activity for people of different ages and constitutions.

Nonetheless, now, three decades later, only 13% of the urban population aged 16+ years have fitness club membership. This share is significantly higher among people aged up to 40 years (16%).

In addition to the need to pay for long-term membership at once (12-month membership is the best option), which is unaffordable for some people or psychologically uncomfortable, fitness club customers encounter a wide range of inconveniences. First of all, it means being bound to one and the same place for a long time. Second, if their schedule or coach changes, or if they are dissatisfied with the set of activities, customers have to be content with what is left. Clubs try to diversify their programs, but customers' appetites and habituation rate outstrip management team's ability to adjust the schedule.

<sup>1</sup> The period of economic and political reforms in the USSR from 1985 to 1991.

*“I have a lot of cards from various abandoned fitness clubs with all kinds of exercises. I didn’t manage to achieve any results or have*

*fun anywhere, and I didn’t like it everywhere. This situation only confirmed my opinion that sports is not for me.”<sup>2</sup>*

## LOOKING FOR SOMETHING NEW. ENTERTAINING AND DIVERSE

The RusIndex study findings show that 43% of the city dwellers did these or those sports in 2021.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, there is still an enormous potential for engaging people in sports, especially

now, when healthy living trends are becoming more popular.

The RusIndex data demonstrate that the TOP5 most popular activities for the Russians by generations are:

All individuals aged 16+	Gen Z. (16-25 years)	Gen Y. (26-40 years)	Gen X. (41-55 years)	Silver Age. (55+ years)
Aerobics, fitness	Running	Aerobics, fitness	Aerobics, fitness	Home exercise machines
Runnig	Aerobics, fitness	Running	Running	Aerobics, fitness
Home exercise machines	Home exercise machines	Home exercise machines	Home exercise machines	Swimming
Swimming	Volleyball	Swimming	Swimming	Running
Yoga	Gym	Yoga	Cycling	Yoga

The growing need to do sports in such a manner that activities do not become boring and threadbare stimulates the development of new types of activity. They are often intentionally simplified versions of professional sports or dancing for

adult amateurs, e.g., squash, body ballet, aerial silks, trampoline classes, bungee fitness (exercises using a special elastic rope providing the feeling of flight), various types of yoga, exercises in hammocks, and even such an exotic option as zoo

<sup>2</sup> Source: social media users’ comments

<sup>3</sup> Ipsos. RusIndex study. 2021/H1. Russians, 16+, 100k+ cities

fitness (exercises imitating animal movements), and much more.

These options are limited only by enthusiastic coaches’ imagination.

## The key idea of this new perception is to try dozens of different sports to find several “one’s own” options for pleasure.

One of the remarkable examples for this concept of free choice of activities is the Fitmost virtual project. It allows using single membership

at fitness centers, yoga and dance studios, martial arts clubs, swimming pools, gyms, etc. without being tied to a specific place and schedule.

## AESTHETICS AND BEAUTY ARE IMPORTANT

Modern sports activities are not only pleasure and physical results but also aesthetics. Amateurs value both the beautiful interior of training halls and the aesthetics of sports activities, club environment and beautiful special uniforms for each type of sports. All these aspects allow them to take delight in physical activities.

*“It should be beautiful. The environment turned out to be very important to me. That’s why I have nice uniforms for all my training sessions, a cool racket and squash dresses. I have an entire drawer full of sports outfits in my dresser.”<sup>4</sup>*

Nice uniforms and aesthetic interiors also make it possible to take beautiful photos for social media.

*“I was captivated by swimming thanks to the bubbles. They were appearing and disappearing so beautifully. Besides, I liked the feeling of water flowing all over my skin.”*

<sup>4</sup> Source: social media users’ comments

## SPORTS AS A BASIS FOR A SOCIAL MIX

As the subject of gender equality is on the rise in the society, girls and women become more and more engaged in classic “non-female” sports: boxing, powerlifting and martial arts. Photos showing girls with barbells and girls wearing boxing gloves can be found more and more often on social media among “classic” posts with family members or during home cooking.

Once purely male sports studios begin to purposefully invite a female audience in response to this trend: girls wearing boxing gloves appear on advertising posters, while more appealing prices are offered.

Another manifestation of the social mix in sports is a direct statement that activities are meant for all age groups: from adolescents to the

representatives of the third age. This is how cross-age targeting manifests itself in terms of lifestyle and interests rather than age or gender.

Such interest groups create a comfortable and almost family atmosphere that often expresses itself in group members’ mutual support and additional mutual motivation. Teenagers give a burst of their energy and grace of youth to the older generation, while they are motivated by the older

generation’s admiration. It is also the first communication with adults on an equal footing for many of them.

Besides, the members of such mixed groups more efficiently master skills of communication with the representatives of other generations.

Apart from mixing by gender-and-age characteristics, of course, there is also inclusion of people with disabilities in sports. Brands also have opportunities here. For example, Coca-Cola helps the Naked Heart Foundation create inclusive workout spaces and multifunctional sports grounds. People with disabilities perform exercises next to ordinary people there.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, sports activities promote empathy.

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## SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ROLE OF SPORTS

Probably, now the newest and most popular format is a combination of sports and socially significant activities. There are many examples of sports-and-charity integration. They can also be found in an article from the current issue Flair Russia 2022 Do Good. Why People in Russia Engage in Charity.

Equally interesting integrations can be found in sports and environmental protection.

For example, the plogging phenomenon, a combination of jogging with picking up litter, has recently emerged in Russia. It originally came to us from Sweden. There are not

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<sup>5</sup> [Coca-Cola and Naked Heart Foundation open inclusive sports ground in Korolev. 25.06.2021](#)





many enthusiasts trying this new kind of sports leisure in Russia. However, there is the Plogging Russia<sup>6</sup> team that tries to systemically promote this new idea. Plogging attracts brands' attention as a new environmental activity. Valio<sup>7</sup> and McDonald's<sup>8</sup> already organize such runs in Russia

Most often, the basis for eco-sports activities is running. In Russia, every tenth person goes for running<sup>9</sup>, and Generation Z chooses this type of sports especially often.

Environmental runs are quite popular: they can be low-key with participation of several hundred people and take place in one city or larger-scale involving thousands of participants from different Russian cities. One of such large-scale events is the Green Marathon that is held annually under the auspices of Sberbank's Charitable Foundation Investment to the Future. The goal of this marathon is to draw attention to environmental problems and tell the Russians how they can help solve these problems. In 2021,

<sup>6</sup> Plogging rising to popularity in Moscow Region. Radio 1. 29.11.2021

<sup>7</sup> Saint Petersburg residents collect almost 700 kilograms of litter during Valio plogging run. Valio.ru. 26.09.2021

<sup>8</sup> McDonald's collects over 45 tons of litter all over Russia. McDonalds.ru. 22.10.201

<sup>9</sup> Ipsos. RusIndex study. 2021/H1. Russians, 16+, 100k+ cities

the marathon was held both offline and in a digital format: people could join the marathon using a mobile application.

Environmental bike rides are less popular, but they still take place. The RusIndex study findings show that running is about twice as popular as cycling: only 4.6% of the Russian city

dwellers claim that they have done cycling or rode a bike at least once in the past 12 months.<sup>10</sup> In the fall of 2021, a bike ride was held in Moscow Region as part of the Car Free Day initiative. The participants switched to scooters, skateboards and bicycles to support the idea of reducing car emissions.

## WITHOUT LEAVING A ROOM

The lockdowns caused by the pandemic created situations when people were unable to visit their sports clubs, and training sessions were adapted to the remote format. Now every tenth Russian uses home exercise machines. It remains to be seen how many people work on their physical shape at home without special exercise machines.

This approach is acceptable for the exercises requiring no special complex equipment or large space. For example, yoga and home training activities without bulky exercise machines have perfectly adapted to the online format

Live broadcasts with coaches were followed by recorded thematic courses

using which one can do exercises at any convenient time.

The benefits of home sports are substantial savings on club membership costs and travel time.

The drawbacks are the need for strong self-discipline and inner motivation to perform regular and long-term exercises, absence of a large free area in compact city apartments, shortage of live contacts with group members, and a decrease in performance due to the absence of group dynamics. Besides, if a coach is not nearby, they will not be able to correct the trainee, and there is a risk of performing exercises incorrectly.

<sup>10</sup> Ipsos. RusIndex study. 2021/H1. Russians, 16+, 100k+ cities

## DIGITAL ASSISTANTS

The OnLife study findings show that 14% of the respondents have sports applications in their smartphones.<sup>11</sup> The highest share is in the group of 25–34 years: every fifth respondent has an installed sports application.

Here are some interesting examples:

- **Run with Zippy:** running tracker with the Zippy interactive cat. As soon as a user takes a pause in activities, the cat starts gaining weight, falling into depression and sending its owner insistent notifications of the need to continue running.
- **Trisystems:** online platform for triathlon training sessions in the off-season period. Users can create an individual training plan with due account for athlete's features and correct this plan as they fulfill the plan and achieve intermediate milestones.

- **Nike Training Club and Nike Running Club:** high-quality recorded exercise sessions for any level of training. Exercises are performed by well-known sportspeople, and one can compete with other users.

Brands should pay attention to the trends in sports activities: mixing of genders and ages in joint groups, value of pleasure and aesthetics, and social and environmental role of sports. Sports based communications grant an opportunity not only to hold interesting campaigns with high audience engagement but also to make a contribution to people's physical and mental health improvement and to strengthen the ESG component of brand reputation.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Pleasure comes to the fore in fitness and sports. The key idea is to try as many activities as possible to choose several “one's own” opinions.
- Health support through sports is a continuous process requiring diversity to maintain motivation. Diversity is achieved thanks to the emergence of multiple niche sports activities. When mixed together, they engage people of different genders and ages with any level of training.
- Sports activities (first of all, running) are an excellent option for social and environmental campaigns. Brands have obtained a tool to strengthen their social or “green” agenda.

<sup>11</sup> Ipsos. OnLife study. 2021/H2