ONLINE ANTI-BRAND COMMUNITIES IN PROFESSIONAL SPORTS AND THEIR ROLE FOR SPONSORS – THE CASE OF FC BAYERN MUENCHEN AND DEUTSCHE TELEKOM AG

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Aim of paper
Sports fans are increasingly utilizing platforms such as Facebook to create, share, and discuss contents. This spread of social media has given rise to anti-brand communities which are forming around common aversions toward (sports) brands. Emerging research on this phenomenon focusses on the reasons why anti-brand communities build and the consequences of anti-brand communities for the opposed brand(Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). Although literature suggests that sponsors of a sports team may lose fans of opposing teams (Hickman & Lawrence, 2010), the negative effects of anti-brand communities built around the shared aversion of a sports brand on a sponsor of that brand has not been studied yet. We close this research gap by a mixed method study of anti-brand communities in the German Bundesliga.

Theoretical background
Sport teams are brands that many fans spend time and money to support. In many cases, brand communities built around the common interest in the team. Moreover, the strong rivalry among the teams fosters anti-brand communities, which can be seen as the antithesis of a brand community(Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006; Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009).Based on the social identity theory, oppositional brand loyalty, and schadenfreude anti-brand communities oppose a specific sport team and try to provoke and corrupt the opposed brand.
Although usually the anti-brand movement not directly aims at sponsors of the opposed brand, research on sport sponsoring suggests that anti-brand communities also affect their members' attitudes to a sponsor of the anti-brand. Evidentially it is possible to transfer positive attitudes towards a sponsoring object to a sponsor's image(Meenaghan, 2001). Moreover, balance theory claims that people strive for balance, order and harmony in their lives (Dalakas & Levin, 2005). Consequently, fans will tend to like whatever is associated with their favorite brand and will tend to dislike whatever is associated with a brand they oppose.

Methodology, research design and data analysis
We study anti-brand communities in the sports-context by focusing on the brand FC Bayern Muenchen (FCB) and its main sponsor Deutsche Telekom AG (DTAG).A qualitative study using netnography and semi-structured interviews with administrators of two anti-FCB-Facebook pages provides an understanding of why online anti-brand communities form and reveals their main characteristics. The subsequent quantitative study extends previous research by analyzing the negative effects of fans' participation in online anti-brand communities for the sponsor of the opposed club. We therefore compare surveys of 52 members of an anti-FCB community with 39 fans of FCB's rival 1.FC Nuernberg(FCN) by using MANCOVA.

Results
Our qualitative analysis shows that anti-brand communities are very similar to brand communities. The anti-FCB communities follow flat hierarchies; however the administrators occupy a leading role. The main motivations to participate in the community originate in the rivalry to the opposed brand and the participants aim at provoking and corrupting the opposed brand as well as glorifying the in-group (i. e. the anti-brand community members).
Our quantitative study revealsthat community membership has a significant negative effect on both attitude ($F(1,88)=8.254$, $p<.01$, $\eta2=.088$)and purchase intention toward the anti-brand FCB's sponsor DTAG($F(1,88)=5.964$, $p<.05$, $\eta2=.065$). In particular, members of the anti-FCB community show significantly more negative attitude towards the FCB's sponsorDTAG ($M=4.90$, $SD=2.50$) than the members of FCN communities who serve as a control group ($M=5.85$, $SD=1.78$). These results are supported by showing that both the members of the anti-FCB community and FCN fans do not differ in their attitudes towards the brand Vodafone (as alternative brand to DTAG). Surprisingly, our study does not reveal an avoidance-effect for current service usage of DTAGs products ($\chi2=1.795$, $N=91$, $p=.18$). However, this mismatch between negative attitudes and buying behavior can be explained by the fact that the community members are rather young (51 % between 15-17 years) and legal restrictions in Germany necessitate that their parents make the telecommunication contracts.

Implications and discussion
Our findings are perfectly in line with predictions based on social identity theory and balance theory. They support the notion that the individuals' attitudes towards a specific brand are related to their relationship to other brands and their social network. Given the results of our qualitative and quantitative studies, our research clearly establishes the relevancy of online anti-brand communities for sponsors of sports teams.Consequently, sponsors should be aware of anti-brand communities opposing the sponsored brand.They could outweigh the benefits of the sponsorship (mainly gained from supporters of the sponsored band) with possible negative effects (on individuals with an aversion of the sponsored brand). Our study is, as far as we know, the first one to unfold the negative effects of online anti-brand communities on sponsors. However, further research on that topic is needed in order to investigate whether our results can be generalized to other sports than football and outside the sports context.

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