

EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FRENCH SPECTATORS BEHAVIOR: HORSE LOVE AND ATTACHMENT ON EQUESTRIAN EVENTS

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Research question

Following the studies in social psychology, marketers work on the affective relationship between consumers and objects, animals, brands, in others. For example, attachment is one of the feelings of belonging to people or objects. Some researches focused on brand attachment even brand love (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Sport marketers identify and measure several points of attachment (e.g., players, level) and motives (e.g., social, aesthetics) of consumers' sport events. We can wonder if marketing researchers identify all the points of attachment of spectators' sporting event and if these points are associated in the attachment or the love concept.

We can note some sports used to an instrument in order to practice. Indeed, we cannot imagine a racecar without cars (objects) or an equestrian event without horses (animals). We suggest that this instrument allows developing the performance of the player and it is one element of sporting event. However, it seems that few researchers studied the instruments.

Consequently, the main aim of this study tends to understand how the affective relationship between spectators' equestrian event and instrument build, and more particularly the relationship between spectators and horses. Indeed, this study distinguishes attachment from love.

Theoretical background

To be discussed, organizers of equestrian events are unable to provide any information on the viewers (spectators and fans), because the majority of events are free. Therefore, they ignore the expectations of spectators. Researchers on the topic of attachment in the sports events, selected individual and collective sports (Robinson & Trail, 2005), and categorized the spectators (e.g., by gender, nationality). Indeed, marketers have been acknowledged the distinction between fans (passionate viewers) and spectators (classic viewers). Some viewers are attached to various degrees on the points of attachment. Studying the spectators, it allows focusing on relationship with the instrument.

Brand attachment even a number of consumers' affective responses to brand, in marketing literature. Researchers investigated the love feeling which involves attachment and passion. Brand love based on interpersonal love and/or attachment, in psychological literature. Ten properties (e.g., passionate desire, emotional bonding) proposed by Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, (2012) to define brand love, could be transposed into the study of horse love.

Indeed, horse was considered as an animal companion, an instrument or an avocation/equipment of the sport. As Hirschman (1994) noted, animal companions may be described as objects/products (ornaments, status symbols, people, avocation and equipment), where "animals serve to facilitate the performance of others activities, as horses with equestrian events". In this perspective, we suggest the horse (as animal, athlete, and instrument) could be one element of equestrian event.

Given these elements, the following hypotheses are being tested:

H1: Horse is one of points of attachment of equestrian event.

H2: Spectators' equestrian events like horse more as companion animal than sport avocation/equipment.

H3: Spectators' equestrian events are in love with horse.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Our qualitative methodology is based on the content analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1991) with individual and collective interviews. We collected data from 25 semi-structured interviews with ten individual interviews (professionals, equestrians (leisure/sport) and guides) and two categories of focus group (guides and equestrians). Individual interviews owed approximately one hour and focus group (each group composed five spectators) for two hours. The participants of this study must have watched at least three equestrian competitions within one year. The sample consisted of French spectators from 15 to 92 years old. Participants discussed their relationships with equestrian events, with horses, also the role of animal they perceived, in these events.

The data analysis was based on a literature review (Batra et al., 2012) with preliminary thematic and built a hierarchical structure. Furthermore, a second analysis, following an inductive approach is realized, in order to emerge new themes, if necessary. Data analysis will be applied using NVivo10.

Results, discussion and implications

Data is being analyzed. Further conclusions will be presented.

First results show that a great majority of the spectators are attached, even in love of this animal. Moreover, we note (at the moment) that the spectators define affection in various degrees (e.g., affection, attachment, love, passion) towards horse, by distinguishing the animal, of avocation/equipment and the athlete.

Scientific contribution concerns the identification of a new point of attachment: the instrument. Furthermore, research studies an animal, not still studied in a context of sports event .Moreover, this qualitative approach used to two qualitative methods, individual and collective interviews. This study may provide the stakeholders of sporting events ways to adapt their communication strategies and partnerships, in others.

References

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