“The impact of the doping effect on cycling sponsorship: analysis of brand lovers and cycling fans consumer reaction”

Exposé

Submitted by
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Abstract

Title: “The impact of the doping effect on cycling sponsorship: analysis of brand lovers and cycling fans consumer reaction”

Keywords: Doping; Sport sponsorship; Team/athlete identification; Brand attachment; Image transfer; Consumer behaviour; Image restoration (optional).

Background: Doping cases are increasing in recent years and it has reached such dimension that concerns society as a whole. The phenomenon will be more extensive because the interests related to sport grow larger. As a result, the sport and the sponsorship are affected in a negative way and consumers may change their opinion about the athletes or sponsor brand. This study shows that far from being limited to the public health and ethics issues, doping is a critical business problem that companies have to face.

Purpose: The intention of the thesis is to find out if there is a relation between brand attachment and demand for sport with consumer behaviour after a doping case. In order to measure this possible attitude change, the perception of the sponsored brand image and the image transfer will be analyzed through the associations of the Sponsorship Portfolio Model. Also, a Doping Effect-Consumer Behaviour Model will be developed to describe the repercussion of sponsorship on consumers arising from the doping effect. The last aim of this study is to find out how effective image restoring strategies are on customers.

Method: A quantitative approach will be used to evaluate the hypotheses. The data will be collected through an online survey. The questionnaire will be divided into two parts: the first one will set forth general questions concerning doping (H₁) and sponsorship (H₂) and the second part will evaluate the negative impact on people who identify with athletes/team (H₃), sport lovers (H₄), and brand lovers (H₅) and investigate their consumers’ reaction.
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1. Introduction

Sport used to be a game full of values; from respect, partnership, teamwork to competitiveness, social relationship and justice (Burdett, 1997). With the evolution of society to the present, the sport has become a business (Ratten, 2011).

The rivalry has made that it has been used by any possible means in order to gain an advantage in any sport event and thus achieve the status or money associated to victory, often resorting to doping, where doctors and trainers have worked unethically to increase the performance of athletes (Baron, Martin, & Abol, 2007).

The term "doping" is used to refer to the use of banned substances (or the presence of markers of such substances in the athlete's body) or methods that may artificially enhance physical or mental condition of an athlete, and with it, the performance in sports, according to the International Olympic Committee (2004).

Rather often nowadays we hear in the news about rejecting behaviours in the sport world. As a result, the sport and the sponsorship are affected in a negative way. Sponsors are afraid of their brand or product experiment negative repercussions for being linked to a doping case, so consumers may change their opinion about the brand sponsored.

From my point of view, the relationship doped athlete-sponsor-fan is still undiscovered, being this reason why the research topic chosen is about the impact of the doping effect on sport sponsorship and fans consumer behaviour.
2. **Problem statement**

2.1. **Research questions**

This research aims to understand brand lovers and cycling fans consumer behaviour, with the formulation of these questions:

RQ₁: How is the sponsoring brand image perceived after a doping scandal?

RQ₂: How are customers affected after a doping scandal?

*RQ₃: How do image repair activities affect consumer behaviour?*

2.2. **Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to find out if there is a relation between brand attachment and the demand for sport (team/athlete identification and performance of the sport) with consumer behaviour after a doping case. I will try to find out how consumers react to the brand and sportsman after a doping case and how effective image restoring activities are on customers.

Previous studies have mainly dealt with the relation between sponsor companies and elite athlete (Bloxsome, Voges, & Pope, 2011; Connor & Mazanov, 2010; Messner & Reinhard, 2012). However, not many studies revealed if there is change in the consumer behaviour of brand lovers and sport fans in a doping framework.

2.3. **Relevance**

Consumer behaviour is an important concept due to its relevant impact in strategic decisions of the company. After a negative effect on the brand, the company must analyze the customer thoughts. In this way, it could carry out an effective marketing communication strategy since the customer is the most important pillar of marketing.
3. Theoretical background

3.1. Demand for sport

The literature has divided the demand for sport into two subgroups, direct demand and indirect demand (Borland & Macdonald, 2003).

The original idea is carried out by the economist Alfred Marshall (Solberg, Hanstad, & Thøring, 2010); the direct demand is the consumption of goods and services in order to satisfy consumers’ necessities while the indirect demand is derived from the direct demand.

Referring to sport, there are types of direct demand: demand for live attendance to sporting events and for watching sporting events via media (Brennan, Canning, & McDowell, 2013).

The indirect demand for sport is the resources spent by business stakeholders on sporting contest because of the direct demand from sports fans. There are some types of derived demand as television advertisers, subscriptions or pay-per-view, merchandising and sponsorship by companies which want to build a positive reputation and be a well-known brand in the market (Brennan et al., 2013; Solberg et al., 2010).

The indirect demand is extremely affected by doping scandals. Fewer and fewer firms want to sponsor athletes or sporting events as there is the risk of doping. The brand image could be adversely affected and, therefore, it could lose current and potential clients (Bloxsome et al., 2011).

The direct and indirect demands are influenced by some variables which have a special relation to doping (Borland & Macdonald, 2003; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001):

- Identification with teams/athletes
- Performance of the sport

I found especially interesting the perspective expounded by Solberg and colleagues (2010). Depending on some variables such as age, interest in sport, uncertainty of outcome, identification with athletes and calculative motive, people have different opinions about doping.
Additional work is needed to find out if this different opinion causes a change in the consumer behaviour.

3.1.1. Identification with athlete/team

Athlete and team identification is a phenomenon connected with sport consumption. People experience an emotional attachment and this feeling affects their behaviour (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Sutton, McDonald, Milne & Cimperman, 1997). Individuals with high identification would consume and invest more time and money (Gau, James, & Kim, 2009).

However, the benefits of using teams/athletes as brand image can reverse markedly if they, for example, are involved in disgraceful event (Erdogan, 1999).

Applying the theory of celebrity endorsement effect, three different effects on the consumer can be found:

Till and Shimp (1995) found out that a negative information about an athlete endorser influences on consumers’ perception of the sportman, and also the endorsed product.

On the other hand, when a negative situation affects to the endorser, the consumers may feel empathy (Berger, Sorensen, & Rasmussen, 2010; Puj, 2012). This feeling is a positive effect and the consumer will purchase sponsored products.

The third possibility is to sack the endorser in order to avoid a link with the company (Louie, Kulik, & Jacobson, 2001).

3.1.1. Performance of the sport

Another possibility to demand sport is the performance of the sport or the uncertainty of outcome (Solberg et al., 2010). Uncertainty of outcome is a special characteristic of sport events that differentiates them from other services (Gratton & Taylor, 2000).

The objective of this study is to find out if people who like to watch or practise sport without any identification with team or athlete will change their perception to the sponsoring brand after a doping scandal and if there is a possible attitude change that affects their consumer behaviour.
3.2. Brand attachment

Based on the Thomson’s (2006) research, Rafi, Ahsan, Saboor, Hafeez and Usman (2011) defined brand attachment as “a critical construct connecting the consumer and the brand affecting the behaviours and fosters the profitability of the brand and lifetime values of the customers”.

Studies in marketing propose that consumers can also feel attached thanks to marketplace entities, such as product brands (Keller, 2003) and celebrities (Thomson, 2006) relating brand attachment with the theory of endorsement.

3.3. Sport sponsorship

Cliffe and Motions (2005) developed a sponsorship portfolio model which links the consumer behaviour with the different components of the sponsorship.

![Sport sponsorship portfolio](image)

Figure 3 Sport sponsorship portfolio (Cliffe & Motion, 2005) Adapted version

Within the sponsorship components, associations have a special relation to doping because a possible damage in the image of the sponsoring company (Lagae, 2005). Brand associations can be influenced because of the celebrity endorsement and sponsorship activities (Keller, 1993). Keller’s research is based on the theory of the meaning transfer (McCracken, 1989). For Amis and Cornwell
(2005), “Consumers assign meanings to celebrities based on individual's interpretation of celebrity image in television, athletics…” and this meaning is transferred to the brand image being able to change the consumer behaviour (Cliffe & Motions, 2005).

3.4. Image restoring (optional)

The author of the image restoration theory is Benoît (1995) who has also written or co-authored numerous studies about image restoration. This theory has been used to analyze tobacco media campaigns (Metzler, 2001), U.S. Air Force Army sexual scandals (Roberts, 2006), hotels crisis (Vassilikopoulou, Siomkos, Chatzipanagiotou, & Triantafillidou, 2009) and image repair strategies of famous sportsmen like Lance Armstrong (Hambrick, Frederick, & Sanderson, 2013) and Roger Clemens (Sanderson, 2008).

Rosenfield (1968), Scott & Lyman (1968) and Ryan (1982) have carried out several image restoration strategies that have provided the basis for Benoît's theory. This theory explains the different strategies (denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification) to rebuild the image of a brand/celebrity when the reputation has been damaged.

3.5. Doping Effect-Consumer Behaviour Model

The Doping Effect-Consumer Behaviour Model (DE-COB) has been developed to describe the effects of sponsorship resulting from a doping scandal.

DE-COB model has been designed with the support of different theories, explained before, regarding sponsorship and consumer behaviour.

Figure 4 Doping Effect-Consumer Behaviour Model (López, 2013)
4. **Hypotheses**

H₁. If a sponsor brand is involved in a doping scandal, the image of the sponsored brand will be negative compared to previous.

H₂. The negative image transfer will cause an attitude change.

H₃. Consumers who are highly identified with a cycling team or athlete involved in a doping scandal will not change their consumer behaviour towards the sponsoring brand.

H₄. Consumers who demand cycling because of the performance will change their consumer behaviour towards the sponsoring brand involved in a doping scandal.

H₅. Consumers who are attached to a brand involved in a doping scandal will not change their consumer behaviour.

H₆. *Image repair activities help to restore lost brand image after a doping scandal having a positive change in consumer behaviour.*

![Figure 5 Research Model](image-url)
## 5. Review of literature

**Introductory articles**

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• Communication as the key for promoting.  
• Sponsorship of sporting events and branding have an important impact on consumer behaviour. |
• Reasons why doping turns up and how affects sport and sponsorship. |
| Sponsorship                    | Effects of Strategic Exiting from Sponsorship after Negative Event Publicity. | (Messner & Reinhard, 2012) | *Psychology and Marketing* | • Impact of a sponsor’s corporate reputation on consumer responses (after a negative event). |
The impact of the doping effect on cycling sponsorship

### Demand for sport

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• Variables affected by doping.  
• Other sources of demand (broadcasting, sponsorship and merchandising). |

### Identification with athlete/team

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| Team identification          | Effects of Team Identification on Motives, Behavior Outcomes, and Perceived Service Quality. | (Gau et al., 2009)           | *Asian Journal of Management and Humanity Sciences*     | • Examination of the emotional and cognitive effects of team identification  
• Links between consumer behaviour and team identification.  
• ‘Highly identified fans consume more media and merchandise’. |
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| Celebrity Endorsement | Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review                           | (Erdogan, 1999)         | *Journal of Marketing Management*                                      | • Importance of the use of celebrities as marketing strategy.  
• Historical development of celebrity endorsement.  
• Pros and cons of Celebrity Endorsement Strategy.  
• Possibility of bad image because of celebrities’ negative qualities.                |
|                       | Endorsers in Advertising: The Case of Negative Celebrity Information    | (Till & Shimp, 1995)    | *Journal of Advertising*                                              | • There is a risk in the using of celebrity endorsers.  
• Study of the impact of negative information about a celebrity on the brand.          |
|                       | Positive Effects of Negative Publicity: When Negative Reviews Increase Sales | (Berger et al., 2010)   | *Marketing Science*                                                    | • “Can negative information about a product increase sales, and if so, when?”  
• The study argues that negative publicity can increase the sales.                      |
**Brand attachment**

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- Differentiation between brand attachment and brand attitude strength.  
- Impact on purchasing behaviour.  
- Brand attachment measure scale. |
|                     | Knowledge Metrics of Brand Equity: Critical Measure of Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength | (Rafi et al., 2011) | *Asian Journal of Business Management* | - Knowledge metrics: relationship between brand attachment and brand associations. |

**Image transfer**

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- Relationship between team identification and image transfer. |
### Image restoring (optional)

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| Image restoring | A Transformative Typology of Pragmatic and Ethical Responses to Common Corporate Crises : Interaction of Rhetorical Strategies, Situational Contingencies, and Influential Stakeholders | (Wallace, Ferguson, & Chandler, 2007) | Association for Business Communication Convention. | • Definitions of Crisis Communication Rhetorical Strategies. Analysing which ones are perceived more positively and negatively in terms of ethical, recommend and effective.  
• Study of different reputation crisis scenarios (Interesting for the thesis: illegal activity and social irresponsibility). |
• Links between response, reputation, and responsibility. |
6. Methodology

The methodology carried out in this thesis is divided into two complementary subprojects: desktop (primary data) and field research (secondary data). Within the field research, it will be used quantitative and qualitative methods.

5.1. Primary data

Objectives:

1. Get results that may be the basis for the development of scientific creation:
   a. Definitions necessary for the understanding of the theoretical background.
   b. Identify the field methodology to be applied in this study.

2. Be a base on the construction of knowledge for the field research. Academic journals' articles, books, notices, circulars and dossiers will be analysed.

Some of the articles and books that I am already taking into consideration can be seen at the references section of this exposé.

5.2. Secondary data

Objectives:

1. Collection of information about attitudes and behaviours to add to the findings obtained in the desktop research of the project.

2. Obtain the information needed to affirm or reject the hypotheses of the study.

An online questionnaire will be launched via Sphinx software in order to get the required information to succeed in the study.

- Quantitative research with seven or five point (Likert) scales.
- Qualitative research: wall of pictures and open-ended questions.
The questionnaire will be divided into two parts:

The first one will set forth general questions concerning doping and sponsorship; and how this factor affects to the image of the sponsored brand. The information collected will be used to affirm or reject the $H_1$ and $H_2$.

Possible questions:

- Are you aware of any sponsorship between a company and an athlete, team, event or other? Y/N

- Have you ever heard of a doping scandal which might have affected the relationship between sponsor and sponsored? Y/N

- In what way would you best describe your reaction to the incident? Neutral/Positive/Negative/Surprised (…)

- Did you have any previous perceptions connected to the sponsoring company? Y/N. If yes, which ones? Status/Energy/Extreme/Quality/Respect (…)

- How have your previous perceptions of the sponsoring company changed because of the doping scandal? Neutral/Positive/Negative (…)

- What was your attitude towards the sponsoring company’s desired associations before the doping scandal? Very bad/Bad/neutral/good/Very good

- What was your attitude towards the sponsoring company’s desired associations after the doping scandal? Very bad/Bad/neutral/good/Very good

The second part will evaluate the negative impact on people who identify with athletes/team ($H_3$), sport lovers ($H_4$) and brand lovers ($H_5$), and investigate their consumers’ reaction. This second part will separate in three:

- Brand attachment. It will be asked to select some sponsoring brands related in a doping scandal that they like. Then, participants have to rate some five-point Likert-type items (Ahluwalia, Stilley & Swaminathan, 2009; Park, Macinnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Dawn, 2010), for example:
○ This brand makes a statement about what is important to me in life.

○ This brand’s image and my self image are similar in a lot of ways.

- Demand for sport. The participants will be asked the motive why demand watching sport (Solberg et al., 2010). If the answer is Identification with athlete/team, participants will select some athletes/teams related in doping scandals that they like. Then, they have to rate four-item scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (James & Trail, 2001), for example:

  ○ Regardless of whether the (athlete/team) win or lose I will continue to support them.

  ○ I consider myself to be a real fan of (athlete/team)

- Finally, participants will answer some questions about their consumer behaviour after a doping scandal. A behavioural outcome measure will be applied, 2 items will be rated (Asadollahi & Hanzaee, 2011):

  ○ How often have you bought the brand in the past? Not at all (1) to very frequently (5).

  ○ Do you intend to buy the brand in the future? Not at all (1) to very frequently (5).

  ○ If you answered 1 or 2, in which way do you change your consumer behaviour? I stopped buying their products/ I tried to substitute their products/ It made me think twice before purchasing from that brand.

The potential sample of the questionnaire will be cycling fans with enough knowledge about doping.

After the analysis of the data obtained in the questionnaire, I would like to conduct 5-10 in-depth interviews with professionals in order to get another point of view, for example, for the image restoration strategies (H6).
7. **Overview of chapters**

**Chapter 1. Introduction**

1.1. Background
1.2. Problem discussion
1.3. Relevance of the topic
1.4. Purpose of the thesis
1.5. Demarcations
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**Chapter 2. Theoretical framework**

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   2.1.2. Brand image, identity and personality
   2.1.3. Brand awareness
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   2.1.6. Goodwill

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   2.5.1. Doping effect
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3.3. Implementation
3.4. Credibility

Chapter 4. Results and discussion

Chapter 5. Conclusions

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5.2. Managerial implications
5.3. Limitations
5.4. Further research

Chapter 6. References

Chapter 7. Appendices
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9. References


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Rationalization of Doping". Sociology of Sport Journal, 19, 276–301.


The impact of the doping effect on cycling sponsorship


The impact of the doping effect on cycling sponsorship


