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## Promotion Processes and Sponsorship Strategies in the Marketing of a Sports Organization

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Agostino Sorbara<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The main aim of this article is to examine the effects of sponsorships on the marketing of a sports organization.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** We have used theoretical, quantitative, and documental research. A survey consisting of 14 questions was administered to Italian sports fans.

**Findings:** From the analysis of the survey it emerged that the interviewees are quite in agreement with the questions posed. Research has shown that sponsorships have benefits for both sponsors and sports organizations, fans, and appreciate sponsoring companies. Companies use sponsorships to offset the high costs of mass media advertising.

**Practical Implications:** Sponsorship has become one of the most popular tools for communication in the corporate sector, companies benefit from it with a return of image. In every corporate marketing strategy, the possibility of using sponsorships as a tool to increase the visibility of the brand must be foreseen. However, for sponsorship to be effective, it must be integrated with forms of advertising in the mass media.

**Originality/Value:** The survey aims to highlight the importance of sponsorships in the sports sector.

**Keyword:** Sponsorship, sports marketing, sport, sponsor, sport fan.

**JEL codes:**

**Paper Type:** Research article.

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<sup>1</sup> Pegaso International (Malta), e-mail: [agostinosorbara@libero.it](mailto:agostinosorbara@libero.it):

## **1. Introduction**

Sport in the last century has become more and more a mass phenomenon, involving billions of people around the world, who practice it, follow it, live it, love it. Today sport represents one of the main "industries", in 2018 the worldwide turnover represented 1.2% of the world GDP (World Bank), even if it is difficult to actually identify the total turnover, in particular that deriving from the related industries. Sporting events are a rapidly growing and evolving sector, as well as one of the most popular forms of entertainment. Major sporting events have become an important element in companies' turnover.

The protagonists of sports marketing are many, ranging from individual athletes, to federations for the development of individual disciplines, up to companies producing goods and services, which have little to do with the sporting spectacle offered, but use it as a means communication to the public (sponsorships). The world of sports marketing is wide, according to the classification of the Cherubini (2003) we have:

- a) the marketing of sporting events;
- b) the marketing of the Federations;
- c) the marketing of the Leagues;
- d) the marketing of sports clubs;
- e) the marketing of individual athletes;
- f) the marketing of sports equipment and clothing;
- g) the marketing of products and services related to sporting activity;
- h) the marketing of companies that use sport as a communicative media.

The sports clubs that have adopted a marketing plan have generated new and consistent sources of income, through the exploitation of the "match product" (season tickets, tickets, sponsors, television rights, merchandising, etc.). Specifically for this study we took into consideration the marketing of companies that use sport as a communicative media (sponsorship processes). Sport is the sector in which sponsorship has developed the most, the shares of sponsorships in the sports sector are between 50% and 70% of the total sponsorships (Lagae, 2005).

According to Shimp, the main forms of marketing communication are direct sales, advertising, sales promotion, sponsorships (Shimp, 2010). Sponsorship is defined as a form of promoting the brand associated with the concept of sport, entertainment, culture and society. It is one of the company's communication tools (Shimp, 2003). Sponsorship is the totality of market-oriented decision-making processes on the provision of money, services, know-how or support in kind to companies, organizations, individuals, groups or institutions in the area of sport, culture, charity, ecology, education or broadcasting, in order to achieve specific corporate communication objectives through the commercial and psychological potential associated with this activity (Tench and Yeomans, 2006).

Sponsorship awareness, corporate image and purchase intent must be measured in the context of sponsorship influence.

## 2. Literature Review

Sponsorship is often seen as a new form of marketing promotion (Shanklin and Kuzma, 1992), but already in ancient Greece, Olympic athletes were sponsored (Yupin and Goldfarb, 2015). Sponsorship has been defined as "providing financial or in-kind assistance to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial goals" (Meenaghan, 1983).

The growth of sports sponsorship is fueled by a greater awareness of sports organizers and companies, due to the potential offered, from the use of new technologies, and of the mass media, with advantages for both (Koronios *et al.*, 2016). The mass media have helped to increase the popularity of sporting events around the world. The commercialization and globalization of sport has led to several favorable circumstances for the sports organizations that organize the events. Sponsors have found that it is the best way to reach the masses, while the latter have identified sponsorship as the fast way to learn about products to buy. Sponsorship represents the investment of a company to create business relationships with the sports industry and individual teams (Filis and Spais, 2012).

Du Plessis *et al.* (2010), define sponsorship as the marketing tool whereby a sponsor contractually provides financial and/or other support to a property or individual in exchange for the rights to use the sponsor's name (company, product, brand) and the logo in relation to the sponsored event or activity. By investing in sports sponsorships, companies not only improve brand visibility, but also help sports organizations nurture talent. In 2011 Ngan *et al.* found that the teams' performance significantly influenced consumers' intentions to purchase the sponsors' product.

## 3. Research Methodology

Theoretical research was used for the reference literature and the definition of the surveys. Documental research was used to determine the economic value of sponsorships in the sports sector. Quantitative research was used for data collection (closed-ended surveys). The surveys were administered to sports fans. One of the advantages of quantitative research is to be able to carry out statistical analyzes. The questions in the surveys are based on sports spectator engagement, where consumer engagement is defined as "an individual's perceived interest in sport" (Shank and Beasley, 1998).

The people who filled out the questionnaire were contacted by email, informing them about the purpose of the survey, the email contained a link to which potential respondents could respond completely anonymously. One thousand people were contacted, of which 430 completed the survey.

The survey was carried out in Italy in 2019 from January to June. The survey also asked for age, and gender. The responses were organized according to a Likert scale, with values from 1 to 5, where:

- 1 = completely disagree;
- 2 = disagree;
- 3 = no answer, or neither agree/disagree;
- 4 = agree;
- 5 = completely agree.

The questions and the number of answers are shown in Table 1. After collecting the data, a descriptive statistical analysis was made, calculating, mean, minimum and maximum value, standard deviation.

#### **4. Discussion**

It is essential to consider sports marketing as a function of a sports organization. Sponsorship is a highly flexible form of marketing communication and can be tailored to a wide range of business, marketing and public relations objectives (Du Plessis, 2010). Sports clubs and organizers of sporting events rely on the sale of their television rights to which sponsorships are also linked to increase corporate profits. In 2018, the expenditure incurred by sponsors in the sports sector amounted to 65.8 billion dollars (Venturoli, 2019). The sponsorship of teams or sporting events occurs at all levels, from the smallest company or neighborhood/country events to world class teams or world class sporting event, such as the Olympics or world championships. Studies conducted by Kwak *et al.* (2011) and Bocșe *et al.* (2012) revealed that fans are emotionally attached to sport by following sporting events. Multinationals use this opportunity to associate their products with sports teams and events.

The ever increasing cost of advertising has shifted the attention of companies to sponsorship, producing a change in marketing and communication strategies leading them to look for new ways to promote their businesses. Hutchinson *et al.* (2016) believe that companies use sponsorships in different ways. In particular in the sports sector, we find three types of sponsorship:

- technical, the team is sponsored through the supply of sports equipment;
- sector, the team is sponsored through the supply of products used in sports, such as drinks, supplements, foods, diet products;
- financial, they sponsor the team by directly providing cash.

Regardless of the service covered by the sponsorship agreement, each sponsor seeks, in return for what is offered, the visibility of its brand, with the aim of increasing sales. Naturally, the sponsor before signing the contract will evaluate whether the sports subject has a marketing plan capable of delivering what is in their expectations. Sponsorship can take place in different forms:

- 1) assumption of the name of the sponsor by the sports club or sporting event;
- 2) presence of the sponsor at an event by means of signs on the sidelines or on the places where television shooting takes place;
- 3) use of clothing and sports equipment of a specific company;
- 4) affixing the name/logo of the brand on the clothing worn by the athletes and staff and/or on the vehicles used for the sports competition.

Sports sponsorship is a sophisticated, highly versatile marketing tool that offers a large audience and great potential to businesses. Sponsorships in fact allow companies to easily make their products known beyond national borders, coming into contact with potential buyers of other nationalities. Both parties involved in a possible sports sponsorship can do a cost-benefit analysis before deciding whether to actually sign a sponsorship contract. The literature cited indicated that sports sponsorship positively affects all stakeholders, both sports companies and spectators. Sports clubs receive significant financial help and viewers increase their emotional attachment to the brands that sponsor their favorite sport. Brand awareness and image are key aspects of sponsorship and how they are a highly effective marketing tool for companies (Yupin and Goldfarb, 2015). Sports sponsorship results in greater brand awareness. The answers deriving from the survey carried out provide further elements to validate these theories. Reams' (2015) exchange theory explains how sports sponsorship is effective, as sports organizations obtain funding for their events while companies benefit from sponsorships through the sale of their products and services.

Our statistical analyzes further support the idea that key factors such as a link between sponsorship and promotion of companies' products and services is effective market action. Sports sponsorship is an unforced domain in which companies are ready and willing to invest. Slowly but steadily, a strong link between sports organizations, companies and spectators develops, to the benefit of all stakeholders (Tsotsou *et al.*, 2014). Nufer and Bühler (2010) explained that the strength of the relationship determines the effectiveness of sporting events, while Zaharia (2016) showed that sports sponsorship is a co-marketing alliance. The objectives of this study were specifically set as follows:

- Recognize how sponsorship works in the minds of consumers.
- Test the relationships between the variables of effectiveness of sports sponsorship (awareness of the sponsor, corporate image and future purchase intention).

Sponsorship is often used as a complementary form of advertising. Sponsorships are therefore often combined with other promotional tools, through forms of media advertising.

## 5. Results

At the survey have responded 430 people out of 1000 requests made, equal to 43%, the average age of the interviewees was 56 years, of which 340 men equal to 79% and 90 women equal to 21%. The answers to the 14 questions are shown in Table 1. The overall average values for each question vary from 3.44 to 4.30, compared to a maximum value of 5. The average is 3.92, with a standard deviation of 0.25. These data indicate that respondents are quite in agreement with the questions posed. Seven questions, "Do you think sponsorships are fundamental for the success of sporting events?", "Do you think that the presence of famous sponsors increases the appreciation of sporting events?", "How important do you think it is to have a good feeling between the team and the sponsor?", "Do you think that a team's reputation affects sponsors?", "Do you think sports sponsorships increase the perception of sporting events?", "Do you think sporting event organizers should choose their sponsors carefully?", "Do you think that the sponsors adequately support your team?", they obtained a weight value higher than 4, compared to a maximum value of 5.

The other seven questions, "Do you think there is a good feeling between the teams and the sponsors?", "Do you think the behavior of the fans towards sports sponsorships is positive?", "Do you think sponsorships would entice you to buy tickets for sporting events?", "Do you think that sports sponsorship is sufficient for the promotion of sporting events?", "Do you think that advertising on social media increases the number of spectators for a sporting event?", "Would you buy the products sold by the sponsor?", "Do you think that the sponsors of your team have good products and services?", they obtained a weight value between 3 and 4, compared to a maximum value of 5.

In two questions "Do you think sponsorships would entice you to buy tickets for sporting events?", "Do you think that sports sponsorship is sufficient for the promotion of sporting events?", The greater number of respondents preferred not to express themselves.

The 34% of the interviewees agreed completely, while 37% agreed with the questions they answered. Overall, 71% gave positive responses. While 21% did not express themselves, and only 8% gave negative answers. After the sponsorship of a sports team, or a sporting event, the brand of the company that sponsored is improved in terms of public opinion. The satisfaction with the sponsor company is directly improved in a directly proportional way with respect to the results achieved by the sports team, or by the success of the sporting event/event.

Our study has shown that the brands that sponsor teams/events/sporting events are better known and appreciated by the public opinion, with an impact on sales. Sports teams and organizers of sporting events/events also benefit from sponsorships. Often the sponsors also provide technical support in order to increase the performance

level of the sports team, effectively increasing its competitiveness. Sponsorship programs can promote the brand name, provide an opportunity to reach a large audience, enhance the image of an event and increase customer awareness, all of which result in increased interest, as sponsorship is one mass communication tool that convinces the public to positively view a sporting event.

## **6. Conclusion**

Our study was conducted to evaluate the effect of sport sponsorship as perceived by fans, and how sport sponsorship affects sporting events, and the other way around. The following conclusions were drawn from our results:

- Sponsorship significantly affects sporting events and brand image awareness.
- Sponsorship is not only a source of financial assistance for sports organizations, it is also an important part of business promotion of their products and services.
- There are positive associations and relationships between sponsorship and promotion of sporting events.
- Sponsorship is an important part of the promotional mix of sports organizations and companies.
- Sponsorship can be a powerful tool for marketing sporting events and for promoting company products and services.
- Sponsorship is a popular medium for corporate communication.
- Sponsorship must be used in conjunction with other marketing communication tools to ensure its effectiveness.
- The growth of sponsorship programs is associated with an increase in the use of alternative ways to promote products and services.
- Sports sponsorship is important from the point of view of the public.
- The rising cost of media advertising is an important factor influencing the growth of sports sponsorship.
- Sponsorship programs are affordable.
- Decisions to select sponsors for sporting events require wise understanding and planning, also taking into account the customers' point of view.

The results showed that the involvement of sports fans had a direct positive effect on the perception of the corporate image. The results show that team attachment has a direct and relatively strong impact on the sponsors' brand image. This indicates that hardcore fans are more likely to have a positive brand image from sponsors. Team attachment has shown quite strong overall effects on both the sponsor's image and purchase intentions, which implies that highly attached fans are more likely to develop a positive image on the sponsor and express a willingness to buy their products.

Each company strives to achieve a particular image with customers, shareholders and the general public. Sport is associated with a healthy lifestyle; this association can be useful for the sponsor. Improving the corporate image is one of the most important communication objectives for corporate sponsors.

The study it found that highly attached fans are more likely to develop a positive image about their team's sponsor and consequently express a positive intention to say good things and buy the sponsor's products. Sports sponsorship improves brand image and awareness. The study has shown that sponsorships have benefits for both sponsors and sports organizations.

**Table 1.** *The effects of sponsorship perceived by fans in the promotion of sporting events*

Questions	1 Totally disagree	2 Disagree	3 No reply	4 agree	5 Totally agree	Value medium	Standard deviation
Do you think sponsorships are fundamental for the success of sporting events?	6 (1%)	7 (2%)	60 (14%)	136 (32%)	221 (51%)	4.30	0.19
Do you think that the presence of famous sponsors increases the appreciation of sporting events?	5 (1%)	15 (3%)	62 (14%)	132 (31%)	216 (50%)	4.25	0.18
Do you think there is a good feeling between the teams and the sponsors?	7 (2%)	20 (5%)	83 (19%)	204 (47%)	116 (27%)	3.93	0.17
How important do you think it is to have a good feeling between the team and the sponsor?	4 (1%)	14 (3%)	57 (13%)	174 (40%)	181 (42%)	4.20	0.18
Do you think that a team's reputation affects sponsors?	8 (2%)	29 (7%)	66 (15%)	159 (37%)	168 (39%)	4.05	0.15
Do you think the behavior of the fans towards sports sponsorships is positive?	13 (3%)	42 (10%)	78 (18%)	140 (33%)	157 (37%)	3.90	0.13
Do you think sponsorships would entice you to buy tickets for sporting events?	10 (2%)	32 (7%)	175 (41%)	138 (32%)	75 (17%)	3.55	0.15
Do you think that sports sponsorship is sufficient for the promotion of sporting events?	8 (2%)	20 (5%)	185 (43%)	148 (34%)	69 (16%)	3.58	0.16
Do you think sports sponsorships increase the perception of	9 (2%)	12 (3%)	69 (16%)	195 (45%)	145 (34%)	4.06	0.17

sporting events?							
Do you think that advertising on social media increases the number of spectators for a sporting event?	32 (7%)	65 (15%)	101 (23%)	144 (33%)	88 (20%)	3.44	0.09
Do you think sporting event organizers should choose their sponsors carefully?	8 (2%)	33 (8%)	74 (17%)	136 (32%)	179 (42%)	4.03	0.15
Would you buy the products sold by the sponsor?	19 (4%)	46 (11%)	63 (15%)	186 (43%)	116 (27%)	3.78	0.14
Do you think that the sponsors of your team have good products and services?	16 (4%)	22 (5%)	101 (23%)	173 (40%)	118 (27)	3.83	0.14
Do you think that the sponsors adequately support your team?	11 (3%)	27 (6%)	70 (16%)	145 (34%)	177 (41%)	4.05	0.15

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