

## EVALUATING FOOTBALL SPONSORSHIP: AN ATTITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

The aim of paper is to explore the relationship between fan identification and attitudes towards sponsorship. The main research hypothesis to be tested is the following: The level of fan identification will be positively related to attitudes towards sponsorship, sponsorship awareness, and purchasing behaviour

### Literature review:

Sponsorship has been defined as &the provision of assistance either financial or in-kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives (Meenaghan, 1983, p. 9), and the sport product is considered as being possibly the best vehicle for this. The issue of sponsorship evaluation, however, has generated much debate and argument in the literature (Thwaites, 1994) and sponsorship effectiveness research has yielded inconsistent findings (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). The lack of consistency regarding sponsorship definition and objectives, and the variety of methods employed to evaluate the effects of sponsorship are some of the factors responsible for the problems of evaluating sponsorship. Much of the empirical research on this topic relied on concrete data such as indicators related to product sales or stock prices (Cornwell, Pruitt & Van Ness, 2001) and into studies employing attitude research such as image, awareness, and purchase intentions (Speed & Thompson, 2000; Tripodi & Hirons, 2009; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2008). Given the economic and marketing importance of sport sponsorship, it is indeed surprising that few sponsors appear to evaluate the impact of their sponsorship investment in a systematic fashion (Davies & Tsiantas, 2008; Thwaites, 1993 & 1994, Thwaites et al., 1998) even in heavily commercialized sports like football (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2004; Thwaites,

1995).

The methodology employed for the purpose of the present study is quantitative. A questionnaire was developed based on existing literature on attitudinal sponsorship evaluation. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions (demographic, fan identification/attachment, and questions determining attitudes and behaviour towards sponsorship) and it was administered during football matches by qualified researchers. The sample consisted of fans of APOEL F.C. 402 questionnaires have been gathered, of which 367 were usable. Data analysis has been carried out through the SPSS 16.0 Statistical Package. Results obtained through descriptive analysis, Non-parametric (Mann-Whitney U test) and Spearman Correlation.

### Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions:

The vast majority of the respondents are strongly identified with their team (86.1% as illustrated in the first dimension and 88% as demonstrated in the second dimension). Moreover, 87.3% have a positive opinion about sponsorship while 75% of the respondents believe that the sponsors contribute significantly to the society. The respondents also demonstrated very high sponsorship awareness levels. 83.4% know the sponsors of their team, 84.3% are aware about their team s sponsors products and services, and 75.5% stated that they use sponsors products/services. Sponsorship seems to have an important impact on purchasing behavior for 30.6% of the respondents. Furthermore, 72.1% of the fans prefer their team s sponsors products and services when price and quality equal non-sponsors products/services.

Results also demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between fans identification with the team and several attitudes and behaviour towards sponsorship. Spearman Correlations showed that the dimension the success of my team is my own success is positively related to the impact that sponsorship has over purchasing behaviour [ $r_{i(353)} = 0.144, p=0.007$ ], and to the level of fans satisfaction with the sponsors products [ $r_{i(367)} = 0.155, p=0.004$ ]. Moreover, the respondents who scored high on this dimension of fan identification tended to have more positive opinion about sponsorship [ $r_{i(361)} = -0.174, p=0.001$ ]. In addition, Non Parametric Mann-Whitney U tests have shown that those highly identified fans tend to purposefully search for their team s sponsors products and services [ $Z(364) = -3.290, p=0.001$ ] and to use sponsors products and services more frequently [ $Z(359) = -2.919, p=0.004$ ]. Interestingly, those fans are more likely to purchase sponsors products/services, not only when their price and quality equal non-sponsors products/services [ $Z(355) = -2.828, p=0.005$ ], but even when the price is higher than non-sponsors products/services [ $Z(364) = -3.391, p=0.001$ ]. Furthermore, highly identified fans tend to demonstrate higher levels of awareness regarding the team s sponsors [ $Z(337) = -2.335, p=0.02$ ]. Almost identical results were found for the second dimension of fan identification explored in this study (When I refer to my team I say we instead of they). These findings are extremely important since they indicate that the role of sport sponsorship in achieving corporate objectives is essential. Moreover sponsorship effectiveness seems to be influenced by the level of fan identification and attachment, something that is can be taken into consideration by sport administrators and sponsorship managers when developing initiatives in an effort to increase the impact of their sponsorship arrangements.

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