

**When Happiness Rhymes With Sponsorship Effectiveness:
An Investigation Into How Emotional Valence Influences Sponsor Memorisation**

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Abstract

Facing the limits of a fully cognitively-based approach of the sponsorship persuasion process, scholars have progressively introduced affective variables to investigate the way sponsorship works. However, if most recognize the emotional content elicited by every sport event, less is known about whether and how it affects sponsorship effectiveness. This study addresses this gap by using the processing efficiency principle to explain how emotional valence affects sponsor memorisation. Data from a pilot study (N=143), undertaken during the Australian Open 2008, confirm that positive emotional response leads to more accurate sponsor memorisation.

Keywords

Emotion, affect, effectiveness, sponsorship, sport, sponsor

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Introduction

Companies from all over the world spent an estimated US\$ 54bn in sponsorship rights in 2007 (SponsorClick, 2007) to achieve a variety of goals. From creating/maintaining awareness to shaping the brand or corporate image and boost sales, sponsorship is now recognised as an essential driver of the marketing strategy of many firms.

Thirty years of intensive research, mobilising various scientific fields, including psychology, persuasion theories, organisational theories, have contributed to the development of a considerable, yet incomplete, corpus of knowledge in relation to sponsorship (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998). Whilst a good understanding of the goals of sponsorship and the variables that may affect its effectiveness has been achieved, much less is known about the tenets of the sponsorship persuasion process (Walliser, 2003).

Several theoretical frameworks have been proposed, such as associative learning (Javalgi, Traylor, Gross and Lampman, 1994), classical conditioning (Speed and Thompson, 2000), meaning transfer (McCracken, 1989) and image transfer (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999). However, no framework has yet received enough support to be considered as a referent one. One of the shortcomings of those frameworks is that they fail to clarify the influence of one particular variable, i.e. the emotional response elicited by the sponsored event, identified in a number of studies (Ferrand and Pages, 1999; Quester, 1996; Speed and Thompson, 2000), but measured in a very few of them (Christensen, 2006; Pham, 1992; Walliser, 1996).

Given that people attend sport events, instead of watching sport on TV, precisely to experience strong emotional episodes (Madrigal, 2001), this paper addresses the critical influence emotions may have on a critical sponsorship outcome, namely sponsor memorisation. Based on the processing efficiency principle, two associations between emotions and sponsor memorisation are proposed. The research methodology is then detailed, followed by the results. Discussion and managerial implications will conclude this paper.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

As in advertising, researchers in the area of sponsorship have referred to a number of core disciplines to identify the ins and outs of the sponsorship persuasion process. The interest in using various scientific approaches was to enlarge the scope of the conceptual frameworks proposed by the traditional, cognitive-based persuasion theories. Non-cognitive processes have hence been progressively introduced to explain how sponsorship persuasion works. For example, Olson and Tjømmøe (2003) have applied Zajonc's (1968) *mere exposure effect* to explain why spectators exposed to sponsor brands during a game tend to develop more positive attitudes toward those brands. Speed and Thompson (2000), on the other hand, refer to *classical conditioning* to explain consumers' reactions to sponsorship.

In relation to sponsorship, Christensen (2006) demonstrated that consumers are often more aware of the communicational context than of the commercial message. This finding is particularly relevant for sport events, which always offer a broad mix of emotions, with different valence and intensity (Bal, Quester and Boucher, 2007). Given that these emotions

may affect the subsequent processing of sponsors-related information (Zajonc, 1980), they should be carefully considered in a sponsorship persuasion process.

Conceptualising emotions in research in marketing

Zajonc's (1968) work has significantly contributed to the acknowledgement of the key role played by emotions in marketing. Following his findings, scholars have considerably enriched the literature on emotions, specifically in the context of marketing. In the case of advertising, Poels and Dewitte's (2006) review of emotional measurement suggests that two different approaches are often used by scholars, depending of their topic: the discrete view of emotions (Izard, 1977) and the continuous approach (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

The discrete approach considers every emotion as a subtle combination of several basic emotions (Izard, 1977). It thus applies particularly to researchers trying to assess the consequences of a (group of) particular emotion(s) on a dependant variable. Although intellectually appealing, this approach presents a fundamental limitation, as recent neurological developments question the idea that specific emotions rely on individual neuronal substrates (Davidson, 2003). In the absence of any specific emotional substrate, Izard's (1977) assumption of basic emotions would appear to be severely compromised.

Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) continuous approach suggests that every emotional reaction may be represented on a three dimensional space, composed of pleasure (i.e. valence of the emotion), arousal (i.e. intensity of the emotion) and dominance (i.e. feeling of control over the emotional reaction). This continuous approach is relevant when investigating the consequences of an overall emotional reaction, instead of a particular emotion. Even though these three dimensions maximise the restitution of the variance of any emotional reaction, Mehrabian and Russell also recognised that intensity and valence are sufficient to represent a broad spectrum of emotional responses in most situations (Derbaix and Poncin, 2005).

Considering the limitation of the discrete view of emotions and the possibility offered by the continuous approach to assess separately emotional intensity and valence, we found Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) work was deemed the most appropriate approach to conceptualize the emotional phenomenon in our study.

The processing efficiency principle

The processing efficiency principle has been used in a number of advertising studies (Newell, Henderson and Wu, 2001; Pavelchak, Antil and Munch, 1988) to investigate the relationship between emotional valence and advertising outcomes. Indeed, as defined by Pavelchak *et al.* (1988, p. 361), the processing efficiency principle states that "*people process information more efficiently when feeling pleasure [...] rather than displeasure*".

A first explanation for the processing efficiency principle may be found in the motivational dimension of positive affects. According to Mathur and Chattopadhyay (1991), positive emotions help to consider a larger variety and quantity of information, while negative emotions decrease motivation to learn or encourage a more heuristic processing of information (Kuykendall and Keating, 1990). However, the most comprehensive explanation of this effect was given by Isen (1984), who explained that the cognitive structures associated with positive emotions are broader and better integrated than those associated to negative emotions. Consequently, when the subject experiences a positive affect, the subsequent

processing is characterised by more elaborate encoding, storing and restitution of the information, leading to more efficient memorisation.

The processing efficiency principle has been validated in a number of studies relating to traditional advertising (Mathur and Chattopadhyay, 1991; Srull, 1983), as well as advertising aired during sport events (Pavelchak *et al.*, 1988). Whether it also applies to sponsor memorization remains, to the authors' knowledge, unclear and untested.

Hypotheses development

Depending on the different goals assigned to a partnership, sponsorship effectiveness may be measured using a variety of indicators. However, as Pham and Johar (2001, p. 123-124) state, "*accurate identification of the event sponsors, as assessed by recall or recognition, is one of the most important measures of sponsorship effectiveness*". Indeed, sponsor identification is not only the easiest KPI to measure; it is also critical in a sponsorship context, since without proper sponsor identification no further information processing is possible.

If the processing efficiency principle applies to sponsorship, positive emotional experiences should lead to more accurate memorisation of sponsors. Given that accurate memorisation supposes the recognition of a greater number of real brands, without necessarily quoting a large number of brands (real and false), we first hypothesize that subjects experiencing a positive emotional response are able to identify a greater number of official sponsors, than those who report a negative or mild emotional response. Hence:

H1: Subjects who experience a positive emotional response memorize accurately a greater number of official sponsors than subjects who experience a negative or mild emotional response.

While subjects experiencing a positive emotional response are expected to recognise more sponsors correctly, as outlined in hypothesis 1, this performance in recognition should be due to improved memorisation rather than due to a larger number of sponsors stated by the subjects. Hence, considering the total number of sponsors stated, no significant difference is expected to exist between subjects experiencing a positive emotional response and those that don't. Hence the following hypothesis:

H2: Subjects who experience a positive emotional response do not quote a greater total of sponsors (real and false) than subjects who experience a negative or mild emotional episode.

Research Methodology

Data was collected during five consecutive afternoons of the 2008 Australian Open. People were randomly interviewed, using a mall-intercept technique. To facilitate data collection, the first author identified himself as authorized to collect data by Tennis Australia. In most cases, people responded positively when solicited. After being briefly introduced to the research topic, respondents were provided with a self-administered questionnaire. A total of 156 persons participated in the study, yielding 143 usable questionnaires.

Amongst other things, the questionnaire measured two different constructs. Emotional responses were measured using Christensen's (2006) scale, by 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. 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, Anger,*

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. Weighted composite scores were calculated for each of these two constructs: intensity and valence. These composite scores reflected and measured the emotional response elicited by the sporting aspects of the event, as opposed to its commercial aspects. Only the valence score is used in the following analysis.

Sponsor memorisation was measured using a recognition test. Recognition tests are commonly used in sponsorship research in order to prevent respondents from using guessing strategies to quote the event's sponsors (Lardinoit, 1999). To secure a robust assessment of sponsor memorisation, and discriminate the accurate and false recognition of sponsors, we used a batch-testing procedure (Pitts and Slattery, 2004; Quester, 1996). This procedure consists in presenting a list of brands – made of official and false sponsors of the event – and asking the respondent to name the brands he or she remembered seeing during the event. A list of 12 brands was presented to respondents, composed of 6 official sponsors, and 6 false sponsors (the main competitor from the relevant product category).

Once data was collected, two sub-samples were created using their valence score. As shown in table 1, a first group ($n_1 = 41 / \bar{x}_1 = 1.013$) comprised respondents with a valence score inferior to " $\bar{x} - 1/2\sigma$ ", to represent subjects reporting a negative or mild emotional response. A second group ($n_2 = 56 / \bar{x}_2 = 2.726$) included respondents reporting a positive emotional response (valence score superior to " $\bar{x} + 1/2\sigma$ "). The statistic " $1/2\sigma$ " was chosen to significantly discriminate two groups of subjects on the basis of their valence score, while keeping the higher number of respondents in each group. A t-test was conducted to check the difference in average valence scores between these two groups and reported a significant difference ($t = -15.114; p < 0.001$).

Results

Table 1 presents the results of the independent-samples t-tests conducted to compare average sponsor memorisation between our two sub-samples. As the Levene's test was significant for both sub-samples, means were compared assuming equality of variance.

Table 1 - T-tests results

		Mean	Std. Deviation
Real Sponsors	Negative and mild valence	4.41	1.341
	Positive valence	4.98	1.070
	Levene's test for equality of variance	F = 2.080 (p = 0.152)	
	T-Test for equality of means	t = -2.317 (p = 0.023)	
Total Sponsors (i.e. real and false)	Negative and mild valence	5.07	1.618
	Positive valence	5.68	1.574
	Levene's test for equality of variance	F = 0.117 (p = 0.733)	
	T-Test for equality of means	t = -1.849 (p = 0.068)	

Our first hypothesis proposed that subjects reporting a positive emotional response should remember accurately a significantly greater number of official sponsors, than subjects reporting negative or mild emotional response. Our data reveal that the second group remembered on average 4.98 sponsors, while the first only reported 4.41 sponsors. Results of

the t-test show a significant difference at a 5% level ($t = -2.317$; $p < 0.05$). Hence, subjects experiencing positive sport-related emotions can accurately recognize a greater number of official sponsors than those who experienced negative or mild emotions. H1 is thus supported.

Our second hypothesis suggested no significant difference in terms of total (accurate and false) sponsor memorisation, between subjects who report positive versus negative or mild emotional response. Recognizing respectively 5.68 and 5.07 sponsors on average, our two sub-samples do not present, as expected, a significant difference in total sponsors memorisation at a 5% level ($t = -1.849$; $p > 0.05$). Therefore, H2 cannot be rejected.

Discussion and Managerial Implications

An increasing number of companies invest in sponsorship to create an emotional relationship with their consumers (SponsorClick, 2007). Sponsored events, and specially the emotions they elicit, are intended to bring this *little bit of soul* that advertising does not necessary convey. However, beyond Pham (1992) and Walliser's (1996) work on emotional intensity and sponsor memorisation and Christensen's (2006) study on emotional valence and attitudinal outcomes, little empirical research has been undertaken to date on this topic.

Although we cannot strictly accept hypothesis 2 because of a small significance, our results support the relevance of the processing efficiency principle for sponsorship persuasion. Indeed, the data demonstrate that positive sport-related emotions contribute to sponsorship efficiency, by favouring the correct recognition of sponsors, without significantly increasing the total number of brands cited. In other words, positive affects lead to a more efficient memorization of sponsors.

Overall, these results are consistent with expectations. However, they only focus on one of the different consequences emotions may have on sponsorship efficiency. Therefore, further research should be conducted to assess the influence of both emotional intensity and valence on other sponsorship outcomes (such as attitude toward the event, toward the brand or purchase intent) in order to reach the same level of understanding in a sponsorship context as has been established in advertising.

From a managerial perspective, these results should incite sponsorship managers to consider property-related emotions as a characteristic of this property, just like attendance profile or media broadcasting. Event organisers themselves could find interest in defining the scope of emotions their property convey, and use it as an additional argument to attract sponsors. Since every sport event elicits a different mix of emotions, for its different targets, a precise understanding of the emotional potential may thus prove to be useful in many companies' sponsorship decision process.

Finally, although they are obviously difficult to control, since they are based on the drama of unscripted sports events, sport-related emotions can still be leveraged by sponsors. Sponsors can provide consumers with richer emotional experiences by offering them opportunities to meet their favourite athletes, or a chance to watch a game from the commentators' box, or even by partnering replay moments, etc. To the extent that these activities enhance consumers' overall emotional experience, better memorisation of the sponsors should be achieved as a result.

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