

Sport Events As A Platform For Sponsoring Engagement — A Conceptual Framework Based On Empirical Insights

Woratschek, Herbert; Buser, Markus; Schönberner, Jan

University of Bayreuth, Germany

E-mail: h.woratschek@uni-bayreuth.de

Aim of the research

The sport value framework (SVF) has adapted the service dominant logic and associated this concept of service-for-service exchange with sport events (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014). The authors propose that according to the SVF sport events have to be regarded as platforms on which various actors co-create value within a network. On the sport event platform, where different actors come together, special relationships occur within sport sponsoring activities. That will be in the centre of interest for the present study.

In sport sponsoring various actors are engaging in interactive experiences. In literature, this multidimensional approach is referred to as actor engagement (AE). It emphasizes engagement as a psychological state emerging from interactive experiences (Storbacka, Brodie, Böhmman, Maglio, & Nenonen, 2016). We thereby focus on sponsors' behavioural manifestations towards a focal sport club that go beyond the exchange of financial or non-financial benefit for the acquisition of rights in the sponsoring process. This extra engagement behaviour towards a sponsee results from sponsors' motivational drivers (van Doorn et al., 2010).

For the purpose of developing a conceptual framework around sponsoring engagement, it is crucial to understand what resources are provided and integrated by sponsors and sponsees. If we follow actor engagement literature as well as the SVF, sponsors also provide other resources beyond financial ones. For our study we want to analyse sponsors' engagement behaviour and their resource-integration beyond contractual agreements on the micro level within the dyadic relationship of sponsor and sponsee (Woratschek et al., 2014).

Review of literature

While sport sponsoring literature strongly focuses on economic and psychological objectives of sponsors, current literature lacks of explanations for sponsors' voluntary engagement and resource integration patterns on engagement platforms. Storbacka et al. (2016) define engagement platforms, as an environment where collaborating actors come together for reciprocal benefit in order to share and expand their knowledge through resource integration. Only few authors, however, have considered relationship building patterns behind sponsorship contracts (i.e. Demir & Södermann, 2015; Gobbs, 2011). These studies also focus on bilateral relationships between sponsor and sponsee and consider sport sponsoring as a relationship platform (Demir & Södermann, 2015). In the concept of the SVF these relations serve to co-create value in collaborative process (Woratschek et al., 2014). With a larger number of resource integrating sponsors network effects can be generated as they will enhance the overall value of the platform (Storbacka et al., 2016).

Conceptual framework

Based on theoretical findings of the SVF (Woratschek et al., 2014) and the shortcomings in sport marketing literature to combine the concept of engagement behaviour (van Doorn et al., 2010) with relationship approaches in sport sponsoring (Demir & Södermann, 2015), we propose to consider sport sponsoring activities as engagement where actors' engagement behaviour displays in resource integration patterns that exceed the contractual sponsoring contents. We want to examine the engagement behaviour of sponsors, in favour of the sponsee that derives the contractually governed benefits.

Therefore, we conceptualize sponsoring as a new context for engagement behaviour and describe actors' disposition. In order to support the conceptual framework an empirical study will be conducted using the Delphi method. Subsequently, sport sponsoring experts will be interviewed in a three-staged process, where in the first round semi structured interviews will be gathered and analyzed qualitatively. For the second and third round all experts are confronted with respective answers and are encouraged to give feedback on the collected qualitative data and evaluating compensated results. By that, different levels of interactive engagement behaviour through a co-creative service exchange among actors on the platform will be deducted and conceptualized for further research.

Implications

Given the paramount importance of sport sponsorship in financing sport clubs or events, the increase of the value of that specific platform is essential. Sport managers are obliged to attract resource-integrating actors and develop their business platform to add value to existing partners as well as attract new ones. For that reason, they necessarily need to understand the value co-creation of the platform and the engagement process characteristic to sponsoring. From there on, they can build on the interactive engagement patterns and demands of actors.

By better understanding sport sponsoring as an engagement platform, sport management practitioners are able to derive strategies, strengthen their relationship with other actors and furthermore build a network where all social and economic actors integrate their resources in a value co-creation process in sports. Hence, the proposed framework with practical insights gathered through the qualitative study deliver a starting point for future empirical research in sport marketing.

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