

## Comparing the consumers' consciousness of the commercial sponsorship and the social cause sponsorship: A qualitative research

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**Abstract:** *This research aims to compare the consumers' consciousness about the commercial sponsorship and the social cause sponsorship. A qualitative research was conducted with 15 in depth-interviews based on structured conversations. The results point up the prominence of the consumers' consciousness of commercial sponsorship, mainly sports sponsorship, with comparison to that of social causes' sponsorship. Nonetheless, the respondents showed keen interest when evoking social causes' activities; which would encourage managers to invest in such facet of sponsorship that has not been sufficiently investigated by professionals and academicians yet.*

**Key words:** *Social cause sponsorship, Commercial sponsorship.*

### Introduction:

Companies intending to proliferate their activities through communication are increasingly resorting to sponsorship. This revolutionary tool of brand commercialization has, however, interested a little stream of researchers searching to prove its efficiency comparing to other promotional instruments, in particular advertising (Grimes & Meenaghan, 1998; McDaniel, 1999; Miyazaki & Morgan, 2001; Sneath et al., 2005). Concurrently, a specific sponsorship has emerged: that of social causes. It consists in financing cultural or charitable events and organizations without direct commercial profits (D'Astous & Bitz, 1996). This special sponsorship context has not been sufficiently examined by researchers (Cornwell & Coote, 2005) and requires further consideration.

This study concentrates, therefore, on comparing the consumers' consciousness of the social causes' sponsorship and the commercial sponsorship. A qualitative research is, consequently, undertaken to fulfill two objectives. Specifying the evoked sponsored events related to each form of sponsorship and the corresponding sponsoring brands so as to explain the prevalence of the most spontaneously cited facet of sponsorship represents the first objective. The latter is apprehended through the comparison between the consumers' consciousness about both the sponsored events and the sponsoring brands. The second is linked to delineating the characteristics of the respondents who will be recruited for the quantitative research as well as the pertinent sponsored event and

sponsoring brand that will be considered in it. The quantitative study will, actually, take into account the results of this qualitative research to examine the effects of the selected facet of sponsorship on consumers' responses.

### 1. Sponsorship: an efficient communication tool

Event sponsorship represents now an increasingly popular promotional vehicle (Javalgi et al., 1994; Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; McDaniel, 1999; Chadwick & Thwaites, 2004; Sneath et al., 2005) that has the potential to turn into "the marketing communications tool of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Tripodi, 2001). Sponsorship has received only limited research attention (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Grimes & Meenaghan, 1998; McDaniel, 1999; Miyazaki & Morgan, 2001; Walliser, 2003). Although sponsorship is often considered as a requisite key of success for an event that provides it with the 'financial backbone' (Lamont & Dowell, 2008), it still represents a "new activity" for many companies (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). A challenge for sponsorship is also how approaching the sponsored events with the sponsors in order to attract the resources that the former require and achieve concomitantly the latter's objectives (Madill & O'Reilly, 2010).

Representing an evolving promotional tool, sponsorship definition is developing.

Sponsorship has been described as "an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity" (Meenaghan, 1991). This definition reveals the commercial aspect of sponsorship (Cornwell et

al. 2001; Meenaghan, 1991; Witcher et al., 1991) and highlights its concerns of generating returns (Klincewicz, 1998; Amis et al., 1999), and enhancing marketing productivity (Rust et al., 2004). This commercial aspect enables as well to achieve certain organizational objectives and represents a source of the company's success by fostering its image and reputation (Shaw & Amis, 2001) and differentiating it from its competitors (Cornwell et al., 2001). Sponsorship is then a strategic activity (Geng et al., 2000) that is able to carry out many functions of the traditional elements of the marketing Mix (Meenaghan, 1991a), or even go beyond it (Currie, 2000). Sponsorship should be, therefore, an integrated part of the marketing mix so as to generate a potent image for the firm (Twaites 1995; Amis et al., 1999). Sponsorship may even offer a better competitive advantage than the other marketing mix elements such as the opportunity for exclusivity that is the right to be the only sponsor of a specified event in its product category (Madill & O'Reilly, 2010).

Other trends have underlined that sponsors benefit society (Mount and Niro, 1995; Stipp, 1998) and do good to it (Meenaghan, 2001b). Another definition of sponsorship, where the financial aim is hidden, is, therefore, "an important marketing communications tool that seeks to achieve favorable publicity for a company and/or its brands within a certain target audience via the support of an activity not directly linked to the company's normal business" (Bennett, 1999). The concept of goodwill is, especially, associated with this thinking about sponsorship.

Other characteristics have been exhibited for sponsorship. It incorporates an exchange of resources that grants mutual (Lamont & Dowell, 2008) and often commercial value to both parties in the sponsorship agreement (Sleight, 1989; Meenaghan, 1991b). In this research stream, sponsorship gathers two regular elements which are: the mutually beneficial exchange of sponsor resources (generated revenue for the sponsored entity) (Cornwell et al., 2001) in return for promotional value (generated commercial and marketing value for the sponsor), and the sponsor's association with the sponsored entity (Meenaghan, 2001a; Crompton, 2004; Ali et al., 2006; Madill & O'Reilly, 2010).

## **2. The development of social causes' sponsorship versus commercial sponsorship**

A diversity of events such as sports, arts and social activities can be sponsored (Meenaghan 2001a). Sport sponsorship grasps mainly all interest and funds available (Wragg, 1994 in Poon & Prendergast, 2006) due to its ability to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers (Quester & Thompson, 2001). It influences consumer behavior including recall of the sponsorship (Slattery & Pitts, 2002), and attitude toward the firm (Bennett et al., 2002; Westerbeek & Smith, 2002). However, arts and social causes sponsorship has been growing (Poon & Prendergast, 2006). This could be explained by the great attention that it has sparked in many consumers' lives. Consumers, actually, exhibit their eagerness for social causes because both their potential influence on others to join them in holding their cause and their enthusiasm to exhibit the good citizens they are through their ethical and empathetic behavior. The important number of interested consumers has driven the managers to explore this profitable path of social causes' sponsorship (Zdravkovic et al., 2010).

A good deal of literature is dedicated to studying the role of cause-related marketing in the firm (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988); however, the sponsorship of causes is all but overlooked in this literature (Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Lefebvre, 2006; Madill & O'Reilly, 2010). Sponsorship of causes contributes to society differently from cause-related marketing. In cause-related marketing, the consumers buy the company's products first and therefore, the company makes a donation of a specific amount to a chosen cause. In sponsorship of causes, the donation does not depend on the consumers' behavior because it makes the event fulfilled first, and then the firm waits for favorable change in consumer attitude or behavior (Cornwell & Coote, 2005).

D'Astous & Bitz (1996) have clarified that the support of cultural or social causes is included in the philanthropic sponsorship activities. This leads therefore to differentiate between philanthropic sponsorship and commercial sponsorship. Philanthropic sponsorship is a non-lucrative activity based on donation to social cause organizations or events, and aiming at beneficiating society either than the firm (Meenaghan, 1991b). Commercial

sponsorship represents, at the contrary, a monetary investment of the sponsoring firm intending to acquire direct benefits (Armstrong, 1988). The objectives of philanthropic sponsorship involve, for example, the improvement of corporate image and social recognition (Armstrong 1988; Sandler & Shani 1989; Quester & Thompson 2001) which can prompt other indirect advantages such as more favorable feelings and attitudes towards the sponsoring firms (D'Astous & Bitz, 1996; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2009) as well as positive intention to buy the firms' brand (Barone et al., 2000; Speed & Thompson, 2000; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2009). Commercial sponsorship allows achieving direct companies' objectives such as improved awareness or better sales (D'Astous & Bitz 1996; Quester & Thompson 2001). O'Reilly and Madill (2007) have, likewise, reasoned that the social marketing sponsorship (philanthropic sponsorship) objectives differ from those of commercial sponsorship in the way that they essentially encompass social marketing objectives. The two forms of sponsorship share, however, more traditional objectives such as building awareness, improving attitudes... Madill & O'Reilly (2010) have proposed a different vision in apprehending social marketing sponsorship. They have, first, estimated that nonprofit organizations would prefer the term 'partner' instead of the term 'sponsor'. They have, also, stated that while the sponsored entity beneficiaries from both the resources offered to pursue its social marketing objectives and the achieved credibility through its association with possible positive-image's corporation; the sponsor or partner may profit from its association with the social marketing objectives of the nonprofit organizations.

### 3. Method

A qualitative research was conducted in order to compare the consumers' consciousness of the commercial sponsorship and the social causes' sponsorship. 15 in depth-interviews based on structured conversations were carried out. Interviews lasted between forty five minutes and an hour. The sample is balanced in terms of sex (eight men and seven women) and age (seven young people and eight adults). It is noted that especially respondents with

high-educational levels had positively contributed to the research. Conversations were derived from an open question that proposed to elucidate the most spontaneously renowned sponsoring brands and sponsored events:

Would you cite brand(s) that sponsored or are sponsoring sportive, cultural or social cause events? Describe both these sponsors and events.

### 4. Results

A thematic data analysis was performed. The occurrence frequency was calculated for both the sponsors and the sponsored events on the basis of the number of times they were evoked. The most interested respondents in the sponsoring activities are both men and women with ages ranging from 20 to 70 years, and especially having high intellectual level.

For the quantitative study, the selected sponsored event is the "Tunisian Red Crescent" activities dedicated to assist the destitute population, especially in the current Tunisian revolution circumstances. The choice is particularly based on the respondents' keen interest in sustaining and even attending the "Tunisian Red Crescent". Furthermore, among the four-cited social causes' sponsorships, the activities of the "Tunisian Red Crescent" are twice cited.

Ten different sponsored events have been evoked in the fifteen speeches. It is also pertinent to highlight that social causes' sponsorship is a little mentioned by respondents (2 speeches for the "Tunisian Red Crescent" activities, and 2 speeches for social causes programs), which corroborates with the fact that this specific sponsorship has been neglected by both researchers (Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Lee et al., 2009) and managers. This finding reveals low consumers' consciousness about social causes' sponsorship. Similarly, cause-related marketing (like Pampers financing a child's vaccination once a pack of baby diapers is purchased) is once cited by a respondent; which attests the scarcity of managers resorting to it contradicting with the abundance of studies dealing with it (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). The cultural events are, moreover, approximately ignored, and just twice alluded to in the "Carthage festival" and

the “Star Academy” entertainment program. Sports sponsorship is, contrarily, widely referred to in the majority of the speeches (8/15); this could be justified by the fact that sports transcend all the linguistic and cultural barriers (Quester & Thompson, 2001). This result demonstrates the high consumers’ consciousness about the sports sponsorship.

These findings reinforce the importance of carrying out a quantitative research in a social causes’ sponsorship framework. In fact, eventual positive results corresponding to different consumers’ responses will persuade the managers to invest in this field in order to beneficiate companies as well as society. The selected sponsoring brands are the top-of-mind brands in their respective product categories in the context of the “Tunisian Red Crescent” sponsorship. These brands are, consequently, “Henkel” and “La Rose Blanche”. This choice is also justified by the confirmation of the benevolent and the responsible of “The Tunisian Red Crescent” that these brands have, actually, sponsored that cause.

To attest the accuracy of these findings, the table 1 gathers all the evoked sponsored events as well as the corresponding sponsoring brands, with reference each time to their respective occurrence frequency. The latter enumerates the speeches dealing with the sponsored event and its respective sponsoring brands, and discerns, furthermore, the number of citations referring to each of the cited elements.

With reference to the sponsoring brands, the dominant one is Coca-cola, cited fifteen times in eight speeches. The top-of mind brands are Coca-cola, Tunisie Telecom, and Mosaique Fm, respectively for the following products categories: drinks, telecommunication companies, and radio broadcasting.

Concerning the African football cup, although Coca-cola was not an official sponsor, it was actually evoked twice more than Pepsi and even before it. In fact, Pepsi was an official sponsor of the African football cup (January 2010). This attests the prevalence of Coca-cola in the Tunisians’ minds as a sponsoring brand.

With reference to the handball world cup which occurred in Tunisia 2005, while both Coca-cola and Tunisie Telecom does not figure in the sponsors’ list, the two brands have been cited as official sponsors of the event. This could be explained by the former occurrence of the event which leads to the forgetting of such

details. This confirms as well the predominance of both Coca-cola and Tunisie Telecom in the Tunisians’ minds as sponsoring brands.

According to the Carthage festival, even though Tunisie Telecom is not an official sponsor of this cultural event, it was mentioned as such. This proves the popularity of Tunisie Telecom as a sponsoring brand.

For the other sponsored events, the most cited sponsoring brands are either Coca-cola for the sports events, or Tunisie Telecom for the cultural events.

For the social causes’ sponsorships, a diversity of brands has been evoked. They correspond, specifically, to food and hygiene brands such as “La Rose Blanche”, “Marwa”, “Henkel”, “Peau Douce”. A possible explanation to such observation is that the social causes sponsored events like the “Red Crescent” activities lack of the necessities and appeals, therefore, to the first needs brands.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the qualitative research disclose the predominance of the consumers’ consciousness about the commercial sponsorship, particularly the sports sponsorship, comparing to the social causes’ sponsorship. Actually, approximately half of the conversations (8/15) tackle sports sponsorship activities. Only four conversations talk over social causes’ sponsorship, especially that of “Red Crescent” activities (2/15), whereas the three remaining ones deal respectively with cultural sponsorship (2/15) and cause-related marketing (1/15).

This qualitative study permits also to delineate the characteristics of the respondents who will be recruited later for the quantitative research and who should have a reasonable intellectual ability. The pertinent sponsoring brands and sponsored event are as well defined. “Henkel” and “La Rose Blanche” are therefore the selected sponsoring brands of the “Red Crescent” activities and will be considered in the quantitative study. The latter will emphasize, essentially, the consumers’ reactions to social causes’ sponsorship.

The most acknowledged sponsoring brand and sponsored event are as well identified. “Coca Cola” is the most cited sponsor, which confirms the prevalence of this brand in the Tunisians’ minds as a sponsor. Perversely, the most evoked sponsored event is the “Red

Crescent” activities, which unfits with the fact that the sports sponsorship is the most cited. This would be explained by the enthusiastic concern of the respondents suggesting social causes’ sponsorship.

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## Appendix

Table 1: Summary of the evoked sponsored events and the corresponding sponsoring brands

Sponsored events	Speeches	Occurrence frequency	Sponsoring brands	Speeches	Occurrence frequency
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- Varadarajan P. R. & Menon A. (1988), "Cause-related marketing: a coalignment of marketing strategy and corporate philanthropy", *Journal of Marketing*, 52(3), 58– 74.

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The TV program "You have the right to"	"You have the right to" is a powerful TV show that permits people to recuperate their rights" "It's a wonderful program, I watch it regularly"	3 citations in 1 speech	Tunisie Telecom, Tunisiana, Jawhara Fm, Mosaique Fm	"I remember seeing Telecom & Tunisiana" " I think Jawhara & Mosaique sponsored as well, did they?"	- 3 citations for Tunisie Telecom in 1 speech. - 1 citation for each of the other sponsoring brands in 1 speech
The TV program "I have something to tell you")	"I like the fact that many families have been gathered once again thanks to this program "I have something to tell you"	2 citations in 1 speech	Tunisiana, Mosaique Fm	"Sponsors! I think that Tunisiana & Mosaique Fm have presented their names along the program"	2 citations for each sponsoring brand in the speech
Child vaccination	"Pampers evokes in its advertising that every time the customer buys a pack of diapers, he offers a vaccination for a poor child"	2 citations in 1 speech	Pampers	"Pampers evokes in its advertising that every time the customer buys a pack of diapers, he offers a vaccination for a poor child"	3 citations in 1 speech
"Tunisian Red Crescent" activities	"Red Crescent" is recently very active because of the nation situation" "It sends everyday food and medicine to the migrants and the poor Tunisian people"	12 citations in 2 speeches	Marwa, Vademecum, Fa (Henkel), La Rose Blanche, Peau Douce,	"Many food brands, I remember Marwa, La Rose Blanche..." "Hygienic products are also needed like those of Henkel" "I know firms who sent as well baby diapers, for example Peau Douce"	1 citation for each sponsoring brand in the 2 speeches, except Henkel (cited with reference to Vademecum and Fa) and La Rose Blanche with 2 citations for each brand
The Football World Cup (June 2010)	"The last football world cup was really wonderful" "It was a surprising world cup, a good surprise for me"	4 citations in 3 speeches	Coca-cola, Adidas, Sony, Hyundai, McDonald's	"Coca-cola exists everywhere, especially in the world cups, I can't remember any world cup without Coca cola"	- 6 citations for Coca-cola in 3 speeches - 1 citation for each of the other sponsoring brands in 1 speech
The African	"This year 2010 is full of football,	4 citations in 2	Coca Cola, Pepsi	"Coca-cola of course sponsored it, its rival	- 2 citations for Coca-



Football Cup (January 2010)	we enjoyed the African football cup...”	speeches		Pepsi I think too”	cola in 2 speeches - 1 citation for Pepsi in 1 speech
The football team « Etoile Sportive du Sahel »	“ESS of course is a powerful team, and all the companies seek sponsoring it”	4 citations in 1 speech	Coca-cola, Orange	“I think that I have seen Orange later” “Coca-cola also is a sponsor, I remember seeing it on the official site of ESS”	- 4 citations for Coca-cola in 1 speech - 2 citations for Orange in 1 speech
The Handball World Cup (2005)	“This sportive event will be ever remembered by Tunisians, it was fabulous, the 2005 handball world cup”	3 citations in 2 speeches	Coca-cola, Tunisie Telecom	“It has been since a long time, so I don’t well remember, but I think Coca-cola sponsored it”	- 3 citations for Coca-cola in 2 speeches. - 2 citations for “Tunisie Telecom” in 1 speech
The musical TV show “Star Academy”	“I get used to watching Star Academy, it entertains me a lot”	3 citations in 1 speech	Pepsi, Ford, Gemey-Maybelline, Neutrogena	“The program is many times intermitted by messages of Pepsi, Ford, GemeyMaybelline, and Neutrogena”	1 citation for each sponsoring brand in 1 speech
Carthage festival	“I attend every year the most interesting shows in the festival of Carthage, it is vital for me to enjoy the summer”	2 citations in 1 speech	Tunisie Telecom	“I see everywhere in the festival Tunisie Telecom, so it sponsors it?”	1 citation in 1 speech