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Commitment in sponsorship relationships

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The study identifies three key determinants of commitment in sponsorship relationships: perceived benefits of a sponsorship relationship, the values shared by sponsorship partners and the tendency towards opportunistic behaviour that a partner might display. Based on these determinants, the study identifies four sponsorship commitment types, namely 'Calculators and Commercial', 'Carers and Communal', 'Cynics and Short-Termers' and 'Innocents and Indifferents'. It also highlights three stages through which commitment develops: the engagement stage, the retention phase and the dissolution phase (identified here as the ERD model). The study considers the nature of each commitment type using the ERD phases, then discusses relevant issues for each of these phases. This research enables prospective partners to assess the compatibility of a partner's commitment intentions and helps contribute to the development of more stable and value-adding programs.

Development of sponsorship

Sponsorship is now a worldwide phenomenon, with the market in 2004 estimated to be worth \$28 billion. The sponsorship markets in North America and Europe continue to thrive while significant increases in sponsorship expenditure have recently been recorded in countries such as China (IEG, 2004). Sport is the major beneficiary of sponsorship, accounting for up to 60% of total expenditure. Within sport globally, soccer is a major recipient of funding. For example, 209 of the UK's 589 largest deals in 2001 were soccer-based sponsorships. In addition, seven of the UK's top ten highest valued deals during the same period were also soccer sponsorships (Intel, 2002). Among the major companies attracted to soccer sponsorship are Vodafone, Emirates Airlines, Samsung and AIG. Although sponsorship expenditures have grown dramatically, prompted by the view that sponsorship can deliver value-added customer experiences (Cliffe and Motion, 2005), a debate continues about the effectiveness of management practice. Some commentators assert that the adoption of professional management practices has accompanied the growth in sponsorship expenditure (Meenaghan, 1999), while others remain concerned by an apparent failure of those involved in deals to manage

sponsorships properly (Thjome, 2002). Moreover, Cornwell and Maignan (1998) and Walliser (2003) highlight an ongoing failure to understand how sponsorships should be managed. Studies of sponsorship management practices, undertaken by Thwaites and Chadwick (2004; 2005) and Thwaites (1995), reinforce such concerns in a soccer context. The findings indicate that contract duration, the retention of sponsorship partners and a low rate of contract renewal are problematic. Due to the global importance of soccer sponsorships, soccer is used here as the focus for analysis. The findings reported later in the paper nevertheless highlight the significance of this study for other types of sponsorship. The use of soccer sponsorship by so many leading international companies, drawn from a broad range of sectors, provides further support for adopting the sport as an analytical focus. The article reviews existing literature in the area and finds that an apparent failure to effectively manage sponsorship programs is the result of the way in which sponsors and sponsees view sponsorship programs. Two recurring issues in the literature are the degree to which sponsorship partners engage in a transaction rather than a relationship, and the nature and development of the commitment between them. As a consequence, the research aims to establish how sponsors and sponsees commit to one another, and to highlight the way in which sponsorship partners are engaged and retained, and relationships then dissolved. In the light of these aims, the determinants of sponsorship commitment are identified, with recommendations for managing sponsorship programs subsequently being provided.

Nature of sponsorship

In spite of the growth in sponsorship expenditure, there is still no commonly held definition of the activity. An early view of sponsorship (Moonman, 1974) asserted it is effectively a form of philanthropy or gift giving where the sponsor pays the sponsee a sum of money in return for the intangible benefits of association. Such gifts are often motivated by a sense of citizenship or by a 'hobby motive', with any commercial gains thought to be incidental rather than intended (Simkins, 1980; Cunningham *et al.*, 1993). Indeed, the notion of there being 'publicity for the donor' implies association, awareness, and hospitality opportunities may still result from this type of an arrangement. For the sponsee, whilst this view of sponsorship does not suggest it is necessarily a commercial transaction, the exchange of a financial payment and the subsequent association with a sponsor this implies, indicates that the relationship is a dyadic one conferring benefits on sponsor and sponsee. Given recent developments in the sponsorship market, the philanthropic view of sponsorship may be discounted as largely irrelevant. It is neither overtly commercial nor linked directly to the broader objectives attached to most sponsorship programmes. There is also an implication that dyad partners need not manage their relationship, the most tangible activity involving the two simply being the flow of financial resources and legal rights between sponsor and sponsee. However, the philanthropic view retains a degree of importance in the way it demonstrates that the sponsorship decision may not be a rational economic one. As Thwaites (1995) has noted, this can be especially pertinent in football

where the 'hobby motive' has been observed as an influence on sponsorship management. In the context of a study relating to football, accepting there might be non-economic influences on sponsorship programmes is therefore important.

Subsequent definitions of sponsorship strongly emphasise commercial dimensions of the activity. These have included corporate (Gardner and Shuman, 1988) and marketing (Otker, 1988) elements whilst emphasising the exchange relationship between sponsor and sponsee. One of the most commonly cited definitions of sponsorship (Meenaghan, 1983) is important in the way it accounts for the exchange of non-financial assistance with a sponsorship partner. But it remains vague about the motives underlying a sponsor's decision to enter into a relationship and is insufficiently focused to enable its application to non-commercial sponsorships. Gardner and Shuman (1988) addressed this concern, although they failed to directly relate their definition to sport. The definition is nevertheless an interesting one in the way it suggests sponsorship is not simply a marketing activity and may have a long-term element to it. Otker (1988) and Kolah's (1999) definitions develop this, identifying that exploitable association is an important element of sponsorship. The contrast between Meenaghan's and subsequent definitions is important because it distinguishes between different views of sponsorship in the literature. One view emphasises that sponsorship is an important part of the marketing communications mix (Meenaghan, 1991; Tripodi, 2001), whilst the other indicates it is linked more broadly to additional elements of the marketing mix (Cornwell, 1995). This suggests sponsorship within different organisations may be perceived and used in different ways. The contrast is also important because it differentiates the view of sponsorship as a simple one-way flow of financial resources from one where the sponsee actually exchanges features of a property, such as a name, a logo or an image, in return for a financial payment.

The network view of sponsorship (Cousens and Slack, 1996; Erickson and Kushner, 1999; Olkonnen *et al.*, 2000; Olkonnen, 2001; Woolfe *et al.*, 2002) emphasises the engagement of sponsor/sponsee in inter-organisational relationships to which both bring their resources and capabilities. Through their collaborative efforts, value is added to the relationship via the communicative effects the sponsorship has on various audiences. The work of Olkonnen *et al.* (2000) and Olkonnen (2001) is especially notable for the way it stresses the importance of interaction between various members of the network and for the participation of each of them in the sponsorship process. On this basis, sponsorship is presented as a focal activity for relations between, for example, sponsors, sponsees, broadcasters, the media and sports fans. This is important because it extends the analysis of sponsorship beyond a single party to the relationship. It also implies that organisations involved in sponsorship deals exchange content beyond a simple financial transaction. The network view is nevertheless somewhat problematic in that it fails to address how relationships at the transactional level connect to network level relationships. It also neglects to account for the dyad relationships of which networks are comprised, to identify the actual extent of the network (where it begins and where it ends) and it provides no guidance about the formation or management of networks.

The importance of collaborative communication, as well as market orientation and brand-building behaviours, has been identified by the resource view of sponsorship as being important to the implementation and management of sponsorship programmes (Farrelly *et al.*, 2000). Amis *et al.* (1999) therefore suggested sponsorship can form the basis for the development of strategic competence. This view is useful in the way that it moves sponsorship on from being a tactical tool to a coherent strategy. But this is premised on a view that sponsorship is purely a foundation upon which to build competitive advantage and does not acknowledge sponsorships may incorporate other elements (such as building community relations). Accordingly, even though the importance of a social exchange phenomenon such as communication is acknowledged, it tends to reinforce the orthodox view of sponsorship as a rational economic activity. An interesting development of the resource view is provided by Farrelly and Quester (2003) and Farrelly *et al.* (2003), highlighting the significance of marketing orientation as a resource in sponsorship deals in long-term inter-organisational, dyadic relationships. They identified that trust and commitment are determined by the communication that takes place between sponsor and sponsee, and the degree of market orientation demonstrated by a sponsorship partner. Whilst this is an important development in understanding how the sponsorship process operates, it is rather restrictive as numerous factors are likely to influence the formation and management of sponsorship relations. For example, the benefits that can be generated through such a relationship, the cultural context within which communication takes place and the relevance of unspoken communication, such as perceptions, are all ignored.

The notion of a partnership approach existing between sponsor and sponsee has been espoused by Hoek (1998) and Mason (1999) who have identified sponsorship as a form of strategic collaboration and as a strategic alliance. This view is also common to relationship marketing and Cousens *et al.* (2001) differentiated relational sponsorships from traditional transactional sponsorships. Indeed, they noted how the extent to which a partnership approach is adopted will influence the effectiveness of the sponsorship. The relational paradigm also states that committing resources involves more than a monetary exchange, which can tie sponsor and sponsee together for more than a one-off or short-term contract. In a sponsorship market where costs have recently escalated, and where value for money has become important to sponsors (SRI, 1998), value-adding partnerships would therefore appear to be an opportune development in the sponsorship literature. For the purposes of this paper, a new definition is postulated. That is, sponsorship is: "a dyadic inter-organisational relationship in which sponsor and sponsee engage in a process of exchanging and managing resources in order to achieve a multiplicity of objectives both within and without the relationship". This definition is intended to address a number of key considerations. Firstly, it is one of few studies in existence postulating that sponsorship is a dyadic inter-organisational relationship (along with Farrelly and Quester, 2003 and Farrelly *et al.*, 2003). The paper contends that a sponsorship programme entails the exchange of more than financial resources. This means the sponsor should not be readily seen as a customer in the relationship because a sponsee may

contribute equally valuable resources to the relationship. As such, the contention is that sponsorships are partnerships, alliances and relationships, rather than simply being contractual agreements. The statement above, pertaining to an exchange and management of resources, is intended to assert that sponsorship is not simply a one-way financial transaction. Rather, it embraces the exchange of a range of resources that can include information, time and communication, from the initiation of a relationship through to its termination. It also facilitates the view of sponsorship as a process to which both sponsor and sponsee commit these resources and manage them in various ways in order to achieve their objectives. As such, it highlights how two parties to a sponsorship relationship align and what the relative contribution is that each party makes to the relationship. Further to this, the definition does not restrict the achievement of objectives to those associated with the marketing function and can thus be used to embrace broader corporate, relational, dyadic and network objectives. This is important in the way it acknowledges that sponsor and sponsee may enter into a relationship for reasons intrinsic to the relationship. This does not exclude how it enables them to build relations with customers or a network of other relationship partners, although an overall implication of the definition is that the effectiveness of managing a sponsorship is dependent upon how the relationship between sponsor and sponsee is managed. Finally, the proposed definition addresses calls made by Cornwell and Maignan (1998, p. 18) for the sponsorship literature to: “[Consider how] sponsorships could be perceived as a means to create bonds with business partners. The construction of alliances regrouping several businesses around a common sponsorship may help generate trust and commitment between the businesses as well as an integrated communications programme” and also explained by Meenaghan (1999, p. 25): “Traditionally sponsorship was viewed as an economic investment and the sponsor-event owner [property] relationship defined in economic terms. However, observation of industry practice clearly indicates that alternative perspectives on sponsor-event [property] owner relationships are appropriate. Today, it is quite common to hear sponsors and event [property] owners refer to one another as marketing partners reflecting the reality of longer-term, closer and more positive relations between the sponsorship parties.”

Sponsorship relations and relationship commitment

One element of the transactional view of sponsorship is that decision-making units are independent. Hence, sponsors identify a set of objectives, allocate resources and make decisions independently of, and in isolation from, sponsees (and vice versa). But there are several reasons why a more collaborative view of sponsorship is required: first, because it will help understand the dynamics of the relationship; second, because mutual understanding is a more effective way of leveraging value and finally, because sponsors and sponsees have yet to embrace the notion that they should ‘collaborate to compete’.

Historically, sponsorships were seen as impersonal, one-off transactions with minimal contact between sponsor and sponsee. This view imbues sponsorship with a sense of being tactical, transitory and of limited scope, thereby restricting sponsorship's effectiveness in generating long-term value for both parties. Nevertheless, a relational view of sponsorship has begun to emerge, with sponsorship being seen as a strategic inter-organisational relationship displaying the following characteristics:

- They are based on an exchange (Aldrich and Whetten, 1981) – the exchange of a financial payment in return for legal rights of association.
- Sponsor and sponsee are connected (Hakansson and Johansson, 1993) – program partners are in congruence, engaging in relationships ranging from a simple payment/rights exchange through to more complex forms of collaborative activity.
- Interaction between partners (Johnston, 1986) – verbal and non-verbal communication is evident throughout a sponsorship from first contact to dissolution.
- Interdependency between partners (Johnston *et al.*, 1999) – due to a recognition of mutual benefit, and/or the synergy between goals, activities, culture and styles of business. It is also held that sponsorship programs, particularly those in sport, are richer, deeper, more socially, culturally and geographically embedded relationships than most academics and practitioners appear to acknowledge. Indeed, Cornwell and Coote (2005) confirm that sponsorships have a social underpinning by establishing a clear link between sponsors, sponsees and consumers' social identity.

The importance of examining sport in such a way is recommended in Wolfe *et al.*'s (2002) study, which establishes the nature and extent of the sport network. In addition, Farrelly and Quester (2003) and Farrelly *et al.* (2003) explain that sponsorships are mutually beneficial and interactive exchanges, in which sponsors and sponsees openly acknowledge the need to collaborate to maximise the benefits of association. The implication of these studies is that sponsorships must be viewed as a dyadic phenomenon, involving exchange and management issues specific to two parties. These dyads are nevertheless embedded in a wider network of relationships that involve other organisations. Therefore, understanding how sponsor and sponsee relate to each other consequently enables us to understand both the micro and macro contexts for their decision-making and the management of their programs. Commitment occupies a central role in the relationship between sponsor and sponsee. The fact that an exchange of money and property rights takes place indicates that both parties commit something valuable to a sponsorship relationship. The contention here is that parties actually commit more to a relationship, including brands, personnel, facilities and time. Consequently, sponsorship programs should be acknowledged as being more complex.

Commitment is fundamental to the success of relationships and is an essential ingredient in partner retention, especially when commitment leads to a partner sacrificing short-term self-interest in favour of long-term mutually beneficial association (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987). Zineldin and Jonsson (2000) indicate that parties have to manage actively the relationship in order

to protect investments, thereby limiting the threats that opportunistic behaviour normally poses. This leads to greater openness between parties, the creation of opportunities for partners to differentiate themselves from rivals and so develop more customer-focused offers (Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Goodman and Dion, 2001). Relationship commitment also reduces partner turnover (and the costs of relationship termination/formation of new relationships) (Sharma and Patterson, 1999), motivates partners to ensure the relationship is a success (Ford *et al.*, 1998), promotes corporate citizenship behaviours (MacNeil, 1978), and helps develop relationship fairness and equity (Telser, 1980). A broad range of commitment studies has been undertaken in marketing (see Iniesta and Sanchez, 2002 for a review), some of which indicate the need for an analysis of commitment in sponsorship relations (i.e. Chadwick, 2002). The literature shows the characteristics of commitment are a desire to maintain and strengthen a relationship (Moorman *et al.*, 1992), a desire to continue in a beneficial relationship (Ganesan, 1994) and a willingness to forgo more attractive short-run alternatives in order to build a long-term relationship (Anderson and Weitz, 1992). Allied to this, analyses of relationship commitment determinants have been a focus for inter-organisational research (for example, De Ruyter *et al.*, 2001). This article contends that an evaluation of the following determinants results in sponsorship commitment being built: communication between relationship partners, values partners share, benefits partners perceive they can realise from a relationship, extent to which relationship partners trust one another, perception of a partner's commitment, role of a written contract within the relationship and location of a partner.

Research method

Undertaken using dyads involving sponsors and sponsees, the study addresses concerns about the relevance of analysing relationships at the business unit level and the network level (Iacobucci and Hopkins, 1992). This also enables the relationship commitment displayed by respective sponsorship exchange partners to be examined. Five stages were used in the methodology, to help bridge the gap between practitioner and academic and to triangulate the methods used.

Phase 1

Based upon an interpretivist philosophy which is aimed at understanding the details of a situation (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998), the study initially examined 174 pieces of information pertaining to sponsorship drawn from newspapers, press releases and website reports. Based upon observations made by Blaikie (2000) and Mason (2002), the content of this information was used both to confirm the importance of commitment as an issue in sponsorship management and as the basis for Phase 2 of the research.

Phase 2

Information generated during Phase 1 subsequently formed the basis for a realist approach which incorporated elements of grounded theory aimed at

generating predictions that could be tested following further study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954), 16 semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted (eight football clubs and eight sponsors drawn from across the four professional leagues in England). To identify determinant variables of sponsorship commitment, content analysis procedures were employed once more, with the addition of techniques advocated by Cohen (1960) being used to ensure agreement between the two coders who analysed the interview transcripts.

Phase 3

In the light of findings from Phases 1 and 2 of the research, nine commitment determinants were identified and operationalised using a combination of scales drawn from the existing literature (Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Moorman *et al.*, 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sarkar, *et al.*, 1997; Jap and Ganesan, 2000) and newly formulated scales. The nine determinants of sponsorship commitment were:

- Contract – the more formal a contract is between sponsorship partners, the greater will be the commitment of them to their relationship.
- Communications – the more open and frequently that communication between sponsorship partners takes place, the more likely a partner is to commit to a relationship.
- Relationship benefits – the greater the benefits that a sponsorship partner perceives can be derived from a relationship, the stronger will be their commitment.
- Location – the more strategically important the location of a sponsorship partner is, the more likely it is that the other partner will commit to a relationship with them.
- Timing – the more established the relationship between sponsorship partners, the stronger will be their commitment to a relationship.
- Perception of the other's commitment – the stronger a party perceives that their partner is committed to their relationship, the stronger will be their commitment to the relationship.
- Trust – the more a party trusts their partner, the stronger will be their commitment to the relationship.
- Managing the relationship – the allocation of dedicated staff to a role intended to manage the sponsorship relationship results in stronger partner commitment to the relationship.
- Shared values – the greater the shared values (organisational and personal) between sponsorship partners, the greater will be their commitment to one another.

In this context, a survey instrument was then developed and tested. Drawing from Fink's (1995) recommendations, 12 questionnaires (five football clubs, five sponsors, the Commercial and Marketing Managers Association – part of the League Managers Association – and the Premier League) were initially pilot tested. Sample members were asked both to answer questions and to complete a pro forma comment sheet on the nature and

structure of the questionnaire (Bell, 1999). In the light of feedback, the final questionnaire was developed. At this stage, an agreement was reached with the Commercial and Marketing Managers Association and the Premier League to endorse the research in order to improve the survey response rate.

Phase 4

This phase adhered to a positivist philosophy in order to enable the observation of social reality (Giere, 1979; Schon, 1983) and to a deductive research approach in order to facilitate control and prediction (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). In this context, a postal questionnaire was despatched to a sample population of 182 (92 clubs and 90 sponsors). Techniques for maximising response rate, including those advocated by Watson (1965), Veiga (1974) and Jobber (1986) were employed. This resulted in a response rate of 60.4% (based on 57 club and 53 sponsor returns). Following recommendations made by Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2002), subsequent checks for the validity and reliability were employed.

Phase 5

The results generated during Phase 5 were subsequently analysed in two stages. An exploratory factor analysis using a Principal Components approach was employed in order to reduce the number of related variables into a more manageable number prior to subsequent analysis (Nunally, 1978; Kline, 1994). Recommended tests including Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Ohlin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (Kaiser, 1970; 1974) were used to confirm the appropriateness of the model, which resulted in ten factors being identified as explaining variance in the proposed model. In order to test the predictive power of each of these [nine] factors over the [one] dependent variable (commitment), standard and hierarchical multiple regression models were used (Hair *et al.*, 1992). Following procedures laid down by Tabachnik and Fidell (1996) and Pallant (2001), measures for evaluating the model and each of the independent variables were employed. This resulted in three key determinants being identified as making a significant unique contribution to the dependent variable: shared values, perceived benefits and opportunistic behaviour.

Phase 6

Following identification of the determinants of commitment during Phase 6, Kane (1985) and Smith's (1975) observations, that research should account for the relative merits of various methods, tools and techniques and be grounded in professional practice, a final phase of triangulating interviews were undertaken. Using a cross-sectional case study approach involving an analysis of six complete dyads (six clubs and six sponsors), the structured interviews also served to examine the generalisability of the findings made during the previous phase of research. The framework listed by Bennett (1986) was used as the basis for structuring and analysing the content of these interviews.

Findings of the study

The analysis of 174 documents showed that it is common practice for sponsorship partners to refer to their commitment to one another. Here are some examples:

- “We believe [the organisation’s] decision to become our new sponsor underlies the club’s and the sponsor’s strong sense of commitment.”
- “The deal seals [the sponsor’s] commitment to supporting the South West’s leading football club.”
- “[The sponsor and the sponsee] are both committed to success . . . making this a natural alliance of two organisations sharing a similar vision.”

Of the documents analysed, approximately one half (78) contained the words ‘deal’ and/or ‘contract’, implying sponsorship relations are primarily founded upon a legal contract. It is only in more recent announcements, made in 29 of the documents, that partnership associations, notions of friendship or a broader social basis for football shirt sponsorships became apparent through the use of words like ‘relationship’, ‘partnership’ and ‘alliance’. These statements provided an insight into the initial commitment intentions of sponsorship partners – perceived benefits attributable to a sponsorship relationship, willingness to abide by the terms and conditions of a contract – rather than necessarily predicting what ultimately happens between them (principally because such statements appear at the start of, rather than during, a relationship). Yet the statements do confirm that commitment starts once one sponsorship party approaches another and communication between them begins. At a basic level, approaching and communicating with a partner means there is a calculative decision (that is, an economic one) that the potential benefits of approaching one sponsor or sponsee are greater than those associated with approaching other prospective partners. Moreover, it acknowledges that in legal terms, a partner is willing to invest in the relationship and accepts there may be costs associated with extricating themselves from a contractual relationship. A willingness to engage with a prospective partner indicates that public statements of commitment are not therefore a semantic exercise – it demonstrates that commitment is fundamental to partner engagement and retention decisions in sponsorship.

The announcements also revealed several other things. Sponsor and sponsee invariably agree that sponsorship programs are beneficial to one or both parties. In the case of the sponsee, in many of the documents, sponsor and sponsee euphemistically acknowledged the financial importance of such deals. In other words, sponsorships are ultimately about the bottom line and not just about the intangible benefits of, say, being associated with a particular partner. In the case of sponsors, benefits can include the advantages attributable to an association with a particular brand or to links with local communities, although the wording of sponsorship announcements often makes the precise nature of the benefits difficult to establish. The duration of sponsor and sponsee commitment was also evident in the statements. In most cases it appears that sponsorship partners consider a commitment to mean a one to three-year contractual relationship. Given the existence of contextual

information, such as that drawn from the annual reports of sponsors and sponsee regarding shared values, convergent objectives and links to particular target markets, there is clear evidence that sponsorships are not simply the result of a transactional exchange involving legal rights and a financial payment. Notions of sharing seemed to be particularly strong in the sponsorship announcements, as did the role of communication, with statements like “we have been talking for a while” and “we have spoken on a regular basis” being notable.

Following the initial review of announcements, the Phase 2 interviews with sponsors and sponsees indicated that seven variables have an impact on sponsorship commitment. These were: communication between partners, values shared by partners, the perceived benefits of a sponsorship, perceptions of a partner’s commitment, impact of geographic location, trust and contract formality. In Table 1 below, the reader’s attention is drawn to a commentary on how each variable has an impact upon sponsorship commitment. Quotes from the interviews are also presented to illustrate each of the identified determinants of sponsorship commitment. A brief summary of findings made during Phase 5 of the research is also presented in the figure.

Phases 4 and 5 of the research confirmed that two of the above variables (shared values and perceived benefits) were statistically significant determinants of sponsorship commitment. However, the analysis revealed that a new composite variable, opportunism (which was strongly linked to perceptions of a partner’s commitment) also had a significant impact on commitment. The ability of a sponsorship partner to behave opportunistically is regulated by factors such as the idiosyncratic investments made in a relationship (that is, dedicated investments that are made in a specific relationship), indicating that the greater or more idiosyncratic these investments, the stronger the ties that will bind a party to a relationship. These are affirmative actions that create a self-interest stake in a relationship, thus affirming one party’s commitment to another. In other words, once a sponsor or sponsee has invested heavily in a sponsorship arrangement, the less likely it is they will behave opportunistically and look for alternative sponsorship partners. An example of an idiosyncratic investment is information – the more of it you give to a sponsorship partner, the greater your investment in the relationship and the more committed you will be to relations with your sponsorship partner. Using the same logic, opportunistic, and therefore less committed, sponsorship partners will be more likely to withhold information from a partner. This enables them to dissolve the relationship more readily in the event of an alternative sponsorship opportunity becoming available.

A sense of self-fulfilling prophecy may underpin sponsorship opportunism in that, because such behaviour is often expected and sponsorship partners will actually engage in opportunism. The more opportunistic a sponsorship partner is, the less likely they are to commit to a long-term relationship and consequently they will avoid actions (such as sharing information) that may undermine efforts to leave a relationship. Overall, the findings of this study highlighted some important features of sponsorship deals. Sponsorship partners are more or less committed because they may or may not share values with a partner. For instance, commitment between sponsee and

Table 1: The nature of sponsorship commitment

	Communication	Shared Values	Perceived Benefits	Trust	Contract	Location	Perceptions of partner commitment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exchange of formal, informal, meaningful and timely information. The stronger the communication between sponsorship partners, the stronger relationship commitment will be. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commonality in beliefs about what behaviours, goals, and policies are important or unimportant, appropriate or inappropriate, and right or wrong. The greater the degree of shared values between a one party and another, the stronger relationship commitment to them will be. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A relationship that is valued above all others and will deliver superior benefits to the available alternatives. The greater the benefits that a partner perceives can achieve from a relationship, the stronger commitment will be. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actions will be open, honest and fair in the relationship with a sponsorship partner. The more a party trusts sponsorship partner, the stronger will be commitment to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The way explicit statements about rights, responsibilities and obligations are enshrined in a written document; The more explicit the statements in a written sponsorship partner is with a partner, the stronger a party's commitment to them will be. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which identification, interdependence and co-ordination can be achieved via the specific location of a partner. The more important the location of a sponsorship partner is to an organisation, the stronger relationship commitment will be. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a partner was felt to be making a commitment, the likelihood of reciprocal commitments is likely to emerge; the stronger the perception of partner's sponsorship commitment, the stronger the other party's commitment to them will be.
Quotes from Phase 2 interviews	<p>"We got on well from the first time we met. They were aware of our position and were happy to tell us what they wanted from us and from the relationship."</p> <p>"They were very good. We went along to the stadium for a presentation. What they said convinced us this was going to be a good deal for us. They were very open about who they were and where they are going."</p>	<p>"The club wouldn't just work with anyone, we're not like that. This is a family run business and most of our supporters are family oriented. We get fathers, sons, whole families coming down... there's no way we would ever get into a relationship with, say, a pornographer. It just doesn't fit in with who we are... I think it would offend people... not so sure about gambling either, although there is more of a link between betting and football than porn and football."</p> <p>"We have similar aspirations to be the best in our chosen fields. We both have an important role to play in the local community" and "... we're both family businesses, we care about the family."</p>	<p>"[The company] deliberately selected this club because there are certain aspects of their operations that are in synergy with ours."</p> <p>"A number of prospective sponsors approached us but we decided to go with [them] because we have a lot in common, starting with the kind of business objectives we are both working to."</p>	<p>"They are doing what is necessary to manage the problems in an appropriate way. We have no doubts about that... how does it reflect upon our brand? The company is unconcerned at this point, we trust the club to do what is right."</p> <p>"I've no reason to doubt that they would do anything to undermine our relationship."</p>	<p>"They have made a commitment to us of £600,000 lasting two years. For this, they get their name on our shirts and we give them a corporate box. They also get six boards in the ground and their logo on the front of the match day magazine."</p> <p>"We have made a commitment worth in the region of £1 million for a one year deal. We could have negotiated more into the deal but that would have cost us more than we were prepared to pay."</p>	<p>"They are a company with strong family values, as are we... the people in this area are important to both of us."</p> <p>"The company wanted to give something back to the local community. Given the club's financial problems, we felt this was the best way of doing it."</p> <p>"They've developed a bit of a reputation for being 'fly-by-nights'... look at their record over the past few seasons, they don't keep their sponsors for longer than two seasons normally."</p>	<p>"I've heard they are on the look out for a better deal than the one they have with us. If it's true then clearly, it's not in our best interests to spend too much time building up our relationship with them."</p>
Finding from Phase 5 of the research	<p>Communication made the fifth largest unique contribution to predicting why sponsorship partners commit to a relationship with a sponsor or sponsee.</p>	<p>Shared values the largest contribution to predicting why sponsorship partners commit to a relationship with a sponsor or sponsee.</p>	<p>Perceived benefits made the second largest contribution to predicting why sponsorship partners commit to a relationship with a sponsor or sponsee.</p>	<p>"Trust" made the seventh largest unique contribution to predicting why sponsorship partners commit to a relationship with a sponsor or sponsee. In terms of the contract, significant points included the way explicit statements about rights, responsibilities and obligations are enshrined in a written document. The more explicit the statements in a written sponsorship contract with a partner, the stronger a party's commitment to them will be.</p>	<p>The contract (contractual terms of the sponsorship contract) made the fourth largest contribution to predicting why sponsorship partners commit to a relationship with a sponsor or sponsee.</p>	<p>Location made the sixth largest contribution to predicting why sponsorship partners commit to a relationship with a sponsor or sponsee.</p>	<p>A new variable - Opportunism (linked strongly to Perceptions of partner commitment) - made the third largest contribution to predicting why sponsorship partners commit to a relationship with a sponsor or sponsee.</p>

sponsee may be stronger because they have both made a firm commitment to raising environmental awareness or because they see themselves as being representative of a particular geographic region. Sponsor and sponsee may also perceive that benefits may or may not be attributable to a particular sponsorship relationship. The greater the benefits – such as increased brand recall for a sponsor or securing a revenue stream for a sponsee – the greater will be the commitment displayed by a partner. The Phase 6 interviews undertaken here helped to clarify the precise nature of the impact that the three variables – shared values, perceived benefits and opportunism – have on commitment, ultimately revealing that there are actually four different sponsorship commitment types:

- (1) **‘Calculators and Commercials’**: sponsors and sponsees that commit to a sponsorship deal primarily for reasons of commercial gain and have a more strategic or long-term view of sponsorship. They actively seek an appropriate sponsorship partner, particularly one that is likely to have similar commercial or organisational values.
- (2) **‘Cynics and Short-Termers’**: sponsors and sponsees that commit opportunistically to a sponsorship deal, motivated only by commercial gain, and have a short-term view of sponsorship. They move quickly from one sponsorship partner to another, are generally reactive, approaching sponsorship partners as they become available. The sponsorship partner has few, if any, links or similarities.
- (3) **‘Carers and Communals’**: sponsors and sponsees that commit to a sponsorship deal for personal reasons or for the benefit of the community, although commercial factors generally still play a part. They have a longer-term view of sponsorship, particularly when there are existing links between the sponsorship partners, and actively seek sponsorship partners, especially with organisations where there are existing, local or community links. Sponsorship partners may or may not have similarities, although could have common location or community profile.
- (4) **‘Innocents and Indifferents’**: sponsors and sponsees that are not really sure why they have committed to a sponsorship deal, but perceive commitment as beneficial, have a short-term view of sponsorship, react to an approach from a prospective sponsorship partner. The sponsorship partner may not have any particular links or similarities.

The implications of making a sponsorship commitment

The findings indicate that making a commitment to a partner is an important feature of sponsorship programs and shows that parties need to address carefully how they engage with prospective partners. How partners engage will have implications across the lifetime of a sponsorship deal. The study's findings show that sponsorship partners can display various commitment intentions, suggesting the lifetime of a sponsorship consists of the following three stages:

Table 2: Implications of committing to different partnership types in sponsorship

<p>CALCULATORS AND COMMERCIALS</p> <p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment intentions – strategic orientation with aim of generating long-term value from a sponsorship programme. • Commitment foundations – seek sponsorship partners that have compatible values and which are seeking long-term generation of value. • Basis for relationship – collaborative approach to sponsorship relations focusing on joint achievement of beneficial outcomes. <p>Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy and tactics – short-term management of long-term strategic relationship. • Managing duration – ensuring continued focus on long-term, with an emphasis on maintaining relationship synergy. • Retention decision – whether long-term value has been generated or if a further contractual period will enable further benefits to be secured. <p>Dissolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship evaluation – extent to which the relationship has been a value adding one. • Relationship termination – generation of maximum long-term value from a specific relationship. • Dissolution management – collaborative approach aimed at achieving harmonious relationship dissolution whilst ensuring additional value can be extracted from the relationship. 	<p>CARERS AND COMMUNALS</p> <p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment intentions – strategic orientation with aim of allying self-interest with that of the local community or a specific geographic area. • Commitment foundations – seek sponsorship partners that display compatible commercial and community orientations. • Basis for relationship – collaborative approach aimed at securing commercial benefits allied to delivery of community/social value. <p>Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy and tactics – long-term orientation in management of relationship with emphasis on tactical relations with local community. • Managing duration – ensuring an ongoing focus on commercial and communal/social aspects of a sponsorship. • Retention decision – whether sponsorship has been simultaneously generating commercial and communal/social returns. <p>Dissolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship evaluation – extent to which the relationship has been commercially and communally/socially successful. • Relationship termination – simultaneous generation of maximum commercial and communal benefits. • Dissolution management – collaborative approach, aimed at achieving harmonious relationship dissolution in order that commercial and communal integrity is preserved.
<p>CYNICS AND SHORT-TERMERS</p> <p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment intentions – short-term with strong emphasis on generating maximum benefit in shortest period of time; • Commitment foundations – seek sponsorship partners that can deliver the maximum benefits, particularly financial, in the shortest possible time. • Basis for relationship – self-interest with no particular emphasis placed on, for example, sharing values with a partner. <p>Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy and tactics – no strategic view of sponsorship but strong emphasis on short-term tactics and opportunism. • Managing duration – unlikely to consider enduring or ongoing relationship, unless alternative, more attractive sponsorship partners are unforthcoming. • Retention decision – based on assessment of short-term benefits generated and/or availability of alternative partners. <p>Dissolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship evaluation – extent to which relationship has been a profitable one. • Relationship termination – based on likelihood of further (financial) benefits being achieved. • Dissolution management – self-oriented approach with little or no regard for the impact this may have on a partner. 	<p>INNOCENTS AND INDIFFERENTS</p> <p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment intentions – more likely to be short-term although strategic orientation may emerge. • Commitment foundations – do not seek sponsorship partners and will often be unsure why relationship is being forged or what benefits it can deliver. • Basis for relationship – likely to have no clear view of who, or what purpose, the relationship serves. <p>Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy and tactics – unlikely to have either a short or a long-term view of sponsorship leading to strong emphasis on short-term decision making. • Managing duration – relationships invariably short-term and managed on a case-by-case basis. • Retention decision – given absence of coherent sponsorship strategy and reactive decision-making, likely to be ad hoc and inconsistent. <p>Dissolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship evaluation – extent to which post-hoc evaluation of sponsorship decision indicates relationship has been beneficial. • Relationship termination – extent to which post-hoc judgement of relationship suggests it should be continued/terminated. • Dissolution management – not an issue, although may be strong emphasis on extricating the organisation from an ill-conceived relationship.

- (1) **Engagement** – the process through which prospective partners assess whether commitment intentions are compatible with those of a partner. Key questions at this stage are:
- Are one party's commitment intentions compatible with those of the prospective partner and/or are they acceptable?
 - When committing to a partner, what will be the basis for this?
 - How will the engagement phase impact on the commitment of each partner to the remainder of the relationship?
- (2) **Retention** – which involves the process of building, managing and retaining relationship commitment with a partner. Key questions are:
- What will be the tactical and strategic implications of the commitment intentions displayed by sponsor and sponsee?
 - In an attempt to manage the duration of a partner's commitment, what measures can be taken?
 - When deciding whether to retain a partner, upon what factors should this decision be based?
- (3) **Dissolution** – which is the process through which partners work towards evaluating and terminating a commitment. Key questions are:
- When seeking to assess the outcomes of relationship commitment, how should it be measured?
 - When terminating a relationship with a partner, what will be the basis for this?
 - What challenges will a partner face in dissolving the relationship and how might this partner mitigate any negative effects of dissolution?

There are clear implications for organisations engaging in relationships with one of the four commitment types. Table 2 below considers these issues using the ERD (engagement, retention, dissolution) framework. The table shows what a prospective partner should expect when considering whether to commit to a relationship.

Conclusions and limitations

A limitation of this research is the focus on sponsorship commitment in soccer. However, the growth in value of soccer sponsorships, the global popularity of soccer and the increasing proportion of worldwide sponsorship expenditure accounted for by sport, justify the approach taken. In addition, the use of sport as a sponsorship platform by large and small, domestic and international companies in a broad range of sectors provides further justification. A second limitation is that the analysis resulting in the identification of four sponsorship types took place at one point in time and is therefore static. This is inevitable because characterising the varying degrees of commitment at different stages of a relationship across a wide range of dyads is difficult. There is clearly an opportunity for further research involving a longitudinal examination of commitment across the life of a sponsorship program, which may offer insights into whether the development of these committer types is chronological, and under what conditions organisations move from one orientation to another.

Despite these limitations, this paper makes a constructive contribution to understanding sponsorship relations. Many practitioners (sponsors, sponsees and agents) still seem unsure as to what to make of sponsorship. In the context of these challenges, the most important implication for relationship partners is that they need to recognise that a sponsorship program is not simply a one-off transactional spend, nor is sponsorship just the result of short-term tactical decision-making. If the intention is for, say, a sponsorship to deliver the benefits of long-term association, careful partner selection becomes a vital decision. What this study shows is that by engaging with particular partner types, achieving these benefits may be easier or more difficult. This means sponsors and sponsees need to understand the basis upon which they and their prospective partners commit to one another. If an organisation associates with a party but they do not share values, this undermines intentions and goals. Alternatively, if a party is seeking to realise particular benefits, allying to one type of partner may yield benefits more or less readily. The study does not imply that by engaging with, for instance, a 'Calculator and Commercial' type as opposed to a 'Cynic and Short-Termmer' type, commitment will be more significant. The typology presented does not portray this type of relationship partner as being an inherently bad one, nor that the former is an inherently good one. Instead, the different commitment types illustrate what managers should expect when engaging with each of them.

Sponsorships should no longer be viewed as transactions because they are actually inter-organisational relationships. This poses a new set of challenges for sponsorship managers including how to establish a beneficial association with a partner, and how to retain them on a long-term basis. Careful selection of a compatible relationship partner raises the status of the sponsorship management process, emphasising the importance of value-adding partnerships rather than just revenue generation or the benefits of an association. The paper also indicates that when managing a relationship, sponsorship programs must be managed in order to achieve long-term strategic goals. This will involve working with a partner to develop common goals and policies, and to establish the mutual recognition that an association is of potential benefit to both parties. Only then will sponsors and sponsees be able to create an open relationship where partners share key personnel, who are working together for the overall dyadic success of a programme. The research confirms that sponsorship management practices are often less sophisticated than other forms of marketing communication or strategy and are frequently brutal and naïve in nature. Such an unfortunate use of sponsorship highlights the need for sponsorship managers to be more professional and adept at generating long-term value through an association. Only when both parties understand the processes through which they commit to one another, will they appreciate that the cumulative benefits of sponsorship come through managing relationships more effectively, and not by chasing revenue or exploiting a property.

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