TITRE :

LES ATTRIBUTS DISCRIMINANTS DU PARRAINAGE EN LIGNE – Le cas du parrainage des évènements virtuels

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TITLE: THE DISCRIMINANT ATTRIBUTES OF ONLINE SPONSORSHIP – The case of online event sponsorship

Summary: This article sets out to identify the discriminant attributes of online event sponsorship based on an approach proposed by Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) in the purpose of formulating a definition. Throughout the article we shall provide examples and compare elements of the offline and online event sponsorship as well as bringing forward the differences between online event sponsorship and other online marketing methods (such as online advertising). Finally, some managerial implications and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: sponsorship, Internet, e-marketing, online event, e-sponsorship, event sponsorship

TITRE: LES ATTRIBUTS DISCRIMINANTS DU PARRAINAGE EN LIGNE – Le cas du parrainage des évènements virtuels

Résumé:Cet article vise à identifier les attributs discriminants du parrainage d'événements en ligne, basé sur une approche proposée par Derbaix, Gérard et Lardinoit (1994) dans le but de formuler une définition. Tout au long de l'article, nous allons comparer les éléments du parrainage d'événements hors ligne et en ligne en donnant des exemples ainsi que mettre en avant les différences entre la publicité en ligne et le parrainage en ligne des évènements. Enfin, certaines implications managériales et les orientations futures de la recherche sont discutées.

Mots clés :parrainage, Internet, e-marketing, événement en ligne, e-parrainage, le parrainage d'événements, sponsoring

THE DISCRIMINANT ATTRIBUTES OF ONLINE SPONSORSHIP – THE CASE OF ONLINE EVENT SPONSORSHIP

Introduction

There are many ways for a brand or a company to associate itself with online content and formats. The brand could be integrated into a video to be found on YouTube. It can partner with an online game or simply be present on a website. In some cases, this association could be considered (online) product placement. In others, online advertising, e-partnership or possibly online sponsorship may be more appropriate terms.Given the multiple formats of online content and the possibilities to partner with them in one way or another, defining online sponsorship is a challenging matter. Even more so if we consider the fact that the scientific community studying the "offline" sponsorship field is still debating on the most appropriate definition for the sponsorship concept. Throughout the years new definitions for sponsorship have been proposed by researchers such as Meenaghan (1991), Sandler and Shani (1998), Walliser (2010) as well as Cornwell, Roy and Steinard (2001) that have proposed a definition designed specifically for sponsorship of events. Nevertheless, Drennan and Cornwell (2004) as well as other sponsorship researchers underlined the need for a new, updated definition of the sponsorship concept especially in the Internet age (Cunningham, 2010).

In this article we shall try to answer this call (at least partly) by basing our research on the work of Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994). After careful analysis we have regarded their approach as being as one of the most rigourous and complete. Twenty years ago they tried to accurately

define sponsorship by identifying its differentiating attributes. Derbaix Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) address five general questions related to the definition of sponsorship: 1) No sponsorship without an event?; 2) No sponsorship without direct investment in the event?; 3) No sponsorship without the communication of the association between the entities? 4) No sponsorship without an incontrollable message?; 5) No sponsorship without marketing objectives?

The authors suggest a list of criteria (to be found in detail in table 1 at the end of this paper) which help to differentiate sponsorship from other forms of marketing communication. These criteria are classified in three categories of different degrees of importance:

a) Common non-discriminants : criteria that is usually associated to sponsorship actions with numerous examples that show its presence andis not a pre-requisite for sponsorship, therefore this criteria is not essential to distinguish the concept of sponsorship.

b) Elevated discriminants: criteria usually associated with sponsorship actions with some examples showing that its presence is not a pre-requisite for sponsorship. By retaining this type of criteria the authors believe it would contribute to maintaining a certain ambiguity by not pinpointing exactly the borders of the sponsorship concept.

c) Absolute discriminants: criteria that is always associated with sponsorship actions and its presence is a definite pre-requisite for any sponsorship action. The authors underline that this type of criteria is the best to draw the conceptual limits of the sponsorship concept and they shall be used to compose the sponsorship definition.

From the start we wish to mention that Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) focused solely on event sponsorship but it does not mean their approach cannot be used for other types of sponsorship. Since the ".com boom" researchers have had more than a decade to observe the

evolution and the diversity of the different formats of online sponsorships. Also, based on our literature review we shall point out the discriminating characteristics that will help to frame and differentiate the concept as well as present pertinent examples and also include new criteria that more recent studies have brought to light.

Sponsorship and online events

One of the first criteria underlined by Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) is: "no sponsorship without an event".From our research, online event sponsorship seems to be a very popular type of online sponsorship. Our understanding of sponsored online events or virtual events is the same as the one described by Drennan and Cornwell, (2004, p. 1125): "real world event sponsorship (related to live sports, arts and charity events)… virtual event sponsorship (related to events created purposely for an on-line environment)".So far we have been able to identify four main types of online events: online competitions, sponsorship of events in virtual worlds, online webinars and online fairs. However, it is not unlikely for new technology to allow for new types of online events to emerge. Just like traditional events, online events "affect" and impact a "collectivity". Much like their traditional counterparts, online events can be a repetitive act. In the same way that traditional sponsors have long time-partnerships with sports teams, online sponsors can support a team in an online competition throughout the years.An online sponsor can support even a single gamer.In MMORPG[1] games, the players that have reached a high level with their character may stream live their game-play to their subscribers on video streaming websites (www.twitch.tv). Such gamers are most commonly sponsored by IT companies (and promote

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[1]Massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) is a genre of role-playing video games or web browser based games in which a very large number of players interact with one another within a virtual game world.

different PC configurations or hardware specialized for gaming), energy drink companies as well as gaming-related websites.Depending on their fan-base (number of subscribers viewing their live stream) the gamer may negotiate more advantageous sponsorship contracts. Although his actions "affect" and impact a "collectivity" one might argue that there is no event per se in this case, therefore we turn our attention to sponsored participants in online competitions and tournaments. In these conditions, the only reason the players would interact is because of the existence of the event (a gaming competition or tournament). Perhaps one of the most interesting options for gaming sponsorships is the sponsorship of professional gaming tournaments. The World Cyber Games (WCG) is an international competitive video-gaming (e-sports) sponsored by Samsung Electronics and Microsoft and it's considered the "Olympics of e-games". This type of championship could of course be categorized as a purely online gaming event. Although these tournaments are usually online, for security reasons the final match is disputed in real life. Another large tournament of online gaming is the StarCraft Starleague. Although it started as a Korean tournament it soon attracted gamers from all over the world. Major sponsors of the tournament include: Coca-Cola in 2001, Panasonic in 2002, Gillette in 2004 and Korean Air in 2010. As part of the tournament is online, sponsors can also support a team and be visible on the scoreboards and included in the team name. The team Orion 2002 changed its name to 4 Union 2003 and then to SK Telecom T1 in 2004 upon sponsorship by SK Telecom. Almost all of the sponsored teams feature the sponsor's name in the team name (for example, Team Samsung Khan). In their own words, players declared that sponsors provide "money, ... pay for new equipment, hotel suites"allowing good gamers to win more than 100 000 US$ per tournament.

So far our examples have been from the world of e-sports but Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) have also addressed the delimitation of the domains of sponsorship and the issue of

"cultural sponsorship" . In their view, which we share as well, there is no reason to differentiate between culture, arts and sports as they are included in the definition of culture as a whole: "Culture: the collection of techniques, institutions, behaviors, lifestyles, habits, beliefs and values that characterize a given society. " (Duverger, in Foulquié, 1978)[2].

Sponsorship and event control

Another point on whichDerbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) insisted was: "no sponsorship without event control?". The authors underlined that one of the main traits of the sponsor-sponsee relationship in the case of events is the "independence of the event with regards to the sponsor". So here we must underline the fact that the authors meant the control of the sponsor over the event itself, not to be confused with the notion of sponsorship control that designates a way to evaluate the impact of sponsorships. Therefore, a fundamental difference between sponsorship and promotions or advertising is the fact that the sponsor cannot fully control the "support" (the event). However, while this may be very much the case for the domain of sports, this criteria will not be retained by Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) as an absolutely discriminant characteristic because for events in other domains, such as artistic expositions, the event is highly controllable by the main "contributor" (sponsor).

How significant is the "level of control of the event with regards to the sponsor" on the Internet? If a certain online event is not fully independent from the brand, does this act qualify automatically in the category of promotions or advertising and therefore completely excluding sponsorship? We argue that on the Internet this criteria can be considered a discriminant

[2]Translation fromFrench text: "Culture: Ensemble des techniques, des institutions, des comportements, des genres de vie, des habitudes, des croyances, des valeurs qui caractérisent une société donnée" (Duverger, in Foulquié, 1978).

characteristic, noting that, just like in the real world, the support can be highly controllable for a virtual online gallery or virtual tour where everything the user will interact with can be managed to the smallest details. Yet, in the case of online events in the domain of e-sports or events that require more player interaction, the support will most certainly be more difficult to control. If for a sponsored webinar the participants are limited in terms of interactivity (usually only text-based messaging with the moderator and other participants), for events organized in virtual worlds sponsors have very little control and the participants (or their avatars) can use all the available functionalities of the virtual platform which constituted the support for the event.

Therefore, we shall keep in line with the approach of Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) and maintain this characteristic as a considerable discriminant of somewhat elevated value but not an absolute requirement (see Table 1).

Sponsorship and socio-cultural independence of the event

Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) have noticed that when it comes to the socio-cultural independence of the event it is harder to define what exactly the word "independence" means, giving no reason to consider repetitive events as something else than sponsorship. Therefore they proposed that the element that discriminates between sponsorship and other marketing tools would be the "event's own identity", its "sociocultural legitimacy in general" and being "outside of the sphere of influence of the sponsor in particular". Meaning that, an event that still "makes sense" without the presence of the sponsor is definitely sponsorship. They proposed the example of the Camel Trophy challenge that would still be a great adventure even without the cigarette sponsor. However, in the case of a private enterprise event, such as celebrating 100 years of

existence, there is no reason for the event to happen without the involvement of company. The event loses all substance, it won't be "sociocultural legitimate in general" and it most certainly will not be "outside of the sphere of influence of the sponsor in particular".

An example that would be relevant in this case is online sponsored machinima competitions. In the past, the IT giant Dell sponsored an online machinima competition of the game Word of Warcraft. Submissions were accepted online via YouTube posts that were inserted as links on the Dell community forum. In such competitions the winner is usually selected according to the online community's votes. Even universities have launched themed machinima competitions. For example, the University of Western Australia (UWA) launches a yearly Machinima Challenge. In 2012 it launched it's 5th such event on the theme 'Seek Wisdom'. Other event sponsors were: AviewTV, Philip Vought, Freemason Magic and The Tornado Gallery. Although submissions are accepted via the Internet, in this case the winners are picked by a judging committee. We can notice that without the sponsor the event does not lose substance and it is still sociocultural legitimate in general and outside the sphere of influence of the sponsor in particular.Therefore we consider the above mentioned criteria as an absolute discriminant for online event sponsorship as well.

Sponsorship and direct investment

If in the beginning we discussed event-related discriminants, now we shall focus on another trait underlined by Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994), which isno sponsorship without direct investment in the event.

Given the rise of ambush marketing, sponsorship will be considered as such only if the sponsor had a direct investment in the event. Any association with the event in the lack of this investment would just constitute ambush marketing. Much like in the case of traditional sponsorship the contribution of the sponsor to the event may be in the form of services, goods, materials or cash/payments.In the traditional approach the Internet was a tool for promoting a sponsorship of real-life events, the Internet has now become the environment where the actual event can take place. For a better understanding we can take the example of a car racing event. Online, the 'car racing' will be done between participants in real time on the Internet allowing sponsors to participate in the online event, thereby the sponsors can support a team, the event itself or even be able to add their logo or message in the online racing circuit.

And yet, the lines between advertising and sponsorship are sometimes hard to be clearly drawn as, very often, advertising and sponsorships have similar traits (like the objectives or the channel of communication). Traditionally advertising communication, like other mass communications is unilateral while the Internet allows for bilateral exchanges: comments, social media activity, e-mails, and so on, in real-time. A simple explanation of online advertising would describe it as an offer of advertising space on the Internet websites in exchange for a fee.Some of the most common types of online ads are banner ads or display-ads.In such cases there is no direct investment in the event from the part of the advertiser, it's just purchase of ad-space, while the sponsor has a direct link to the online event.For example, in an online game tournament an advertiser would pay a fee to have its company logo displayed on the website while, the sponsor, would be directly linked to the event. The sponsor's investment could consist in services: server hosting or other technical support, goods: such as prizes or equipment and payment support for any game-related matter. One form in which sponsors also contribute to the online event is by

enriching the online experience: new challenges, new (gaming) terrain and equipment, bonus points. In the world's largest online gaming golf tournament (World Golf Tournament), the list of sponsors includes brands such as Nike, Lexus, Insurance of America and others.

Therefore the direct investment in the event and not simply the purchase of advertising space shall be considered as an absolutely discriminant factor to determine online event sponsorship.

Sponsorship-linked marketing

A third point thatDerbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) have considered as significant for determining the borders of sponsorship was:"no sponsorship without leveraging" (communicating the association).

The term "sponsorship-linked marketing" was introduced by Cornwell, (1995, p. 15) and defined as: "the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the purpose of building and communicating an association (link) to a sponsorship was coined to reflect the required coordination of interacting employees, audiences, volunteers, events, activities, sales promotions, merchandise, cosponsors, and media".Sponsorship is one of the instruments of the marketing mix that needs other instruments in order to communicate about it. In sponsorship, researchers agree that through the association with another activity or event, the sponsor aspires to achieve a transfer of the values of the event to its own brands or products, or even to its own institution.

Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) insisted on marking the difference between sponsorship and anonymous contribution or help. The authors proposed not to consider the French concept of*mécénat* as sponsorship. In their opinion "sponsorship in openly interested and declared while

mécénat is openly free". In the case of sponsorship, the partnership is always identified which is not the case in the French concept of *mécénat*. Online, we may notice forms of *mécénat* on anonymous donation websites for example.

Also, the originality of sponsorship is in the communication of the association to a particular event that is socio-culturally independent.The online environment offers countless opportunities to activate sponsorships depending on objectives, target audience and online sponsorship format. Sponsorship leveraging through advertising has been the subject of several research studies. Cornwell et al. (2005) underlined the need to look at "thematically tied advertising", that would not only note the sponsorship relationship but also strengthen the link creatively for a higher impact on consumers. In a recent such research paper Kelly, Cornwell, Coote and McAlister (2012, p. 15) have proposed the term of sponsorship-linked advertising (SLA) which "includes advertising that communicates a sponsorship link or tie, as well as advertising that demonstrates a theme that links to sponsorship." Within sponsorship-linked advertising the authors differentiate between: explicit, implicit and combine sponsorship-linked advertising (SLA). Explicit SLA means there is an explicit communication of a sponsorship link. Such explicit communications may be the presence of an event logo or of a sponsorship statement in an advertisement: "Innovative City of the Year sponsored by Citi Bank".Implicit SLA means there are implicit sponsorship connections. Such implicit connections, can be "exemplified by abstract, creative, or indirect execution that suggests (without any explicit statement or event logo) an overall theme associated with the sponsored event. What distinguishes implicit SLA from the realm of creative advertising – and from other forms of event-related advertising – is the advertiser's intent to associate with a sponsored event". Such strategies have been used mostly by ambushers that wish to indirectly associate with an event for which they do not own sponsorship rights, therefore

implicit SLA is the only option they have to associate to the event. For example, around the time of a major sporting event, company X that does not own sponsorship rights for the event launches an advertisement suggesting sports relatedness: presenting a stadium, athletes competing or any other such visual in the commercial. And in the case of combined SLA it means using both implicit and explicit sponsorship-linked ads.

To conclude, sponsorship activation is a key discriminant factor of absolute importance for defining online event sponsorship.

Sponsorship and message control

Another point that the authors' underlined was no sponsorship without an incontrollable message.

The authors' founded their reasoning on the classification proposed by Pellemans (1991) who observed two facets of the message: the psychological component –implicit and the objective component − explicit or denoted. Here, the non-control of the message refers to the fact that implicit perception of the message is sensitive to personality, culture, knowledge of the sender and of the receptor.

The nature of the event can also have an incidence on the message. The authors' noted that the non-controllable character of the event gives sponsorship its authenticity. In opposition to communication by advertising, communication by sponsorship relies on the association with reality as it is experienced (Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit, 1994).

The authors also investigate the relation to the form of the message and its possible impact on the decoding of the message. In the case of traditional sponsorship in the majority of cases the message does not carry explicit explanations (Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit, 1994). The authors'

considered that the volume of the information (explicitly or implicitly) presented does not constitute an absolute discriminant parameter (high but non-absolute). In the Internet age sponsorship does not allow only for citations as Grégory underlined it was the case for traditional sponsorship in 1984.

In the case of online sponsorship this might constitute a discriminant attribute as a study conducted in 2008 by Weeks, Cornwell andDrennan showed that activationnal communications have better outcomes.A more precise explanation for activation (short for activational communications) has been proposed by (Weeks et al., 2008, p. 639) "communications that promote the engagement, involvement, or participation of the sponsorship audience with the sponsor" and, non-activational communications can be described as "communications that promote the sponsorship association, but that may be passively processed by the sponsorship audience."Some activational communications can be in the same, non-activational for a different audience. For example, an event-based competition involving the direct public is activational for the direct audience while in the same time it is non-activational for the indirect public which cannot take part in the competition.

Although the non-control of the message in terms of consumer decoding is a common non-discriminant attribute, activational explicit messages will have a higher importance and even be discriminant factors for online event sponsorship.

Sponsorship and marketing communication objectives

Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) argued that the notion of "commercial benefits", cited by many sponsorship researchers, seems too imprecise. Dubois andJolibert (1992) have underlined the two levels of sponsorship outcomes in terms of: -behavior, such as sales, profits and market shares and -attitude, such as evolution of the measures of favorable associations. However we subscribe to the more recently sponsorship outcomes presented by Cornwell (2005): cognitive outcomes – awareness and image, affective outcomes – liking and preference, and behavioral outcomes – purchase intent, purchase commitment and purchase.

Online sponsorships can serve the same objectives as traditional sponsorships such as increasing brand awareness, brand image, perception, purchasing behaviour as well as some more specialized ones, adapted for the online environment. By using online sponsorship, a sponsor might keep the same objectives but target the Internet-savvy consumers that are prone to favourably perceive such an action due to their Internet familiarity. Also, certain online communities might be harder to reach in real-life due to geographical obstacles but are easily reachable and identifiable online. On the other hand, a specific objective of online sponsorship would involve taking advantage of the interactivity traits of the internet.

Online event sponsorship can serve multiple objectives, so it will depend on each case what marketing objectives will be pursued, therefore constituting a discriminant attribute.

Sponsorship and organizations

The last aspect Derbaix, Gerard and Lardinoit (1994) looked at was sponsorship as a technique of communication in the service of organizations. The authors argue that the usage of a larger term

than enterprise or company is justified as institutions, individuals and groups have also engaged in sponsorships but they reject the word "donor". They support the use of the term organization that was defined in Le Robert (1993) as "an association that pursuitsdeterminedgoals" because it comprises all human groups that are likely to communicate. We also agree with this view for online events as on the Internet individuals, groups as well as institutions and companies can engage in online sponsorship, therefore the term "organizations" is more comprising.

Table 1.Summary of discriminant attributes and their level or importance for online sponsorship.Adapted from: Derbaix, Gérard and Lardinoit, 1994, p. 61.

Level of importance / Discriminant criteria	Absolutely discriminant	Elevated discriminant	Common non-discriminant
ONLINE EVENT			
- Non-controllable support		X	
- socio-cultural independence	X		
- Rarity			X
INVESTMENT			
- Directly in the event	X		
LEVERAGING			
- Explicit SLA	X		
- Implicit SLA			X
- Combined SLA		X	
MESSAGE			

- Non-control (implicit message)			X
- Explicit message	X		
AIMED OBJECTIVES			
- Marketing communication	X		
- Multiple objectives			X

Based on Table 1 the resulting online event sponsorship definitionis: a technique that comprises, for any organization, the creation or direct involvement with an online socio-culturally independent event and the association with the online event through leveraging, with the purpose of achieving its marketing objectives.

Conclusion and future research directions

The resulting definition for online event sponsorship is not very different from the one Derbaix and his co-authors (1994) proposed for traditional event sponsorship. We can therefore conclude that the principles of sponsorship have been transposed to the new online environment and while there are many differences between the offline and the online worlds, sponsorship has adapted while still maintaining its core fundamentals.

From our examples of online events, we have been able to put forward the discriminant characteristics that would help us to define online event sponsorship, such as: event control and socio-cultural independence, direct investment in the event, sponsorship-linked marketing, message control, marketing communication objectives and organizations. However, we do not

claim that this list is exhaustive. It could perhaps be extended with certain online specificities of virtual events, but this was not the purpose of this paper. Our intent was rather to check whether on the Internet, there are certain discriminant attributes of sponsorship that much like in the real world have kept their level of importance (such as socio-cultural independence of the event and direct investment) while others have become more or less important (such as sponsorship-linked marketing).

Throughout the paper, we have also tried to show more clearly the difference between online sponsorship and other online marketing tools such as online advertising. Our paper also brings to light some aspects related to the more practical side of online event sponsorship: how it is done and in what the sponsor's contribution consists in. In the near future we shall continue the present work with a qualitative study on a sample of managers that have already implemented online event sponsorship.

The framework of Derbaix, Gérard, and Lardinoit (1994) is very useful when analyzing online event sponsorship. But what about other online sponsorship formats where the notion of the event is less evident, such as for example when a brand associates itself to a website? Does such an association, even when it is presented as a sponsorship, necessarily present an "event"? By identifying discriminant attributes and online specificities of sponsorships we hope to propose in the future a more accurate definition for the concept of online sponsorship. Given that at the present time little is known about the factors that influence consumer outcomes in the case of online sponsorship, in the long term, future research should also focus more on identifying these specific factors and measuring their impact. Ideally, integrating our work in a wider comparison of offline and online sponsorship and an analysis of which formats would produce best outcomes and in which situations could provide a significant managerial contribution to this field.

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