

BRAND BUILDING THROUGH SPONSORSHIP – A CONSUMER INSIGHT

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Abstract: The present paper develops a series of considerations regarding the importance of the brand in sports and sports competitions, the description of the sponsorship process, the links that are formed between the brand and sponsorship, presenting a study on the need and importance of the sponsorship process within sports clubs and organizations to help athletes at different stages. Sponsorship is the material support of an event, activity or organization by an unaffiliated partner. It is a good way to increase brand awareness, which helps to generate consumer preferences and promote brand loyalty. Brands play an important role in the development of companies because they bring a number of benefits to them. Well-known brands offer manufacturers the guarantee of finding the best distributors. They are much more receptive to a famous brand.

Keywords: *Brand, Sponsorship, Sports Competitions, Consumer Insight*

Introduction

Sport sponsorship was explained as the attempt to form a strategic link between a company and a sports event or organization, as a mean of communicating brand messages to the general public using the support of a particular team, player or event. With the large-scale expansion of sports to a different audience, the platform has also been known to significantly differentiate a company from its competitors [1].

Sports activities have been very attractive to sponsors, in part due to the special attention they attract. Sport is the main type of sponsorship, mainly for the following reasons: the inclination to attract the general public not only to each event, but also through the media associated with these activities. In addition, it offers a simplistic segmentation measure and increased visibility opportunities for the sponsor, due to the duration of each event.

Sports sponsorship is not only about organizations or events, but also includes the athletes involved. Sponsoring certain athletes involved in large-scale events is an effective way of attracting consumers' attention. In addition, in some sports, there are a wide range of sponsorship opportunities.

Brands help organizations win consumer loyalty, due to the feelings of trust and affection they trigger. Lately, many new opportunities have opened up for companies to compete with each other in creating sponsorship contracts that are favourable to both them and the sports entities they are involved with. Successful brands allow companies to set a top price, justifying the additional costs of marketing and production. This derives from the trust that the brand brings.

Literature review***Theoretical notions regarding the sponsorship process***

Sponsorship can be defined as providing resources (for example, money, people, equipment) through an organization (sponsor) directly to a person, authority or body, to enable the latter to carry out an activity in exchange for the benefits envisaged in regarding the sponsorship promotion strategy and which can be expressed in corporate terms, marketing or media objectives [2].

To understand how sponsorship works and its goals, it is important to first determine what sponsorship is. There are several ways to define sponsorship. Different authors and institutions over the years have given several definitions of sponsorship, however, no consensus has been reached on the definition of sponsorship.

Sponsorship is a commercial activity where one party will allow another opportunity to exploit an association with a target audience in exchange for funds, services or resources. Sponsorship is an investment, in cash or in any way, in an activity, in exchange for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity. Sponsorship is the payment of a fee by a company in exchange for the right to a public association with activity, element or person, if the purpose is to achieve a commercial objective [3].

Sponsorship can also be seen as a combination of advertising with its ability to control messages and public relations with its high credibility potential and the dissemination of messages directed by or with a third party. However, changes in consumer trends and needs determine how marketing tools are implemented across organizations. Successful sponsorship requires a

"total marketing package", not just used as a single marketing tool [4].

In other words, organizations should consider the sponsorship process not only for the awareness it offers, but also for the opportunity to be associated with the event itself and to develop value in terms of strategic branding.

Sponsorship allows companies to meet with customers, suppliers and others in unique situations. People who participate in sponsored activities or special events already have favorable feelings about the activity. These positive attitudes are easily transferred to a company that has provided financing. In addition, the main purpose of sponsorship is not just the exposure of the brand to a target audience, but the image transfer: the sponsor links to an event, organization or team, so that it becomes associated with its image in the minds of people.

Sponsorship has four main characteristics:

Domain: refers to the type of sponsorship, for example: arts, sports, media or charity.

Composition: refers to the exclusivity of the sponsor. The more sponsors, the weaker the association becomes at the event and the greater the risk of people getting confused, not observing or forgetting the sponsors.

Status: refers to the size and prestige of the event; the larger the event, the greater the potential of a sponsor's image. However, a small event may involve a more personal experience.

Duration: refers to the duration of sponsorship. The longer the sponsorship, the stronger the image transfer.

Properly executed sponsorship is capable of meeting a wide range of objectives. These objectives have been presented by several authors in different forms or divisions over the years.

According to Kotler and Keller, the main reasons why a company chooses sponsorship as one of their communication tools: to identify with a certain target market or lifestyle, to raise awareness of the name of the company or product by exposure to a brand, to create or strengthen perceptions of key image associations, to create experiences and to evoke feelings, to express commitment to the community or social issues, to entertain key clients or to reward key employees and to enable merchandising or promotion opportunities [5].

The main objectives of sponsorship are:

- generating awareness of the company or a particular product or service;
- developing customer loyalty or building relationships with the public;

- to change or strengthen the perceptions held by the target audience;

- to improve the corporate image;

- building a company database,

- launch of a new product or service;

- to attract new employees and channel members, as well as to motivate existing ones;

- to create experience and evoke feelings;

- to express their commitment to the community or social issues.

Brand awareness is achieved by exposing the brand to as many potential consumers as possible.

Brand awareness consists of two different elements: brand recognition and brand recall [6].

Brand recognition describes the ability of consumers to confirm the brand's prior exposure, while brand recall is the ability of a consumer to apply for a brand, given certain cues, such as product category, corporate implications, or needs to be met. Sponsorship activities present multiple opportunities to achieve awareness goals and much of the research so far in the sponsorship literature has focused on awareness issues, such as sponsor recall.

The brand image can be defined as the perception of a brand reflected by the association of trademarks held in memory [7]. Favourability, uniqueness and strength of associations are essential to the success of a brand.

Trademark associations are developed from a variety of sources, including the use of products, information sources and association with other entities. The source of "association with other entities" is of particular relevance to the sponsorship activity. When a brand becomes associated with an event, some of the associations associated with the event may become linked in memory with the brand. Similarly, trademark association can be used to create favorable, strong and unique associations that might otherwise not be present.

The image of the corporation is defined as the set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person holds about an object. In the corporate image, the object refers to the corporation or company. While many companies use sponsorship as a vehicle. For brand exposure, many companies consider sponsorship as an opportunity to promote a favorable image of their brand or company. The image is the result of a certain meaning that the consumers share about a brand [8].

Sponsorship in sport

Sports activities are very attractive to sponsors, partly due to the general public. Sport is the main

support for sponsorship, mainly for the following reasons: the inclination to attract the general public not only to each event, but also through the media associated with these activities.

Sports sponsorship not only allows sponsorship of events, but also includes athletes and teams. Sponsoring certain athletes involved in large-scale events is an effective way to attract consumers' attention. In addition, in some sports, there is a wide range of sponsorship opportunities. For example, in football, sponsorship may include: play equipment, clubs, players, stadium, equipment (ball) and field, among others.

In recent decades, sport has evolved from a relaxing activity into a complex industry. On the one hand, sport is mentioned daily in the media, on the other hand socio-economic development, such as the explosive growth of the fitness sector and the increase of attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle, acts as a positive factor for the sector. Thus, these changes have developed this new industry in which sports management and sports marketing appear as a solution to meet the demands of customers.

Sport management is an area concerned with the coordination of human and material resources, relevant technologies and unforeseen situations for the efficient production and exchange (marketing) of sports services. In other words, sports management involves the production and marketing of a sport, while sports marketing involves not only the marketing of a sport, but all the marketing activities that use this sport.

The reasons or objectives of sports sponsorship may vary depending on the response of the organization or the person who wants to get something from consumers or the target audience. However, an important restriction on sports sponsorship is that it communicates a limited message, usually nothing more than the brand and logo. Using the right sports sponsorship, you can create a brand association with a friendly, young and dynamic image of a sportsman, developing a series of values that can have a positive effect on the brand image, truly reaching the goals.

For a company, sponsorship is an event communication technique that allows its brand to be associated with another organization, event or athlete to obtain certain benefits. For the event organizer, athletes, clubs or any other sports entity, sponsorship is a very important means of financing [9].

The sports property benefits from money, goods, services or advice from experts. The sponsor receives benefits such as promotional rights and

marketing benefits through the association with a sports event or organization. They hope to increase consumer awareness of their brand and build brand equity [10].

For the success of an association it is important that between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored sports property there is an affinity, a common element, even the target segment of consumers being common. Therefore, when making a sponsorship proposal, it is important to identify the position of the respective brand in the minds of consumers and the connection of this position with the purpose of sponsorship. The way consumers think about the sporting event can influence the way they think about sponsors and vice versa.

The main purpose of a sponsorship is to create an emotional connection between the event's audience and the sponsor's brand. It starts from the fact that the organized event already has an affective connection with its audience and, therefore, the strategy of integration in the event consists only in the integration of the sponsor's mark in the event.

Sponsors most often seek to improve the brand image and increase brand awareness. The most common objective for sports is to attract financial support that helps administrative or development goals. It is very important that the partners of an agreement know their objectives. Sponsor goals are largely marketing goals, so they can be closely linked to certain market segments. By partnering with the right brand, the owner of the sports property can influence how his target market thinks about the sports brand. A private sponsor can even add credibility to the event or organization's image, add value to the brand and build new business relationships.

Athletes are significantly used to support a sports brand, as they benefit from significant media coverage and most of the time public image recognition worldwide. Therefore, the sports brand uses sponsorship to promote its product / service through sponsorship contracts. However, it is important that the company chooses the right athlete to represent the brand well and achieve the marketing goals set.

The relevance of sponsorship is crucial; Indeed, the brand must ensure that the entity sponsors the match and can influence the target audience. The second factor, the length of the impact refers to the ability of the sponsorship to have more or less long-term effects.

In addition, the brand must verify whether the sponsorship is in line with the marketing

objectives and is cost effective, which means the compatibility of the factors, which means that the benefits of sponsoring the athletes should exceed the costs of obtaining this sponsorship contract [11]. The potential of uniqueness is another important factor to consider.

Indeed, uniqueness offers a competitive advantage and can increase brand awareness incrementally. Athletes are now as social media marketing products, with the rise of the internet and social media, not only are sports brands betting on them to increase the brand awareness of the targeted customers. So, this market is growing gradually, and people are trying to do business by creating contact between athletes and brands looking for sponsorship.

Sports sponsorship is a profitable tool for developing and enhancing the image and reputation of the company brand. Thus, sports sponsorship should be appreciated as a way of recognizing the sustainable advantage [12]. Resurrected sport brands might want to attract new sponsorship to increase their revenues and to sustain the new image [13].

Sponsorship should produce a unique result that perfectly matches the image the sponsor otherwise tries to convey. By defining these strategic promotion goals, the core values and beliefs of each company will ultimately be the tools to support the commitment and investments that make sense for the growth of their brand or products.

The performance of sport organizations, beneficiaries of sponsorship can be increased due to improved and stable sources of income [14, 15].

Methods

Regarding the practical part of this work, we used a survey in order to gather information and to draw conclusions regarding the perception that our respondents have regarding the brand construction through sponsorship. Due to insufficient in-depth examinations in this area, our paper must be a starting point and a prelude to future investigations that can be based on the existing study.

In order to identify the people's opinion about the relationship between sponsorship and brand building, we conducted a research on a sample of 250 people, by completing an online questionnaire, on 01 June 2019-05 July 2019.

The questionnaire included 14 questions that initially aimed at creating a profile of the people questioned, and then followed various aspects related to the topic discussed.

The questionnaire was conducted in pursuit of the objectives of this research. The data obtained were subjected to univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses, supported by the Microsoft Office Excel program.

We chose Excel analysis because it is a very good tool to use for and has the advantage of being on the desktop of almost everyone.

As research methods we used:

- the method of bibliographic study (specialized literature analysis).

- the survey method using questionnaires.

The participation was performed on a voluntary basis and the verbal agreement of the participants was requested. The participants were assured about the confidentiality of the results but also about the possibility to request the results personally from the researcher. All people participated in the research under the conditions of informed consent.

Analysing the data on respondents we see that 60% are male and 40% are female.

Regarding the civil status of the respondents, the majority of 67% is represented by unmarried persons, 20% being married respondents, the lowest weight being 0% designating the respondents with the widow / widower status. The number of persons aged 18-24 years was 100 persons, the equivalent of 40%, and 72 respondents were aged 25-34 years.

The analysis of the jobs revealed that 144 are employed in various fields, respectively 73%, 17% are only students without a job, 18 people are household and the number of unemployed people is zero.

Of the people surveyed, 87% have a stable residence in the urban area and 13% in the rural area. Analysing the incomes of the respondents we noticed that those who already have a job have incomes between 1500-3000 rum.

We decided to analyse the respondents hobbies to determine if the sphere of intellectual and physical activity has any relevance in our study. The results show that 10% are passionate about literature, 8% go to the movies, 16% practice extreme sports, 47% have turned travel into passion, and 19% have other hobbies.

Findings and discussions

Regarding the effects of the sponsorship process, our respondents chose as the predominant effect the generation of awareness of the company or of a certain product or service, followed by the awareness of the brand or the improvement of the corporate image (figure 1).

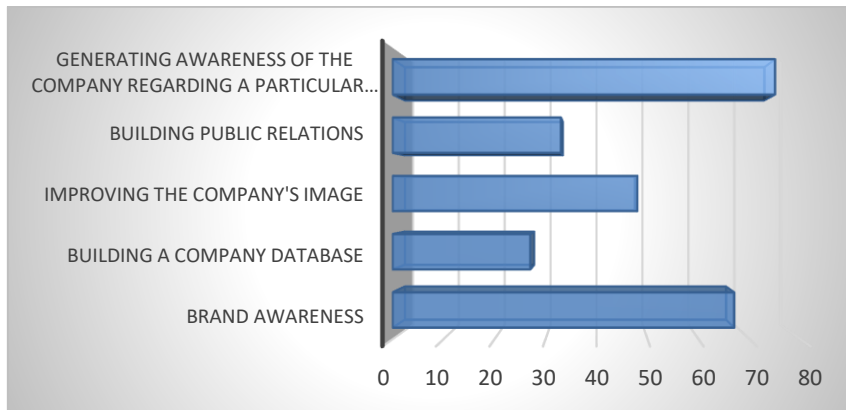


Figure 1. Percentage frequencies by sponsorship effects

Among the most significant disadvantages of the sponsorship listed by the participants in our study are the fact that sponsorship communicate a limited message, subjective, followed by highlighting only the brand and logo, presenting only an association of a brand with an image, without giving more details or lack of common element between the sponsor brand and the sponsored sports property (figure 2).

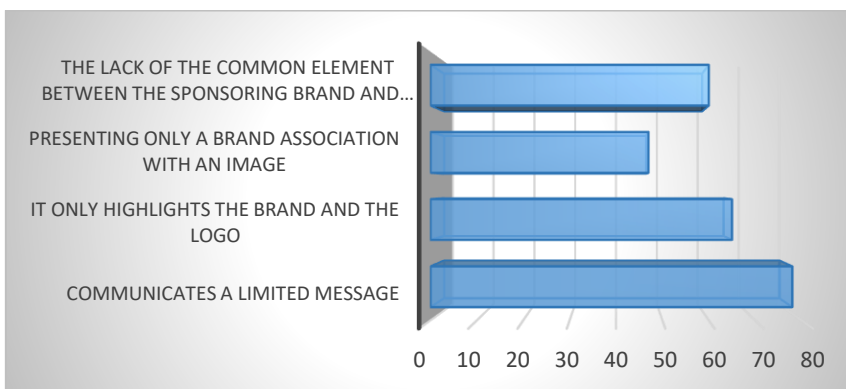


Figure 2. Percentage frequencies of the disadvantages of sponsorship

Respondents were given four response options (I agree, most likely, not necessarily and at all) to respond if they perceived a more positive / enjoyable brand due to their sponsorship following some fairly important sponsorship sports.

The results showed that 27% of the respondents agree with the statement and 43% most likely perceived the brand in a more positive or pleasant way, while 30% of the respondents consider that they do not perceive a brand in this way. In total, it can be stated that 70% of the respondents have a more positive than negative perception about a brand due to their sponsorship in major sports sponsorship campaigns (figure 3).

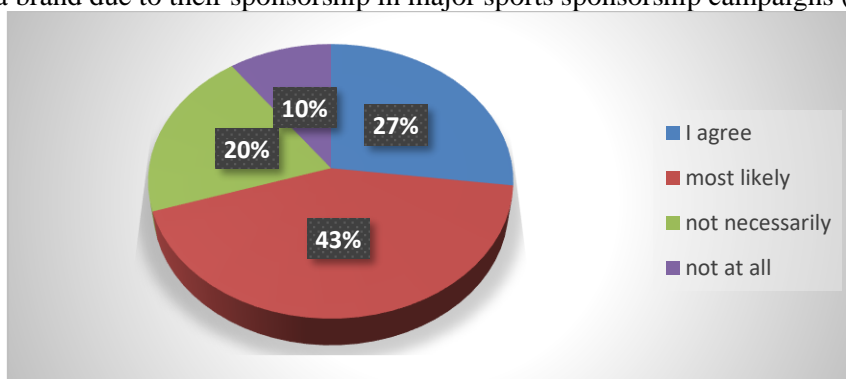


Figure 3. Percentage frequencies of the perception of major sports sponsorship campaigns

Most of our respondents, 63% easily recognize the famous logos of sports brands, 17% fail to recognize them, and 20% sometimes make the correlation between a brand and an athlete/team sponsored by the brand (figure 5).

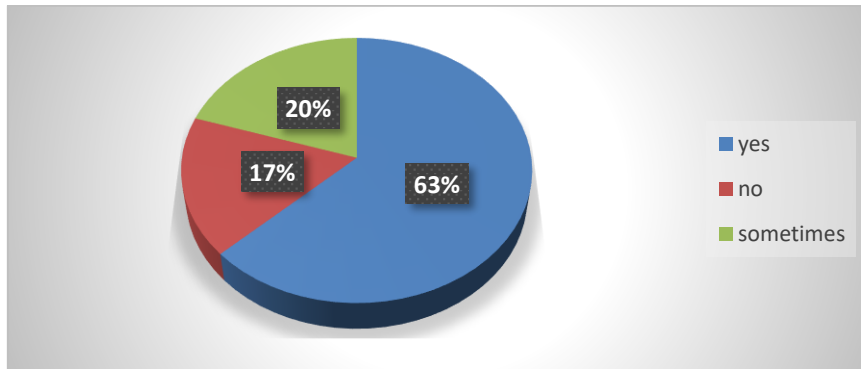


Figure 5. Percentage frequencies according to the degree of recognition of the logos of sports brands

The following question was addressed to know the opinion of the respondents on how sponsorship helps athletes or sports teams, and why these associations are becoming more popular, both in real life and in social media. Thus in the figure 6 are depicted the answers of the people in our study.

The vast majority consider sponsors to focus on major sporting events because they attract the attention of fans around the globe and are very popular.

Sports events can be distributed via social media by fans all across the world. This offer the possibility to share the sport events and to increase the benefices of sponsorship. Twiter and Facebook are an excellent medium for live coverage. Sponsorship can contribute to the increase of sport performance, as teams and athletes become more financial secure, therefore reducing the pressure for finding financial resources.

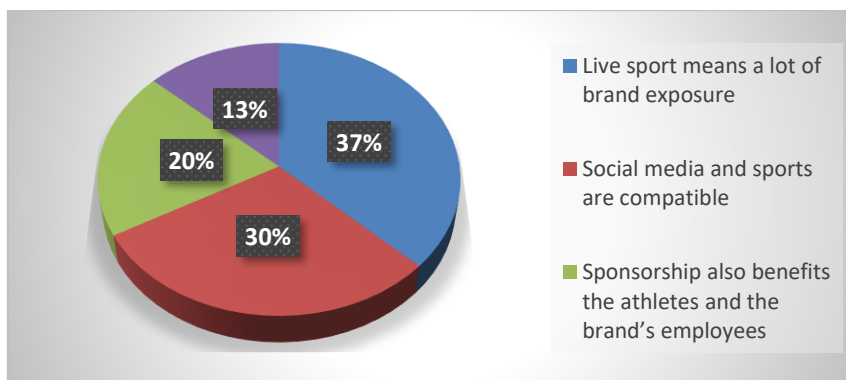


Figure 6. Percentage frequencies of sponsorship associations

The last question was asked to find the opinion of the respondents on why companies should sponsor sports for young people. Each sponsorship package has benefits for the sponsor built in: field signage, website advertising, company name on uniforms, so all this increase awareness of the company's products and services. They also suggest a welcomed form of advertising. In most settings consumers are inclined to tune out advertising. Although many traditional ways of reaching consumers are failing, youth sports sponsorships are a positive and engaging way to market a brand.

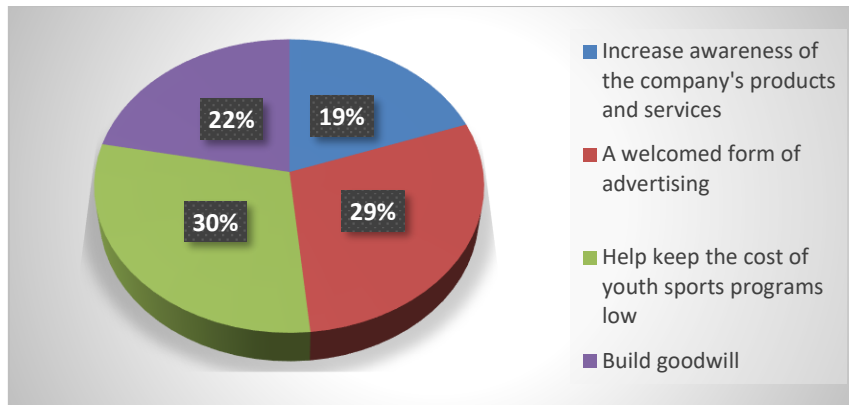


Figure 7. Percentage frequencies of the reasons why companies should sponsor sports for young people

Conclusions

The conclusions obtained in this study wanted to know the opinion of some people, especially fans of the various sports regarding the sponsorship process, which are the reasons why the sponsors focus nowadays more on the athletes and sports teams, which are the gains obtained by both sides, but also the disadvantages of this process.

Regarding the effects of the sponsorship process, our respondents chose as the predominant effect the generation of awareness for a company or a certain product or service, followed by the awareness of the brand or the improvement of the corporate image.

Among the most significant disadvantages of the sponsorship listed by the participants in our study are the fact that they communicate a limited message, subjective, followed by highlighting only the brand and logo, presenting only an association of a brand with an image, without giving more details or lack of common element between the sponsor brand and the sponsored sports entity. The vast majority of respondents consider sponsors to focus on major sporting events because they attract the attention of fans around the globe and are very popular. Sponsorship can benefit from the advantages of social media, where both official and private broadcasts are being distributed. Social media can increase the coverage of major sports events in case of non-TV broadcast.

Sports sponsorship is likewise beneficial for the teams and the brand's own employees. Having sponsorship funding allows athletes to concentrate more on the training and obtaining good results, therefore reducing the stress when it comes to deal with financial problems. Sport sponsorship is also beneficial for the company's employees as it is connected very strongly with health and active

life, which means the brand becomes the recipient of positive sentiments.

Determining the outcomes of sponsorships is crucial, as to find out what sponsorship investments is leading to influential image and video content. Sponsorship monitoring is very useful for brands when it comes to analysing where to locate future investments. Tracking user engagement is also valuable for brands to discover and anticipate the social media influencers that they could potentially sponsor in the future.

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