

Consumer-Scepticism Towards Sponsoring and Its Impact on Sport Sponsorship

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Aim of the research/project

Sponsorships are powerful marketing tools which use the platform provided by sport events, teams or athletes to co-create value with other actors, including the sport brand itself, media, fans, and other sponsors. However, recent scandals involving professional sports, corruption of mega sport events and its governing bodies, and the vast amount of money involved may lead to a growing scepticism among consumers towards sponsoring (Kelly, Coote, Cornwell, & McAlister, 2017). Therefore, this paper aims to conceptualize consumer-scepticism towards sport sponsorships and assess its impact on both the sponsor and the sport brand.

Theoretical background

Consumer scepticism towards marketing activities has especially been studied in regard to advertising (Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005), cause-related marketing (Shruti & Julie, 2006) and electronic Word-of-Mouth (Zhang, Ko, & Carpenter, 2016), but only recently in connection with sport sponsorship (Kelly et al., 2017). Attribution theory provides a suitable background for explaining scepticism towards sponsoring.

While scepticism may be contingent upon context and specific execution strategies (Kelly et al., 2017), cognitive processing mechanisms in sport sponsoring support the notion that the perceived motive of the sponsor significantly determines sponsorship response (Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Hairong, 2004). The conceptualization of consumer-scepticism towards sponsoring in this research therefore includes both scepticism regarding the motives of the sponsors and more general aspects of scepticism within the context of sport (Zhang et al., 2016).

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

An online survey among consumers, who were invited via sport-related online communities and email, was carried out. Out of 268 respondents, 215 indicated that they are fan of a specific club from the 1. Bundesliga. Threat for common method bias was reduced by using different question types and proximally separating measures of predictors and criterion variables (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Harman's (1976) single-factor test demonstrated that none of the factors accounted for most of covariance among items.

Data analyses included four steps. First, the dimensions of consumer scepticism in the context of sport sponsorships were explored in a principal component analysis. Second, an ANOVA was conducted to test the influence of consumers' interest in football on their scepticism towards sponsorships. Third, a structural equation model using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach was estimated to study the impact of consumer scepticism towards sponsorship on fans' evaluation of the main kit sponsorship of their favourite club. Fourth, the relative importance of the scepticism dimensions depending on consumers' interest in football were assessed in a PLS multi-group analysis.

Results, discussion, and conclusion

The exploratory factor analysis over the scepticism items (KMO = 0.711) results in two components (66.9% of variance explained). The first dimension represents the individual's concern about sponsoring as a threat to the sport, its integrity and its values. The second dimension expresses scepticism due to the commercial and manipulative motives of the sponsor.

ANOVA reveals that fans of a club score (significantly) lower on all except one item in the scepticism scale. The estimation of the structural equation model demonstrates that scepticism towards sponsoring negatively influences the evaluation of a specific sponsorship ($\beta = -0.138^{**}$). Additionally, both the "attitude towards the sponsor" ($\beta = -0.314^{**}$) and the "attitude towards the team" ($\beta = -0.206^{**}$) are negatively affected by scepticism. Further, consumer scepticism towards sponsoring has a moderating effect on the influence of team identification on attitude towards the sponsor ($\beta = 0.054$; $\beta_{\text{moderation}} = -0.115$) and attitude towards the team ($\beta = 0.300^{**}$; $\beta_{\text{moderation}} = 0.108^{**}$).

The multi-group analysis shows that the sport-related component of scepticism is more important for determining overall scepticism for the group of non-fans ($\beta_{\text{non-fans}} = 0.598^{**}$) than for fans ($\beta_{\text{fans}} = 0.439^{**}$). Although, due to the small sample size, the bootstrapping approach does not identify this difference as

statistically significant, the tendency fits to the previous observation that football fans care less about the detrimental effect of sponsorships on the sport. Regarding the sponsor-related dimension of scepticism no difference between fans ($\beta_{\text{fans}} = 0.485^*$) and non-fans ($\beta_{\text{non-fans}} = 0.419^{**}$) could be observed.

The contribution of our findings is threefold: First, we demonstrate, that consumer scepticism towards sponsorships can occur either because of a general belief that the activities of sponsors destroy the values of the sport or due to mistrust in a sponsor's actual intentions. Second, our study reveals that especially consumers with lower levels of attachment to the sport are sceptical towards sponsorships, indicating that sponsors may risk their relationship to less sport-interested consumers. Third, our findings demonstrate that not only the sponsor brand, but also the team brand is negatively affected by scepticism towards sponsorships. Therefore, both sponsors and sponsees are advised to remedy the reasons for scepticism.

References

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