

**We Play The Same Game, But Do We Share The Same Passion?
A Comparison of French And Australian Emotional Reactions During Sport Events**

Charles Bal, Université Paris-1 Panthéon Sorbonne /The University of Adelaide –
charles.bal@adelaide.edu.au

Pascale Quester, The University of Adelaide – pascale.quester@adelaide.edu.au

Carolin Plewa, The University of Adelaide – carolin.plewa@adelaide.edu.au

Abstract

Despite their omnipresence in sports events and their key role in attracting patrons to sporting events, sport-related emotions have not been extensively studied. Examining the two dimensions of valence and intensity, this paper compares the emotional reactions of two groups of French and Australian spectators during two major events of the world tennis calendar: Roland Garros and the Australian Open. This paper provides evidence that French and Australian patrons experienced comparable emotions, and explains the differences observed. Contrary to our expectations, data reveal that emotions affect the formation of attitude toward both events differently.

Keywords

Sport, Fan, Event, Emotion, Cross National

We Play The Same Game, But Do We Share The Same Passion? A Comparison of French And Australian Emotional Reactions During Sport Events

Introduction

Sports events play a central role in modern societies. Whether we consider them as entertainment, business opportunities, inspiration for physical and mental strength, or even social binds, sports have become embedded in today's social intercourse. Indeed, sports events have progressively become a *place to be* for brands willing to address consumers outside of the traditional, unidirectional and impersonal advertising context. Indeed, since they can convey strong images (Pracejus, 2004) to large audiences as well as targeted consumers (Bennett, 1999), sports have become a privileged set of references for local companies and multinationals' communication campaigns. Consequently, it has also become a familiar area for academics, particularly for those investigating the tenets of the sponsorship persuasion process (Rifonet *al.*, 2004).

Specifically, sports events constitute an ideal framework to investigate emotions from a consumer behaviour perspective. Indeed, be it based on collective performances or individual achievements, a sport event offers a wide array of emotions, with variable degree of intensity and valence. As summarized by Zillmann and Paulus (1993, p. 604): "*sport generates fandom that is more intense, more obtrusive, and more enduring than it is for other forms of entertaining social activities without direct participation in the spectated events*".

Despite this evidence, brands willing to invest in sponsorship keep ignoring the emotional content of events in their decision-making process. This may be due to the perceived elusiveness and volatility of sport emotions, as opposed to hard facts, such as attendance profile and event media coverage (Kuzmaet *al.*, 2003; Thwaites, 1995). However, considering the global appeal of major sports events and the universal nature of emotions (Izard, 1977), one could expect that the emotional responses elicited by a sport event may well be the common factor of sport enthusiasts from all over the world, regardless of their cultural background. Demonstrating that two similar events happening in two different countries can trigger similar emotional reactions may thus help positioning sports-related emotions as a variable of interest for both event organisers and potential sponsors.

This paper presents the results of an empirical study, aimed at (1) empirically assessing the universality of emotions by comparing the emotional responses of French and Australian spectators during two similar major tennis events: Roland Garros and the Australian Open, and (2) confirming the impact of emotions on the attitude towards the event, which is acknowledged as a strong predictor of sponsors' appreciation (Bal, Quester and Plewa, 2009). The results are expected to contribute to the literature dealing with emotions and cross-cultural differences, with a particular focus on sport event management and sponsorship. Using Mehrabian and Russell (1974) continuous approach for emotions, hypotheses are presented that compare both audiences' emotional responses and their influence on attitude toward the event. Following the development of hypotheses, the research methodology is detailed and results are discussed. The paper concludes with future research directions.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Poels and Dewitte's (2006) meta-analysis of emotional measurements in advertising emphasizes the existence of two main approaches to measure the emotional phenomenon: the discrete (Izard, 1977) and the continuous approach (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The discrete approach, which considers every emotion as a subtle combination of several basic emotions (Izard, 1977), is particularly relevant to researchers trying to assess the consequences of a (group of) particular emotion(s) on a dependant variable. However, recent neurological developments question the idea that specific emotions rely on individual neuronal substrates (Davidson, 2003), compromising Izard's assumption of basic emotions.

As an alternative, Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) continuous approach to emotions suggests that every emotional response can be represented on a tridimensional basis, made of pleasure (i.e. valence), arousal (i.e. intensity) and dominance (i.e. feeling of control over the emotional reaction). This continuous approach is relevant when investigating the consequences of an overall emotional response, instead of a particular emotion. Even though these three dimensions maximise the restitution of the variance of any emotional response, several studies have established that intensity and valence are sufficient to represent a broad spectrum of emotional responses in most situations (Derbaix and Poncin, 2005).

Given the limitation of the discrete view of emotions and the potential offered by the continuous approach to assess separately emotional intensity and valence, Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) approach was deemed the most appropriate to conceptualize the emotional phenomenon in our study. Consequently, our research hypotheses consider a bi-dimensional view of emotions, based on valence and intensity.

Hypotheses Development

As a social phenomenon, every sponsored property has its own symbolic and affective content (Ferrand and Pages, 1999) that can be used as differentiation lever. In the sport context in particular, events constitute a reservoir of affects made of happiness, surprise, satisfaction and disappointment, affording consumers a global affective experience that attracts and retains them (Bal *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, in addition to these event-related emotions, one should also consider a more cultural factor, acknowledging that spectators from different countries can experience similar events differently. Then, any differences in emotional responses of the patrons could be attributable to both event- and cultural-related factors.

In tennis, Roland Garros and the Australian Open tournaments share a number of similarities – relating to the sport (organization, number of players, stakes), media (attendance profile, expected broadcast) and marketing (same publicity, tournaments promotion) aspects of the event. They also target comparable western audiences (French and Australian). While there is no doubt that these two events are marketed differently and attended by different people, the universality of the emotional phenomenon (Izard, 1977) would support that similar emotional responses should be expected during both events. Hence, our first two hypotheses state:

H1: Patrons from Roland Garros and the Australian Open report similar levels of particular emotions.

H2: Patrons from Roland Garros and the Australian Open report similar levels of emotional valence and intensity.

Furthermore, given that emotions constitute the main reason to attend live sports events (Madrigal, 2001), we can expect patrons' emotional responses to shape their overall attitude toward the event, with no apparent reason for different influences between French and Australian patrons. Hence, our third hypothesis:

H3: Emotional intensity and valence positively affect the attitude toward the event, and this equally for the patrons of Roland Garros and the Australian Open.

Research Methodology

To address our hypotheses and allow for comparisons, two identical data collections were held during two of the most important events of the world tennis calendar: Roland Garros 2008 ($N_1 = 437$) and the Australian Open 2009 ($N_2 = 375$). Data was collected during the first five days of each event, using a mall-intercept technique. Each construct was measured using previously validated multi-item scales, after three independent judges had translated them from English to French.

Emotional responses were measured using Christensen's (2006) scale, asking respondents to indicate the extent to which (from 0 to 6) they felt a list of 10 emotions (5 positive, 5 negative), while watching tennis matches. This scale has been developed in the specific context of sponsorship and proposes sport relevant emotions only. Factor analysis led to the selection of 7 out of these 10 emotions, forming a set of positive (*Enjoyment, Happiness, Joy*) and one of negative (*Sadness, Sorrow, Disappointment*) emotions. Emotional intensity was obtained by summing weighted positive and negative emotions; while emotional valence was obtained by withdrawing weighted negative emotions to weighted positive emotions. These composite scores reflected and measured the emotional response elicited by the sporting aspects of both events, as opposed to their commercial aspects.

Attitude toward the event was measured using Speed and Thompson's (2000) 'Personal Liking of the Event' scale, developed in the context of Olympic sponsorship. This four item seven-point Likert scale presents a satisfactory reliability for the Australian Open ($\alpha = 0.72$) and a more modest one for Roland Garros ($\alpha = 0.66$).

Results

Our first hypothesis proposed that patrons from Roland Garros and the Australian Open should report a similar experience of 10 particular emotions. Table 1 presents the results of the independent-samples t-tests we conducted to compare emotional responses between our two samples. In particular, similarities and differences were tested in relation to individual emotions as well as the valence and intensity of the overall emotional response.

As shown in Table 1, data reveal that seven out of the ten considered emotions presented significant differences between our two samples. A globally higher experience of all negative emotions was reported by French patrons, while Australian patrons described higher levels of enjoyment and happiness. However, despite significant differences, deltas between French and Australian's emotion means appear moderate, as they are lower than half of the standardized deviation for the majority of emotions. Consequently, H1 is only partially supported.

Table 1 – Results for hypotheses 1 and 2

	Roland Garros Means (Std Dev.)	Australian Open Means (Std Dev.)	Δ	t-tests & probabilities
Enjoyment	4.520 (1.293)	4.920 (1.045)	- 0.400	t = 4.847**
Joy	4.050 (1.446)	4.210 (1.364)	- 0.160	t = 1.613 (p > 0.05)
Happiness	3.870 (1.377)	4.470 (1.176)	- 0.600	t = 6.611**
Hope	3.300 (1.774)	3.270 (1.903)	+ 0.030	t = 0.233 (p > 0.05)
Trust	2.580 (1.774)	2.650 (1.955)	- 0.070	t = 0.524 (p > 0.05)
Disappointment	2.230 (1.859)	1.400 (1.666)	+ 0.830	t = 6.758**
Worry	1.580 (1.805)	0.920 (1.315)	+ 0.660	t = 6.016**
Sorrow	1.370 (1.676)	0.620 (1.204)	+ 0.750	t = 7.314**
Anger	1.190 (1.736)	0.710 (1.319)	+ 0.480	t = 4.492**
Sadness	1.100 (1.526)	0.500 (1.054)	+ 0.600	t = 6.610 **
Valence	1.431 (0.814)	1.637 (0.908)	- 0.206	t = 3.418**
Intensity	2.840 (0.972)	2.843 (0.921)	- 0.003	t = 0.048 (p > 0.05)

** Significant difference at a 1% level

Our second hypothesis suggested no significant difference in terms of emotional valence and intensity between patrons from Roland Garros and the Australian Open. As expected, data do not reveal a significant difference of emotional intensity between our two samples ($t = 0.048$; $p > 0.05$). However, a small ($\Delta = - 0.206$) but significant difference in terms of valence emerged ($t = 3.418$; $p < 0.01$). Hence, H2 is partially supported.

Our third hypothesis proposed no significant difference between the groups in relation to the effect the emotional experience has on the attitude toward the event. This hypothesis was tested by comparing two structural equations models (Roland Garros vs. Australian Open) using maximum likelihood estimations. As depicted in Table 2, emotional valence (S.E.: 0.373; $p < 0.001$) and intensity (S.E.: 0.348; $p < 0.001$) contribute similarly to the formation of the attitude toward the Australian Open. In the context of Roland Garros, however, emotional intensity (S.E.: 0.435; $p < 0.001$) is shown to have a much stronger influence on the attitude toward the event than valence (S.E.: 0.209; $p < 0.001$). Hence, H3 is rejected.

Table 2 – Results for hypothesis 3

	Roland Garros S.E. (p)	Australian Open S.E. (p)
Valence → Attitude toward event	0.209 ($p < 0.001$)	0.373 ($p < 0.001$)
Intensity → Attitude toward event	0.435 ($p < 0.001$)	0.348 ($p < 0.001$)
X² ; ddf ; probability	6.968 ; 3 ; 0.138	7.303 ; 4 ; 0.121
RMR – RMSEA	0.034 – 0.041	0.040 – 0.047
GFI– AGFI	0.994 – 0.976	0.992 – 0.971

Discussion and Future Research

There is no doubt that sports events convey a broad range of affects, with varying degree of emotional intensity and valence (Broach, Page and Wilson, 1995; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003). However, research on these emotions has remained limited to date. From a sponsorship persuasion perspective, few studies have actually tried to assess the effects of sports emotions (Christensen, 2006; Pham, 1992; Walliser, 1996). This lack of consideration for the emotional responses elicited by the event is surprising, given that sport sponsorship has been described as an indirect form of persuasion, relying on the fundamentally affective relationship that exists between the consumer and the sponsored property (Crimmins and Horn, 1996); and exerting an emotive rather than cognitive influence on consumer behaviour (Quester, 1996).

This paper tried to address this gap by comparing emotional reactions of two groups of tennis spectators who attended Roland Garros (France) and the Australian Open respectively. While our data revealed a number of significant differences, especially in relation to negative emotions, we believe those differences to be contextual rather than cultural. Indeed, the French data collection took place during days that were rainy enough to lead to the postponement of several matches, causing a general feeling of frustration amongst members of the public that could explain an over-rating of negative emotions. This weather-related explanation is also supported by the lack of significant difference in terms of overall emotional intensity between French and Australian patrons. If the emotional responses were essentially explained by cultural factors – meaning that one population would fully live their affective experience, while the other population would control and/or hide it – one would expect to find different intensity scores; which does not appear here. Given these different results and explanations, we believe that similar emotional reactions can be expected during two identical events happening with similar weather conditions in two different occidental countries, such as France and Australia.

Furthermore, our data clearly shows that emotional valence and intensity does not influence attitude toward the event equally during the French and the Australian Open. For Roland Garros, both emotional valence and intensity are significant predictors of the attitude toward the event; intensity being however a strong predictor. This leads to the conclusion that French spectators still prefer a pleasant experience, but that the arousal of that experience will be of greater importance in developing their liking of the event. Influences are much more balanced for Australian patrons, for whom emotional valence and intensity shape their attitude toward the event similarly.

From a managerial perspective, these results emphasize the universality of emotions in a sport context. If every sport conveys its own range of emotions, our findings suggest that brands – and particularly sponsors' brand – could expect comparable emotions during two similar events of a same sport. Brands can thus use these sport-related emotions as a differentiation variable in their selection of the best property to sponsor. Future research should examine emotions across a number of sporting contexts and different audience sizes

Finally, the simultaneous acknowledgement of the universality of the emotional phenomenon and of the different influences they can have should convince sponsors to consider these emotions in their measurement of sponsorship effectiveness. Since no consensus has yet been reached on how these emotions affect sponsorship effectiveness, empirical research investigating the roles played by emotions in the sponsorship persuasion process would appear long overdue as well as useful for both theory and practice.

References

- Bal, C., Quester, P.G., Plewa, C. and Steyer, A. 2008. Emotions and Sponsorship Marketing: Toward a Better Understanding of Sponsorship Persuasion Process. In O'Cass, A. (Ed.). Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference. Sydney: University of Western Sydney, CD ROM
- Bal, C., Quester, P.G., Plewa, C., 2008. Emotions and Sponsorship: A Key to Global Effectiveness? A Comparative Study of Australia and France. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 21 (4), 451-463
- Bennett, R., 1999. Sport Sponsorship, Spectator Recall and False Consensus. *European Journal of Marketing* 33 (3/4), 291-313.
- Broach, V.C., Page, T.J., Wilson, R.P., 1995. Television programming and its influence on viewers' perceptions of commercials: the role of program arousal and pleasantness. *Journal of Advertising* 24 (4), 45-54.
- Christensen, S.R., 2006. Measuring consumer reactions to sponsoring partnerships based upon emotional and attitudinal responses. *International Journal of Market Research* 48 (1), 61-80.
- Crimmins, J., Horn, M., 1996. Sponsorship: from management ego trip to marketing success. *Journal of Advertising Research* 36 (4), 11-20.
- Davidson, R.J., 2003. Sevens sins in the study of emotion: corrective from affective neurosciences. *Brain and Cognition* 52, 129-132
- Derbaix, C.M, Poncin, I., 2005. La mesure des réactions affectives en marketing :évaluation des principaux outils. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing* 20 (2), 55-76.
- Ferrand, A., Pages, M., 1999. Image management in sports organisations: the creation of value. *European Journal of Marketing* 33 (3/4), 387-401.
- Gwinner, K.P., Swanson, S.R., 2003. A model of fan identification: antecedents and sponsorship outcomes. *Journal of Services Marketing* 17 (3), 275-294.
- Izard, C., 1977. *Human Emotions*, New York: Plenum Press.
- Kuzma, J.R., Veltri, F.R., Kuzma, A.T., Miller, J.J., 2003. Negative Corporate Sponsor Information: The Impact on Consumer Attitudes and Purchase Intentions. *International Sports Journal* 7 (2), 140-147
- Madrigal, R., 2001. Social identity effects in a belief-attitude-intentions hierarchy: Implications for corporate sponsorship. *Psychology and Marketing* 18 (2), 145-165.
- Mehrabian, A., Russell, J.A., 1974. *An Approach to Environmental Psychology*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

- Pham, M.T., 1992. Effect of involvement, arousal and pleasure on the recognition of sponsorship stimuli. *Advances in Consumer Research* 19, 85-93.
- Poels, K., Dewitte, S., 2006. How to capture the heart? Reviewing 20 years of emotion measurement in advertising. *Journal of Advertising Research* 46 (1), 18-37.
- Pracejus, J.W., 2004. Seven psychological mechanisms through which sponsorship impact consumer. In: Kahle, L.R., Riley, C. (Eds.), *Sport Marketing and the Psychology of Marketing Communications*, Lawrence Elbraum Associates, Portland, pp. 175-189.
- Quester, P.G., 1996. Consumers' perception of sponsorship sources. *Asia Pacific Advances in Consumer Research* 2, 13-18.
- Rifon, N.J., Choi, S.M., Trimble, C.S, Li, H., 2004. Congruence effects in sponsorship the mediating role of sponsor credibility and consumer attributions of sponsor motive. *Journal of Advertising* 33 (1), 29-42.
- Speed, R., Thompson, P., 2000. Determinants of sports sponsorship response. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 28, 226-238.
- Thwaites, D., 1995. Professional Football sponsorship: profitable or profligate? *International Journal of Advertising* 14(2), 149-164.
- Walliser, B., 1996. Le Rôle de l'intensité des émotions éprouvées par le téléspectateur dans la mémorisation du parrainage. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing* 11 (1), 5-21.
- Zillman, D. Paulus, P.B., 1993. Spectators: reactions to sports events and effects on athletic performance. In: Singer, R.N., Murphey, M., Tennant, L.K. (Eds), *Handbook of Research on Sport Psychology*, Macmillan, New York, NY, pp. 600-619.