Have You Thought About The Club's Image? The Role Of Sport Club Image For The Attainment Of Sponsoring Goals

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Aim of abstract — research question

Sport sponsors have various expectations and try to achieve heterogeneous goals with their sponsorships. However, there is a clear tendency to spend more money on clubs with higher sporting success and better image. Club image is a key variable since sport managers can control their club's image more efficiently than players' motivation or sporting success, aspects that depend on many, partly unpredictable factors (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002). The empirical research is based upon a comprehensive literature review of sport sponsoring research with a focus on relevant factors for sponsorship decisions in sports. In particular, the review focuses on empirical sponsoring research that refers to sport club brands. Based on this literature review, the research is designed to analyze the effects of club image on the attainment of sponsoring goals from the perspective of sponsorship decision makers. The research questions are:

1. What kind of heterogeneous sponsoring goals can be identified?
2. How does club image affect the attainment of sponsoring goals?
3. Do those effects differentiate with regard to the sponsoring goals?

Theoretical background

In general, sponsoring literature refers to economic and psychological goals. Typical economic goals are customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer acquisition, sales and revenue increase. Psychological goals refer, amongst others, to brand awareness, image improvements, and the enhancement of employee motivation (Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004). Of course, the goals can vary depending on the sport's popularity, the sport club's success or, for example, specific strategic approaches of the sponsors. However, the development of marketing theory as a value-based and market-oriented concept demands a dynamic and strategic consideration of sport sponsoring (Demir & Söderman, 2015). Sport sponsorships need to achieve strategic goals, support customer relationship management, generate sales opportunities and provide a contribution to brand management (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005). Therefore, the attainment of sponsoring goals requires a strategic approach to enable the integration of sponsorships into the entire marketing strategy of the sponsor. With regard to those requirements, the image of a sport club is a critical factor when deciding for a sponsorship.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The empirical analysis focuses on sponsorships in different sports leagues in Germany. The research considers sponsors from basketball, hockey, handball and football clubs playing in the premier leagues. It can be assumed that those sports clubs have a profound level of organization and professional structures. The data was collected using an online survey in the 2011/2012 season. Based on available contact data and an adequate distribution over the four leagues approximately 1,800 sponsors were contacted. The survey was addressed to sponsorship decision makers in order to ensure high quality information. As a result, 155 completed questionnaires were received, i.e. a response rate of 8.6%. Although, at a first sight, this response rate might seem low with regard to the actual number of contacted sponsors, however, the contribution of 155 sponsorship decision makers must be highly appreciated since it is usually very difficult to collect such data. The majority of the sponsors are involved in basketball (57%), followed by football (15%) and handball (15%). Sponsors of hockey clubs represent 13% of the data set. Moreover, sponsors come from various branches, e.g. banking and financial services, automobile, energy, media, catering and food service industries, and the construction sector. 40% of the interviewed managers nominate board member, CEO, or owner as their position in the company, 23% belong to the executive management.

First, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed in order to identify relevant goals of the surveyed sponsorship decision makers. As a next step in the data analysis, structural equation modelling was applied to obtain insights into the relationships between sports' club images and sponsoring goals. The model was built upon the literature review and theoretical considerations of the relevance of club images for the attainment of specific sponsoring goals.

Results, discussion, and implications

Club image is a paramount factor for sport sponsorship decision makers, especially when considering the improvement of specific sponsoring goals. Sport club managers must work on their clubs' images so that sponsors are able to attain their sponsoring goals. Obviously, the clubs' success plays an important role. Nevertheless, sport managers of less successful clubs also need to work on their clubs' image. For example, they could highlight their historical successes or focus on special rivalries. In addition, sport club managers should be aware that the sponsorship decision makers' impression of the club and its ambassadors (e.g., coaches and players) is essential.

References

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