
THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF INTERNAL TARGET GROUPS IN SPONSORING MANAGEMENT – AN EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY ANALYSIS USING THE EXAMPLE OF TRIATHLON SPONSORSHIP

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Synopsis:

Abstract:

AIM OF PAPER

Successful sponsoring is geared towards current social framework conditions. If promotional orientation represented one of the central arguments for many companies regarding the implementation of their sponsorship activities in the past, there is a growing orientation towards implicit means, according to which sponsoring companies are increasingly incorporating internal target groups into their sponsorships. The growing relevance of this trend has since been taken into account by its inclusion in the academic debate. The approach of Sponsorship-linked Internal Marketing (abbr.: SLIM) rests on the assumption that sponsoring can be utilized as a strategic resource to increase implicit effects such as motivation and identification of internal audiences (Farrelly et al. 2012; Cornwell 2014). However, there is still very little empirical evidence that describes the effect of SLIM holistically, despite several research papers on the topic (cf. Hickman et al. 2005; Garry et al. 2008). This paper examines SLIM on the basis of a case study using the example of a German business school, which provided financial support to two former students in their goal of successfully participating in an Ironman competition, and which accompanied the triathlon project as main sponsor from 2012 to 2013.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The consideration of the sponsorship-specific activation of internal stakeholders is subsumed under the term Sponsorship-linked internal Marketing (Farrelly et al. 2012). SLIM activities are classified into four categories. These include sponsorship-related activities for strategy formulation, communication, programme activation and evaluation. SLIM

activities can furthermore occur at different levels of effect, which include the individual, team and culture level. As part of SLIM activities, employees should display higher levels of motivation as well as loyalty towards colleagues and their company. At the team level, the actors should identify with the performance level of the sponsored object. At the culture level, sponsorships should contribute towards an increase in identification. All SLIM elements should be aligned and coordinated in such a way as to contribute towards an increase in the company's success (e.g. increased identification and productivity, etc.).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

A qualitative approach using a single case study was chosen to examine the SLIM model (cf. Yin 2009). The investigation of the topic was carried out using interviews with five university employees, who describe their respective attitude and perception of the Ironman project from an ex-post perspective. In order to capture the SLIM effect as holistically as possible, and from the perspective of university members not involved in the project, one interview partner was selected from each of the most important reference groups of the university (e.g. professor, research associate, executive etc.). In addition to the interviews, the findings are also based on the observations of the author, who accompanied the project from initiation to completion.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

According to the statements of the interview partners and the observations by the author, the SLIM strategies specified by the university management (e.g. contribution to work/life balance, networking) were achieved. In order to affect the strategy-conform use for the university, the relevant SLIM programmes were selected and implemented (e.g. participation in training sessions, lounge evenings, active and/or passive participation in local running events, corporate running challenges, etc.). Through the increased offer of sports events, a large number of work/life balance measures were made use of, and synergy effects with university sports emerged. Through the "storytelling" of an extraordinary mission, the project was a topic of conversation internally and externally across its entire duration, and a platform was created, with the aim of intensifying the network idea. With regard to SLIM communication, the sports environment resulted in an improvement of individual exchange, as it led intuitively to an informal sports language. With regard to the individual level of SLIM evaluation, the sponsorship led to an increased interest in sports in general and physical fitness in particular. The project also acted as a catalyst for an increased feeling of togetherness at the team level. Triggers for the SLIM effects level included emotional communication work and personal exchange with the sponsored athletes. At the culture level, a high degree of identification with the sponsored athletes was observed, as they were highly appreciated for their discipline and performance. The Ironman case shows that companies can achieve intra-organisational goals by means of SLIM, such as employee identification as part of their sponsorships (Farrelly et al. 2012). Thus, the case provides decent evidence of the effectiveness of the SLIM model. In summary, it can be stated that strategic SLIM resources represent implicit instruments of value creation.

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