

Sport in Society
Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics

ISSN: 1743-0437 (Print) 1743-0445 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fcss20>

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To cite this article: Manuel Alonso Dos Santos, Franklin Velasco Vizcaíno & Carlos Pérez Campos (2019): The influence of patriotism and fans' fulfilment of sponsorship activation in the sponsor's image transfer process, *Sport in Society*

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2019.1619700>



Published online: 25 May 2019.



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The influence of patriotism and fans' fulfilment of sponsorship activation in the sponsor's image transfer process

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ABSTRACT

In the context of international sports tournaments, fans' feelings of patriotism and fans' acquisition of knowledge from social media seem to be decisive factors in determining sponsorship success. We explore how both factors influence fans' intentions to purchase sponsors' products. This study is based in survey data collected from fans during the FIFA 2018 World Cup. Findings from this study contribute to the literature in three ways. First, we find evidence that patriotism has a positive effect on fans' attitudes and behaviours toward sponsors. Second, we operationalize fans' fulfilment of sponsorship activation, as a fan's engagement response to a sponsor's social media marketing communications, to reveal if it has positive effects on attitudes and behaviours toward sponsors. Third, we discuss several aspects that sponsors might want to consider when deciding to sponsor major sporting events, they can adjust their marketing strategy to generate stronger revenues from product sales.

KEYWORDS

Patriotism; social media engagement; sponsor's image transfer; sponsorship activation; FIFA World Cup

Introduction

The FIFA World Cup is the fourth most important worldwide sporting event (Statista 2018). According to the New York Times, Russia's 2018 FIFA World Cup was expected to generate \$6.1 billion in revenue and an increase in sponsorship deals topping \$1.6 billion (Panja 2018). In this context, sponsors go head-to-head trying to make the most of a return on their investments and try to capitalize on fan engagement in social media as the number of followers increase exponentially in this event (Flamant 2018). The present research advances the understanding of how fans' feelings of patriotism and fans' fulfilment of sponsorship activation (FSA) influences attitudes and behaviours toward sponsors.

Sports marketing literature has described the cascade effects of international sport events and sponsorship efficacy with different conceptions of fans' identity (Devlin and Billings 2018; Donovan et al. 2005). Ultimately, this stream of research needs conceptual clarity and

the introduction of frameworks that include fans' cognitive and affective responses (Meier et al. 2018). This research addresses this call by exploring patriotism as a fan's affective factor that motivates the intention to purchase sponsors' products. Additionally, in this research we feature a variable, fans' FSA that captures fans' interactions with the sponsor's social media content. Considering that fans' self-identification processes foster social media consumption (Phua 2010), and that fans' self-identification affective responses and feelings of patriotism and national pride increase society's well-being, the findings of this paper are relevant to sports marketing literature.

The present research utilizes a unique set of survey data collected during the 2018 FIFA World Cup to explore the relationships among the sponsor's image transfer process (ie attitude toward the event, attitude toward the sponsor, intention to buy sponsor's products), fans' level of patriotism and fans' FSA. Key insights from the analysis of this set of relationships are reported in this paper. Furthermore, the proposed effects fit into social identity theory (SIT) as an overarching theory that can explain the relationships among the variables examined in this study.

Next, we present the conceptual development section describing the importance of fan's feeling of patriotism and fan's FSA, and how these two factors impact the sponsor's image transmission process. The image transmission process is the chain of effects including attitude toward the event, attitude toward the sponsor and intentions to buy sponsor's products (see Meenaghan 2001). Subsequently, the methodology is presented. The study concludes with a discussion of key findings, theoretical contributions and sports marketing implications.

Conceptual development

Despite the importance of the individual's self-identification processes in sports marketing research, little is known about how patriotism and FSA influence sports fans' attitudes and behaviours. The purpose of this study is to examine how fans' feelings of patriotism and fans' efforts to acquire knowledge from a sponsor's social media content, affect the sponsor's image transmission process. The central tenet of our proposed framework is based on fans' national identification process, as a psychological factor that facilitates positive evaluations of sponsors. In this research we aim to find a positive relationship between patriotism, conceived as a social-identification schema and fans' responses to the sponsor's image transmission process. In particular, we study the setting in which major sports events take place (FIFA World Cup). The proposed conceptual model and numbered assumptions are shown in Figure 1.

Patriotism and sports fans' attitudes and behaviours toward the sponsor

According to Kosterman and Feshbach (1989), patriotism represents an individual's feelings of attachment to one's country. Patriotism is a valuable asset for societies as individuals show national belongingness, continuous support to the in-group (ie individuals self-identified with the nation), and share positive evaluations about their group independent from outgroup derogation (Blank and Schmidt 1993; Mummendey, Klink, and Brown 2001). When individuals demonstrate patriotic feelings, the affective responses toward the ingroup motivate them to actively express social values like cohesion, responsibility, trust and pride

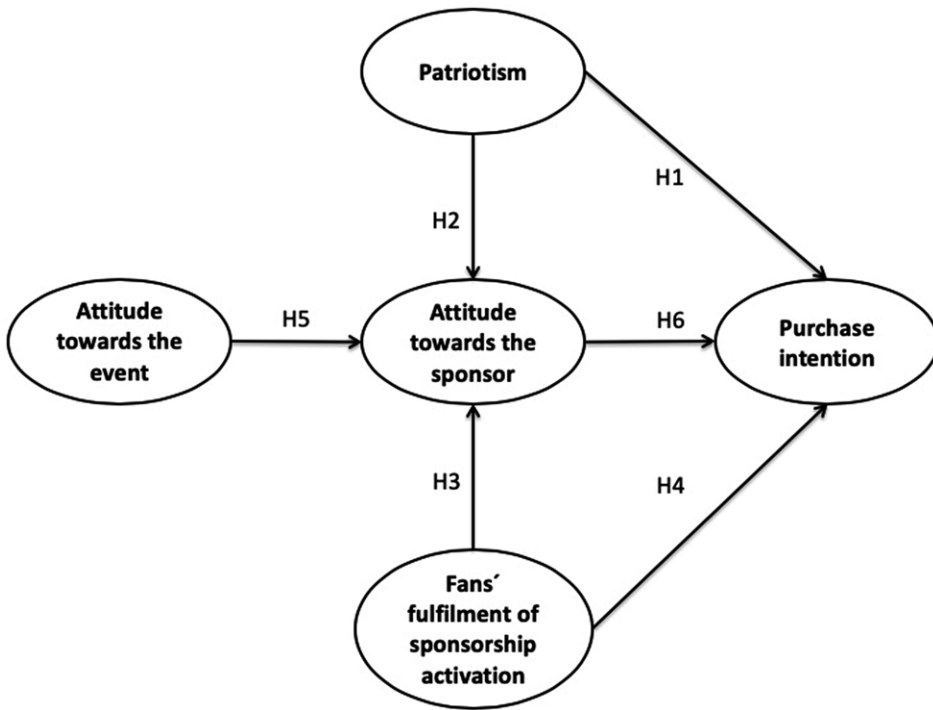


Figure 1. Graphic representation of the conceptual model.

(Staub 1997). Moreover, patriotic feelings halt criticism toward the ingroup and provide support for all kind of actions the ingroup engages in. These two reactions to patriotic feelings intensify the sense of loyalty to the group (Schatz and Staub 1997; Staub 1997).

Patriotism, conceived as a social-identification schema that aggravates group-supportive behaviours, has been conceptually linked to SIT (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner 1982). SIT predicts that the increased levels of self-identification toward the ingroup (ie a national soccer team competing in FIFA World cup or an Olympic team) will generate more favourable levels of attachment and support towards ingroup consumption activities. This phenomenon is in particular salient in sports marketing because it is well known that in sports, there are high levels of identification between fans and sponsor's product offerings.

Endorsing this argument, we found several papers in our literature review that rely on SIT to explain the relationship between fans' self-identification with the ingroup and fans' responses to sports related outcomes. For example, Branscombe and Wann (1994) present evidence for highly identified fans showing two types of responses: strong support to the ingroup and strong criticism of fans from rival teams. Fink et al. (2009) provide evidence on how the fans of a team maintain ingroup attachment, even in circumstances when a member of their group (ie a player of the team they follow) commits unscrupulous off-field behaviours. Underwood, Bond, and Baer (2001) propose a framework on how self-identity with a team builds positive customer-based brand equity. Additionally, Heere and James (2007) develop a team identity scale that was based on SIT theory. Following these findings from previous literature that examined self-identification processes, it is valid to anticipate that patriotism, a self-identification process with one's country, can predict similar positive effects toward sports marketing stimuli. Thus, we consider fans' patriotic feelings to

positively influence their evaluation of sponsors of the national team and to further generate a strong motivation to purchase sponsors' products.

Since patriotism is particularly salient when a nation is under threat (Kimmelmeier and Winter 2008; Li and Brewer 2004; Skitka 2005), when national symbols are displayed in advertisements (Yoo and Lee 2016), or when a country is in a win versus loss type of context such as in sporting tournaments (Evans and Kelley 2002), patriotic feelings could be capable of provoking a powerful sense of attachment and camaraderie among nationals. This context is similar to circumstances where fans are cheering for their national teams that participate in main sports events like FIFA World Cup. Fisher and Wakefield (1998) exemplify this strong sense of attachment by describing how specific values that are shared among fans with a team result in group supportive behaviours.

Self-categorization theory (SCT) (Turner et al. 1987) further helps to support the positive link we are anticipating between patriotism and fans' positive responses to sponsors (attitude toward the sponsor and intention to buy sponsors' products) because SCT embodies the social-cognitive mechanism that bonds people to a salient group. Therefore, we predict that feelings of patriotism become more salient when individuals categorize themselves as being loyal to the nation such as the case when a national team participates in main sporting competitions.

In addition to the above arguments, the work of Heere et al. (2011) helps to support our case by presenting a conceptual framework that explains the formation of ingroup communities when members self-identified with other salient groups such as local teams, high school teams and so forth. Wells, Youn, and Sun (2004) further describe how the unique characteristics of sports (ie dividing fans into different consumption and social contexts) generate different consumption communities whose members are bonded by their self-identification with the team; although those members, might differ in their level of media consumption, media habits and social values. Furthermore, team identification is a determinant of feelings for national belongingness and national pride (Meier et al. 2018).

As described above, patriotism elevates individuals' level of engagement and support for the ingroup activities and behaviours. This effect, an increase in the levels of attachment to the group and the social self-categorization association with the salient team (ie a national sporting team), motivate fans to respond favourably to ingroup members and team's activities as SIT and SCT envisages (for a review see Madrigal 2004). Since sponsors are always aiming to show 'commitment' to the team and mirror having the similar values to the teams they sponsor (Kinney and McDaniel 2004); sponsors would be seen by fans of a national team as part of the ingroup. Then, in return for these beliefs, sponsors' will receive fans' appreciation through a halo of goodwill perceptions (Meenaghan 2001). Therefore, fans' feelings of patriotism act as a catalyst for seeing the sponsor as part of the ingroup and motivate desire for the sponsor's products. We expect that the cognitive process of the sponsors' image transfer process (see Pracejus 2004), that sponsors rely on to transfer brand meanings and motivations to sport fans, would be simplified by the strong patriotic feelings. This phenomenon occurs because of the loyalty, affective responses and high involvement that patriotic fans demonstrate to the salient team. Thus, the combination of high levels of self-identification and affective feelings that patriotism raise will precondition fans to recognize and process the sponsor's image values (Meenaghan 2001), to positively evaluate the sponsor's brand, and to purchase the sponsor's products.

In sum, we predict that patriotism becomes a relevant motivational vehicle that captures collective values and sentiments from the ingroup that further generates positive effects in fans' attitudes and behaviours respective to the sponsors of a national team.

H₁: Higher levels of patriotism feelings in fans generate higher intentions to purchase sponsor's products.

H₂: Higher levels of patriotism feelings in fans will result in a more favourable attitude toward sponsors.

Fulfilment of sponsorship activation and sports fans' attitudes and behaviours toward the sponsor

Sports marketing literature is rich in investigating fans motives to engage in sports' consumption behaviours (DeSarbo and Madrigal 2011; Kim and Trail 2011; Trail, Fink, and Anderson 2003; Ridinger and James 2002). With the rapid development of social media, sports fans are now active participants in social media content rather than simple passive viewers (Bowman and Cranmer 2014). Even nowadays, sports fans are engaging in brand discovery behaviours by performing active searches of content in social media they feel strongly connected to (Hutchinson 2018). This particular behaviour is facilitated by social media's characteristics of generating personal connections and relationships among consumers (Zhou, Wu, and Luo 2007); consumers' brand awareness and brand trust as a priority over search engine optimization (Hutchinson 2018); and consumers' personal extensibility motivations (Okazaki and Taylor 2013). These factors constitute variables that must be exploited by sponsors in many strategic ways through social media networks to leverage sponsorship success as several articulations and activation frameworks of sponsorship propose (Cornwell et al. 2006; Weeks, Cornwell, and Drennan 2008).

We follow the aforementioned logic to include in our model an examination of the role of fan's FSA in the sponsor's image transfer process. We conceive that FSA is relevant in the context of fans' strong self-identification processes with the national team, especially in major sports events like the FIFA World Cup. IEG (2013) estimated that 74% of sponsors' marketing communications uses some form of social media content to activate sponsorships.

Previous literature on consumers' engagement processes define activation as 'consumer's level of energy, effort and time spent in a particular consumer-brand interaction' (Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014, 154). Wakefield (2012) presented evidence that activation is central for the chain of psychological effects that happen in the sponsor's image transfer process. Activation processes imply a necessary level of fans' awareness of sponsors' marketing communications and a level of frequent interactions between the audience and the sponsor (DeGaris, Kwak, and McDaniel 2017). The purpose of activation is to increase the consumer-brand interactions and by these repetitive connections, increase the level of involvement with the sponsor (Madrigal and King 2018).

For the purpose of this study we operationalize FSA as a comprehensive measurement of concrete manifestations of fans' awareness and interactions with sponsor content in social media. When fans are actively interacting with a sponsor's information in social media, they are exhibiting not only a strong learning orientation and knowledge acquisition, but

also personal extensibility demonstrations to connect with the sponsor's brand meanings (Okazaki and Taylor 2013). These are the reasons why we further interpret FSA as a personal desire to connect with a sponsor's brand meanings which are communicated through social media accounts, news, and forums. By this, fans can augment pleasant feelings of attachment and connection between the sponsor and the team that will have an influence in the levels of sponsor-event congruency (Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006) and in the attitudes toward the ad and purchase intentions (Bee and Dalakas 2015).

From a fan's perspective, engaging in FSA constitutes a positive reaction to the strong sentiments of commitment, trust, self-connection and reciprocity rising from the high quality relationship fans perceived with a sports team (Kim and Trail 2011; Williams and Chinn 2010). This argument is also in line with Grönroos (2004), reflecting how strong relationships with a brand generates opportunities to actively interact with it on social media. When fans show active behaviours, such as repetitive interactions with social media content of their favourite team, they are categorized as die-hard fans as DeSarbo and Madrigal (2011) proposes.

A good example of FSA is exemplified by the work of Li, Scott, and Dittmore (2018). This study illustrates how fans during the 2016 Rio Olympics decided to follow not only team or player social media accounts, but also national governing bodies' accounts. Thus, FSA not only represents fans' experiences and interactions with sponsors' content in social media, but also is a reflection of a strong sense of affiliation and self-identification as SIT envisages. We found further evidence of this link in Li et al. (2018) that compared the motives behind sport fans' use of Twitter or Weibo to follow their teams. This study provides insights that fans are active searchers of information because it satisfies their need for gratification and personal extensibility motivations.

In summary, we predict that FSA facilitates the attribution of image transfer between the sponsor's brand and the team generating more favourable attitudes toward the sponsor and more favourable intentions to purchase sponsor's products.

H₃: Higher levels of FSA result in more favourable attitudes toward sponsors.

H₄: Higher levels of FSA result in positive intentions to purchase sponsors' products.

The effect of image transmission on sports sponsorship

According to the theory of sponsor's image transfer (Gwinner 1997), the inherent characteristics of a sporting event can be transferred to a third brand through a trade association called sponsorship. In this way, sponsor and sponsored link their brands causing the attributes of a sporting event such as Formula 1 (speed, precision, power) to be transferred to the sponsoring brands. The aim of the sponsor's image transfer process is to evoke positive feelings and attitudes towards the sponsor by closely linking an event that the consumer values to increase awareness of the sponsor's brand and to increase purchase intentions of their products (Grohs and Reisinger 2005). As a result, the positive attitudes evoked towards the sporting event are transmitted to the sponsor (Abreu Novais and Arcodia 2013; Alonso-Dos-Santos et al. 2016a).

Positive attitudes towards a brand are valid predictors of behaviour (Kim, Ko, and James 2011) and, as well as purchase intention, have been shown as a valid indicator in academic

literature to predict future purchase behaviour (Ajzen and Driver 1992). The image transmission process begins by developing positive attitudes towards the sponsor from the event, and which finally influence the purchase intention. The positive and significant effect of the influence of the attitude towards the sponsor on the purchase intention has been widely documented in scientific literature (Abreu Novais and Arcodia 2013; Alonso Dos Santos et al. 2014; Biscaia et al. 2013; Byon, Lee, and Baker 2014). Therefore, the hypotheses are:

H₅: Higher levels of attitude toward the event generate higher attitude toward sponsor.

H₆: Higher levels of attitude toward the sponsor generate more favourable purchase intention.

Method

Data collection system and sample

A web-based survey was conducted using Amazon Mechanical Turk in July 2018 after the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Before proceeding with the analysis, the valid answers were filtered using the IP address and the response time, the answers coming from the same address and those questionnaires that had been answered in a shorter time than rationally expected were eliminated. Subsequently, the atypical data were eliminated using the Mahalanobis index. (Mahalanobis 1936). The final study sample was made up of 427 responses (73 percent from male individuals). Respondents were residents from 21 different countries around the world in which the 2018 FIFA World Cup was broadcast. The age range was between 18 and 55 (mean age 33, the standard deviation was 10.8).

Measures

The patriotism scale is composed of six items and was adapted from Kosterman and Feshbach (1989), previous versions of this scale demonstrated adequate levels of reliability and validity (Rocha and Fink 2015). The attitude towards the sponsor scale (AttSponsor) has four items, adapted from Dees, Bennett, and Villegas (2008) and subsequently evaluated by Dees, Bennett, and Ferreira (2010). The attitude towards the event scale (AttEvent) and the purchase intention scale (IntBuy), both with three items, were adapted from Alonso-Dos-Santos et al. (2016) and previously used by Speed and Thompson (2000) and Smith, Graetz, and Westerbeek (2008). The FSA scale was constructed by the authors adapting items from Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) and Wakefield (2012) that resulted in the following items: *The sponsoring brands used social networks to promote the event and its participation*; *The brands that sponsored FIFA World Cup were proactive on social networks*; and *The FIFA World Cup sponsor brands have profiles on the social networks I use*. All of these scales are five-point Likert type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Analysis procedure

First we perform an exploratory factor analysis with the aim of analyzing the internal structure of the scales by VARIMAX rotation and then, we employ the method of partial

least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 3.0 software (Ringle, Wende, and Becker 2015). This method was chosen because the sample is not normally distributed and because the objective of the research is based on the prediction and study of the relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables (Hair et al. 2017b). This method is also recommended when the theoretical content is scarce or is in preliminary or exploratory stages (Hair et al. 2017b).

The analysis was carried out in two stages: first we evaluated the reliability and validity of the measurement scales to ensure that the variables were capable of accurately measuring the phenomena under study without random errors, and then we evaluated the structural model.

Results

Factor analysis

The exploratory factor analysis was performed using SPSS (IBM 2017) confirming that all items load adequately on the respective component (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin index = 0.929; Bartlett sphericity test, total variance explained was 59.7%, $p < .001$). Specifically, all FPE construct indicators had a factorial coefficient of at least .674.

Evaluation of the measurement model

The evaluation of the measurement model began with the analysis of the reliability of the constructs and indicators by analyzing the Cronbach alpha coefficients, the composite reliability index and the factorial loads of the items on their respective constructs. We use the PLS-SEM for our analysis (Hair et al. 2017a) Table 1 shows that Cronbach's alpha coefficients, outer loadings and composite reliability index (CR) exceeded the minimum cut of .70 established in the literature (Henseler, Hubona, and Ray 2016). In addition, all outer loadings were significant and the rho_A indicator was higher than .7 (Dijkstra and Henseler 2015).

The convergent validity test was performed by examining the average variance extracted (AVE), which was higher in all cases than .5 (Hair et al. 2017a). The discriminant validity was contrasted using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT), Fornell-Larcker criterion and the cross-loading criterion. Table 2 shows that the HTMT coefficients are significantly less than .90 and that the correlations between the constructs are lower than the square root of the extracted variance (Henseler, Hubona, and Ray 2016). Table 3 shows cross loads and that the mean variance shared between a construct and its indicators is greater than the variance that that construct shares with the other constructs in the model.

Evaluation of the structural model

The evaluation of the structural model was performed by examining the cross-validated redundancy (Q^2), the determination coefficient (R^2) and the path coefficients (Table 4). Q^2 (Geisser 1975) is the estimate provided by the Stone–Geisser test using the blindfolding procedure (Omission Distance = 7), which is used as a criterion to analyze the predictive capacity of the dependent constructs and endogenous variables, provided values greater

than .29, consistent with the literature (Chin 1998). Q2 coefficients show that the variables Attitude toward the sponsor and Intention to buy have predictive capacity as these coefficients are greater than 0 (Hair et al. 2014). The R2 coefficient is used as a measure of the predictive accuracy of the model. Values close to .5 indicate that Attitude toward the sponsor and Intention to buy have a moderate capacity (Hair et al. 2014), while the effect size of the variables is generally close to medium. The path coefficients report that the variables have a positive influence and that they are all significant (bootstrapping = 5000). Therefore, all hypotheses are supported. Finally, by studying the standardized root mean square residual coefficient (SRMR, Hu and Bentler 1999) it is estimated that the model has an adequate fit (Henseler, Hubona, and Ray 2016).

Table 1. Evaluation of the measurement model: AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability.

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE	Factorial loads
FDB	.821	.821	.882	.651	.797–.813***
AttEvent	.817	.819	.891	.731	.832–.869***
AttSponsor	.759	.764	.847	.581	.728–.798***
IntBuy	.839	.843	.903	.755	.869–.872***
Patriotism	.906	.909	.928	.681	.779–.868***

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p > .05$.

Table 2. Discriminant validity; HTMT above the diagonal; square root of the AVE in the diagonal (bold) and correlations between the dimensions under the diagonal (Fornell–Larcker criterion).

	FDB	AttEvent	AttSponsor	IntBuy	Patriotism
FDB	.807	.782	.871	.710	.623
AttEvent	.642	.855	.761	.730	.681
AttSponsor	.686	.605	.763	.692	.737
IntBuy	.593	.603	.563	.869	.599
Patriotism	.537	.588	.617	.524	.825

Table 3. Discriminant validity and cross loads.

Construct/Item	FDB	AttEvent	AttSponsor	IntBuy	Patriotism
FDB1	.813	.550	.564	.467	.481
FDB2	.797	.502	.569	.458	.464
FDB3	.804	.513	.541	.511	.391
AttEvent1	.557	.870	.494	.552	.547
AttEvent2	.555	.832	.563	.461	.502
AttEvent3	.532	.862	.486	.540	.456
Patriotism1	.476	.521	.509	.441	.833
Patriotism2	.456	.501	.550	.421	.868
Patriotism3	.441	.485	.551	.458	.829
Patriotism4	.420	.452	.445	.392	.798
Patriotism5	.433	.485	.529	.454	.842
Patriotism6	.434	.463	.456	.424	.779
AttSponsor1	.467	.489	.764	.539	.516
AttSponsor2	.519	.432	.728	.334	.432
AttSponsor3	.565	.485	.798	.450	.472
AttSponsor4	.547	.435	.758	.373	.454
IntBuy1	.461	.515	.449	.866	.441
IntBuy2	.574	.548	.535	.870	.474
IntBuy3	.502	.507	.476	.872	.448

Bold values represents the loads of the items in their own constructs.

Table 4. Assessment of the structural model.

Relationship-construct	Path	R^2	f^2	Q^2	SRMR
AttEvent -> AttSponsor	.159***		.029		
AttSponsor -> IntBuy	.189***		.051		
Patriotism -> AttSponsor	.294***		.123		
Patriotism -> IntBuy	.222***		.028		
FDB -> AttSponsor	.426***		.231		
FDB -> IntBuy	.344***		.105		
FDB					
AttEvent					
AttSponsor		.569		.305	
IntBuy		.427		.294	
Patriotism					
Estimated model					.062

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$.

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this study is to examine how fans' level of patriotism and their FSA influence attitudes toward sponsors, and purchase intentions of sponsors' products. Specifically, we developed a model based on the theory of image transmission and SIT with the aim of ascertaining whether fans' national identification and active engagement in sponsors' social media content influence the sponsor's image transmission process.

This study makes several significant contributions to the academic literature on sports management: (1) Until now we knew that the patriotism construct influences identification with sport (Rocha and Fink 2015), involvement and brand (Kim, Yim, and Ko 2013), but we did not know how it influences the image transmission process. (2) We operationalize FSA as a measure that captures information-seeking behaviours of fans through social media networks showing collateral marketing communications of the sponsor. (3) We examined and operationalized the relationships between patriotism, FSA and the image transmission process with the lens of SIT and SCT providing strong theoretical support. And (4) we demonstrated that FSA can influence attitude toward the sponsor and intention to buy the sponsor's products.

The validation process of the scales was conducted using an exploratory factorial analysis and a PLS-SEM model. The results showed that all scales give reliable scores free of random errors and that the scores obtained with the scales reflect the real differences between the objects with respect to the characteristic being measured. Subsequently, the structural model was evaluated, the model as a whole had an adequate fit (SRMR < .08) explaining 57% of the attitude toward the sponsor variance and 43% of intention to buy sponsor's products. All hypotheses were supported.

Regarding the H1 and H2 hypotheses, we find that patriotism significantly and directly influences attitude toward the sponsor and intention to buy sponsor's products. Unlike the study by Rocha and Fink (2015), we did find a direct relationship between patriotism and purchase intention. This means that sponsors can expect positive results in terms of return for their investments when manipulating the level of fan patriotism. For example, global brands such as Coca-Cola or Adidas can segment geographically and broadcast television spots that include national pride symbols. Since this strategy is simpler and cheaper to implement through social media networks, sponsors can expect favourable reactions to their content in social media as FSA strengthens the connection with the sponsor's brand.

With respect to FSA, the results showed that this variable has a direct and significant influence on attitude toward the sponsor and intention to buy the sponsor's products. The study of consumer behaviour in social networks and brand communities of sponsors have shown that consumer behaviour is influenced by opportunism, trust in the community, or identification with the team (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al. 2016). But until now we did not know how FSA influenced the sponsor's image transmission process. This finding might suggest that search behaviour responds to a need for self-identification and self-categorization (Li et al. 2018). Therefore, global brands should have adequate control and management of the social media content and virtual environments of the events they sponsor in order to ultimately increase sales of sponsors' products. Sponsors who eventually also sponsor athletes should co-manage the creation of value for the sponsored through communities and social media networks to evoke feelings of pride, belongingness and connection.

We also found that sports marketing literature has not fully studied FSA yet, since most studies use different operationalizations such as information knowledge (Witkemper, Lim, and Waldburger 2012); fan involvement (Schlesinger, Herrera, and Parreño 2012); or goal directed search (Wang, Wang, and Farn 2009). These conceptualizations seem to have different connotations than that of FSA. Thus, this study features FSA and its importance in the sponsor's image transmission process.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 constitute the backbone of the image transmission process. Both hypotheses were found to be positive and significant in previous research (Neijens, Smit, and Moorman 2009; Roy and Cornwell 2003; Stipp and Schiavone 1996). Regarding the first hypothesis, sports organizations can implement corporate responsibility actions to increase attitude toward the event, for example, donating part of their results to charitable organizations or incorporating parallel events aimed at people with reduced mobility. These actions are the responsibility of the sports institution, but could be considered as an opportunity to increase sales and sponsorship income. A better attitude toward the event would mean a better attitude towards the sponsor, which would mean an increase in sales (Choi and Yoh 2011).

This study has some limitations. The first place we must recognize that the sampling was at convenience through the tool Amazon Turk. This type of sampling does not allow us to know the degree of extrapolation of the results. Likewise, the temporality of the process only allows us to have a temporary conception of the phenomenon under study, assuming also the complexity and dynamism of the social networks. Finally, this study focussed on the study of a major sporting event like the FIFA World Cup. The values and attributes associated with this sporting discipline and context are not necessarily applicable to other sporting disciplines and tournaments. This is why it would be interesting to carry out a cross-cultural and cross-sport analysis to determine the influence of patriotism and FSA on the image transmission process.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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