Introduction

Sponsorship has become a critical strategic tool as well as an important component of business firms’ communication mix (Thompson and Quester, 2000). Meenaghan’s (1983) seminal works have contributed to establishing the legitimacy of sponsorship in the marketing literature and spawned many subsequent studies. Yet, despite multiple definitions proposed by scholars, there remains a lack of unanimous definition, each country holding on to its own (Walliser, 2003). Nevertheless, researchers agree that sponsorship involves an exchange between the sponsor and the sponsored entity, also called property, so as to afford to the former access to the communication potential benefit derived from its association with the latter.

Defining sponsorship

Early definitions of sponsorship stressed the relationship between sponsor and property, describing sponsorship as a mutually beneficial business relationship between a firm and an organization operating in the arts, sport or education realm. However, this definition was soon replaced by that put forward by Meenaghan (1991a: 36, who defined it as “an investment, in cash or kind, in an activity [sports, event, festival, fair or art in general] in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity.” Such commercial objectives were, at the time of that definition, held to include brand exposure (Otker and Hayes, 1988), so as to attract audiences’ attention (d’Astous and Bitz, 1995). Similar definitions have been developed by Cornwell (1995) and Pope (1998b).

Despite its usefulness, Meenaghan’s early definition has become obsolete as sponsorship practice has evolved. Contemporary and subsequent definitions, such as those offered by Sandler and Shani (1989) or Desbordes et al. (2004), emphasize that the support offered by sponsors is not restricted to money and may include human resources and technology as well as in-kind contributions. Likewise, the expectation of the sponsor may reach beyond exposure to include corporate image, brand image or even sales, which other communication media may not afford them (Javalgi et al., 1994). Derbaix (1995) and Erdogan and Kitchen (1998) further extended the definition of the concept by describing the property as a cultural
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Object carrying values and images of its own, distinguishing it from others (Ferrand and Pages, 1996), and able to benefit a firm that associates itself with it.

Described by some as a communication technique and by others as a tool, sponsorship appears to have become more than just a component of the promotional mix of business firms. It has evolved into a more strategic communication medium (Meenaghan, 1998b; Berrett and Slack, 1999) operating in a complex manner.

Sponsorship marketing and sponsorship-linked marketing

The notion of association lies at the core of sponsorship. It is indeed critical to sponsorship effectiveness. According to Cornwell (1995), the communication value of sponsorship remains nil until such time as the sponsor can promote the association it has developed with the property, so as to ensure it is known and understood by its target market. This typically requires the broadcast and articulation of the association by a range of leveraging activities (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Amis et al., 1999). As a result, the literature and the professional practice of sponsorship reflected the belief that sponsorship must be supported by communication activities, dubbed sponsorship marketing. Hence, sponsorship must be embedded in its own dedicated communication mix (e.g. PR, advertising, direct marketing, merchandising and packaging), to secure the full communication of the association to the target consumer market (Kuzma, Shanklin and McCally, 1993). It follows that the effectiveness of sponsorship depends on the communication mix dedicated to it. Indeed, empirical studies have demonstrated that the impact of sponsorship on recall and brand image is greater when it is fully integrated into a broader communication strategy (Meenaghan, 1991a; Walliser, 2003). Advertising, in particular, has been shown as critical in the articulation of the association message (Cornwell et al., 2005).

Far from competing with each other, therefore, advertising and sponsorship can be complementary (Meenaghan, 1991b). Their interaction may even be synergetic, each reinforcing the other and combining for better outcomes than would be possible with either alone (Pope and Voges, 1995; Levin, Joiner and Cameron, 2001). Both must be used in combination if consumers are to be made aware of the sponsor’s role (Vignali, 1997).

More recent research has alluded to a higher purpose for sponsorship, whereby it becomes not only one of the planks of the communication mix, but the very heart of the overall marketing strategy (Fahy, Farrelly and Quester, 2004). Coined “sponsorship-linked marketing” (Cornwell, 1995), this approach implies that the marketing plan should be designed around sponsorship activities, allowing brand differentiation and positioning, and ultimately delivering to the firm an opportunity for competitive advantage. That competitors would want to emulate such outcomes without necessarily spending the same budget has resulted in the rise of ambush marketing, the strategy whereby non-sponsors “pose” as sponsors in the hope of harvesting commercial benefits.

Sponsorship actors

Having defined sponsorship, it is important to understand all the different actors that participate in this process. At the most simple level, sponsorship involves:

- One or more sponsors: While some events are characterized by an exclusive and unique sponsor, many offer varying degrees of exposure to a specific number of sponsors who have acquired sponsorship rights (e.g. VISA and Coca-Cola for the Olympic Games).
• One or more properties: Sponsors may decide to support one event at a time, or to be associated with a repetitive event, a team, or teams involved in one of more competitive events (e.g. Credit Lyonnais sponsors the Tour de France as well as Judo).
• One or more target markets: Sponsors often aim to reach multiple targets, separately or together: consumers, other businesses, shareholders and potential partners (e.g. local or national sponsors are also involved in the Olympic Games, in addition to more global brands).

Research to date has primarily focused on sponsor and property, endorsing the notion of a dual and reciprocal relationship (Thompson and Quester, 2000; O’Reilly and Harrison, 2005), best described as a partnership or a strategic alliance (Farrelly et al., 2005) that benefits all parties: the property secures resources not otherwise available (Cheng and Stotlar, 1999), while the sponsor reaches commercial objectives (Rodgers, 2003) and the audience enjoys an event that would not be possible without the sponsors (O’Reilly and Harrison, 2005). Authors have stressed the mutually beneficial nature of sponsorship (Farrelly and Quester, 1997; Chadwick and Thwaites, 2004), noting that it may be further enhanced when the images of the sponsor and property are congruent (Thompson and Quester, 2000).

Professional practice suggests that sponsorship often involves further actors, with a range of agencies or facilitators assisting sponsors, properties and audiences. For example, Olkkonen (2001) identify sponsorship right holders, consultant agencies and broadcasters as three other relevant categories of actors, as shown in Figure 22.1.

In other words, sponsorship involves a lot more than the mere addition of a brand name on an athlete’s shirt (Shannon, 1999). The association between sponsor and property can create real added value, provided a genuine collaboration occurs between the two. Cheng and Stotlar (1999) compared this to a marriage between sport and business, concluding that “if the firms are only attracted by the commercial potential of sport and do not engage in a future relationship, then sport and its very essence are threatened by over-commercialization.”

Figure 22.1 The sponsorship actors and their relationships
Sponsorship categories and types

Sponsorship practice demonstrates a wide variety of conceptualizations and manifestations. This variety stems from the many possible contexts in which it can be implemented, the different types of partners and involvements that could exist and the varied approaches to its implementation.

The different contexts of sponsorship

The type of association required to underpin sponsorship is not restricted to the sport arena, although sport tends to be the context of choice for many sponsors (Farrelly and Quester, 1997). Importantly, sponsors increasingly consider a portfolio of properties, as opposed to a single one, to reach a variety of objectives.

Sport sponsorship

Sponsors have long favored sport because of its capacity to deliver exposure (Nichols and Roslow, 1994), convey strong images (Pracejus 2004), transcend cultural and linguistic barriers (Davies, Veloutsou and Costa, 2006), and allow firms to reach audiences, be they broad or narrow (Bennett, 1999). Moreover, because it rests on reality and is subject to the vagaries of athletic pursuits, the spectacle of sport offers thrill and drama, taking audiences on an emotional roller coaster (Johnston and Scherer, 2000).

This combination of exposure, proximity with the target’s interest and the richness of the content of the association has made sport the ideal medium to reach a large consumer public (Crowley, 1991). However, researchers have suggested that the effectiveness of sport as a promotional vehicle resides more in its ability to contribute to corporate image than its capacity to increase sales (Javalgi et al., 1994; Thwaites, 1994).

Other types of sponsorship

A different logic seems to be at play when sponsors support the arts (e.g. visual arts, dance, theatre and music). Orientated towards image as opposed to market share (Thwaites, 1995), arts sponsorship tends to be managed by the public relations department rather than the marketing department (Farrelly and Quester, 1997). Arts events attract a qualitatively different audience from that of sport events: older, more affluent, better educated and usually employed in more senior jobs (Meenaghan, 1998b; Quester and Thompson, 2001). As a result, arts sponsorship seems better suited to firms aiming to improve their corporate image and develop or maintain relationships with influential members of networks, by using relationship marketing and corporate hospitality (Farrelly and Quester, 1997; Quester and Thompson, 2001). Consequently, many sport sponsors also engage selectively in art-related activities, in order to broaden their appeal.

Types of partners and partnership levels

In the case of sport sponsorship, partnerships are possible with different types of properties, whether they are organizations (e.g. federations and Olympic committees), events (e.g. Olympic Games, rugby championships or tennis tournaments), teams or individual athletes. An additional proposition has been added with specific locations (e.g. stadium and training...
centre), through the process of naming, which some have described as more cost effective than traditional advertising (Clark, Cornwell and Pruitt, 2002).

Once the sponsor has selected both the context and type of sponsorship it wants to engage in, a choice remains to be made in relation to the depth of engagement. This can be conceptualized as a continuum. At one extreme, the sponsor may join a long list of companies or brands able to make mention of the property in their communications. At the other extreme, the sponsor may seek total exclusivity, via a naming right contract that all but eliminates others and provides unique access to the property as part of the marketing mix (Quester, 1997a). These increasing levels of engagement are typically reflected in the associated costs of the sponsorship fee and are often subject to protracted and ferocious negotiations, often locking parties into several years of partnership.

- **Official supplier**: By supplying the property with the product or service it provides to consumers, this type of sponsor seeks to demonstrate its expertise. However, this type of sponsorship, while showcasing the product, remains limited in its ability to deliver meaningful exposure and is usually granted little scope for on-site access for corporate hospitality and relationship building. That Hardy’s wines or Cadbury chocolates are partners of the Australian Formula One Grand Prix is more about securing exclusive sales at and around the event than it is about brand awareness or equity building.

- **Official sponsor**: Despite not contributing directly (beyond financially) to the event, this type of sponsor can often enjoy higher visibility at the event, along with access to corporate boxes and other privileges (such as meeting with athletes or artists). More frequent mentions and inclusion in programs are typical of this type of sponsorship. SingTel, the Singapore telecommunication company, sought and secured the sponsorship of the Singapore Formula One Grand Prix with a view to establishing itself on the world stage, a process enabled by the global audiences of the sport.

- **Principal sponsor**: Having contributed more than other official sponsors, the principal sponsor can typically claim more benefits. The TOP sponsor scheme put in place by the International Olympic Committee enables brands like VISA, Coca-Cola or General Electric to enjoy a greater status and recognition than other sponsors of the event.

- **Naming right sponsor**: By paying a premium, the naming sponsor can ensure that its name becomes an integral part of the name of an event or person. This allows the building of a close relationship and longer lasting learning on the part of audiences (Crowley, 1991; Desbordes et al., 2004; McCarthy and Irwin, 2000). This is in addition to all the other benefits already available to the principal sponsor. Commonly associated with stadium and other sport facilities, naming rights can also be attached to specific tournaments, competitions or teams. In Australia, for example, insurance company AAMI has successful earned naming rights in relation to a stadium in Melbourne as well as a Western Australian football team. A dramatic increase in naming rights in recent years has resulted from the realization that sponsorship clutter could restrict the benefit of the approach (McCarthy and Irwin, 2000). Investments in naming rights are often highly expensive, although they are usually associated with greater impact, at least in terms of sponsorship recall (Quester, 1997a).

### Implementing sponsorship

The sponsor must now consider how it wants to implement the association and, in particular, what form of exposure it will seek. Several methods are available, depending on the specific sponsorship under consideration:
On-site signage includes the provision of large logotypes around the field (Walliser, 1997; Lardinoit et al., 1996; Lardinoit and Quester, 2001). Hence, spectators are repeatedly and frequently exposed to the sponsor’s brand, whether they are at the event itself or at home watching it on television. However, on-field signage suffers from the very fact that audiences are otherwise engaged, as they follow the on-field performance (Walliser, 1997; Lardinoit and Derbaix, 2001). Hence, only the more involved consumers, those who want to know what the conclusion might be, are highly sensitive to on-field signage (Lardinoit and Quester, 2001).

Personal display of logo applies to athletes or team whose equipment or clothes will don the sponsor’s logo. According to Crowley (1991), this permits the identification of the sponsor at the core of the action but seems restricted in its capacity to make an impact on memory. However, Lardinoit et al. (1996) reported that such on-person logos contributed to a shift in memorization scores greater than that achieved by on-site signage alone.

Broadcast sponsorship refers to the support of one or more television programs by a sponsor willing to embed its names in the surrounding advertising context. Described in 2005 by Meenaghan, this specific form offers the opportunity to associate a brand to a program without contributing at all to the event broadcast (Meenaghan, 2005). Broadcast has now grown to become one of the most effective and potent forms of sponsorship, given its volume reach.

Corporate hospitality: Often present yet subtle, sponsors’ corporate presence aims at leveraging the investment in the form of clients and partners’ entertainment and rewards, recognition of key clients or suppliers, as well as a preliminary stage before signing a contract.

The objectives of sponsorship

Research has now produced a considerable amount of empirical findings in relation to sponsorship objectives (Meenaghan, 1998b; Dolphin, 2003). First equated to advertising (Armstrong, 1988), sponsorship has evolved from a method to simply achieve media exposure to a more sophisticated tool capable of building brand image. The capacity to determine clear objectives is of course at the core of the issue of effectiveness, since no precise evaluation of sponsorship impact can be made in isolation from its initial purpose (Cornwell, 1995; Chadwick and Thwaites, 2004). Despite this, many scholars have lamented the absence of measurable objectives from sponsors’ briefs, hampering the opportunity to accurately measure the effectiveness of sponsorship (Farrelly, Quester and Burton, 1997). In this section, therefore, we first identify the different targets which sponsors may seek to influence, before describing two main types of sponsorship objectives: marketing and corporate.

The different targets of sponsorship

One of the advantages of sponsorship lies in its capacity to reach a great variety of existing publics (Pham, 1992; Cornwell and Maignan, 1998). In her synthetic review of sponsorship audiences, Crowley (1991) identified seven potential audiences a firm may wish to reach, including consumer (Thwaites, 1995), suppliers, staff (Meenaghan, 1991a), the general public, local communities, business networks and partners (Meenaghan, 1991a), as well as shareholders. Sport appears particularly suited to reach several types of audiences at once. For example, Quester and Farrelly (2005) described how the Tour de France, one of the longest-running sponsorships in the world, was initially devised to win consumers over, but has evolved into a yearly opportunity to build up the network of Credit Lyonnais branches around
the country, firm up connections with the local business community in each of the villages or cities where the Tour stops, and reward and motivate all staff who can participate and experience the Tour (Quester and Farrelly, 2005).

The marketing objectives of sponsorship

Researchers have converged around the notion that sponsorship can contribute to the building of brand equity (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Irwin, Lachowetz, Cornwell and Clark, 2003; Barros and Sylvestre, 2006), most notably by enhancing brand image (Chien et al., 2005). To understand how sponsorship can contribute to brand equity and more broadly to the overall marketing objectives of the sponsor, this section will detail a series of successive steps in brand building, namely brand awareness, brand positioning, brand image and attitudes, and sales.

Brand awareness

By avoiding other communication channels prone to cluttering, sponsorship may offer some degree of exclusivity in relation to key consumers (Kuzma et al., 2003). Hence, the property acts not so much as a communication medium as it does as a supporting platform where the sponsor can display its brand (Nichols and Roslow, 1994). Consequently, the media coverage which the property can generate becomes a key criterion for sponsors to select it (Thwaites, 1995). However, as noted by Meenaghan (1983), such media exposure of the property is a necessary but rarely sufficient step to ensure the awareness of the sponsor. Hence, sponsors must first ensure that they secure appropriate levels of brand exposure as part of the sponsorship to generate desirable levels of brand memorization (Quester, 1997a; Pruitt, Cornwell and Clark, 2004). Brand memorization is often the most cited objective sought by sponsors (Crowley, 1991; Quester, 1997a).

Although Cornwell, Roy and Steinard (2001) suggest that brand awareness follows naturally from sponsorship, any increase in awareness achieved from sponsorship may depend on the awareness enjoyed by the sponsor prior to the sponsorship operation. Hence, those sponsors who are already best known will benefit more than less-known ones (Lardinoit and Nagard-Assyag, 2004). Indeed, Walliser (1994) believes that, given consumers’ limited capacity to memorize information, any increase enjoyed by one sponsor is achieved at the expense of another, a notion consistent with the idea of “share of mind” (Easton and Mackie, 1998), and endorsed in the case of sponsorship by Lardinoit et al. (1996).

Importantly, the specific choice of sponsorship, related to the type of property or the location of the event, may enable sponsors to create differentiated awareness in specific markets. For example, community-based sponsorships, aimed at the grass-roots level and local areas, can create a strong community-based spirit that benefits a local brand. When Coopers, an Adelaide family brewery, sponsor the Norwood Red Legs, they do so to reinforce their local value to consumers from that specific Adelaide suburb. Likewise, national sponsors, like Australian banking institution Wespace, who become involved in a global event such as the Olympic Games, can often lift their awareness and status in their domestic market.

Brand positioning

The great diversity of sport activities within and across national borders offers sponsors an almost infinite array of positioning options, either by associating their product to the sport
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itself or by leveraging the values typically associated with the sport (Lardinoit and Nagard-Assayag, 2004). Indeed, the identification of the company as a key sponsor of a sport can be the cornerstone of the brand positioning (Cornwell, 1995; Cousens and Slack, 1996; Cheng and Stotlar, 2000; Farrelly and Quester, 2003), as well as a source of differentiation (Ferrand and Pages, 1996; Quester, 1997a).

Whether it is to reinforce a current positioning or to reposition a brand (Ferrand and Pages, 1999), sponsorship can often help sponsors seeking to align their image with that of the property (Meenaghan, 1994; Fahy et al., 2004). In that sense, such positioning can also be seen as one intermediate objective in the building of a broader brand image, as well as in the fostering of favorable attitudes.

Brand image and attitudes towards the brand

Image transfer from the property to the sponsor’s brand is without doubt the most sought after benefit of sponsorship (Javalgi et al., 1994; Meenaghan, 1999, 2001a; Meenaghan and Shipley, 1999; Christensen, 2006). Indeed, empirical evidence has confirmed the occurrence of such image transfers as a result of sponsorship (Otker and Hayes, 1988; Nebenzhal and Jaffe, 1991; Meenaghan and Shipley, 1999). As a social phenomenon, events and properties hold a particular meaning, in terms of associated beliefs, symbols and emotions, in their defined social sphere (Ferrand and Pages, 1999). Hence, each property, just like each brand, projects onto its own audience its own set of values and symbols; in short, its own image.

That image is the sum of all beliefs, ideas and impressions created by the brand, and stored in consumers’ memory. Sponsorship, therefore, is a tool that allows the building of an image by activating secondary associations with the brand by linking it with an external party, replete with its own values, symbols and emotions (Roy and Cornwell, 2004). However, while subject to the influence of these secondary associations, this image is far from fully modified or modifiable. The relative permanence of brand image stems in part from consumers’ selective perceptions, whereby consumers attend only to the information that “fits” with their pre-existing view. Hence, while it remains one of the most sought after objectives of sponsors, image transfer does not naturally flow from sponsorship. Rather, a set of conditions are required, not least a degree of articulation with the property (Cornwell, 1995; Cornwell et al., 2005), or a congruence or perceived fit between sponsor and property (Johar and Pham, 1999; Fleck and Quester, 2007).

The issue of congruence or fit becomes particularly complex when considering that many properties are sponsored by a collective of brands, just as brands tend to manage an assortment of sponsorships, as previously mentioned. Achieving a coherent set of perceptions requires that additional consideration is given to complementary or at least compatible images and associations. Indeed, some properties, such as the French Federation of Tennis, actively seek to recruit sponsors for whom belonging to a select and highly meaningful network of firms will represent an additional value, a benefit which can only be delivered if long-term relationships, as opposed to opportunistic agreements, are established with sponsors.

Ferrand and Pages (1999) defined an event as a social fact, a “place” where groups gather to celebrate together a sport or cultural spectacle. No event, therefore, can be neutral: it must generate reactive emotional responses and is imbued with meanings from all members of the audience (Grimes and Meenaghan, 1998; Fahy et al., 2004). This is how events develop their own unique sets of attributes that contribute to the formation of attitudes towards them (Chien et al., 2005). Attitudes towards the event are a summary of experiences leading to general favorable or unfavorable predispositions towards the event.
By associating itself with an object valued both symbolically and affectively by the target audience, the sponsor seeks to elicit positive affects and to appeal to consumers’ goodwill (Masterton, 2005). Hence, the main benefit of a sponsorship campaign should be able to be measured in terms of attitude change (Crompton, 2004). In other words, the combination of the event image and of the event experience enjoyed by the consumer should result in an attitudinal benefit for the sponsor, in the form of a general cognitive and affective appreciation of the brand by the consumer (Gwinner and Swanson, 2003). Empirical support for increases in attitude scores as a result of a sponsorship activity has been reported in the literature (Speed and Thompson, 2000; Meenaghan, 2001b; Roy and Cornwell, 2004).

**Purchase intentions and sales**

The ultimate purpose of all marketing endeavor is an increase in sales (Meenaghan, 1983; Crompton, 2004) or an increase in the value of the company’s stock (Cornwell et al., 2001). Sport sponsorship offers sponsors very privileged access to a group of consumers who pay attention to what is related to their key focus of interest (Dolphin, 2003). As a result, sport sponsorship is often used to persuade the audience to move from non-consumers or occasional consumers to regular and loyal users of the sponsor’s products or services (Garland, MacPherson and Haughey, 2004).

While sponsorship may be valuable to create suitable conditions for future sales (Crompton, 2004), it can also be used to generate sales more directly, as when exclusive rights to sell the product on the site of the event are secured by the sponsor (Meenaghan, 1983). Similarly, offering an opportunity to sample the product on the site of the event can also boost sales by consumers after the event (Meenaghan, 1998b; Crompton, 2004). However, in most instances, it remains difficult to establish a direct causality between sponsorship and sales. Researchers have therefore relied on an intermediate indicator, purchase intentions, to measure the impact of sponsorship on consumers’ product choices. Many studies have measured purchase intentions in relation to sponsorship, with mixed results. Some experimental studies have demonstrated a positive link between sponsorship and purchase intentions (e.g. Pham, 1992; Shanklin and Kuzma, 1992; Quester and Farrelly, 1998; Bennett, 1999; Becker-Olsen, 2003) whereas others do not show any relationship between sponsorship and purchase intentions (e.g. Pitts and Slattery, 2004).

**The corporate objectives of sponsorship**

Beyond the commercial and market-driven considerations, sponsorship can also be conceptualized as the means to engage with various other stakeholder groups, both within and outside the firm, or as a platform to affirm a specific position within society or a variety of community groups. These types of corporate objectives have long been neglected in the sponsorship literature but are becoming more prevalent in justifying ever-increasing sponsorship budgets. This section discusses the three main stakeholder groups which sponsors may wish to communicate with, over and beyond their consumer target markets.

**Internal marketing**

While research has identified consumers as the prime target of sponsors’ efforts, several authors have noted that sponsorship can also be used to enhance staff motivation and job satisfaction (Vignali, 1997; Grimes and Meenaghan, 1998; Pope, 1998b). By building staff
engagement around a common project, such as the support of a cause, or the preparation of a boat to be raced in a prestigious competition, or by offering to best-performing staff privileged access to the property, sponsorship can influence staff productivity, decrease absenteeism and improve morale more generally (Irwin and Sutton, 1994; Chadwick and Thwaites, 2004). Hence, as suggested by Gardner and Schuman (1987), sponsorship may help to share or reshape the organizational culture of the sponsor, reinforce its core values and develop a team spirit.

**Relationship marketing**

A business never operates in isolation from other businesses. Whatever its final consumers, the company must develop and nurture a myriad of relationships in its attempt to design, manufacture and distribute its product or services. In addition to the immediate network of firms with which it must cooperate to deliver to its target market, a firm must also contend with opinion leaders, the media as well as politicians, who all may hold considerable influence or power over the activities a firm engages in. These multiple and diverse relationships must all be developed and maintained, despite the few hard goals that can be measured. Sponsorship can assist in this endeavor, by creating the opportunities for key stakeholders to be invited as special guests to a sport event, a cultural show, or any other property-related performance. Each of these invitations may lead to informal conversations when the sponsor can, at the very least, explain its position on a number of issues, without the risk of being accused of seeking to gain undue influence (Meenaghan, 1983; Quester, 1997b; Vignali, 1997; Pope, 1998b; Farrelly and Quester, 2003).

This practice, also known as corporate hospitality, can become the most beneficial of all elements of a sponsorship campaign, where access to the star athletes or champions, and proximity to the finish line or goal can represent a valued opportunity for the building of the type of relationships both parties can rely on and build upon (Pruitt et al., 2004). Scholars have commented about the potential for sport sponsorship to create social bonds, empathy and complicity, which can lead to solid business collaborations (Cousens, Babiak and Slack, 2001).

**Corporate social responsibility**

In some industry sectors, such as liquor or tobacco, the image of the firm as a good corporate citizen is one that simply does not appear believable to many consumers. Firms operating in these contexts, and those who have been the subject of adverse criticism before or wish to prepare themselves for the eventualty of a crisis in the future, have been considering sponsorship as the means to build (or rebuild) their battered image.

Meenaghan (1983) was the first to point to the capacity of sponsorship to break through consumers’ increasing skepticism towards marketers. As they turned away from advertising and its increasing incapacity to offer an uncluttered voice to consumers, sponsors aimed to illustrate their commitment to causes or communities, to signal their intentions to “give back” and to enter into a dialogue with opinion leaders and secure the goodwill of the public for their activities and behavior. Research in this area has spanned many countries, merging several bodies of literature (Sandler and Shani, 1989; Shanklin and Kuzma, 1992; Javalgi et al., 1994; Cousins and Slack, 1996; Stipp and Schiavone, 1996; Quester, 1997a; Amis et al., 1999).

This effect, however, may well be more complex than previously thought: For example, Javalgi et al. (1994) and d’Astous and Bitz (1995) questioned whether sponsorship could
provoking such deep change in the corporate social responsibility (CSR) image of the sponsor. For example, they did not find a linear and automatic response in corporate image and the boost in corporate image is, according to these two authors, commensurate with what it was prior to the sponsorship.

One of the most unfortunate outcomes of the potential CSR benefits of sponsorship has been the targeting of sport properties by firms seeking to redress criticism of their negative social impact. Reminiscent of the days when tobacco firms targeted sport as an outlet for conveying advertising messages, fast food brands or firms involved in "unpopular" industries, like pharmaceuticals or genetic engineering, may perceive sponsorship as the means to regain some credit in the minds of consumers. This poses a difficult challenge for sport properties as they contemplate whether such an association may harm their own standing in the minds of consumers.

Conversely, a related issue involves the possible damage done to a brand when the sponsored entity spawns scandals, as when drug taking or corruption occurs, or when a sponsored athlete comes into disrepute for his off-field behavior. Golfer Tiger Woods' womanizing, for example, had more concrete consequences than just tabloid stories: some of his sponsors dropped him while others who had contemplated supporting him withdrew.

**Conclusion: the important but forgotten role of emotions**

Thirty years of research have transformed sponsorship research into a mature and well-established field of study. Its objectives have evolved, from awareness to image building, trial motivation or CSR manifestation. We now know that sponsorship can be used in a variety of ways, to reach a variety of publics, to fulfill a variety of objectives.

Far from being like advertising, but deprived of a message, sponsorship is seen to be able to work at a more subtle level, creating associations and meanings which, if well conceived by marketers, can benefit the brand. In fact, recent research acknowledges that sponsorship has grown away from a merely tactical tool to a strategic one.

When considering the marketing objectives of sponsorship, McDonald and Shaw (2005) have commented that sponsors no longer seek to build an image with the view of winning their consumers’ minds. Rather, sponsors aim to target their hearts, and to communicate emotions before they communicate ideas (Nicholls, Roslow and Dublish, 1999). By addressing consumers through an activity they often relate to with passion, sponsorship offers an opportunity to build an affective bond (Meenaghan, 2001b), by definition less open to direct competition than rational arguments about the merit and attributes of the product or brand.

The connection with the target, via the emotional experience of a game or show, is harder to emulate, longer lasting and resonates better with consumers who are increasingly skeptical about marketing messages and practices. Indeed, in an extensive study undertaken in France and Australia, Bal et al. (2009) showed that both valence and intensity, key emotional dimensions, were related to both memorization and attitudinal responses towards sponsors. Indeed, this research suggested that beyond the actual management of the event itself, it was the experience that needed to be conceptualized and managed for the benefit of both audiences and sponsors. To the extent that greater intensity of emotion can mediate sponsorship effectiveness, experiential marketing would appear to have much to contribute to the sponsorship domain.

Sponsorship offers marketers many opportunities to connect in a unique manner with a multitude of audiences. Research has only just uncovered the tip of the iceberg and much remains to be explored, hypothesized and validated in relation to this highly visible yet only partially understood medium.
References


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