

Nature and Evolution of Paralympic Sponsors' Motives

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Aim

The aim of this study is to further analyse Paralympic sponsors' motives to question its uniqueness and specificity, in regards with traditional sport sponsorship. As the literature mainly focused on the Paralympic Games, the study focuses on the International Paralympic Committee's commercial sponsors; the Worldwide Partners (WWP).

Theoretical Background

Although Paralympic sponsorship has significantly developed in recent years, in line with what has been done with the Olympics, only very few studies and publications have focused on the topic. These publications often focus on the case of the Paralympic Games. Two categories of publications are identified. The first category addresses the « consumer » perspective focusing on attitudes, brand image and purchase intentions (e.g. Nam & Lee, 2013). The second perspective represents the firm perspective and focuses on the consequences of sponsoring parasport athletes and teams, such as the impact on stock market value (e.g. Ozturk *et al.*, 2004). Although interests in Paralympic sponsorship increase (Legg & Dottori, 2017), the motives behind firms' engagement is hardly analysed, which can appear surprising considering their critical dimension in contemporary sponsorship management (Woisetschläger *et al.*, 2017) and the specificities of parasports.

Methodology

From a methodological point of view, the aim was to identify and then categorize the motives of the six main IPC WWP. To do this, we used the Sponsorship Motive Matrix developed by Slåtten *et al.* (2017) and that comprises two dimensions: external versus internal and opportunist versus altruistic, that in turn create four quadrants: market, society, bond and clan. Three sources of information, where actions and objectives are mentioned, were used: the IPC annual reports (2010-2016; <https://www.paralympic.org/the-ipc/publications>), the website paralympic.org, and the website of WWP. Three researchers separately analysed the contents through the lens of the four quadrants of the matrix, as defined by authors themselves, to thematize and characterize actions and motives. Categorisations were then compared and discussed to reach an agreement between the researchers.

Results

The main findings tend to demonstrate a strong external orientation for the majority of the IPC WWP. This positioning is not as clear-cut for the second dimension, and it seems that this might evolve over time, depending of the length of the partnership. At the beginning, the altruistic orientation seems predominant. The claimed intention is not for instance to realise sales on specific segments or to get a direct and proportional return on investment. This description corresponds to the “Society” quadrant from the matrix and seems to correspond to the literature. Over time, the strength of the altruistic motivation seems to diminish to become more opportunistic, or strategic, in search for more marketing efficiency, without necessarily directly referring to overt commercial terms. This description corresponds to the “Market” quadrant of the Matrix. Based on the data collected, it seems that the initial motives of the WWP are close to “philanthropic” patronage. Over time, they can evolve towards cause-related marketing or corporate sponsorship. In that sense, the character of Paralympic

sponsorship seems quite relative and specific. These interpretations however need to be taken with caution considering the evolution of the relationships between the IPC and its WWP over time: relationships that tend to be progressively extended in terms of perimeter and in terms of integration within IPC programs. This situation tends to indicate a will to co-create between partners in the long-term perspective, indicating the strength of sponsors' commitment to the International Paralympic movement.

Overall, it seems that the process (moving from altruistic versus opportunistic motives) appears quite traditional (e.g. Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004), especially when considering local sport sponsorship. However, the evolution seems different in the sense that he can evolve towards either cause-related or commercial sponsorship. Yet, it is however unknown what drives one partnership towards one direction instead of the other. If this study increased our understanding of parasport sponsors' motives, its exploratory nature and the fact that the sources may not exactly reflect the intentions of the sponsorship deciders as they represent communication documents; differentiating motives from objectives (Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004). Further investigation is required, and interviews with IPC's sponsors constitute the next step for us in that direction. Similarly, a more direct comparison with Olympic sponsors' motives and objectives seem a relevant future direction for the study.

References

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