SPONSOR AND SPONSORED ENTITIES INTERACTIONS IN A SPORT EVENT: IMPACT ON FANS' BRAND IMAGE, BRAND ATTACHMENT AND PURCHASING INTENTION

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INTRODUCTION

Meenaghan (1991, p.36) describes sponsorship as "an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity". Hence, sponsorship has the capacity to achieve a range of goals, such as corporate image, corporate social responsibility, brand exposure, marketing sales, and effects (e.g. image building, goodwill generation, attitude change). Moreover, a company's sponsorship activities are able to impact simultaneously on internal and external publics such as general public, internal staff, politicians/regulators, media, target market, self/peers (Meenaghan, 2005 p.246). Hence, this marketing tool impacts on the three generic consumer psychology behaviour stages (cognitive, affective and conative) presented by Lavidge & Steiner (1961) in the Hierarchy of Effects model.

Despite the growth of sponsorship, little academic research has been published in this area. However, in the context of the impact of sponsorship, Cornwell, Weeks and Roy (2005) offer a model of consumer-focused sponsorship-linked marketing communications that summarizes and extends theoretical understanding of the topic. Furthermore, Poon & Prendergast (2006) adapt the hierarchy of effects model and suggest a new framework for evaluating sponsorship opportunities. In this context, the purpose of this research is to analyse the impact of commercial sponsorships on purchasing intention (conative component), on the sponsor in relation to brand image (cognitive component), and brand attachment (emotional component). Furthermore, this study will analyse the relationship between sponsor, event, team and top players and this paper will illustrate this relationship by considering the interrelations between Adidas (sponsor), 2006 FIFA World Cup Germany (event), the French national football team (team) and their captain Zinédine Zidane (top player).

METHODS

Structural equation modeling (SEM), performed with LISREL 8.54 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2003) was used to conduct this research. To test predicted relationships between the variables (see Figure 1), we adopted a two-step modeling approach. The first step (the measurement model) corresponds with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and allows the evaluation of psychometric properties of the measurements (i.e. self-reports). The second step (structural model), consists of testing simultaneously the structural and measurement models and allows focussing on conceptual connections among the latent factors. Data was collected from 286 (N=286) French postgraduate students based on their interest in this event.

RESULTS

The measurement model provided an adequate fit to the data, Chi² (494) = 722,25; *p*= .00, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .040, Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) = .98, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .99 (Hu & Bentler, 1998, 1999). The structural model also demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data, Chi² (627) = 1248,86; *p*= .00, RMSEA = .059, NNFI = .96, CFI = .96. The part of explained variance of "Adidas Purchasing Intention" is high (r²= 0.70). Results (see figure 1) suggest that "Adidas Brand Attachment" predicts "Adidas Purchasing Intention" (β=0.83). Results also highlight that "Adidas Brand Attachment" is impacted by "Zinedine Zidane Brand Attachment" (β=0.17) and "French national football team Brand Attachment" (β=0.18). Finally, each "Brand Attachment" latent variable is impacted upon by sponsor image

latent variables. For example, "2006 FIFA World Cup Germany Brand Attachment" was directly impacted upon (r^2= 0.43) by the three brand image latent variables: "Party World Cup", "Mega Event World Cup" and "Business World Cup".

Figure 1: Structural model of the relationships between brand image, brand attachment and purchasing intention in context of sponsorship.
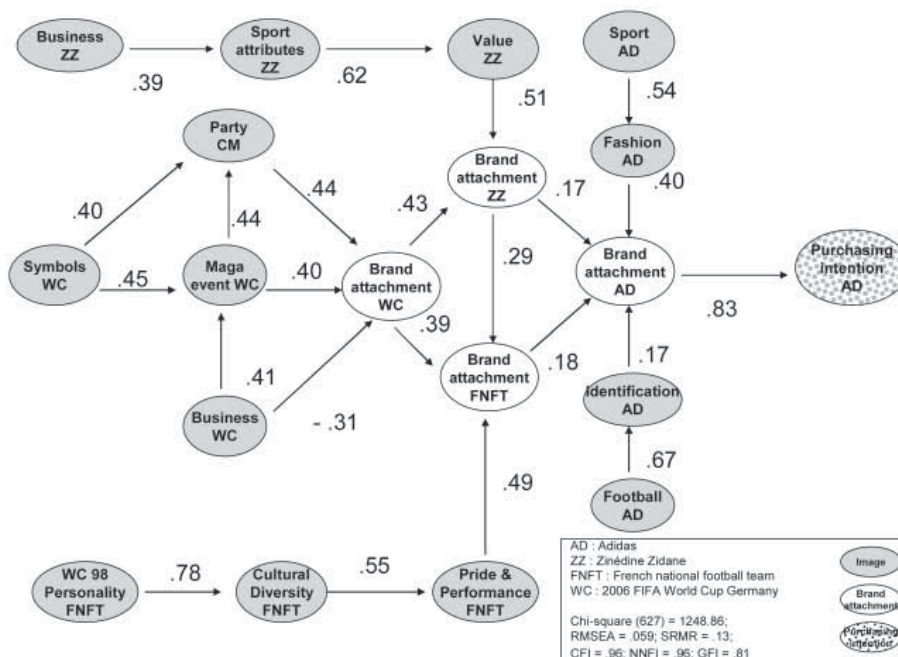
DISCUSSION

First, the significant path coefficients presented in figure 1 reveal that sponsee consumer's attachment impact on sponsor attachment and sponsor. Second, the model demonstrates the relationship between brand image (cognitive stage), brand attachment (affective stage) and purchasing intention (conative stage). This result is coherent and consistent with the cognitive/affective/conative relations specified in the hierarchy of effects model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Third, the three brand image factors are directly connected to brand attachment factors which connect the three brand systems.

The results of this study have managerial implications. The association with three different entities (i.e. event, national team, famous national team player) within the framework of an international event constitutes a pertinent sponsorship strategy on the national team market.

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