

The Question of Sponsorship Effectiveness

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Abstract This chapter summarises the effects of sponsorship on consumer behaviour. Sponsorship is a marketing communications strategy that pairs a brand with an event to enable the brand to benefit from the audience of the event and from the target audience's positive associations with the event. The effects of sponsorship have been widely researched. Pascale Quester has contributed significantly to research in this area, having published more than 20 papers on event sponsorship, substantially improving knowledge to enable managers and event organisers to maximise sponsorship benefits. This chapter reviews prior research relating to the effects of sponsorship and its moderating variables. Specifically, this chapter recaps the findings about the main effects of sponsorship and identifies some avenues for further research. Then, it reviews the role of perceived brand-event fit, consumers' event involvement and self-congruity with the event, consumer nationalism, consumers' gender, education and age, as well as sponsorship activation in sponsorship effectiveness.

Keywords Sponsorship · Ambush marketing · Congruence · Activation · Articulation · Consumer behaviour

Introduction

Pascale Quester has extensively researched the effects of sponsorship on consumer behavior and the variables that moderate these effects. Sponsorship is a (cash or kind) investment made by one organisation in an event, person, or idea for the purpose of exploiting the commercial potential of the association of the sponsoring organisation and the event, person or idea (Meenaghan 1983). In the past 40 years, sponsorship has evolved from simple, short-term corporate donations that boosted

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management egos into long-term, economic-based relationships between the sponsor and sponsees or properties, typically grounded in complex legal agreements (Quester and Thompson 2001). Sponsorship spending has increased significantly in the past 30 years, from just \$2 billion worldwide in 1984 (Sponsorship Research International 1996) to \$55.3 billion in 2014 (International Events Group 2015). The increase in sponsorship activities reflects the growing belief that developing a brand through association with an event may be effective in building brand equity. Indeed, many studies demonstrate that sponsorship can increase brand equity and revenues by building brand awareness, brand attitude, brand image, brand trust and brand loyalty (Chien et al. 2011; Mazodier and Merunka 2012; Quester 1997). However, Mazodier and Rezaee (2013) report substantial negative abnormal returns following sponsorship announcements. Such a finding suggests that investors perceive sponsorship as a less efficient marketing communication strategy for improving firm performance. This chapter reviews the most common sponsorship effects on consumer-based outcome variables and their antecedents, identifying the limitations of prior studies that explain the negative reactions of shareholders to sponsorship announcements.

Summary of Main Effects and Avenues for Further Research

As noted, the effect of sponsorship activities on brand knowledge is quite well established. Specifically, sponsorship can increase brand awareness (Grohs et al. 2004; Javalgi et al. 1994; Mazodier and Chandon 2005; Quester 1997) and improve brand attitude (Grohs et al. 2004; Lardinoit and Quester 2001; Mazodier and Merunka 2012; Quester and Thompson 2001). Many studies suggest that sponsorship can improve brand image thanks to the transfer model (e.g. Grohs and Reisinger 2014; Gwinner and Eaton 1999; Woisetschläger and Michaelis 2012). In addition, research demonstrates that sponsorship can promote consumers' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (e.g., in the context of non-profit organisations (Cornwell and Coote 2005), charitable activities (Menon and Kahn 2003), and community-based sports sponsorship (Quester et al. 2013)). Sponsorship can also positively affect brand trust (Lee and Mazodier 2015; Mazodier and Merunka 2012), brand loyalty (Mazodier and Merunka 2012; Sirgy et al. 2008) and increase purchase intent (Daneshvary and Schwer 2000; Madrigal 2000; Mazodier and Chandon 2005).

If this is the case, why do investors remain sceptical about sponsorship? First, a common criticism is “the lack of attention paid to measuring sponsorship effects relative to the investment made” (Olson and Thjømmøe 2009, p. 504). The substantial negative abnormal returns reported by Mazodier and Rezaee (2013) suggest that sponsorship fees and related costs have become excessive over the last decade. Therefore, managers might be expected to direct their marketing spending on

communication strategies that are more justifiable. Further research is needed to quantify financial returns on sponsorship activities and to convince financial analysts of the effectiveness of investment in sponsorship. Such research should compare sponsorship investment with other event communication strategies (e.g. advertising, ambush marketing) (Mazodier and Quester 2014a). Ambush marketing refers to any form of communication around an event that uses its characteristic signs and symbols to mislead spectators by implying that the brand is an official sponsor (Mazodier et al. 2012). The intention of such strategies is to improve brand equity through the massive audience that certain events attract. Two studies show that sponsorship improves more effectively brand loyalty and purchase intent than advertising (Olson and Thjømøe 2009; Mazodier and Merunka 2012). However, given that sponsorship incurs additional expenses (i.e. the sponsorship fees), it is conceivable that it could reduce profits even while improving brand equity. As such, marketers and investors need more guidance to identify the most effective marketing activities to improve their brand equity. Sponsorship research is also limited in that it has not uncovered a great deal of knowledge about the long-term effects of sponsorship. Most research investigates the immediate consequences of sponsorship; however, the cumulative nature of sponsorship effectiveness suggests the need to gain a perspective of the longer term effects and as such, the use of longitudinal research methodologies (Pham 1991). Recent studies have collected relevant data periodically to record the effects of sponsorship over time (Mazodier and Quester 2014b; Woisetschläger and Michaelis 2012). However, academics and professionals have called for more research on the long-term effect of sponsorship, including its effects beyond the end of sponsorship (McAlister et al. 2012).

Moderators of Sponsorship Effectiveness

Like other marketing communication strategies, sponsorship effectiveness depends on many factors that can substantially influence the return-on-investment of the sponsorship activities. Therefore, managers should know the constructs that influence consumer reactions to sponsorship and its profitability. The following sections review these constructs and discuss them from the perspective of the following considerations relating to maximising the benefits of sponsorship:

- managers select one event to sponsor based on the perceived fit between the brand and the event
- individual characteristics moderate the effects of sponsorship and managers should use sponsorship to target the consumers that react most positively to sponsorship
- sponsorship activation influences the effects of sponsorship.

How to Select One Event to Sponsor

The Role of Perceived Fit

Sponsorship research often includes the idea of perceived fit (also referred to as congruence, relatedness or match) between the sponsor and the sponsored event or activity. In the sponsorship literature, fit usually refers to consumers' perception of the similarity or consistency between the brand and the sponsored property. The extent to which the sponsor and the event are similar can depend on the functionality, attributes, image or other key associations of the sponsor and the sponsored property (Gwinner and Eaton 1999; Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006; Speed and Thompson 2000). Several studies on sponsorship have found a positive effect of perceived overall fit on the effects of sponsorship (e.g. Deitz et al. 2012; Gwinner and Eaton 1999; Mazodier and Merunka 2012; Olson 2010; Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006; Speed and Thompson 2000; Zdravkovic et al. 2010). Quester et al. (2013) also confirm the substantial role of perceived fit for community-based sponsorship effectiveness. For example, property CSR image only influences perceived sponsor CSR image when consumers perceive the association between the brand and the club as congruent. Perceived fit also has a direct positive effect on sponsor CSR image (Quester et al. 2013).

However, using realistic sponsorship stimuli, Olson and Thjømmøe (2009) demonstrate that sponsors with a low level of fit may enjoy stronger identification than sponsors with a high level of fit primarily because people find some degree of incongruence interesting. Olson and Thjømmøe (2012) find a negative effect of an initial high-level of fit between a sponsor and an event on sponsor recognition when sponsorship activation occurs. Indeed, the articulation of the sponsorship, which is the ancillary marketing communication actions purported to explain the relationship between the sponsor and the sponsored property (Cornwell et al. 2005), is likely to remove the initial advantage of a congruent sponsorship, that is, the presence of pre-existing links in the consumer memory between the event and the brand (Cornwell et al. 2006). This is because congruent associations can be overlooked or regarded as not stimulating because they conform to consumers' expectations (Jagre et al. 2001).

Thus, there appears to be a flaw in the conventional wisdom suggesting that there should be a fit between the brand and the sponsored property. This flaw can be explained by the congruence theory (Mandler 1982) and the concept of 'created fit' (Becker-Olsen and Simmons 2002). According to Mandler (1982), incongruent information can lead to superior recall and positive evaluations because incongruent messages can stimulate consumer interest. As such, the process of resolution leads to greater positive evaluations. Further, Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002) argue that the link between a sponsor and an event can be apparent from the mere juxtaposition of their names ('native fit'), or the association may require some explanation in dedicated communication ('created fit'). Zdravkovic et al. (2010) highlight that managers should not rely on natural fit but should proactively attempt

to communicate their brand's fit with the event to consumers. If sponsorship articulation leads to incongruence resolution, the brand generates arousal, is interesting, and is valued positively (Jagre et al. 2001). It is for this reason that sponsorship research, which investigates both native and created fit, demonstrates that low-fit sponsorships can generate more positive effects. Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) demonstrate that created fit, which they achieved by explaining how the sponsor and incongruent sponsor recipient relate, can improve evaluations of incongruent sponsorships. Mazodier and Quester (2014b) empirically validate congruence theory (Mandler 1982) and demonstrate that initial incongruence leads to a greater sponsorship-induced change in brand affect. Over time, as consumers are exposed to and become aware of sponsorship activation, the initial sponsorship incongruence is resolved, generating positive attitudes. Given that sponsorship-linked marketing improves brand affect for consumers who initially perceive the association as incongruent, managers can sponsor events that do not share a natural fit with the brand without jeopardising their marketing performance. However, Mazodier and Quester (2014b) recommend that they reserve a substantial budget to explicate their fit with the sponsored event and that they should do so early in the campaign. Indeed, incongruent sponsors that fail to explain convincingly their association with the sponsored event can face negative reactions from consumers who have not resolved the incongruence.

Individual Consumer Characteristics

Extant research indicates that sponsorship effectiveness depends on several individual consumer characteristics. Managers should run sponsorship when they target consumers who are likely to react positively.

Event Involvement

The level of consumer involvement in the sponsored property is an important predictor of sponsorship effectiveness (Mazodier and Chandon 2005; Walraven et al. 2014). Indeed, individual exposure to corporate sponsors is a function of the number of events attended or watched (Wakefield et al. 2007). Therefore, the more the consumer is involved with a particular sponsored object, the more likely they will be exposed to sponsor messages, and thus there will be a higher probability of sponsorship awareness. Event involvement not only leads to a higher probability of sponsorship exposure but also to a higher probability of sponsorship processing. As Pham (1992) posits, involvement with a sponsored event leads to higher overall attention devoted to the event, including the attention for embedded sponsorship stimuli. Likewise, Wakefield et al. (2007) argue that highly involved consumers are more willing to engage in active information processing and thus are more likely to pay attention to sponsorship exposure. Moreover, image transfer is positively

influenced by a spectator's strong involvement, and attitudes towards the sponsor are more favourable when the spectator is involved in the event (Levin et al. 2001). The more the spectator is a 'fan' of the event, the more they will perceive that sponsorship helps the event. In turn, the spectator will hold more goodwill towards the sponsor (Meenaghan 2001).

Consumers' Self-Congruity with the Sponsored Event

Mazodier and Merunka (2012) and Sirgy et al. (2008) indicate that managers should select events with symbolic attributes that match their targeted consumers' self-concept. This matching process is referred to as 'self-congruity' (Sirgy 1985). Self-congruity plays an important role in both pre-purchase and post-purchase behaviours (Johar and Sirgy 1991), and according to self-congruity theory, a fit between the brand and the consumer's self-image arises when a value-expressive brand triggers the consumer's self-schema, which contains self-knowledge related to the product's perceived image (Sirgy 1985). Sirgy et al. (2008) and Mazodier and Merunka (2012) extend research on self-image congruence to a sponsorship context by demonstrating that self-congruity with a sponsored event strengthens the effects of sponsorship on brand trust, brand affect and brand loyalty.

Demographic Variables

Further, various demographics may influence sponsorship effectiveness. Prior research provides contradictory results. Some research finds no significant difference in the effectiveness of sponsorship, regardless of age or gender (Daneshvary and Schwer 2000; Quester 1997), whereas other research suggests that young people remember brand sponsors better than do older people (Walliser 1994). These results coincide with research on memory, which has demonstrated that memory of the source of a message decreases with age (Spencer and Raz 1995). Given that younger people are more able to associate a sponsor with an event, sponsorship should have a more significant effect on this group. Moreover, older people are less comfortable with sports sponsorship, and have greater negative attitudes towards the sponsor (Dalakas and Kropp 2002). Mazodier and Chandon (2005) and Walraven et al. (2014) confirm that older age (of the consumer) has a negative effect on sponsorship awareness and purchase intent.

Discussing the gender effect, Pham (1992) observes higher awareness scores among men exposed to sponsorships, and Kinney et al. (2008) and Walraven et al. (2014) indicate that men are more likely than women to recall and recognise sponsors correctly. In contrast, according to McDaniel and Kinney (1998), women respond more positively to sponsorship in the areas of awareness, attitudes, and purchase intentions. These results are confirmed by McDaniel (1999) and Mazodier and Chandon (2005). It is likely that the effect of gender depends on the event and

further research should investigate the interaction effect between gender and event involvement.

Kinney et al. (2008) and Walraven et al. (2014) indicate that education level has positive effects on sponsorship recall.

The Role of Consumer Nationalism

As market globalisation exposes foreign firms to potential backlash from consumer nationalistic orientation towards their products, sponsorship strategies must consider the interplay between nationalistic sentiment and sponsorship effects. While foreign sponsors are typically preoccupied with determining the fit between their brand and a local event, they must also consider individual-level nationalistic sentiment. The success of companies in foreign markets depends on creating favourable country-directed consumer attitudes. Sponsorship research indicates that an event with a foreign sponsor tends to be evaluated less favourably than an event with a domestic sponsor (Ruth and Simonin 2003; Yue et al. 2014). Lee and Mazodier (2015) demonstrate that consumer ethnocentrism and animosity negatively moderate sponsorship effectiveness, while cosmopolitanism has a positive effect on sponsorship effectiveness. Therefore, the presence of foreign brands in a sponsored event invokes ethnocentric feelings among local consumers, which dampens sponsorship goodwill and other positive sponsorship outcomes. Hence, the strategic uses and outcomes of international sponsorship must be considered in conjunction with consumers' perceptions of foreign brands from a nationalistic perspective.

Sponsorship Activation

The terms 'leverage' and 'activation' are often used to define marketing communication campaigns that intend to remind consumers of the sponsorship (Carrillat et al. 2015). Sponsorship-linked marketing activities often span many days, weeks or years and imply repeated exposure to sponsor messages. It is ultimately the marketer's responsibility to make consumers aware of the link between the event and the brand, using advertising, public relations, promotion, and merchandising. For example, at the 2013 Hong Kong Rugby Sevens tournament, co-sponsor Cathay Pacific created a popup store in Causeway Bay that used equipment to allow consumers to momentarily 'become' rugby players - conveying the excitement of the game to them on an individual level. It is well established that sponsorship activation is key to maximising sponsorship effectiveness (Carrillat et al. 2015; Chadwick and Thwaites 2005; Quester and Thompson 2001; Weeks et al. 2008). As noted, one objective of sponsorship activation is to communicate the meaning of the association between the sponsor and the event to leverage the benefits of sponsorship (Quester and Thompson 2001). Therefore, 78 per cent of sponsorship

managers invest as much in sponsorship activation as they do in fees to acquire the official rights to the sponsorship (International Events Group 2013). Nevertheless, Olson and Thjømøe (2009) report that the ratio of activation spending to sponsorship spending has an inverted U-shape relationship with sponsorship effectiveness, with the optimum being approximately the two or three threshold.

Conclusion

Over more than 15 years and 20 articles, Pascale Quester has considerably improved our knowledge about sponsorship. Quester has established sponsorship as an effective marketing communication strategy and identified several variables that drive sponsorship effectiveness. Nevertheless, more research is needed to establish the financial return on investment of sponsorship (particularly its long-term effects) and to compare the return on investment of sponsorship with other event communication strategies such as traditional advertising or ambush marketing.

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