



TESTING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPORT EVENT PERSONALITY AND SPONSORSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: A CASE STUDY OF A KICK-BOXING EVENT IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to test the relationship between the personality of a kick boxing event and the effectiveness of sports sponsorship. The sample of the survey consisted of one hundred and seventy nine (N = 179) spectators of an international kick-boxing event, organized by the Pan-Hellenic Kick boxing Federation, which was held in Thessaloniki, Greece. The personality of the event was measured with Aaker's five dimensional model. Three variables were used to measure sponsorship effectiveness: Attitude towards the sponsor, development of Word-of-mouth communication and Intention to purchase the sponsor's products. The results showed that all the dimensions of brand personality had significant and positive relationships with the variables that used to measure sponsorship effectiveness. Exciting and Sophisticated were the two dimensions with the highest correlations.

KEYWORDS : sport sponsorship, sponsorship effectiveness, event personality

Introduction

There have been several proposed variables in order to measure the effectiveness of sport sponsorship. Since, sales can't be directly measured, as they cannot be isolated from the macroeconomic-environment, attitudinal variables have been mainly used as indicators of sponsorship effectiveness. The main ones that have been proposed in the literature are the attitudes towards the sponsor, the development of w-o-m communications towards the sponsor and the intention to buy the sponsor's products (Nassis, Theodorakis, Alexandris, Tsellou, Afthinos, 2012; Speed & Tompson, 2000; Tsordia, Papadimitriou & Parganas, 2017; Tsordia, Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou, 2018).

As the amount of money invested on event sponsorships has been continuously increasing, the identification of the factors that influence the effectiveness of sport sponsorship is an important area (Alexandris 2012; Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2000). It has been recently proposed that the personality of a sport event can be one of the factors that influence the success of a sport sponsorship program (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). There have been very limited research so far to explore the relationship between the personality of a sport event and the development of positive sponsorship outcomes. The present study aimed to test if the personality of a kick-boxing event, measured with the five dimensions proposed by Aaker (1997) relates with the development of positive behavioral outcomes (Aaker, 1996a, 1996b; Alexandris, 2016; Carlson, Todd Donovan & Cumiskey, 2009; Funk, et al., 2016; Keller, 1993; Schiffman & Kanul, 2010).

Literature review

The identification of the factors that influence the development of sponsorship effectiveness is not an easy task. Since sponsorship is an integral part of the communication mix, it is difficult to isolate and study its impact. A second factor that makes the measurement of sponsorship outcomes particularly difficult is the fact that it is subject to the influence of irrelevant factors in the market environment (Dean, 2002). Finally, the third factor concerns the impact of exogenous variables, such as changes in the socio-economic and marketing environment. Therefore, it is difficult to assess whether the fluctuations in sales are due to a sponsorship program or changes in the economic / social environment. The main methods that companies use to evaluate the results of their investment on sports sponsorship can be summarized as follows: (a) media coverage / publicity, (b) sponsor's recognition, (c) influence on the sponsor's image – attitudes towards the sponsor, (d) development of w-o-m and e) effect on consumer intentions, (f) effect on sales (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Meenaghan, 1991; Stotlar, 2004; Tripodi, et al., 2003; Walliser, 2003).

Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) defined brand personality as "the set of human personality traits that are both applicable and relevant for brands" (p. 151). This definition proposes that a product/service can be perceived by consumers as having personality-like traits, in the same way that individuals have. The most widely accepted brand personality model has been developed by Aaker (1997), who proposed a five-facet brand personality measurement scale: (1) sincerity: a tendency of a brand to be perceived as down to earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful, (2) excitement: a tendency of a brand to be perceived as daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date, (3) competence: the degree to which a brand is perceived as reliable, intelligent and successful, (4) sophistication: the degree to which a brand is perceived as upper class and charming, and (5) ruggedness: a tendency of a brand to be perceived as outdoorsy and masculine. These facets have been used extensively in the marketing literature and have been shown to be applicable in several business (Buresti & Rosenberger, 2006; Daniel, et al., 2008; Donovan, Carlson & Zimmerman, 2005; Lim, Lee & Pedersen, 2013; Lüthje, 2004; Stankovich, 2011; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac & Pease, 2008).

Research Objectives

The present study aimed to test the relationship between event personality and:

- Attitudes towards the sponsor's products
- Development of w-o-m communications about the sponsor
- Intention to buy the sponsor's products

Methodology

One hundred and seventy nine (N = 179) questionnaires were distributed and collected at the end of a Kick Boxing event from the spectators. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first part concerned the evaluation of the personality of the event, using Aaker's (1997) five dimensional model, and the second part included the evaluation of three sponsorship outcomes: a) attitude towards the sponsor, b) word of mouth communication; c) intention to buy the sponsors' products. These scales were used in a previous study by Tsiotsou & Alexandris (2009).

Results

The analysis indicated that from the 179 spectators, 56 were women (31.3%) and 122 were men (68.2%). Regarding their age, the average age was 26.9 years old, with the youngest person being 18 and the oldest being 46 years old.

The correlation analysis showed statistically significant positive correlations among all dimensions of 'event personality' with the three outcomes. More specifically, w-o-m had statistically significant positive correlations with all the

five dimensions of sport personality: Sincerity, $r = .22$; Excitement, $r = .40$; Competence, $r = .36$; Sophistication, $r = .35$ and Ruggedness, $r = .31$. There were statistically significant correlations between the "intention to buy" and the five dimensions of sport personality: sincerity, $r = .26$, excitement, $r = .42$, competence, $r = .37$, sophistication, $r = .39$, and ruggedness, $r = .35$. Finally, there were statistically significant correlations between the 'attitude towards the sponsor' and all the five dimensions of sport personality: sincerity, $r = .20$, excitement, $r = .40$, competence, $r = .37$, sophistication, $r = .34$ and ruggedness, $r = .29$, Table 1).

Table 1 Correlations among the Event Personality dimensions and the Sponsorship outcomes

Dimensions	Attitudes towards the Sponsor	Word of Mouth	Intention to buy the sponsors' products
Sincerity	.20*	.22*	.26*
Excitement	.40**	.40**	.42**
Competence	.37**	.36**	.37**
Sophistication	.34**	.35**	.39**
Ruggedness	.29**	.30**	.35**
*.05, **.01			

Discussion

Identifying the factors that influence the development of positive sponsorship outcomes is an important task for marketers in their effort to make a profitable sponsorship investment (IEG, 2018). The present study indicated that the event personality variable is one of these factors that should not be overlooked. Previous research has proposed that products can have specific personality traits, as humans have, and these traits can determine their image and influence customers' decisions (Alexandris, 2016). In the present study we found that a personality of a sport event can influence the way that spectators perceive the sponsors of the event. All the three sponsorship outcomes used in this study were shown to be significantly related with the five event personality dimensions.

In more details, the results showed that the "excitement" dimension was the one with the highest correlations with the sponsorship outcomes. This means that sport marketers should invest on events which are perceived as fun and exciting from spectators. They should also cooperate with event organizers in order to create an exciting atmosphere in this event, which will increase the possibility of the development of positive sponsorship outcomes. The "competence" dimension was the second most highly correlated with the sponsorship outcomes. A competent event is the one that has prestige, strong image and also good competition in terms of the athletes that compete. Subsequently it is one of the factors that should be considered for sponsorship investment. The "sophistication" factor was the third one that was shown to be highly correlated with the sponsorship outcomes. A sophisticated event is the one that is perceived as "up-scale" in terms of the supporting services and "smart" in terms of using technologies to improve the spectators' experience (Alexandris, 2016). Once again these are factors that event organizers should work on.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the result of the present study showed that all the event personality factors are related with the development of positive sponsorship outcomes, it has to be noted that they are based on a single case. More events should be used in future studies in order to test this relationship. Furthermore, three dimensions of sponsorship effectiveness were used. More variables can be used in future studies such as the sponsors' image and brand associations in order to better measure brand effectiveness (Tsotsou, et al., 2014).

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