

Who Decides About Sponsorships? Exploring a Sport Sponsorship Decision-Making Model

Schoenberner, Jan; Woratschek, Herbert and Buser, Markus

University of Bayreuth, Germany

jan.schoenberner@uni-bayreuth.de

Aim

Sponsorship is an important income source for sport organizations and a relevant investment for sponsors. Sponsors go through a decision-making process about alternative sponsees prior to such an investment. Despite the relevance of this decision-making process research about sponsorship decisions is still limited (Walliser, 2003). Therefore, Arthur, Scott und Woods (1997) conceptually applied the buying center model on firm's decision-making units to get a better understanding of sponsors' decision-making process. Nevertheless, after 21 years no study took up their proposal to conduct more in-depth research about the sponsors' decision-making process. Notably there is a lack of empirical research. Therefore, we state the following research questions:

To what extent is the buying center model applicable on sponsors' decisions and how should it be modified for application to the sport sponsorship context?

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

According to Webster and Wind (1972) firm's buying behaviour is a complex process with more than one actor participating. To understand this group process one approach is to identify the roles of the actors involved. Therefore, Webster and Wind (1972) have suggested the buying center model. The buying center model describes all actors participating in organizational decision-making processes and how their behaviour differs from each other. Five different roles are defined: *user*, *buyer*, *decider*, *influencer* and *gatekeeper*. Later Bonoma (1982) added the role *initiator*. Thereby, each role can be occupied by more than one person and every person can occupy more than one role. Arthur et al. (1997) have conceptually transferred the buying center model to the sponsorship context. They have proposed the buying center may explain the sponsor's decision-making unit which leads to a deeper understanding of the sponsors' decision-making process. However, they have acknowledged that their conceptual suggestion needs further research for verification. Although there are many articles about sport sponsorship, there is still a lack of research about sport sponsors' decision-making process.

Research Design and Data Analysis

We applied a qualitative approach using the Delphi method to identify the roles of the participating actors in the sponsorship decision-making process. The paramount advantage of the Delphi method consists of the feedback edited and reflected by the monitor team. The feedback stimulates cognitive processing and triggers reconsideration of the experts' first-time answers. The responses are of higher quality than those of a one-time questioning (Häder, 2014). We interviewed 18 experts in the field of sport sponsorship in two rounds. This exceeds the critical number of experts considered necessary for a qualitative Delphi

study. Data were analysed qualitatively using MAXQDA. We derived the code system both deductively from the theoretical buying center framework and inductively from the received text material.

Results and Discussion

Our findings indicate sponsorship decisions are rarely made by one single actor. There are mostly decision-making units where various actors occupy different roles. We found four roles from the buying center model being relevant in the sponsorship context. Both *decider* and *user* were identified as identical to the original buying center model. Two roles need to be renamed due to a better adaption to sponsors' decisions. The *influencer* changes its name into *expert* and the *gatekeeper* into *coordinator*. The fifth buying center role, *buyer*, is divided in two different roles: *negotiator* and *signatory*. The role *initiator* was not found in our study. This can be explained by some experts stating that usually the property sends a proposal to the sponsor and not vice versa. Thus, the initiative emanates normally from the sponsee. However, we discovered one new role: *networker*. A *networker* establishes and maintains contacts within and outside the firm. The results show according to the buying center model every role can be occupied by more than one actor and one actor can occupy more than one role.

Based on the findings we suggest the following sport sponsorship decision-making model (SSDM) based on the sport value framework (SVF). SSDM includes the seven roles occurring in sponsorship decision-making units: *decider*, *negotiator*, *signatory*, *user*, *expert*, *coordinator* and *networker*. Our empirical research outlines networking as an important activity in the sponsorship context. Networkers have been considered central in latest approaches as the SVF by Woratschek, Horbel and Popp (2014). Networkers in sponsorship link other actors to co-create value through business and leisure activities around a sport event.

Conclusion and Implications

The initial objective of this study was to test to what extent the buying center model is applicable to the sponsorship context. The results indicate the original buying center should be modified to better explain the sponsors' decision-making process. Therefore, we implement the SSDM with its seven roles to the sponsorship context. Managers should use this knowledge to ensure the optimal staffing when making a sponsorship decision. Former sponsorship models focus mainly on dyads like the relationship between sponsor and sponsee. Consequently, the important role *networker* is neglected.

References

- Arthur, D., Scott, D. & Woods, T. (1997). A conceptual model of the corporate decision-making process of sport sponsorship acquisition. *Journal of Sport Management*, 11(3).
- Bonoma, T. V. (1982). *Major sales: Who really does the buying?* Harvard Business Review, 60(3), 111-119.
- Häder, M. (2014). *Delphi-Befragungen. Ein Arbeitsbuch* [Delphi-interviews. A workbook] (3rd ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Walliser, B. (2003). An international review of sponsorship research: extension and update. *International Journal of Advertising*, 22(1), 5-40.
- Webster Jr, F.E. & Wind, Y. (1972). A general model for understanding organizational buying behavior. *Journal of Marketing*, 12-19.
- Woratschek, H., Horbel, C. & Popp, B. (2014). The sport value framework—A new fundamental logic for analyses in sport management. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 14(1), 6-24.