Cornwell and Maignan reviewed the progress of sponsorship research in 1998, and a great deal has transpired in terms of research since then. The aim of this review is to account for progress to date and to set a research agenda that takes sponsorship research to the next level. Since the Cornwell and Maignan review was published, there have been a few other stock taking papers, including one international review by Walliser in 2003 and a “state of the art” paper that was more focused on theory development (Cornwell, 2008), but no recent systematic review of research.


The Cornwell and Maignan review identified five streams of research including: the nature of sponsorship, managerial aspects of sponsorship, measurement of sponsorship effects, strategic use of sponsorship, and legal and ethical considerations in sponsorship. While some streams have logically declined, for example, the case for explaining the nature of sponsorship as market driven is now accepted and no longer a topic of extensive interest; other areas continue as strong, for example, measurement of sponsorship effects has grown considerably. New areas of sponsorship research such as sponsorship’s contribution to brand equity and the impact of ambushng have also developed. Given space considerations, we will only detail one area as illustrative and that is the work related to brand equity.

Brand Equity Focused Sponsorship Research

Brand equity is defined as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm or/and to that firm’s customers” (Aaker, 1991, p.15). Keller (1993) proposed Customer-Based Brand Equity model, consisting of brand awareness and brand association based on brand knowledge as a determinant of brand equity. These two models on brand equity are the most accepted theories in both academic and practical areas.

For the most part, recent studies on brand equity in the sport context have tended to center around sports team’s brand equity (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Bauer, Sauer, & Schmitt, 2005; Ross, 2006) and firm’s brand equity sponsoring (Keller, 1998; Cornwell, Roy, & Steinard II, 2001; Roy & Cornwell, 2003). Gladden, Milne, & Sutton (1998), from sports team’s brand equity perspective, contended that brand equity plays a cardinal role in building and strengthening team’s image and increasing its asset. Bauer, Sauer, and Schmitt (2005) proposed a customer-based brand equity model in team sport (BETS) using Gladden and Funk (2002) model of brand associations and Keller’s (1993) brand equity model. They stress the importance of brand equity to the economic success of sports organizations based on consumer responses. From the sponsoring firm perspective, much attention has been given to corporate brand equity based on sponsorships in the sport setting. Keller (1993, p.307) asserted that “sponsored events can contribute to brand equity by becoming associated to the brand and improving brand awareness, adding new associations, or improving the strength, favorability, and uniqueness of existing associations for a firm.” Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard (2001) highlighted that brand equity under active sponsorship management plays a vital role in differentiating the brand from competitors and in adding financial value to the sponsoring firm.

Considerable attention has been given to the question of brand equity under sponsorship. Previous research has investigated sponsor - event fit (Speed & Thompson, 2000; Roy & Cornwell, 2003), event (sport) - brand fit
(Musante, Milne, & McDonald, 1999), and sponsor awareness and sponsor image (Javalgi, Traylor, Gross, & Lampman, 1994; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Carrillat, Lafferty, & Harris, 2005) in order to enhance sponsor’s brand equity. Another factor potentially enhancing brand equity is team identification (Tsuji, Bennett, & Leigh, 2009). Team identification based on social identity theory is defined as “degree to which a fan’s relationship with the team contributes to their social identity” (Mahony, 1995, p.12). Wann (2006, p.332) also defined team identification as “the extent to which a fan feels a psychological connection to a team.” Previous studies focused on the fact that highly identified individuals tend to purchase team merchandise (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002) and to have intention to return to the event (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). Furthermore, Madrigal (2000) states when fans are at a point of high levels of identification, sponsors gain better outcomes. Nevertheless, until recently, there were few studies considering sponsor’s brand equity from team identification perspective. Future research in this area should consider financial measurement of equity and brand equity benchmarking.