

Factors driving Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Communication for Sports Sponsors:

A Comparative Analysis between “Star” clubs and “Underdogs”

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Abstract

The primary goal of this study is to scrutinize the growing importance of sport sponsorship, by identifying the key factors in the sport sponsorship relationship, and singling out how these factors are anticipated by supporters of teams at the top and bottom of the league standing. According to literature, this study examines the impact of sponsor recognition, attitude toward sponsor and perceived sponsor’s sincerity on two major behavioral outcomes, supporters’ purchase intention and word of mouth communication (Olson, 2010; Wakefield & Bennett, 2010). However, research regarding sponsorship evaluation is not well established as the interactions between constructs proposed are complex and dynamic. A quantitative method was used for the purpose of this study and 1311 questionnaires were completed by supporters from two distinct fan bases; one from a “star” football club and one from an “underdog” football club. The proposed hypotheses were empirically confirmed, either fully or partially. The attitude towards the team’s sponsor had a significant effect on both purchase intention and word of mouth communication. Nevertheless, altruistic motivation seems to be the most powerful factor affecting word of mouth, both positive in favor of the team’s sponsors and negative against the rivals’ sponsors. The comparison between the two teams shows significant differentiation in the main variables; however, no mediation or moderation role can be attributed.

Keywords: Sponsor recognition, sincerity, attitude, purchase intention, word-of-mouth (WOM)

Introduction

Sponsorship is a well-known remarkable development first used in 590 BC, when athletes of the Olympic Games were financially rewarded by the Greek state (Lee & Ross, 2012). Sport sponsorship is a company’s investment in cash or kind, for creating a business-to-business relationship with a sport team, in order to gain publicity and awareness within a particular target audience, via the encouragement of an activity not straightforwardly related to their business (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross, & Maroco, 2013). Sponsorship is an exceptional business-to-

business transaction which closely connects two parties, for reciprocal benefit. The sponsor company, one of the two parties involved in the transaction, offers cash or kind benefits, in exchange for affiliating with the second part, the sponsee property, which allots value through affiliation (Fullerton, 2008). Sponsorship is a critical component of a company's marketing mix through which companies can produce considerable benefits (Fahy Fahy, Farrelly, & Quester, 2004), with many organizations greatly utilizing sponsorship as a communication strategy in order to evade the confusion related to more conventional marketing communications (Lings & Owen, 2007). Sport is an unforced domain for sponsorship, given that companies are more inclined to invest in sport associations and clubs, which have a strong bond with a mass audience as the goodwill that supporters feel towards their favorite club can possibly be demonstrated toward sponsors (Dees, Bennett, & Tsuji, 2006). The chief beneficiary of sponsorship expenditure is sport vistas. A little less than three quarters of all sponsorship expenses are focused on sport clubs (IEG, 2013). The prolonged financing of sponsorship is one barometer of the faith firms place in the specific marketing tool to accomplish self-promotion goals. There are various reasons explaining the domination of sport in the sponsorship field. By engaging in a sport sponsorship agreement, sponsor firms may also benefit from increasing- public as well as target market- awareness, product tryout and sales growth, image reinforcement, hospitality opportunities, enhancing employee relations and changing the social consciousness of the firm (Demirel & Erdigmus, 2014; Kim, Ko, & James , 2011). Eventually firms participate in sponsorship agreements in order to impact their bottom line. The basic approach sponsors pursue to influence customer attitude is deploying the positive concomitance amidst sponsor and sponsee. Furthermore, the benefits for a sport club engaging in a sponsorship agreement include economic resources, publicity and in-kind support, as well as affiliation with the sponsor (Kim et al., 2011). Concurrent with the continuous increase of sport sponsorship spending, the necessity for substantiating its effectiveness intensifies too, eliciting the attention of researchers to indicate and classify the benefits of sport sponsorship (Walraven, Koning, & Van Bottenburg, 2012).

Notwithstanding the indisputable relevance of sport sponsorship and the abundant amount of research conducted about its effectiveness, there is no widely established theory and there is a necessity for further research (Walraven et al., 2012). Academic research, until now, has mainly fixated on the assessment of abstract corporate sponsorship in lieu of actual sports clubs' sponsors (Biscaia et al., 2013). Moreover, there is a lack of research questioning how supporters of teams at different competitive levels perceive sponsorship and how this factor influences sponsorship effectiveness. The goal of the present research is to single out the key variables in the sport sponsorship relationship and to single out to what degree a team's position in league standing affects these variables from the perspective of supporters. More specifically, the intent of this study is to distinguish the key constructs in the sponsorship context, as well as to analyze the impact of attitude toward sponsors, a sponsors' recognition and the role of sponsor's altruism impact on purchase intention and word of mouth communication of individuals from two distinct fan bases; one from a "star" football club and one from an "underdog".

Literature Review

According to sponsorship literature, it is crucial to investigate whether sport sponsorship provides any assets to sponsoring companies from the point of supporters' affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses, such as perceived quality, price and intention to procure the sponsor's products (Walker & Kent, 2009). Previous studies have addressed a variety of attitudinal and

behavioral factors influencing the effectiveness of sport sponsorship, such as attitude toward sponsor (Kim et al., 2011), sponsor recognition, sponsor sincerity, purchase intentions of fans (Biscaia et al., 2013) and word of mouth communication, as high level sponsorship outcomes (Alexandris, Tsaousi, & James, 2007). Nonetheless, hardly any of them have investigated how the relationship between fans and sport clubs affects sponsorship effectiveness and even fewer researchers have developed an abstract basis for how a team's competitive level affects fans' attitudes toward sponsorship or/and sponsor firms. Regardless of its gravity and the abundance of research on sport sponsorship, the complexity of the association amidst sponsorship and fans' buying objectives remains blurred as the interactions between the proposed variables are complicated and dynamic.

According to previous researchers, there are many reasons why firms decide to undertake sponsorship with the most important being to create positive consumer attitudes toward their brand and to build, enhance, or alter their brand image (Ko & Kim, 2014). Establishing a positive impression or attitude towards a brand has been recognized as a major factor of sponsorship effectiveness (Alexandris et al., 2007). Within the context of sponsorship attitude is the supporter's overall perception about a sponsor firm and a positive one is associated with propositions to support, positiveness towards, and eagerness to think about the sponsor's goods (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). The creation of positive supporters' attitudes towards sponsors is one of the main targets of sponsor firms (Ko & Kim, 2014). The perspective of fans with respect to a sponsor firm has therefore been a prevalent dependent variable in research about sponsorship effects (Speed & Thompson, 2000). An individual's notions about an entity constitute the base of his attitude toward that entity, with notions being viewed as the associations transferred from the entity to the individual's memory (Biscaia et al., 2013). Associations transferring between the sponsee and the sponsor are mainly a transfer of meaning and constitute one of the main results of sponsorship (Grohs, Wagner, & Vsetecka, 2004). Companies undertaking sponsorship activities assume that fans will have the same positive notions regarding them as they have toward their sports club (Shaw & McDonald, 2006). A sponsor is likely to be recognized as an ally of the club's fans due to the support which the sponsor offers to something they conceive as significant (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). When the sponsor and the sponsee bear upon individuals' mind, either intentionally or unintentionally, the attitude toward the sponsee is likely to be assigned to the sponsor, either as distinguishing brand concomitants or in a positive comprehensive assessment, thus a positive switch in prejudice about the sponsor (Walraven et al., 2012). A positive attitude toward the sponsor is related to supporters' assessments of the team's profits from the sponsorship agreement and in order to maximize these effects, firms should make efforts to be perceived as "good" sponsors whose relations with the team produce the desired benefits (Alexandris et al., 2007). Furthermore, previous researchers have proved that attitude toward the sponsor is a crucial forecaster of purchase intentions (Koo, Quarterman, & Flynn, 2006).

Sponsorship can enhance corporate image, and we can measure its effectiveness in terms of recall, recognition, and image changes (Bibby, 2011). Sponsor recognition is an extensively acknowledged factor for evaluating sponsorship effectiveness (Walsh, Kim, & Ross, 2008). The concept of sponsor recognition ascribes to one's capability to identify the trademark of the sponsor, under disparate circumstances, and it comprises the brand recall and the recognition effectiveness (Biscaia et al., 2013). The individual's identification of the sponsor is essential for accessing further information about the sponsor. According to Crompton (2004), the first step in the sequence of sponsorship benefits as a prerequisite for sponsorship effectiveness in mass audiences is sponsor recognition, the awareness of its existence. In other words, if recognition is

not initially accomplished, sponsoring firms are unable to fulfill their consequent ambitions (Farrelly, Quester, & Greysen, 2005). Recognition of sponsors is crucial to accomplishing their strategic goals as team supporters may appreciate the firm as a consequence of the effect generated through the exposure inside and outside the sport arena (O'Reilly, Nadeau, Séguin, & Harrison, 2007). A solid recognition of a sponsoring firm is important to enhance brand value as well as to evade the ambush marketing policies of competition (O'Reilly et al., 2007). Nevertheless, only a few researchers have ascertained that fans are frequently distracted by non-sponsor firms, which are trying to capitalize on any similarity with the official sponsors as well as create a concomitant association with the team. Nowadays, firms are increasingly recognizing the creation of an effective sponsorship program as a challenging task in that it assures that fans distinguish sponsors and nonsponsors in the right way, preventing any ambush marketing techniques by nonsponsors (Grohs et al., 2004). Moreover, the extent to which individuals are in a position to recognize a sponsorship, sponsor recognition, is a decisive quantum of the sponsorship's efficacy (Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004). It also prompts crucial consumer conduct such as a positive stance on the sponsor (Speed & Thompson, 2000) and purpose to acquire its goods (Madrigal, 2001).

Another line of analysis has examined the role of the construct of sponsor's sincerity as a major factor enhancing sponsorship effectiveness (Alexandris et al., 2007; Olson, 2010). According to literature, an individual's reaction to sponsorship is affected by his notion about the sponsoring firm. This notion is mainly assigned to the attitude that sponsoring is a minor profit-making communication means in relation to advertising. This "feel good" perspective is decreased when sponsors are considered less sincere. Furthermore, it has been proven that there is a positive association between an individual's anticipated sincerity of the sponsoring firm and his reaction to sponsorship (Koronios, Psiloutsikou, Kriemadis, Zervoulakos, & Leivaditi, 2016). In the event that a team's supporters anticipate the sponsoring firm as a sincere associate of the team, rather than having the impression that a sponsor is just trying to exploit their love for the team in order to sell his goods, these supporters will probably show concern and sympathy unto the sponsoring firm as well as an eagerness to think about its merchandise (Kim et al., 2011). Moreover, individuals have positive feelings and show a higher purchase intention when the motives of sponsoring firms are anticipated to be more charitable rather than merely commercial (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). In accordance with an elaboration likelihood model, sincerity is intermittently utilized to indicate subsequent attitudes (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006). A Sponsor's sincerity performs a crucial role in forecasting an individual's stance towards the sponsor himself. The impression individuals have of a company is comprised of the information they use in order to assess the company. As the notion of sponsoring company sincerity is utilized for assessment objectives, supporters will perceive the firm as trustworthy (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Although sincerity has been found to be a crucial forecaster of higher-level sponsorship effects, essentially no prior research has extensively investigated it, with Rifon et al. (2004) being the only ones who have used sincerity as a dependent variable.

Purchase intention is one of the most extensively examined sponsorship effects (Alexandris et al., 2007; Biscaia et al., 2013). Purchase intentions indicate the given intention of a fan to display a substantial endeavor to obtain a product/service (Spears & Singh, 2004). Purchase intentions differ from current purchase actions, nevertheless an individual's intentions are crucial in directing her actions (Ajzen, 2001). Conforming to this premise, purchase intentions are an indicator of a consumer's inclination to have a certain purchase behavior (Dees et al., 2006) especially when a sponsor engages in sport activities addressed to supporters who have a common

identity. From a sponsor's viewpoint, the purchase intention of fans constitutes the most important exponent of sponsorship effectiveness given its influence on a sponsor's sales (Crompton, 2004). Furthermore, for the majority of sponsoring firms the improvement of the effectiveness of their bottom lines by way of increased sales, is of utmost importance (Lings & Owen, 2007). From a team viewpoint, the purchase intention for sponsors' merchandise is a pivotal indicator for the team to legitimate their association with existing sponsoring companies and to negotiate potential sponsorship agreements (Hong, 2011). As far as supporters' viewpoints are concerned, recognizing a firm as upholding their club, they may acquire the sponsors' goods as a form of altruism or to compensate the firm for sponsoring the club (Parker & Fink, 2010). Based on such an assortment of results, various research has utilized purchase intentions as the decisive variable to assess sponsorship effectiveness (Alexandris et al, 2007; Madrigal, 2001). Nevertheless, the largest proportion of the research bears upon general sponsors, instead of concentrating on present sponsors affiliated with a club (Hong, 2011). Hence, the present research contemplates purchase intentions as the endpoint of sponsorship efficiency.

Although the largest proportion of the research has identified purchase intentions as a main sponsorship outcome (e.g., Biscaia et al, 2013; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2001), word-of-mouth (WOM) communication has not been thoroughly investigated. Word of mouth communication can be described as a transmission of opinions and ideas between people, apropos of a product/service, which concerns the item of the communication (Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001). Word-of-mouth communication could be proposed as an extremely enticing sponsorship outcome, which will possibly have a more compelling impact on an individual's attitude than other promotion tools as individuals perceive it as more approachable, trustworthy, and less biased (Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003). Moreover, utilizing information received by word-of-mouth communication is an efficient approach to eliminate any anticipated risk derived from the consumption -for the first time- of any product or service (Alexandris et al., 2007). This is especially pertinent in the sport context, as in the case of sport service organizations, in which supporters' anticipated risk is generally high due to the complications in the evaluation of the quality of services offered by sports clubs. The difficulties in the evaluation of services offered by sports clubs are caused by the high intangibility and inconsistency of the sport service product (Alexandris et al., 2007).

Developing the research model and Hypotheses

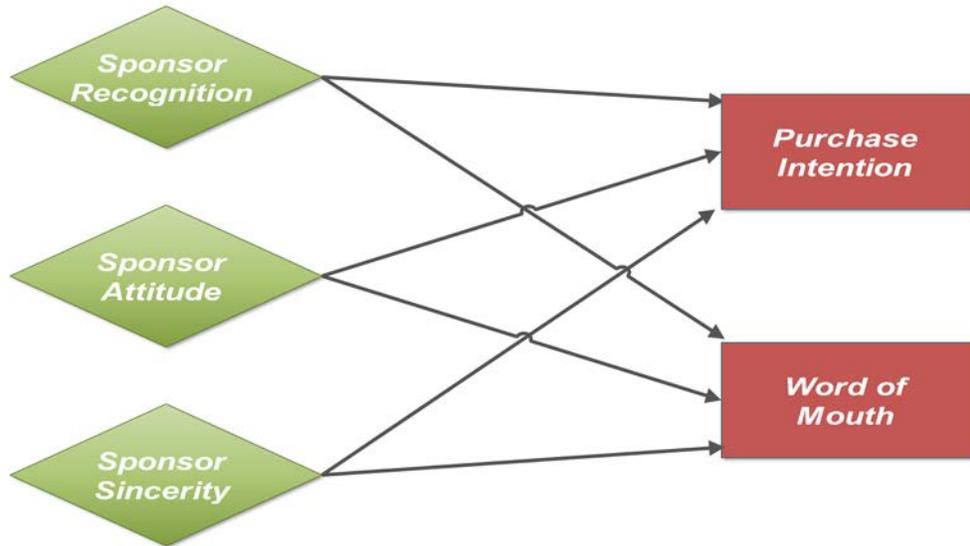
The intent of this study is to single out the key variables in the sponsorship relationship and to single out to what degree a team's position in league standing affects these variables from the perspective of supporters. More specifically, the aim of the research is to examine the impact of attitude towards actual sponsors, sponsors' sincerity and recognition, on supporters of "star" and "underdogs" clubs purchase intentions and word-of-mouth communication. In order to clarify the connection between each factor the following model has been used (Figure 1).

All the hypothesized variables are displayed in the suggested model as presupposed in figure 1, which critically investigates the following hypotheses:

- H1: Sponsor recognition is positively related to purchase intentions of the supporters.
- H2: Sponsor recognition is positively related to word-of-mouth communication of the supporters.
- H3: Attitude toward sponsors is positively related to purchase intentions of the supporters.

- H4: Attitude toward sponsors is positively related to word-of-mouth communication of supporters.
- H5: Supporter opinion about sponsors sincerity is positively related to their purchase intention.
- H6: Supporter opinion about sponsors sincerity is positively related to their word-of-mouth communication.

Figure 1. Factors driving Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Communication Model



Definition of Variables

Sponsor recognition was utilized to evaluate sponsorship awareness (Walsh et. al, 2008) and measured the number of sponsors that respondents were able to identify correctly among various well-known companies. A list of 16 firms (with half of them being the real sponsoring firms and the rest being non-sponsoring) was used to estimate recognition and supporters were asked to identify the official sponsoring firms of their team to evaluate recognition (Biscaia et al., 2013). For the purpose of analysis the authors constructed a single variable that represents the percentage of correct answers that were given by each respondent (scale from 0 to 100%).

Sponsor attitude refers to the opinion that the respondents hold about each sponsor. The authors separately measured the respondents' opinion about both the general corporate image and the image of their products/services for each sponsor. The scale used was proposed by Gwinner and Bennet (2008) in order to evaluate the attitude toward each real sponsor of the club. Supporters were invited to assess their emotions about each sponsoring firm. The two variables that were included in the actual analyses were constructed as the mean of the values given for the different sponsors (scale from 1 to 5).

Sponsor altruism (Dean, 2002; Rifon et al., 2004) refers to the degree a company is perceived by the respondents as being altruistic in its motivation to become a sponsor, and has in general, been proved that it is positively correlated with high-level sponsorship effects (Alexandris et al., 2007; Dean, 2002; Rifon et al., 2004). Sponsor Altruism was measured using items derived from Dean (2002) and Rifon et al. (2004). The authors performed an exploratory factor analysis to identify the motives that fans perceive as driving the sponsors' choices

(KMO=0.806, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p>0.000$ and the total variance explained by the factors was 59.6%). It produced two distinct factors with no cross loadings over 0.2: a) purely business-oriented, selfish motives, like increased profits, sales and advertising (cronbach's $\alpha=0.85$) and b) altruistic motives like promotion of the sport or the team being sponsored (cronbach's $\alpha=0.78$). For the remainder of the paper, they will be referred to as selfish and altruistic motives respectively.

Purchase intention refers to the respondents' intention to purchase the products and/or services sold by their team's sponsors. The scale used was proposed by Hong (2011) and intention was measured with a direct question for each sponsor; one single variable was computed as the mean of the original values given by the respondents (scale 1 to 5).

Word-of-mouth communication consists of two dimensions: the communication in praise of the team's sponsors (positive WOM) and the communication against the competitors of the team's sponsors (negative WOM). Both of the respective variables were directly measured on a 5-point scale and were based on scales proposed by Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009).

Research Design and Data Collection

The present study introduces the effects of sport sponsorship as measured from two different football teams that were chosen in consonance with particular criteria. More specifically both teams had to have been playing for at least three seasons in the first Greek division. This assured that no relegation or promotion overwhelmed the attitude of the supporters as this variable affects psychographic measures of supporter loyalty (Königstorfer, & Urich, 2009). Furthermore, the star club was only licensed if it was amid the top five Greek football clubs in revenue (Deloitte, 2008) and had participated in European championships in the last three years. This guaranteed that the star club was actually financially advantaged. The club was considered an underdog if it had not participated in European championships in the last three years and was not among the top Greek football clubs in revenue (Deloitte, 2008). Data were obtained from both teams' supporters following the same procedure.

A quantitative questionnaire was selected as the predominant means of collecting the data. To elaborate, a team of five researchers was responsible for distributing the questionnaires to the fans during their entrance to the stadium. Each spectator was randomly selected by the research team and politely asked to take part to the survey. Particular circumstances on the field, such as the constant flow of people, especially on coming to the field, and queues that are sometimes created in and out of the stadium, favors the selected operation by the researchers. In order to reach the desired sample, the whole operation took place at three different times. Researchers attended three consecutive home matches of both teams in a row so as to increase the validity of their outcomes. The procedure adopted may be described as quasi-random systematic sampling, with particular spectators at each gate being approached at fairly consistent time intervals (analogous to picking units from a production line periodically). That such a sampling method generates near random samples from which meaningful statistical inferences can be drawn is well established (Bennet, 1999). Questions were assessed on a five-point Likert scale and the time needed for completing the survey was 10-12 minutes. A total of 1515 questionnaires were completed and after the elimination of some ill completed questionnaires, 1311 were successfully used for the purpose of the study. According to Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991), in order to export safe results for an individual brand in general, it is necessary to have at least 100 responses. The present study serves the above condition as each sponsor has been followed by approximately

135 responses. Finally, the items gathered from the questionnaires were analyzed by means of the SPSS.

Results-Discussion

The analysis was based on 1311 responses coming from football fans. Almost half of them (47.1%) came from the fans of a major Greek team based in the capital (star club) and 52.9% from the fans of a less successful team with a more local profile (underdog club). The great majority of the respondents were men (90.7%) who were either still in school (36.8%) or employed (47.3%). In terms of family status, 59.6% of them were not married while 33.7% were; a mere 6.7% were divorced. The high percentage of unmarried respondents probably is due to the age distribution (63.4% were younger than 35 years old).

Table 1: T-tests for the main variables of the model between star team fans and underdog team fans.

| | Levene's test for equality of variances F (sig) | t (sig, 2- tailed)* | Mean (Star) | Mean (underdog) | Mean Difference (SMR-UMR) |
|------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Corporate image (CI) | 21.249 (0.00) | -10.955 (0.000) | 3.320 | 3.636 | -0.316 |
| Product image (Pri) | 15.725 (0.00) | -11.464 (0.000) | 3.293 | 3.600 | -0.307 |
| Sponsor recognition (SR) | 7.103 (0.008) | -52.320 (0.000) | 0.364 | 0.912 | -0.548 |
| Selfish motives (SM) | 3.316 (0.069) | -6.858 (0.000) | 4.009 | 4.254 | -0.245 |
| Altruistic motives (AM) | 6.351 (0.012) | -15.587 (0.000) | 2.873 | 3.476 | -0.603 |
| Purchase intention (PI) | 60.663 (0.00) | -14.193 (0.000_ | 3.315 | 3.692 | -0.377 |
| Positive word-of- mouth (PW) | 59.166 (0.000) | -12.433 (0.000) | 2.208 | 2.902 | -0.694 |
| Negative word-of- mouth (NW) | 29.964 (0.000) | -3.465 (0.001) | 2.382 | 2.591 | -0.209 |

Before testing the main model, the authors performed a series of independent t-tests to examine whether there was a difference in the mean values of each of the model's variables between the two fan bases. The difference in variances was taken into consideration and every one resulted in a significant difference and every one of them showed a higher mean value for the fans of the "underdog" team. Table 1 presents the results in detail. All variables were measured on 5-point Likert scales, except for sponsor recognition, which represented the percentage of the respective team's sponsors identified by the respondents.

This is a very important finding mostly because of its consistency. The fact that all the model's variables have different results for the two different teams shows that it is a connection that should be further explored. The current data do not allow authors to explore the exact reasons accounting for the difference. Nevertheless, it is a valid hypothesis that this could very well be the result of the team's base. The highly performing team (star club) is based in Athens and has fans from the entire country, while the less successful team (underdog club) is based in a smaller city and the great majority of its fans live in this city, thus forming a much more coherent group. This distinction does not apply to the sponsors of the two teams, eliminating therefore, such a connection from the results.

To test the proposed model, the authors used multiple linear regression analysis. More specifically, the authors tested whether there was an effect on the three independent variables, e.g. sponsor recognition, sponsor attitude and sponsor sincerity, on the two dependent variables, e.g. intention to purchase and word-of-mouth (positive and negative). Bivariate correlations between predictor variables were no higher than $r=0.529$. The Stepwise method was used to reach the final model. Regression analysis showed evidence that supports the proposed research hypotheses. More specifically, the intention to purchase the sponsors' products was explained ($R^2=.0.748$, $p<.001$) by their products' image, their corporate image and their recognition. Furthermore, the intention to speak favorably about the sponsors and their products (positive word-of-mouth communication) was explained ($R^2=.0.263$, $p<.001$) by perceiving their motives as altruistic or as selfish, their recognition, and their corporate image. Additionally, the intention to speak unfavorably about the sponsors' competitors (negative word-of-mouth communication) was explained ($R^2=.0.063$, $p<.001$) by perceiving the sponsors' motives as altruistic and by their products' image.

The respective results are presented in detail in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

All three of the research hypotheses were confirmed, either fully or partially (all or some of the distinct dimensions of our independent variables had a significant effect on all or some of the distinct dimensions of the dependent variables). In consistence with the current literature (Koronios, Psiloutsikou, Kriemadis, Zervoulakos, & Leivaditi, 2015) altruistic motivation seems to be the main factor affecting word-of-mouth, both positive in favor of the team's sponsors and negative against the rivals' sponsors. As expected, perceiving a sponsor as having selfish motivation has a negative effect on positive word-of-mouth communication; it has no effect, however on purchase intention or negative word-of-mouth communication. The attitude towards the team's sponsor had a significant effect on all three dependent variables, thus showing how important the sponsor's image is both in terms of product image and corporate image. The finding that attitude toward the sponsoring company has a significant positive effect on fans' purchase intentions supports prior literature (Koronios et al., 2016; Schlesinger and Güngerich, 2011; Madrigal, 2001).

Table 2: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for the Intention to purchase

| Independent Variables | Intention to purchase | | |
|--|-----------------------|-------|---------|
| | Coefficients | Beta | T-value |
| Constant | 0.524** | | 9.996 |
| Product image | 0.497** | 0.480 | 12.320 |
| Corporate image | 0.333** | 0.346 | 8.962 |
| Sponsor recognition | 0.172** | 0.110 | 6.920 |
| $R^2=0.748$, Adjusted $R^2 =0.747$ $F(3, 1234) = 1221.405$ | | | |

**significant at $p<0.01$

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for the Positive Word-of-Mouth Communication

| Independent Variables | Intention to purchase | | |
|---|-----------------------|--------|---------|
| | Coefficients | Beta | T-value |
| Constant | 0.593** | | 2.788 |
| Altruistic motives | 0.492** | 0.352 | 11.714 |
| Sponsor recognition | 0.573** | 0.184 | 6.435 |
| Selfish motives | -0.162** | -0.101 | -3.908 |
| Corporate image | 0.202** | 0.106 | 3.528 |
| $R^2=0.263$, Adjusted $R^2 =0.260$ $F(4, 1233) = 109.898$ | | | |

**significant at $p<0.01$

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for the Negative Word-of-Mouth Communication

| Independent Variables | Intention to purchase | | |
|--|-----------------------|-------|---------|
| | Coefficients | Beta | T-value |
| Constant | 0.821** | | 4.014 |
| Altruistic motives | 0.223** | 0.156 | 4.764 |
| Product image | 0.276** | 0.131 | 4.011 |
| $R^2=0.063$, Adjusted $R^2 =0.062$ $F(2, 1235) = 41.841$ | | | |

**significant at $p<0.01$

Following the support of our proposed model, the authors included the team as a variable. Although the effect of the team was significant for purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth, it only increased the value of R^2 by 0.002 and 0.003 respectively (no significant effect was found for negative word-of-mouth). Therefore, the authors cannot attribute a mediation or moderation role to it. Nevertheless, this is an indication that the specific characteristics of the various teams are to be taken into consideration when one decides on sponsoring a team. Further research could reveal that different team profiles lead to different results for sponsors and/or are better suited to different sponsors. It would be of great interest to include the different attitudes and choices between local and national teams in the research.

Managerial Implications

Sponsor recognition, sponsor attitude and sponsor sincerity have all been recognized as having a significant effect on intention to purchase and word-of-mouth communication, which may indirectly lead to increased sales for a specific team's sponsor and decreased sales for its rivals. Therefore, all three should be of concern to managers when making decisions about

sponsoring a sports team. More specifically, they should ensure that their motivation is or at least appears to be altruistic. The fans' perception that the sponsors' motivation is altruistic increases the respective word-of-mouth communication both in their favor and against their competitors. Furthermore, they should eliminate any reference to business motivation since it has, on its own, a negative effect on word-of-mouth communication. This finding is in general ascribed to the notion that sponsoring-in relation to other marketing techniques- is perceived to be an important monetary support for the sport club, but this "feel good" facet is decreased when sponsors are considered as insincere (Quester & Thompson, 2001; Speed & Thompson, 2000)

The sponsor's image, both corporate and specific product images, affects word-of-mouth communication as well as intention to purchase. This finding is also in line with the phenomenon of "transfer of goodwill," as proposed by Meenaghan (2001). It could, consequently, be recommended that managers concentrate on the formation of positive sponsor image in order to increase sponsorship effectiveness. This is evidence that sponsors would benefit from presenting a strong image of quality products and business practices along with altruistic motivation to sponsor a sports team. The line is indeed fine; promotion activities should present the sponsor as a company that is strong, offers high quality products, is genuinely interested in supporting sports and is socially responsible. Such promotion is also essential in terms of quantity. Moreover, sport club managers should widely popularize sponsorship by way of various means of communication. These can take the form of indoor and outdoor promotions, printed works (e.g. match day program, newsletters), the Internet, social media, announcements in the arenas, etc. These actions may be conducive to the increase of sponsorship awareness as well as to the enhancement of the sponsor's image.

The research shows that sponsor recognition also has an effect on intention to purchase and positive word-of-mouth. This finding supports prior literature (Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005; Hickman, 2015) where sponsorship recognition by fans influences their share of wallet, as far as the purchase of products/services of the sponsoring firms is concerned. Unfortunately, the achievement of a high degree of sponsor recognition is a challenging task, as according to previous studies, supporters' recall and recognition of sponsors is highly variable which, by extension, impacts the measurable success of the investment (Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2002; Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006). Therefore, the mere sponsorship of a team is not enough; the sponsorship itself should be supported by distinct promotional events to increase awareness.

Limitations and Future Research

While the present study offered valuable insights into the anticipation of sport sponsorship outcomes, there are various limitations which must be taken into consideration by future researchers. Additional sampling from other sport teams, events, and sports (e.g. basketball) is suggested. The various possible sponsorship outcomes identified by previous studies reveal an auspicious field of future sponsorship research. For example, the fit between sponsor and sponsee was not investigated in the present research. Given that previous research has proven that high-fit sponsorship agreements are more effective than low-fit ones (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006), the variable of sponsorship fit could be taken into consideration by future studies in relation to the model proposed by the present research. The aim of this research was to empirically investigate the proposed sponsorship model, nevertheless, some limitations must be taken into consideration. One major limitation is the fact that this research examined word-of-mouth and purchase

intentions as endpoints of sponsorship and not actual behavior. Future research should explore the degree to which purchase intentions of individuals affect their current purchase patterns.

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English abstract

Factors driving Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Communication for Sports Sponsors: A Comparative Analysis between “Star” clubs and “Underdogs”

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Abstract

The primary goal of this study is to scrutinize the growing importance of sport sponsorship, by identifying the key factors in the sport sponsorship relationship, and singling out how these factors are anticipated by supporters of teams at the top and bottom of the league standing. According to literature, this study examines the impact of sponsor recognition, attitude toward sponsor and perceived sponsor’s sincerity on two major behavioral outcomes, supporters’ purchase intention and word of mouth communication (Olson, 2010; Wakefield & Bennett, 2010). However, research regarding sponsorship evaluation is not well established as the interactions between constructs proposed are complex and dynamic. A quantitative method was used for the purpose of this study and 1311 questionnaires were completed by supporters from two distinct fan bases; one from a “star” football club and one from an “underdog” football club. The proposed hypotheses were empirically confirmed, either fully or partially. The attitude towards the team’s sponsor had a significant effect on both purchase intention and word of mouth communication. Nevertheless, altruistic motivation seems to be the most powerful factor affecting word of mouth, both positive in favor of the team’s sponsors and negative against the rivals’ sponsors. The comparison between the two teams shows significant differentiation in the main variables; however, no mediation or moderation role can be attributed.

Keywords: Sponsor recognition, sincerity, attitude, purchase intention, word-of-mouth (WOM)

French abstract*

Factors driving Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Communication for Sports Sponsors: A Comparative Analysis between “Star” clubs and “Underdogs”

Facteurs influant l'intention d'achat et la communication de bouche-à-oreille dans le sponsoring sportif

Une analyse comparative entre les clubs "Star" et "Underdogs"

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Résumé

L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'examiner l'importance croissante du sponsoring sportif en identifiant les principaux facteurs dans la relation du sponsoring, en précisant comment ces facteurs sont anticipés par les partisans des équipes en tête et en bas du classement de la ligue. La présente étude examine l'impact de la notoriété du sponsor, l'attitude envers le sponsor et la sincérité perçue du sponsor par rapport aux deux principaux résultats comportementaux, que sont l'intention d'achat des supporters et la communication de bouche-à-oreille (Olson, 2010; Wakefield et Bennett, 2010). Cependant, la recherche sur l'évaluation des sponsors n'est pas bien posée car les interactions entre les constructions proposées sont complexes et dynamiques. Dans cet objectif, cette étude utilise une méthode quantitative. 1311 questionnaires ont été remplis par des supporters de deux groupes de supporters distincts. L'un d'un club de football "star" et l'autre d'un club de football "underdog". Les hypothèses proposées ont été confirmées empiriquement, entièrement ou partiellement. L'attitude vis-à-vis du sponsor de l'équipe a un effet important sur l'intention d'achat et sur la communication de bouche-à-oreille. Néanmoins, la motivation altruiste semble être le facteur le plus puissant pour expliquer la communication de bouche-à-oreille, à la fois positivement en faveur des sponsors de l'équipe et négativement contre les sponsors des rivaux. La comparaison entre les deux équipes montre une différenciation significative des principales variables. Cependant, aucune variable de médiation ou de modération n'y peut être attribuée.

Mots-clés: Identification du sponsor, sincérité, attitude, intention d'achat, bouche-à-oreille

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German abstract*

Factors driving Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Communication for Sports Sponsors: A Comparative Analysis between “Star” clubs and “Underdogs”

Treibende Faktoren für Kaufintention und Mundpropaganda-Kommunikation für Sportsponsoren

Eine vergleichende Analyse von “Star”-Clubs und “Underdogs”

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Kurzfassung

Das grundlegende Ziel dieser Studie ist die Untersuchung der wachsenden Bedeutung von Sportsponsoring indem die Schlüsselfaktoren in der Sportsponsorenbeziehung identifiziert werden und isoliert wird wie diese Faktoren von den Unterstützern der Mannschaften an der Spitze und am Ende der Tabelle antizipiert werden. Gemäß der Literatur untersucht diese Studie den Einfluss von Sponsorenerkennung, Einstellung gegenüber dem Sponsor und der wahrgenommenen Aufrichtigkeit des Sponsors auf zwei Hauptverhaltensresultate, die Kaufintention von Unterstützern und Mundpropaganda-Kommunikation (Olson, 2010; Wakefield & Bennett, 2010). Jedoch ist die Forschung in Bezug auf die Bewertung von Sponsoring noch nicht etabliert, da die Interaktionen zwischen den vorgeschlagenen Konstrukten komplex und dynamisch sind. Eine quantitative Methode wurde für den Zweck dieser Studie genutzt und 1311 Fragebögen wurden von Unterstützern zwei unterschiedlicher Fangemeinden ausgefüllt; eine von einem „Star“-Footballclub und eine von einem „Underdog“-Footballclub. Die vorgeschlagenen Hypothesen wurden empirisch entweder ganz oder teilweise bestätigt. Die Einstellung gegenüber dem Sponsor der Mannschaft hatte einen signifikanten Effekt sowohl auf die Kaufintention als auch auf die Mundpropaganda. Trotzdem scheint altruistische Motivation der stärkste Faktor zu sein, der die Mundpropaganda sowohl positiv zu Gunsten des Mannschaftssponsors als auch negativ gegen den Sponsor des Rivalen beeinflusst. Der Vergleich zwischen den zwei Mannschaften zeigt eine signifikante Differenzierung in den primären Variablen; jedoch kann keine Mediation oder Moderationsfunktion zugeschrieben werden.

Keywords: Sponsorenerkennung; Aufrichtigkeit; Einstellung; Kaufintention; Mundpropaganda (WOM)]

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Spanish abstract*

Factors driving Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Communication for Sports Sponsors: A Comparative Analysis between “Star” clubs and “Underdogs”

Factores que conducen a la intención de compra y a la comunicación boca a oído en los patrocinadores deportivos

Un análisis comparativo entre los clubes "Star" y "Underdogs"

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Resumen

El principal objetivo de este estudio es analizar la creciente importancia del patrocinio deportivo, identificando los factores clave en la relación de patrocinio deportivo y destacando cómo estos factores son anticipados por los partidarios de los equipos en la parte superior e inferior de la liga. Según la literatura, este estudio examina el impacto del reconocimiento del patrocinador, la actitud hacia el patrocinador y la sinceridad del patrocinador percibido en dos resultados principales del comportamiento, la intención de compra de los partidarios y la comunicación boca a oído (Olson, 2010; Wakefield y Bennett, 2010). Sin embargo, la investigación sobre la evaluación de patrocinio no está bien establecida ya que las interacciones entre las construcciones propuestas son complejas y dinámicas. Se utilizó un método cuantitativo para el propósito de este estudio y 1311 cuestionarios fueron completados por partidarios de dos bases de fans distintas: uno de un club de fútbol llamado "Stars" y otro de un club de fútbol llamado "Underdog". Las hipótesis propuestas fueron confirmadas empíricamente, total o parcialmente. La actitud hacia el patrocinador del equipo tuvo un efecto significativo tanto en la intención de compra como en la comunicación boca a oído. Sin embargo, la motivación altruista parece ser el factor más poderoso que afecta al boca a oído, tanto positivo en favor de los patrocinadores del equipo como negativo frente a los patrocinadores de los rivales. La comparación entre los dos equipos muestra una diferenciación significativa en las principales variables; sin embargo, no se puede atribuir ningún papel de mediación o moderación.

Keywords: reconocimiento del patrocinador, sinceridad, actitud, intención de compra, palabra de boca

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Italian abstract*

Factors driving Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Communication for Sports Sponsors: A Comparative Analysis between “Star” clubs and “Underdogs”

Fattori che guidano le intenzioni di acquisto e il passaparola riguardanti le sponsorizzazioni nello sport

Una analisi comparativa fra “Favoriti” e “Sfavoriti”

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Abstract

Il ruolo primario di questo studio è quello di porre in analisi la sempre maggiore importanza delle sponsorizzazioni sportive, attraverso la definizione dei fattori chiave dei rapporti nelle sponsorizzazioni sportive, e identificando come alcuni fattori siano anticipati dai tifosi di squadre che sono al vertice e in fondo alla lega sportiva. Secondo la letteratura che riguarda il tema, lo studio esamina l’impatto del riconoscimento degli sponsor, l’atteggiamento verso lo sponsor, e la percezione della sincerità dello sponsor rispetto a due fattori comportamentali, le intenzioni di acquisto dei tifosi e la comunicazione passaparola (Olson, 2010; Wakefield & Bennett, 2010). Comunque, la ricerca che riguarda la valutazione delle sponsorizzazioni non è ben stabilita in quanto le interazioni fra i fattori proposti sono complessi e dinamici. Un metodo quantitativo è stato utilizzato allo scopo in questo studio e 1311 questionari sono stati completati da tifosi da due gruppi distinti; un gruppo riguardante i “favoriti” dei club di football e uno degli “sfavoriti”. Le ipotesi proposte sono state confermate empiricamente, completamente o parzialmente. L’atteggiamento verso lo sponsor di un team ha avuto un impatto significativo sia nell’intenzione di acquisto che nella comunicazione passaparola. Aldilà di questo, una motivazione volta all’altruismo sembra il fattore più importante rispetto al fattore comunicazione passaparola, sia a favore delle sponsorizzazioni del team che a sfavore delle sponsorizzazioni di team rivali. La comparazione fra le due squadre mostra una significativa differenziazione nelle variabili di base; ad ogni modo, non possono essere attribuiti ruoli di mediazione o moderazione.

Keywords: riconoscimento di sponsorizzazioni, sincerità, atteggiamento, intenzioni di acquisto, passaparola

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Chinese abstract*

Factors driving Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Communication for Sports Sponsors: A Comparative Analysis between “Star” clubs and “Underdogs”

体育赞助商的购买意向和口碑传播的驱动因素：

明星俱乐部和失败者俱乐部的对比分析

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摘要

本文旨在通过识别体育赞助关系中的关键因素，以及指出联赛最好和最差的球队赞助商如何期望这些因素，来详述体育赞助商越来越重要的作用。根据已有文献，本文验证了赞助商认可、对赞助商的态度和赞助商感知的诚意对于赞助商购买意向和口碑传播两个主要行为结果的影响(Olson, 2010; Wakefield & Bennett, 2010)。然而，由于构念之间交互作用是复杂的、动态的，关于赞助商评价的研究还不充分。采用定量研究方法，从两个差异较大的足球俱乐部（明星足球俱乐部和失败者足球俱乐部）的赞助商收集 1311 份问卷，全部或部分的证实了所提出的假设。结果显示，俱乐部对赞助商的态度对于赞助商的购买意向和口碑传播有显著影响。然而，在所有因素中，利他动机是正向影响俱乐部自身赞助商口碑传播和负向影响竞争者赞助商口碑传播的最重要因素。两个俱乐部的对比显示主要变量有显著差异。然而，没有中介和调节作用存在。

Keywords: 关键词：赞助商认可，诚意，态度，购买意向，口碑传播

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