

# Hidden Agenda In Sports Sponsorship Decisions

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## Aim of the research

Sports sponsorship has been growing constantly over the past decades. The therewith associated professionalization results in an increasing need for strategic planning of sponsorships (Cornwell, 2008; Hartland, Skinner & Griffiths, 2005). Thus, sponsorship decisions should be derived from the corporate strategy and be compliant with the objectives of the organization (Hohenauer, 2016). However, matters are sometimes different in practice. Hohenauer (2016) indicates that the personal interests of the CEO in sport often influences the decision which property to sponsor. Empirical studies which investigate the extent to which corporate objectives and personal motives influence sports sponsorship decisions are missing. The aim of our study is to close this gap. Accordingly, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: How do sponsors evaluate the existing corporate sponsorship objectives in sports?

RQ2: What are the real and perceived individual sponsorship objectives in sports?

RQ3: How do corporate and individual sponsorship objectives influence sponsorship decisions?

## Theoretical background

A lot of research has been conducted on corporate sponsorship objectives over the past years. The main corporate objectives stated in academic literature are increased awareness, an enhanced company image, and an increase in sales or market share (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013; Hohenauer, 2016). A selection of additional corporate objectives outlined by Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013) consists of the involvement with the community, building of trade relations and goodwill, alteration of public perception, engagement in social responsibility, enhancement of employee relations, and the blockade of competition.

Individual sponsorship objectives in contrast are hardly examined in academic literature. Cornwell (2008) mentions enthusiasm of the CEO towards a particular sport. Hohenauer (2016) describes the CEO's interests in sport as individual objective. Hartland et al. (2005) formulate personal objectives vaguely as management interests. Referring to management literature, as suggested by Cornwell (2008), personal motives of managers might consist of prestige, achievement, success, job security, influence, identification, power etc.

Cornwell (2008) indicates sponsorship decision-making is influenced by both business objectives and personal interests. Hartland et al. (2005) argue that the corporate objectives are the main priority nowadays while personal objectives have the least if any impact on sponsorship decisions. In contrast, a sponsorship expert interviewed by Hohenauer (2016) stated that many decisions are based just on gut feeling, because the CEO fancies the sponsorship. These contradicting statements illustrate the need for further empirical investigation within this subject.

## Methodology and research design

The examination of managers' personal interests and their influence on sponsorship decisions is challenging (Cornwell, 2008). That is why we use the Delphi method as appropriate research tool. The Delphi method can be applied for "distinguishing and clarifying real and perceived human motivations" (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, p. 4). It is therefore regarded as a proofed tool for uncovering hidden personal motives. We apply a qualitative approach of the Delphi method to identify the sponsorship objectives and their influences on the sponsors' decision-making. Psychological effects as opinion leadership or peer pressure are excluded due to the anonymity of the experts (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Another advantage of the Delphi method consists of the feedback edited and reflected by the monitor team. The feedback stimulates cognitive processing and triggers a reconsidering of the experts' first-time answers. The responses are of higher quality than these of a one-time questioning. A highly accurate application of the Delphi method is identified as critical success factor for data collection. We plan to interview a sample of approx. ten experts in the field of sports sponsorship in three Delphi rounds. The experts have already ensured their participation.

## Results

We are not able to provide empirical results of this study yet. The Delphi study is conducted in June 2017. We will complete the research report by the end of July. Thus, the project along with its empirical results will be presented assuredly at the conference in September 2017.

## References

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