

Sponsorship in Portuguese Professional Football: Influence in Fan Behaviour

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Abstract

Research Question / Aim of Paper

The aim of this study is to understand how sponsorship influences the behaviour of spectators. It is intended to evaluate the degree and the form of influence of sponsorship in spectators, as well as understanding if the profile of the spectator influences the way as they see it. In this context, perception, behaviour intention and buying intention are seen as changeable dependents and attendance to the games, type of relation with the club, season ticket ownership and amount spent per year with the club appear as independents changeable of this study.

Theoretical Background

By definition, sponsorship communicates a message, according to strategic or operational objectives of a certain organization. However this communication, intends in a way or another, to influence consumer behaviour, either he's a final or a mere intermediary in the activity in cause.

Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard (2002) describe the process of individual decision taking in four different steps: recognition of the problem, search for information, evaluation of alternatives and choice of the product. Of course, this process is not complete without, after the decision taking, an analysis on the effectiveness of the taken decision, or either, if the product satisfied the initial need. Any actual sport organization needs to identify new income sources to create economic stability in long term. TV channels dispute the best moments, stadiums had been changed into entertainment centres, fans participate actively and companies use sport as vehicles of its products.

One of the most common ideas inside companies with responsibilities in sponsorship decisions, concerns the fact that this type of communication instrument has not been subject of many studies before. After all, how much does sponsorship worth? How can we prove that certain sponsorship brought benefits for the company? These are some of the most common doubts for the manager.

Methodology / Research Design / Data Analysis

Investigating influence of sponsorship in spectator behaviour was the aim of this study. It was clearly assumed the option of not studying only memory results or analysing media insertions, but trying to go further on this subject perceiving and verifying in which way consumers are influenced by sponsorship.

Regarding this goal, a study was made to 302 adepts of Sporting Clube de Portugal in the 2003/2004 season, using interviews through a questionnaire. It was verified the existence of a relation between the profile of the spectator, through the frequency of attendance to the games, the fact of being member of the club, the ownership of season ticket and the annual expenses with the club, with behaviour and purchase intentions and the perception of spectators on the sponsors.

Results / discussion / implications

Regarding spectators, it was possible to evidence through the case of Sporting Club Portugal that there are no significant differences in the way as fans classify themselves.

At the memory level, almost all fans of Sporting Club Portugal identify the main sponsor of the club, although only half of them mention the correct company name in cause. This situation is due, among other factors, to the way as each one of the three main sponsors of the club generates its participation and involvement on it.

The first conclusion related with the existence of sponsors in sport is that fans see it as a positive thing, even saying it improves their perception about the company. Also, fans will remind better the company due to the sponsorship, even considering probable to weave positive commentaries on the company in the future. Finally, at the purchase intention level the majority recognizes to be very probable to make an effort in the future to buy products from the sponsor.

When analyzed all hypothesis we could find the following:

- The more games are attended, the better become the perception of spectators on sponsor's image.
- Members of Sporting Club Portugal improve perception on the sponsor of the club in a more accented form than not-members.
- Season ticket owners, probably with a bigger frequency of assistance to the games than the ones not possessing this type of ticket, have also a better perception on sponsors.
- Members of Sporting Club Portugal consider more seriously acquiring products of the club sponsor than non-members.
- The bigger are the amount spent with the club, the bigger are the probabilities of them to consider purchasing the sponsor's products in the future.

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