

A contemporary framework for sponsorship effectiveness evaluation: A multigenerational approach

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to explore the key determinants of positive consumer behavior associated with sports sponsorship. Taking into account that distinctions among generations on a broad range of outcomes are of greater concern to firms, professionals as well as academics, one more aim of this research was to explore possible distinctions across generational groups in relation to the efficiency of sponsorship. A quantitative method was employed for the aims of the present study and a total of 3,434 questionnaires were successfully gathered and analyzed by means of SPSS and AMOS. According to the results, factors such as attachment to team, sport involvement and beliefs about sponsorship found to have a significant effect on fans' awareness of and attitude toward sponsors. Moreover, results indicated a significant impact of attitude toward sponsors and awareness of sponsors on fans' purchase intention. Finally, results indicated significant differences regarding fans' age group, in relation to sponsorship.

Keywords: sponsorship, generations, purchase intentions

Track: Consumer Behavior

1. Introduction

According to World Advertising Research Center, global sponsorship investment was estimated to reach \$65.8 billion in 2018, with the majority of the funds being allocated to sports (Handley, 2018). Nevertheless, although sponsorship funds are continually increasing for the majority of sports clubs and leagues, sport organizations are required to demonstrate to sponsoring firms how beneficial an investment it is. One way to do so is by demonstrating that- as a result of sponsorship- supporters' awareness of sponsoring firms is reinforced, making them more eager to give their support to these firms through the purchase of their goods and services (Kaynak *et al.*, 2008).

Sponsoring companies make investments in sports in the hope that the compassion supporters displayed to the sports club/league will be shifted to the company's product through sponsor-sponsee correlation (Madrigal, 2001). Existing research proposes that supporters' connection to the sports club has a significant part to play on awareness of sponsorship (Wakefield & Bennett, 2010), supporters' attitude towards sponsors, purchase intentions of sponsors' goods and eventually, in boosting sales (Deitz *et al.*, 2012). However, being knowledgeable of the fact that supporters are dedicated is not enough. Marketers must be aware of the determinants which can affect fans' support of sponsoring companies.

In addition, considering the fact that sport appeal to fans of various ages, a cross-generational marketing strategy –as far as sponsorship effectiveness is concerned- is of necessity. Cross-generational marketing is the tactic of meeting the special requirements of people in more than one given group in relation to generation, which is classified as a group of people who were born and were living in approximately the same period (Williams *et al.*, 2010). Messages as well as activities of sponsoring firms aimed at these specific groups, have to express the principles of their generation which, as a result, can motivate their purchasing behavior. As such, good comprehension of sponsorship on a cross-generational scale is an extremely significant marketing activity.

Although past research has concentrated separately on the antecedents impacting of sponsorship awareness or the connection between purchase intentions and sponsorship (Biscaia *et al.*, 2017), so far no extensive framework has been created integrating these notions in order to thoroughly comprehend the determinants affecting sponsorship's efficiency. In addition, to date, no single research has investigated the efficiency of sponsorship in respect to generational cohorts.

As a result, the aim of this research is to provide an integrated conceptual framework in order to elucidate the factors influencing supporters' awareness of and attitude towards

sponsoring firms, as well as their impact on subsequent purchase intentions. Moreover, this study attempts to identify the extent to which the generational cohorts influence the above-mentioned factors, as far sponsorship effectiveness is concerned. In this way, this research reviews existing literature related to sports sponsorship so as to create a conceptual framework, aiming to assist future empirical research and support managerial decisions, in order to enhance the benefits for sports clubs and sponsoring companies alike.

2. Theoretical Background

The assessment of sponsorship is a subject of dispute in the literature, implying that present approaches neither deal with nor comprehend the full impact of sponsorship activities. Stotlar (2004) is of the opinion that evaluation is lacking due to the failure to consolidate the process of assessment both theoretically and in practice. Given that sponsorship can be characterized as a commercial opportunity, the use of ROI as an evaluating tool is commonplace. A number of firms conduct research on market share benefits or increases in sales volume, which are not accurate measures of sponsorship assessment, since they fail to exploit the entire range of gains which can be acquired through sponsorship activities. Previous studies refer to the rise in the economic value of sponsorship as one of the determinants which contributes to the skepticism surrounding sponsorship assessment (Lobo, Meyer, and Chester, 2014). This one-dimensional character of contemporary sponsorship assessment methods will fail to capitalize economically if the non-commercial influences, namely prompts related to emotions, which are not taken into account. Past researches agree that the utilization of total sales as the only determinant of sponsorship's efficiency is extremely questionable, because it doesn't take into consideration factors such as the potential impact of concomitant marketing campaigns results, the carry over inferences of previous advertisements, potential changes in the economy as well as entry or exit of rival companies (Lobo, Meyer, and Chester, 2014). Sponsorship outcomes should also be estimated in relation to the degree of awareness accomplished, attitudes development or alteration as well as aided and unaided brand or firm recall.

The psychological features of buyer behavior are frequently chosen to be extremely significant when studying buyer reactions to sponsors. Three fundamental psychological processes impacting buyer behavior have been proposed, i.e. the processing of data, learning as well as change in attitude/ behavior (Lobo, Meyer, and Chester, 2014).

Fan's sport involvement is regarded as being a key element in order to establish sponsor recognition, attitude towards sponsor and sponsor advocacy. As stated by Gwinner and Swanson (2003), the greater degree of involvement of supporters, the more positive the

reaction to a sponsoring firm. Fan involvement is crucial to the comprehension of the processes of sponsorship, given that it constitutes an act of indirect persuasion which has the ability to influence a buyer's impression of a product through its connection to sports entity or activity. Very little research until now has investigated the impact of a supporter's involvement with sports on the attitudes they display toward sponsoring organizations and purchase intentions (Lobo, Meyer, and Chester, 2014).

The present research also attempted to explore the relations between sponsor awareness, attitudes towards sponsors and purchase intentions, on the basis of how often the supporter visited the sports event's website and its social media accounts (i.e. Facebook etc.), a variable that has not been investigated in studies on sponsorship in the past. Based on the very few studies which have dealt with the role played by the Internet and social media in sports, the role of the Internet and social media has been acknowledged as being an effective means of relationship marketing which is able to "build meaningful relationships through opportunities for communication, interaction, and value" (Williams & Chinn, 2010, p. 436). In addition, from the viewpoint of the sports supporter, it is implied that a supporter's degree of identification with the sports entity becomes greater through his/her interacting in social media websites (Eagleman & Krohn, 2012). Based on the above, it becomes interesting to take into account any effect of website and social media usage on sponsorship effectiveness.

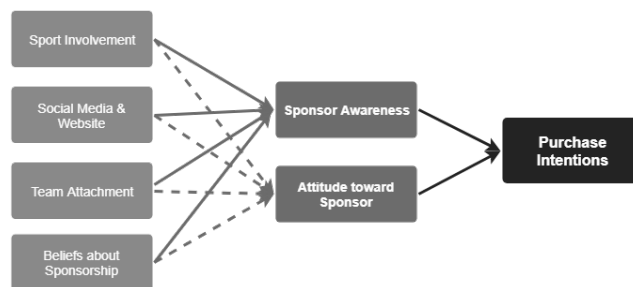
What is more, based upon the assumption that goodwill toward the sponsored entity can be redirected to the brands or goods of the sponsoring company through sponsor-sponsee correlation (Madrigal, 2001), a great deal of research has proposed that a supporter's level of attachment with his/her preferred sports club is instrumental in improving attitude toward the sponsoring company (Meenaghan, 2001). For instance, past researches discovered that one's attachment with the sports club was connected to attitude toward the sponsoring organization, whereas others observed that supporters with a high degree of team attachment tended to be more positive toward the sponsoring organization than supporters with a lower degree of team attachment (Dees et al., 2010).

Beliefs are related to fans' assessment of the objectives of sponsorship. According to attitude theory, Madrigal (2001) claimed that supporters form favorable or unfavorable beliefs regarding the advantages of sport sponsorship: people may value the advantages of sponsorship, namely, assisting the sports club, enabling a sporting event to take place, advertising a sporting event, assisting the community etc. This belief connects an attitude entity (i.e. sponsorship) to a positive assessment (Madrigal, 2001). Other individuals think of

sponsorship as being a determinant which changes the nature of sports in order to promote commercial gains. As a result, they may have a strong tendency to form unfavorable beliefs about sponsorship and subsequently negative attitudes towards sponsors (Nassis et al., 2014).

Despite there being an abundance of studies investigating the progression of multiple-generation marketing mix variables, no research up to now has investigated generations' differences as regards the efficiency of sponsorship. A generation or age cohort is classified as being a part of individuals that experience life together as well as the same events at the same age. For example, they have a financial, social, historical and political background in common (Williams et al., 2010). In accordance with a compilation of a large number of source, four primary generations exist based on birth date: Baby Boomers (1946-64), Generation X (1965-76), Millennials or Generation Y (1977-1195) and Generation Z (1996 and thereafter) (Williams et al., 2010).

The current research suggests a new framework for the study of sponsorship which is founded upon a synthesis of the literature, whereas generational cohorts will be studied- for the first time in sponsorship framework - as possible distinguishing determinants. Based on the literature, the subsequent model and hypotheses are posited:



H₁: Sport involvement (centrality and attraction) are expected to influence attitude toward sponsor and sponsor awareness

H₂: Team attachment are expected to influence attitude toward sponsor and sponsor awareness

H₃: Beliefs about sponsorship are expected to influence awareness of and attitude toward sponsors

H₄: Usage of events' website and social media is expected to influence awareness of and attitude toward sponsors

H₅: Sponsors awareness is expected to affect purchase intention

H₆: Attitude toward sponsors is expected to affect purchase intention

3. Methodology

A quantitative approach was employed for the aims of the research and questionnaires were gathered from Greek sport spectators of the World Cup Russia 2018. Spectators were

asked to complete a survey, which was web-based, with the help of a popular sports website which urged visitors who viewed the World Cup to participate in the survey. A total of 3,434 questionnaires were successfully completed and analyzed via SPSS and AMOS.

4. Results

4.1 Statistical analysis

Exploratory Factorial Analysis (EFA) using Varimax method (varimax rotation) was compiled to investigate the factorial structure of the questionnaire. The factorial structure chosen to examine the magnitude and rate of change of eigenvalues was based on the rule that important factors should be related to eigenvalues >1 and the factor loading should be over 0.6. Sampling Adequacy was used to measure Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO). KMO greater than 0.8 indicates sampling adequacy. Moreover, validation analysis was performed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Finally, in order to investigate the hypothesis presented in previous section, a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used. The general indicators of good adaptation were: the normed χ^2 index, Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (Lomax & Schumacker, 2010). CFA and SEM was performed using the AMOS software while EFA was performed using the SPSS software.

4.2 Construct validity of questionnaire

EFA and CFA analysis showed that Sport Involvement Scale, Team Attachment Scale, Beliefs about Sponsorship Scale, Attitude Toward Sponsors Scale, Awareness Scale and Purchase Intention Scale had satisfactory adaptation. More in detail, EFA indicated an index $KMO > 0.8$ for all scales. The variance of the data explained by factors varied for 65.4% to 73.4% for the 6 scales. CFA showed that all the scales had: Normed $\chi^2 < 1$, $RMSEA < 0.1$ and $CFI > 0.9$.

4.3 SEM results

Analysis of SEM are presented in Table A. The results of the SEM analyses supported almost all the respective proposed hypotheses (H1-H12). More in detail, the results for initial research hypothesis indicate, that sport involvement, either centrality dimension ($b=0.043$, $p < .05$) or attraction dimension ($b=0.084$, $p < .001$) affect positively the attitude toward sponsor. Also, sponsor awareness affected positively by centrality dimension ($b=0.109$, $p < .001$) and attraction dimension ($b=0.193$, $p < .001$) of sport involvement. Furthermore, awareness was affected positively by team attachment ($b=0.125$, $p < .001$), beliefs about sponsorship ($b=0.198$, $p < .001$) and event's web and site social media usage ($b=0.086$, $p < .001$). The results regarding attitude toward sponsor indicated that attitude toward sponsor affected positively by beliefs about sponsorship ($b=0.298$, $p < 0.001$) and by team attachment ($b=0.187$, $p < .001$). Finally,

purchase intention affected positively by attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.192$, $p<.001$) and awareness of sponsor ($b=0.016$, $p<.05$). The evaluation of the initial proposed model showed that the original model was not found to have a satisfactory adaptation to empirical data, since almost all of the indicators were outside the desired limits ($\chi^2=211.5$, $CFI=0.239$, $RMSEA=0.248$).

Table A: SEM model for the investigation of research hypothesis

		Affect		b	p	Result
H1	Involvement centrality	→	Sponsor awareness	0.109	.005	S
H2			Sponsor Attitude	0.043	.005	S
H3	Involvement attraction	→	Sponsor awareness	0.193	<.001	S
H4			Sponsor Attitude	0.084	<.001	S
H5	Team attachment	→	Sponsor awareness	0.125	<.001	S
H6			Sponsor Attitude	0.187	<.001	S
H7	Beliefs about sponsor	→	Sponsor awareness	0.198	<.001	S
H8			Sponsor Attitude	0.298	<.001	S
H9	Events web site and social media	→	Sponsor awareness	-0.022	0.697	R
H10			Sponsor Attitude	0.086	<.001	S
H11	Sponsor awareness	→	Purchas intention	0.016	.033	S
H12	Sponsor Attitude	→	Purchas intention	0.192	<.001	S

The final modified model presented in Table B. After the modification a high adjustment to empirical data achieved and the indexes is greater than desired values ($\chi^2=2.39$, $CFI=0.948$, $RMSEA=0.082$).

Table B: Final (best) SEM model

		Affect		b	p
Involvement centrality	→	Sponsor awareness		0.106	0.031
		Attachment		0.330	<.001
		Sponsor Attitude		0.035	.007
		Events web site and social media		0.112	<.001
Involvement attraction	→	Sponsor awareness		0.190	<.001
		Attachment		0.268	<.001
		Events web site and social media		0.125	<.001
		Beliefs about sponsor		0.023	<.001
		Sponsor Attitude		0.071	<.001
Team attachment	→	Sponsor awareness		0.124	.006
		Sponsor Attitude		0.178	<.001
Beliefs about sponsor	→	Sponsor awareness		0.196	<.001
		Sponsor Attitude		0.284	<.001
Events web site and social media	→	Sponsor Attitude		0.088	<.001
Sponsor awareness	→	Purchas intention		0.016	.037
		Sponsor Attitude		0.072	<.001
Sponsor Attitude	→	Purchas intention		0.192	<.001

Final model includes statistical significant effects of centrality dimension of sport involvement scale on team attachment ($b=0.330$, $p<.001$) and event's web site and social media usage ($b=0.112$, $p<.001$). Also, model includes statistical significant effects of attraction dimension of sport involvement scale on team attachment ($b=0.268$, $p<.001$), event's web site and social media usage ($b=0.125$, $p<.001$) and belief about sponsorship ($b=0.023$, $p<.001$). Finally, the final proposed model include statistical significant effect of sponsors awareness on

attitude toward sponsors ($b=0.072$, $p<.001$).

4.4 Results by age group

SEM analysis regarding age group (19-22, 23-41, 42-53, over 54) indicate that in age group between 19 and 22 years old the significant effects are those between attraction dimension of sport involvement on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.164$, $p<.05$), team attachment on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.128$, $p<.05$), beliefs about sponsor on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.208$, $p<.001$) and attitude toward sponsor on purchase intention ($b=0.236$, $p<.001$). On the contrary, in age group between 23 and 41 years old the significant effects are those between attraction dimension of sport involvement on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.052$, $p<.05$), centrality dimension of sport involvement on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.056$, $p<.05$), attraction dimension of sport involvement on sponsor awareness ($b=0.183$, $p<.05$), team attachment on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.154$, $p<.001$), team attachment on sponsor awareness ($b=0.140$, $p<.05$), beliefs about sponsorship on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.264$, $p<.001$), beliefs about sponsor on sponsor awareness ($b=0.212$, $p<.001$), attitude toward sponsor on purchase intention ($b=0.149$, $p<.001$) and sponsor awareness on purchase intention ($b=0.021$, $p<.05$). Different results emerged in age group between 42 and 53 years old. In more detail, in this age group the significant effects are those between centrality dimension of sport involvement on sponsor awareness ($b=0.306$, $p<.05$), team attachment on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.212$, $p<.001$), beliefs about sponsorship on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.316$, $p<.001$), beliefs about sponsorship on sponsor awareness ($b=0.255$, $p<.001$) and attitude toward sponsor on purchase intention ($b=0.206$, $p<.001$). Finally in the age group of 54 years old and above the significant effects are those between attraction dimension of sport involvement on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.161$, $p<.05$), team attachment on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.185$, $p<.001$), beliefs about sponsorship on attitude toward sponsor ($b=0.440$, $p<.001$), beliefs about sponsor on sponsor awareness ($b=0.271$, $p<.001$) and attitude toward sponsor on purchase intention ($b=0.303$, $p<.001$).

5. Discussion, Implications and Further Research

The purpose of the study was to provide a conceptual framework for the assessment of sport sponsorship's effectiveness, taking into consideration – for the first time – the effect of fans' generational classification. A conceptual framework offers an uncomplicated perspective of a complicated reality and might serve as a guideline to direct empirical investigation (Biscaia et al., 2017). The present study's main contribution is the development of a framework which is corroborated theoretically as well as through research and which can be employed not only by sports clubs but also by actual or potential sponsors, in order to

comprehend the way in which the efficiency of the sponsorship can be enhanced.

The main variables examined were sport fans' levels of sponsor awareness, their attitudes toward sponsors and their subsequent purchasing intentions. In addition to exploring variances in these variables based upon the generational cohorts, the degree of fans' involvement with the sporting activity as well as their attachment with the sports club, the utilization of the sport event's website and/or Facebook page and fans' beliefs regarding sponsorship, were also analyzed as main antecedents of sponsorship efficiency. The implications of the current study are that by employing the present framework, sports organizations can be assisted in demonstrating to sponsors which factors enhance awareness as well as interest in sponsoring company brand and which will eventually boost sales. One of the major significant findings of the present study, is associated with how frequently a sporting event's website and page on Facebook is used. As formerly mentioned, no previous research on sponsorship has been conducted with regards to the use of either the Internet or social media. An additional exceptional finding of the study, was the employment of generational cohorts as a possible mediator to the relationships that were explored. The results of this research indicate that factors such as sport involvement, team attachment, beliefs about sponsor and frequency of usage of sport event's website and Facebook page affect spectators' attitude toward sponsor and the sponsor awareness that in turn affect purchase intention. In more detail, attitude toward sponsor and the sponsor awareness mediate significantly between independent variables (sport involvement, team attachment, beliefs about sponsor, frequency of usage of sport event's website and Facebook page) and purchase intention. This means that the higher level of sport involvement, team attachment, beliefs about sponsor and frequency of usage of sport event's website and Facebook page increase the attitude toward sponsor and the sponsor awareness that in turn lead to an increase of purchase intention. One major limitation of the study is that the findings were founded upon one sporting event. Consequently, further investigation is proposed to empirically examine the efficiency of sponsorship in various sporting activities.

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