

Factors Affecting Managers' Decision-Making in Thailand Professional Sports Sponsorship Alliance

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the Western sports alliance theories with Thai context. In particular, the experimental research was conducted to test the effect of five variables. The variables are namely; value maximization, level of business network, risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal, congruence, and process manageability on the intention to end sports sponsorship alliance formation of professional sports sponsorship alliance partners. In total, 400 managers were participated. 200 managers are from 13 professional sports categories include: Football (45), Golf (11), Jet Ski (17), Volleyball (20), Sepak Takraw (16), Bowling (11), Motorbike Racing (6), Cycling (9), Car Racing (7), Snooker (16), Badminton (9), Tennis (17), and Basketball (16). 200 managers of corporate sponsors are from different industries include: Agro and food industry (32), Consumer products (25), Financials (31), Industrials (31), Property and construction (10), Resources (9), Services (21), Technology (19), Sports (13), and Others (10). The results reveal that the five variables have a significant effect on both property's and sponsor's intention to end sports sponsorship alliance formation.

Keywords

Sports sponsorship, Professional sports in Thailand, Thai sports sponsorship, Sports sponsorship alliance formation, sports sponsorship termination

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Introduction

Professional sports are becoming more pragmatic as a business model and also play important roles in the international economy (Aeknarajindawat & Jernsittiparsert, 2019; Somjai, Srisuponvanit, & Jernsittiparsert, 2019). In particular, sponsorship alliance has been recognized as a fundamental mechanism of professional sports (Brand Finance 2018; Farrelly, Quester, and Clulow, 2008). The formation of professional sports sponsorship alliance is the establishment of a formal business relationship between a professional sporting organization and a sponsor in order to achieve common goals (Cornwell, 2014; Ryan and Fahy, 2012; Farrelly and Quester, 2005). The relationship between a corporate sponsor and a sporting organization was defined as a strategic alliance partner. Partners will play a strategic role to create mutual benefits regarding future value from the long-term relationship (Cornwell, 2014; Nufer and Buhler, 2011; Farrelly, 2010; Urriolagoitia and Planellas, 2006; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1992).

Following sports marketing and business alliance literature, Meenaghan (1999); Farrelly and Quester (2003); Farrelly and Quester (2005); Urriolagoitia and Planellas (2007) appoint that sports sponsorship could operate as a business-to-business alliance, and Dyer, Kale, and Singh (2001); Geringer (1991); Hamel, Doz, and Prahalad (1989); Inkpen and Beamish (1997); Lambe and Spekman, (1997) reveal that half of alliance formation projects failed.

However, there are less to none of sponsorship study focusing particularly on the decision-making strategy and effects on the ending of sponsorship alliance formation. Thus, the present study aims to better understand sports

sponsorship alliance formation and examine the Western sports alliance theories with Thai context.

Theoretical Foundation, Literature Reviews and Hypotheses Development

Theoretical Foundations

This study integrated theoretical perspectives to support how alliance partners decide to or not to form an alliance in professional sports sponsorship relationship. The alliance concept has been employed by various scholars in order to investigate the sponsorship in the business contextual. Therefore, the alliance formation theory was utilized.

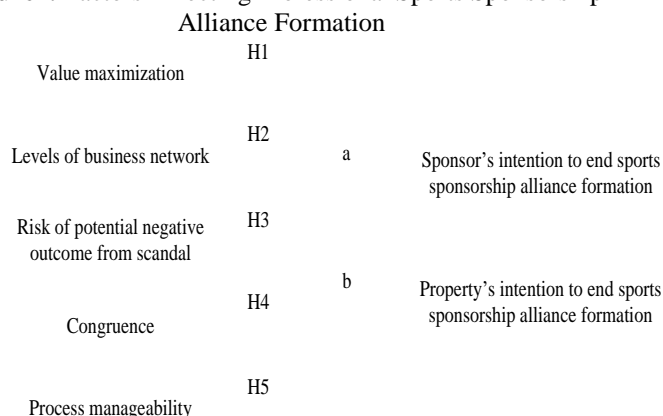
Alliance concept in sports sponsorship

This research focuses on the alliance formation phase which is the initial phase that partners have the intention to form the alliance. Sponsors' and properties' managers have their mission to analyze reasons and potential alliance benefits, then select the partners and choose the most appropriate form of cooperation for alliance management. In this phase, there are two key factors: partner selection and choice of the most appropriate governance form for alliance management (Russo and Cesarani, 2017). Regarding decision-making strategy in sports sponsorship, Russo and Cesarani (2017); Shah and Swaminathan (2008) indicated that multiple factors of partner selection criteria have tendency to affect an alliance's success or failure. These factors could be classified into five key variables. The five variables are namely; value maximization, levels business network, risk

of potential negative outcomes from scandal, congruence, and process manageability.

The following Figure 1 below presents the conceptual model constructed to test the effects of five variables on the intention to end sports sponsorship alliance partners.

Figure1: Factors Affecting Professional Sports Sponsorship



Value maximization

The concept of "value maximization" is relatively close to the return on investment (ROI) in business literature. The ROI concept basically considers costs versus expected benefit. The sponsorship with higher ROI ratio appears to be more attractive to partners than the sponsorship with a lower ROI ratio (Farrelly, Quester and Clulow, 2008; Farrelly, Quester and Burton, 2006; Crompton, 2004). Therefore, we propose our Hypotheses 1a, 1b as follow:

Hypotheses 1a: Sponsors are likely to end an alliance formation with properties providing a lower level of ROI than those with a higher level of ROI.

Hypotheses 1b: Properties are likely to end an alliance formation with sponsors providing a lower level of ROI than those with a higher level of ROI.

Level of business network

Business networks have been defined as "a set of two or more connected business relationships in which firms share and utilize each other networks" (Anderson et al., 1994 p.2). Business networks and business relationships are a key asset for companies' competitive advantage and performance (Mitrega et al., 2012; Palmatier, Dant, and Grewal, 2007, 2008, Palmatier et al., 2008). In order to achieve their purposes of entering the alliances, partners tend to prefer the partner with a higher level of business network into consideration than one with a lower level of business network when analyzing alliance partner selection. Therefore, we propose our Hypotheses 2a, 2b as follow:

Hypotheses 2a: Sponsors are likely to end an alliance formation with properties providing a lower level of business network partner than those with a higher level of business network.

Hypotheses 2b: Properties are likely to end an alliance formation with sponsors providing a lower level of

business network partner than those with a higher level of business network.

Risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal

Scandal in sports was conceptualized as actions that are "either illegal or unethical, involve multiple parties over a sustained period of time, and whose impact affects the integrity of the sport with which they are associated" (Hughes and Shank, 2005 p.214). These scandal risks have been caused by the involvement of drugs (Carrillat and d'Astous, 2014), doping (Chien, Kelly, and Weeks, 2016), illegal actions (Carrillat and d'Astous, 2014), corruptions (Kulczycki and Joerg Koenigstorfer, 2016), legal battles regarding rivals for sponsorship exclusivity (Cobbs, 2011), and the death of stakeholders, athletes/coaches, third party/spectators (Hughes and Shank, 2005). The risk was highlighted as a determinant criterion in sponsorship decision-making (M.A. Johnston, 2015; Crompton, 2015; Crompton, 2014). Partners are likely to prefer the partner with lower risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal into consideration than one with a higher risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal when analyzing alliance partner selection. Therefore, we propose our Hypotheses 3a, 3b as follow:

Hypotheses 3a: Sponsors are likely to end an alliance formation with properties providing a higher level of scandal partner than those with a lower level of scandal.

Hypotheses 3b: Properties are likely to end an alliance formation with sponsors providing a higher level of scandal partner than those with a lower level of scandal.

Congruence

In the marketing field, congruence is a central idea in sponsoring and has historically been shown to be beneficial (Cornwell, 2014). In the sponsorship literature, concept of congruence has been studied under different names; these names present the same idea of congruence as "going well together" (Fleck, Roux, and Darpy, 2005). The various names under congruence concept include; fit (Speed and Thompson, 2000; Becker-Olsen and Simmons, 2002), match-up (McDaniel, 1999), relevancy (Rodgers, 2003), functional or image similarity (Gwinner, 1997), native or created fit (Becker-Olsen and Simmons, 2002), or self-evident or strategic linking (Cornwell, 1995). Congruence of sponsors, events, or properties have a high impact on consumer perception (Carrillat, D'Astous, and Charett Couture, 2015; Close, Lacey, and Cornwell, 2015; Lee and Labroo, 2004). Partners tend to take congruence into their consideration when analyzing alliance partner selection. Therefore, we propose our Hypotheses 4a, 4b as follow:

Hypotheses 4a: Sponsors are likely to end an alliance formation with properties providing a lower level of congruence than those with a higher level of congruence.

Hypotheses 4b: Properties are likely to end an alliance formation with sponsors providing a lower level of congruence than those with a higher level of congruence.

Process manageability

Process manageability could be conceptually defined as the degree of interaction, including communication and coordination required by partners in the process of establishing, managing, implementing and sustaining a specific alliance project for the effective alliance activities (Shah and Swaminathan, 2008). In this study, we refer process manageability to the degree of ease or difficulty associated with the structured process for developing new sponsorship alliance or renewal of a previous deal. Partners with difficult process manageability require more resources than those with easier process manageability. For that reason, a partner with high (easy) process manageability could become a priority in a manager's mind in terms of determining a partner's attractiveness. Therefore, we propose our Hypotheses 5a, 5b as follow:

Hypotheses 5a: Sponsors are likely to end an alliance formation with properties providing a lower (difficult) level of process manageability than those with a higher (easier) level of process manageability.

Hypotheses 5b: Properties are likely to end an alliance formation with sponsors providing a lower (difficult) level of process manageability than those with a higher (easier) level of process manageability.

Research Methodology

Sample Selection and Data Collection Procedure

A total of 400 managers who have experience in Thai professional sports industry took part in this study. These managers responsible involving one or more of decision making, managing, operating or evaluating outcomes of the sponsoring agreement. 200 participants are from Thai corporate sponsors and 200 participants are from Thai sporting organizations. For the pilot study, 100 participants of were managers from a cross-section of industries recruited from executive MBA programs (NIDA Business School and KMITL Business School, Thailand). To collect the data participants were randomly assigned to evaluate a hypothetical alliance scenario by providing choices of proposal attributes.

Variables

In this study, all variables shown in Table 1 and Table 2 are anchored by the five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The constructs of the measurements are developed from the previous related literatures as per these following details. To measure the perception of value maximization (ROI), we adapt a three-item construct from the financial payoff perceptions scale that has been used in the alliance context, developed by Shah and Swaminathan (2008). The perception of level of business network, we apply a three-item construct from perceived size scale that has been developed for business alliance study by Jaeki Song (2007). The perception of risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal, we adapt a five-item construct from the reflective

scales to measure perceived risks that developed for marketing purpose by Thelen, S.T., Yoo, B., & Magnini, V.P. (2010). The perception of congruence, we adapt a five-item construct from one of the most popular measures used to measure responses to possible sponsors and event combinations (Speed & Thompson, 2000). The perception of process manageability, we adapt a four-item construct of the process manageability scale that has been developed by Shah and Swaminathan (2008), four items scale into the amount of management time, energy, and emotional stress required for alliance initiation and implementation; the number of organizational departments and people involved, and the intensity of interaction and communication required. Low scores on the flexibility of deal development process will indicate a more difficult time to manage the deal. And, for the dependent variable, we adapt the four-item construct from the partner attractiveness scale that has been developed by Shah and Swaminathan (2008) to measure an intention to end level.

Methods

An experiment design using hypothetical scenarios as a treatment was applied. The scenarios were developed from real-world cases that reflected our five variables. Two pretests were conducted to assess the effectiveness of the instrument. Firstly, to assess the content validity, the initial version of the scenarios was administered to 7 experts: 2 from academics, 2 from professional sport marketers, 2 from sporting association and 1 from The Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) board of governor. Questions at the end of the instrument asked respondents to comment on the questionnaire, providing feedback in the form of suggestions for improvement or any concerns they may have had in the areas of logic, clarity, wording, and overall interpretation of the study. The feedback was consolidated and evaluated based on clarity of the comments as well as any overlaps in items being indicated for revision and deletion. The validation of the content was also evolved through Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) test. If the IOC score ranges from 0.5 to 1.00, it means that the item has content validity. In contrast, if the IOC score is lower than 0.5, it means that item should be revised or deleted (Hair et al., 2014). It was appeared at 0.89 which meets the criteria. Secondly, the effectiveness of each scenario was identified by comparing the mean between low-level and high-level scenarios of each factor. This pretest was conducted among 42 managers who represents our real participants. The questionnaire with low condition scenario were administered to 21 of managers. As well as the entire questionnaire with high condition scenario were administered to 21 of them. The results of the pretest were successfully ensuring that the scenarios are able to manipulate the level of five studied factors effectively (Table 1). Moreover, it can be summarized that the questionnaire is reliable as the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient score turned out at 0.831 (Cronbach, 1971). Finally, the revised questionnaire was incorporated and administered to the participants. The data from the questionnaire were screened, edited and coded, then analyzed quantitatively by using a statistical program.

Statistical significance was set at the $P < 0.050$ level. Finally, to test the hypotheses, independent t-test was conducted.

Table 1 presents the pre-test results in order to assess the effectiveness of 20 hypothetical scenarios. By comparing means of perception scores between low-level and high-level conditions, the results indicated that (Value Maximization = 0.000 and 0.000, $p < 0.050$; Level of Business Network = 0.000 and 0.000, $p < 0.050$; Risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal = 0.000 and 0.000, $p < 0.050$; Congruence = 0.000 and 0.000, $p < 0.050$; Process manageability = 0.000 and 0.000, $p < 0.050$). Therefore, the scenarios were successfully manipulated.

Table 1: Results of Measure Validation

Variables	Classify	Level	Mean	S.D.	S.D. Er	T- Stats	Sig.
Value Maximization	Sponsor	Low	4.150	0.635	0.142	8.015	0.000*
		High	2.484	0.679	0.151		
	Property	Low	3.849	0.901	0.201	5.390	0.000*
		High	2.318	0.895	0.200		
Level of Business Network	Sponsor	Low	4.250	0.517	0.115	11.692	0.000*
		High	2.082	0.647	0.144		
	Property	Low	4.018	1.023	0.228	5.765	0.000*
		High	2.216	0.951	0.212		
Risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal	Sponsor	Low	2.340	1.078	0.241	-5.832	0.000*
		High	4.100	0.811	0.181		
	Property	Low	2.200	0.880	0.196	-8.866	0.000*
		High	4.300	0.589	0.131		
Congruence	Sponsor	Low	3.820	0.838	0.187	7.087	0.000*
		High	2.120	0.669	0.149		
	Property	Low	4.220	0.642	0.143	8.375	0.000*
		High	2.240	0.840	0.187		
Process manageability	Sponsor	Low	3.925	0.688	0.154	7.083	0.000*
		High	2.237	0.813	0.181		
	Property	Low	4.050	0.666	0.149	7.120	0.000*
		High	2.337	0.844	0.188		

*Statistically significant at 5% confident level ($P < 0.050$)

Research Results

Table 2 presents the results of independent samples analysis. By comparing means of variables with lower condition and higher condition on the intention to end sports sponsorship alliance formation from sponsor side, the results indicated that (1a = 0.000, $p < 0.050$; 2a = 0.000, $p < 0.050$, 3a = 0.000, $p < 0.050$; 4a = 0.000, $p < 0.050$, 5a = 0.000, $p < 0.050$). Therefore, **Hypotheses 1a, 2a, 3a, 4a, and 5a are supported.**

By comparing means of variables with lower condition and higher condition on the intention to end sports sponsorship alliance formation from property side, the results indicated that (1b = 0.000, $p < 0.050$; 2b = 0.000, $p < 0.050$, 3b = 0.000, $p < 0.050$; 4b = 0.001, $p < 0.050$, 5b = 0.000, $p < 0.050$). Therefore, **Hypotheses 1b, 2b, 3b, 4b, and 5b are supported.**

Table 2: Results of Independent Samples Analysis

Variables	Classify	Level	Mean	S.D.	S.D. Er	T- Stats	Sig.
Value Maximization	Sponsor	Low	3.912	0.749	0.167	7.371	0.000*
		High	2.125	0.784	0.175		
	Property	Low	4.187	1.087	0.243	7.734	0.000*
		High	1.650	0.984	0.220		
Level of Business Network	Sponsor	Low	3.975	0.822	0.183	9.813	0.000*
		High	1.775	0.572	0.128		
	Property	Low	3.937	1.081	0.241	7.494	0.000*
		High	1.512	0.961	0.214		

Risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal	Sponsor	Low	1.712	0.488	0.109	-	0.000*
		High	4.100	0.840	0.187	10.982	
	Property	Low	1.437	0.668	0.149	-7.392	0.000*
		High	3.462	1.026	0.229		
Congruence	Sponsor	Low	4.087	0.460	0.103	15.874	0.000*
		High	1.650	0.509	0.113		
	Property	Low	2.650	0.753	0.168	3.724	0.001*
		High	1.712	0.836	0.186		
Process manageability	Sponsor	Low	3.912	1.130	0.252	5.372	0.000*
		High	2.162	0.918	0.205		
	Property	Low	3.675	1.132	0.253	6.087	0.000*
		High	1.675	0.935	0.209		

*Statistically significant at 5% confident level ($P < 0.050$)

Discussion and Conclusion

The usable of alliance theories in sports sponsorship alliance formation not only works in the Western context as shown in various research works (Johnston (2015); Cornwell (2014); Johnston and Paulsen (2014); Ryan and Fahy (2012); Farely (2010); Urriolagoitia and Planellas, (2006), but also works for Thai professional sports context. In particular, managers' decision-making strategies in Thai professional sports sponsorship alliance formation were focused in the present study. This research examines the relationship between corporate sponsors and professional sporting organizations (Professional clubs and leagues) and the factors affecting their decision making to form an alliance. This is achieved by employing managers that recruited from 13 different professional sports categories, together with corporate sponsor from 10 different industries in Thailand as the sample group of this study. The five key variables namely: value maximization, level of business network, risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal, congruence, and process manageability are hypothesized to become the decision-making factors of professional sports sponsorship alliance formation. The results suggest that value maximization, level of business network, risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal, congruence and process manageability have a significant effect on both side of alliance partners.

Contribution and Future Direction

Theoretical Contribution

This study extends the theory of alliance development process theory and enables it to be applied in a professional sports sponsorship context. This research suggests the new theoretical framework for sponsorship alliance formation in professional sports. In order to further understand the casual relationship among independent variables (value maximization, level of business network, risk of potential negative outcomes from scandal, congruence, and process manageability) and dependent variable (intention to end sports sponsorship alliance formation). Moreover, the research methodology may broaden academic research towards understanding how to conduct an experimental design by using hypothetical scenarios as a treatment to examine the decision-making strategy in professional sports. This is expected to be useful for other researchers and anyone who studies about the decision-making strategy regarding sports business alliance or in other industries.

Managerial Contribution

This study aims to provide a guideline for development and management of sports sponsorship relationship between professional sporting organizations and corporate sponsors effectively. The framework (new theoretical framework for sponsorship alliance formation in professional sports) is expecting to help managers determine in advance if a potential relationship is one that will result in competitive advantages that are worth the time and resources required to sustain them. Moreover, the results may further help managers of professional sporting organizations or corporate sponsors understand knowledge regarding strategic decision for the success of sports sponsorship alliance formation.

Future Direction

This research addresses the usable of Western alliance formation strategy theories between alliance partners (corporate sponsor and professional sports property) particular in Thailand. Five variables were suggested as an alliance formation conceptual model. To personalize and broaden the results of the study in specific sports characteristic context, future research is needed to collect data from specific sport categories and/or a comparative population in order to heighten the level of reliable results. However, the distinctive variables that may exist in specific context has not been explored. Thus, future qualitative research is needed to study in-depth in order to further understand the relationship between professional sports sponsorship and sponsors in Thai context.

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