

Good Or Bad: How Do People Form Their Judgements On Sponsorship-Fit?

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Aim of the research

Fit represents a theoretical concept that is commonly used with regards to the processing of sponsorship-based stimuli. Even though fit acts as a meaningful predictor of effects, the research on how recipients form their opinion on fit is still sparse. Insufficient insights have substantial implications for managers as they have to choose sponsorships or might have to work with sponsorships that lack apparent fit (Olson & Thjømøe, 2011). Furthermore, a recipient that is confronted with a sponsorship that has a low level of fit, might experience a state of reactance which can lead to reactions that counter the desired sponsorship outcomes.

Therefore it is the aim of this research to contribute to the deeper understanding of the basis of sponsorship-related fit and additionally shed light on potential reactance towards low levels of fit.

Literature review

Numerous studies provide evidence for the positive effects of high levels of perceived fit. For instance, fit was found to have a positive relationship with sponsor recall and recognition, as well as attitudes towards the sponsorship and sponsor (for an in-dept overview see Olson & Thjømøe, 2011). However, fit is often examined as an overall-fit and only few studies try to explore underlying dimensions. Olson and Thjømøe (2001), for example, found four dimensions that could significantly predict overall-fit, whereas the adjusted explained variance was 33% to 34%. It is assumed that this value could be considerably higher if multifaceted predictors that integrated various sponsorship contexts were incorporated. Furthermore, it has to be emphasised that fit is interpreted differently throughout the literature. Narrow definitions focus on similarities between sponsor and sponsee whereas broader definitions interpret fit as how suitable the link between sponsor and sponsee is perceived (e.g. Woisetschläger, Michaelis & Backhaus, 2010). This research integrated both point of views by referring to a concept of sponsorship fit and tries to unveil comprehensive success factors that make for a "perfect sponsorship match" from a recipient's standpoint.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

Two qualitative studies were conducted to explore predictors of sponsorship fit as it relates to the recipient's point of view. In addition, special attention was directed to the reasons why fit was perceived as low and why (or if) the sponsorship itself was rejected as a result of this.

At first, a netnography involving Virtual Sport Communities was conducted by following the research steps proposed by Kozinets (2010). In total, 651 user submitted posts were identified and analysed through qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2007). A total of 35 of the both deductively and inductively developed categories showed sufficient levels of inter-coder reliability (Cohen's kappa).

In-depth interviews with sponsorship managers were conducted as a second study to enrich the recipients' point of view with the one of professionals (i.e. managers were asked to assume the position of the recipients). Twelve managers took part in the study and represented the major concerned parties namely sponsors, sponsees and intermediate agencies. The interviews were likewise analysed through qualitative content analysis. In doing so, 25 categories showed sufficient levels of inter-coder reliability.

Results, discussion, and implications

The two studies resulted in a combined number of 39 separate categories (which need to be reviewed through future quantitative research) that influence fit as it relates to a perceived „perfect sponsorship match“ from a recipient's point of view. Several categories are highly contextual, meaning that they only apply to certain kinds of sponsorships (e.g. naming rights, uniform sponsorship). With regards to their substance, the author proposes four main groups to arrange these categories: 1. similarity between sponsor and sponsee (i.e. sponsor fit), 2. characteristics/state of the sponsor, 3. characteristics/state of the sponsee, and 4. content-related make-up (shape) of the sponsorship deal.

In addition, a few categories that were not placed in these four groups, dealt with the anticipated overcoming of resistance that was based on reactance towards low levels of fit. However, these categories also give insights on possible negative outcomes of sponsorship-related fit. The theory of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966) might be utilised to explain these outcomes as boomerang effects and should be investigated more closely in future research.

References

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