THE EVALUATION OF CULTURAL EVENT SPONSORSHIPS IN THE ITALIAN CONTEXT: AN INSIGHT INTO BUSINESSES' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Event sponsorship literature has recently reiterated the need to review reporting practices with some authors in particular calling for a broad approach to evaluation which contemplates sponsorship's whole effects through multi-faceted measures. The research explores, through in-depth interviews with Italian sponsorship managers, how current post-event sponsorship evaluation practices could be improved in order to provide businesses with a relevant picture of the value of such investment and to which extent the improvement of such practices may affect their decision-making process. It highlights how a comprehensive approach which contemplates sponsorship's consumer-related effects as well as the impact of the sponsored event on the community may be particularly appropriate to companies not operating in traditional consumer markets while also influencing their renewal process especially from a technical point of view.
Keywords: event sponsorship evaluation, cultural sponsorships, CSR

INTRODUCTION

Event sponsorship represents in Italy the most considerable form of business investment in culture while also being an important source of funding for cultural organisations. As a recent survey shows, cultural sponsorships represent the fourth most important communication tool used by Italian businesses following traditional advertising and unconventional media. Such investments are in most cases directed towards the events sector, particularly exhibitions, and they take the form of cash contributions (43,6%) rather than in-kind sponsorships (34,7%) (Civita, 2010). Similar findings are reported also in former surveys (Bertani, 2009; Civita, 2003). With regard to events, a research conducted in 2011 on Italy's cultural festivals has highlighted the relevant role played by the private sector in their financing. Private contributions cover in fact 50,5% of festival earnings -exceeding public funding (41,7%)- and businesses are by far the most relevant player followed by the non-profit sector and banking foundations (Guerzoni, 2012). In recent years, as the risk of private investment reductions increases under the economic crisis pressure, the need to legitimize the cultural sector and raise awareness of the value of culture-related investments has been gaining momentum in Italy. Within this scenario, the Italian literature on event management and business investment in culture has been emphasising the need to review current reporting practices within the relationship between cultural organizations and private sponsors/funders, and devote more effort to the measurement of the overall impact of culture-related investments (Morganti, Nuccio, 2009). According to Cantoni (2009) and Fuortes and Argano (2011) a wider approach to ex-post evaluation which allows for return on investment evidence in terms of marketing reach, as well as impact on the community and staff members may help businesses understand the worthiness of culture-related investments, thereby assisting their decision-making process. Other authors have underlined how impact assessment, and in particular economic impact, may provide cultural organizations with a strong negotiating tool to acquire, in the eyes of private funders, credibility and support for current and prospective events (Bracalente, Ferrucci, 2009; Guerzoni, 2008).

Similar approaches to the evaluation of private investments in culture can be found in the international literature on sponsorship and post-event sponsorship evaluation (Allen et al., 2008; Bowdin et al., 2011; O'Toole, Mikolaitis, 2002; Skinner, Rukavina, 2003) and some hints also in the former Italian literature (Baia Curioni, 2003; Bondardo, 2006; Bortoluzzi Dubach, Frey, 2008; Severino, 2005).
However, such a comprehensive approach to evaluation within the relationship between cultural organizations and businesses seems hard to spread in Italy. According to recent surveys, when ex-post evaluation is carried out, the following criteria are generally measured: media coverage, key stakeholders' relationships established and corporate reputation (Civita, 2010; EGG, Astarea, 2008). At the same time, businesses report problems in acquiring relevant return on investment evidence from cultural organizations as well as a lack of proper assessment tools amongst their cultural 'partners' (Moneta, Cantoni, 2012).
A gap may therefore be noticed between the evaluation dimensions and criteria suggested by the literature and those commonly applied, but the two 'voices' converge on the need to review current evaluation practices.
In light of these considerations, this study seeks to:
1. examine, within the Italian context, how current post-event sponsorship evaluation practices could be improved in order to provide businesses with a relevant picture of the value of such investment,
2. understand to which extent the improvement of such practices may affect the relationship between sponsoring businesses and cultural organizations when it comes to establishing or renewing sponsorship agreements.
More specifically, the objectives of the research are to uncover the type of information Italian businesses seek through post-event sponsorship evaluation, its benefits and role within their decision-making process as well as the perceived barriers that limit effective event sponsorship evaluation. For this purpose, a practitioner perspective is gained from interviewing cultural sponsorship managers from 5 Italian businesses.
Post-event sponsorship evaluation: theoretical approaches and measures
As Meenaghan's early definition states, "*event sponsorship is a collective term given to the sponsorship of various activities in the fields of sports, arts and causes*" (p. 98, 2001). As in any other form of sponsorship it involves the payment of a fee, either cash or in kind, to a property –such as an event- in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property. Such an activity may therefore be seen as a mutually beneficial contractual relationship throughout which the sponsored event secures resources for its programming and in exchange, the sponsor attains specific commercial goals which can be summarized as follows: heighten visibility; increase awareness of the company and/or its products/services; enhance image at corporate/brand level; networking/entertaining key stakeholders -e.g. clients, commercial partners, institutions etc.; promote product/service features; sales promotion; raising staff morale; showcase social responsibility (Getz, 2005; Bowdin et al. 2011; Allen et al. 2008; Bortoluzzi Dubach, Frey 2008; Coughlan, Mules, 2001; Meenaghan 2001). Such objectives may also be found amongst Italian firms that invest in culture and sponsor cultural events. According to several surveys the main reasons for such investments are: increase awareness, build brand image, heighten visibility, express social commitment, build relationships with key stakeholders and in particular clients, institutions and the wider community (EGG, Astarea 2008; Bertani 2009; Civita 2010).
Post-event sponsorship evaluation, adopting Allen et al.'s definition (p. 373, 2008), consists in "*providing a clear understanding of how the sponsorship performed against the objectives that were set for it*" while also paying attention to the overall quality of it's delivery and management. The versatility of the medium that enables businesses to pursue several marketing and communication functions and its multi-purpose nature requires an extensive range of measures in order to grasp sponsorship's effectiveness (Meenaghan, 2005). In keeping with this principle, the literature has repeatedly highlighted the need to adopt a comprehensive approach to post-event sponsorship evaluation (Masterman, 2007; Meenaghan, 2005) and recently several authors have stressed the concept in light of the increasing competition for funds within the events sector and for budget allocation within firms which entails a tighter scrutiny of sponsorship expenditure (Allen et al. 2008) as well as a wider comprehension of the value of businesses investment in culture (Cantoni, 2009; Fuortes, Argano, 2011).
With reference to the evaluation measures that should be considered in a comprehensive approach to sponsorship evaluation, the literature is unanimous in identifying the need to conduct a media coverage analysis in order to verify the level and type of attention given by the media to the sponsor and, more generally, the event. Such analysis provides sponsors with an insight on the extent and nature of the message the audience was exposed to and on the target market that was likely exposed to it (Masterman, 2004; Getz, 2005; Allen et al., 2008; Bortoluzzi Dubach, Frey, 2008); factors that influence how many people will attend and audience's perception (Jeffries-Fox, 2005). It is also an indicator of the event's success and of the effectiveness of sponsee's media relations efforts therefore resulting as a useful tool to understand

cultural partner's competence. Awareness-related objectives may instead be measured by employing conventional advertising research techniques[1] via target market or in-event surveys to assess the level of attention actually received by the brand while also determining whether the sponsorship is being clearly communicated both outside and within the event (Soscia, 2003; Coughlan, Mules, 2001; Meenaghan, 2001). Moreover such data is valuable since awareness often leads to changes in attitudes and perceptions. This latter effect, which consists in transferring the event's values and emotions to the sponsor's image, is widely considered as both a key component of sponsorship itself and the evaluation process and a problematic issue because of the intangible nature of the observed phenomenon and the varied factors that influence image-transfer process such as: the characteristics of the target market[2], the sponsorship management[3], the reputation of the organizations involved and, of course, the communication activities put into place. While assessing through in-event and target market surveys[4] sponsorship's ultimate effect on consumers' minds and perceptive system, sponsors may therefore also verify the accuracy of certain choices related to the sponsorship's planning and implementation; first of all they may gain insight on whether the sponsee selection was correct since the perceived fit between the event and the sponsor brand facilitates image transfer (Meenaghan, 2001; Allen et al., 2008: Bortoluzzi Dubach, Frey, 2008; Masterman, 2007).

Although market objectives are not the primary focus of cultural events sponsors (Quester, Thompson, 2001; Olkkonnen, Tuominem, 2006), by collecting data, via on-site records and surveys on visitors' experience of the sponsor's product/service and purchase intent, insight may be gained on whether the sponsorship facilitated product/service promotion while also providing useful information on its most and less appealing features and on the type of market most likely interested in it (Getz, 2005; Bortoluzzi Dubach, Frey, 2008; Jeffries-Fox, 2005; Masterman, 2004; Skinner, Rukavina, 2003). The literature is also quite exhaustive in analysing the relationship between sponsorship and sales effects (Meenaghan, 2001) and on the measures that may be applied for this purpose (Jeffries-Fox, 2005) although bottom-line impact measurement is critical (Sneath et al., 2005; Fabris, 2003) unless the sponsor secures rights to sell through its association with the sponsorship (Masterman, 2007). While greater prominence is given to the measurement of the afore-stated consumer-based objectives within sponsorship evaluation research (Cobbs, 2011) some authors emphasize the need to also track networking and business development effects since they are recognised as an important rationale for sponsorship engagement (Cobbs 2011; Ryan, Fahy 2012; Severino 2005). Despite being complicated to measure also because of the "*holistic, cumulative and largely intangible nature of relationships*" (Stokes, p. 392, 2005) such effects, when mentioned, are generally assessed by itemizing the corporate hospitality opportunities provided (Getz, 2005; Allen et al., 2008) and interviewing the firm's sales manager (Bortoluzzi Dubach, Frey, 2008), while more extensive evaluations analyse how much business clients are involved physically and emotionally in the event and in the activities surrounding it (Parker, 1991; Stokes, 2005). The importance of measuring sponsorship's effect on staff is emphasized in particular by the most recent literature in response to the value of intangible and knowledge assets -such as creativity and morale- for businesses in the current post-industrial scenario (Bondardo, 2006; Bortoluzzi Dubach, Frey, 2008; Cantoni, 2009; Schiuma, 2009; Sacco, 2005). In this respect Cantoni (2009) points out that measuring such effects means also evaluating sponsorship's economic benefits since some of the skills that may be acquired affect business productive processes. Likewise, Schiuma (2009) clarifies that art sponsorships may generate a high impact on businesses by developing "*tangible and intangible components of the organisational infrastructure*". According to the author, the measurement of such effects is functional to acquire greater evidence of the benefits that may be achieved from art-based initiatives, therefore ultimately raising awareness of the potential value of such a unique development solution for businesses. The assessment of the event's impact on the community and the environment is another aspect on which the literature, especially more recently, dwells. The rationale underlying such an approach is that by measuring such dimensions, sponsors may communicate their social responsibility more effectively (Skinner, Rukavina, 2003; Baia Curioni, 2003; Cantoni, 2009; Severino, 2005), thus resulting as a useful tool to pursue their CSR sponsorship objectives. From this perspective, major prominence is given to economic impact measurement (O'Toole, Mikolaitis, 2002; Skinner, Rukavina, 2003; Getz, 2005). Other authors also mention the social and cultural

1 Such as recall, recognition and brand association tests.
2 E.g. the level of knowledge of the event and the sponsor, degree of involvement with the type of event being sponsored and the event itself.
3 These include: "the sponsorship choice, the time of entry, the time and manner of exiting, the level of overt sponsor commitment, the nature of caring displayed toward the activity and its fans, and finally the interplay between these factors" (Meenaghan, p. 109, 2001).
4 In this respect Soscia (2003) suggests investigating audience's perceived legitimacy of the brand to sponsor the event as well as the reasons of such legitimacy but standard semantic differential and likert scale approaches may also be employed through surveys both prior to and after the sponsorship (Masterman, 2007; Meenaghan, 2005).

impact produced for example in terms of regeneration effect, greater opportunities for preservation of cultural heritage (Cantoni, 2009; Severino, 2005; Fuortes, Argano, 2011) while some refer to environmental impact in light of businesses' increasing concern towards the topic (Getz, 2005; Allen et a., 2008). Lately several Italian authors have reiterated the concept encouraging the events sector to evaluate the economic impact produced in order to strengthen ties with current and prospect private funders and gain credibility (Guerzoni, 2008; Bracalente Ferrucci, 2009). Within the Italian scenario, ex-post sponsorship evaluation is far from adopting such a comprehensive approach. If any evaluation is undertaken, the measures commonly applied are: media coverage, key stakeholders' relationships established and corporate reputation (Civita, 2010; EGG, Astarea, 2008). On the other hand however, as several surveys show, businesses report problems in evaluating their sponsorship's effectiveness (Moneta, Cantoni, 2012) while considering such activity an important component of the sponsor-sponsee relationship (Civita, 2010).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The assumption underlying the research is that a deeper understanding of businesses' approach to post-event sponsorship evaluation may help identify which, amongst the evaluation dimensions and criteria mentioned by the literature, should be considered and to which extent a comprehensive approach to evaluation may improve the relationship between sponsoring businesses and cultural organizations.
For this purpose, a qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with sponsorship managers from several Italian businesses has been undertaken so as to provide the opportunity to fully understand post-event evaluation perceptions and practice. Furthermore, qualitative study is considered appropriate in sponsorship evaluation since it represents a complicated research area (Zaltman et al., 1982) and in-depth interviews have precedence in the sponsorship literature (Farrelly et al., 2006; O'Reilly, Madill, 2012).
The sponsorship managers interviewed have been selected through purposive sampling on the basis of the temporal continuity with which their firms sponsored in cash cultural events in Italy between 2007 and 2011. The sample stems from a preliminary analysis on the cash sponsors of the ten best-attended exhibitions in Italy between 2007 and 2011 as well as on the sponsors that funded over the same period the Festival della Scienza, a nationally renowned cultural event based in Genoa. By calculating the frequency of appearance of each sponsor within the two databases created, the study allowed the identification of the institutions that finance the sector on a regular basis. Further analysis of the social reports of the 14 identified institutions confirmed the consistency and relevance of their cultural event sponsorship policies. Initial contacts vie e-mail and telephone were made with each of the sponsorship managers of the identified firms explaining the research topic and aim and asking for their consent to being involved in the study; of the 14 contacted 5 agreed to participate. The interviews took place over February and March 2013 and were conducted by the same interviewer either face-to-face or over the phone and lasted between 25 and 90 minutes. All interviews included a series of mostly open-ended questions on the following topics:
current evaluation practices
benefits and barriers to post-event sponsorship evaluation
information needs and level of interest towards the measures recommended by the literature
the role and prominence of evaluation in the process of starting and renewing sponsorship agreements
To further assist the interviews, a protocol was used outlining key questions and themes. In 2 cases a follow-up questionnaire was sent to the sponsorship managers to cover the topics that were unable to be addressed during the interview due to time constraints.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the five firms interviewed, two are utilities which provide services at the consumer level in the energy sector, one offers commercial services to customers in the gambling sector, one is an oil company and one produces and sells high quality furniture. Three of them, in particular the utilities and the furniture factory, invested annually, between 2007 and 2011, more than 3.500.000 euros in culture through sponsorships, donations and other forms of financial support to the sector; cultural sponsorships cover from 50 to 90% of their total investments. The oil company in the same period invested an average of about 500.000 euros per year in culture, of which sponsorships represent less than 10%. No data has been given in this respect by the gambling company for confidentiality reasons.
Evaluation's benefits and barriers. In order to understand benefits and barriers encountered in conducting event sponsorship evaluation, current practices were at first investigated. When asked to describe their experiences with sponsorship evaluation, the sponsorship managers of the two utilities and of the oil company said they had never done, received from their sponsee nor commissioned to a third party a post-event evaluation. In actual fact, some form of ex-post sponsorship analysis is performed that is based on attendance figures, media coverage and documentation of on-site sponsor recognition but

these aren't considered adequate indicators of the sponsorship's effectiveness. As regards the reason for non-use, there is consensus amongst the three managers that adequate evaluation tools are lacking for the type of objectives pursued by their firms related to social responsibility issues and that attributing reputation-related outcomes to cultural sponsorships is critical especially for the type of firms they represent. "We do not intend sponsorship as an investment in communication to be measured in terms of awareness or turnover increase. Our aim is to give something back to the community, strengthen ties with it and secondly improve market positioning", said the sponsorship manager of one utility while the other stated that "considering our type of business it is difficult to significantly move sales and consensus through the sponsorship of a cultural event. Furthermore effective and consistent evaluation tools are lacking". Another mentioned barrier is evaluation's high operating costs. If this latter together with the difficulties in measuring reputation-related outcomes also represent, according to the literature, some of the main problems related to sponsorship evaluation (Masterman, 2007), for this type of firms such latter issue seems particularly challenging even though studies have been made on how sponsorship may effect attendees' assessment of the sponsor's CSR[5]. There also seems to be a narrow view of evaluation confined to sales-related metrics which, as Sneath et al. (2005) underline, makes it difficult to assess the outcomes associated with event sponsorship.

As regards the gambling firm, evaluation is carried out occasionally by an external company and is based on attendance figures, media coverage and attendees' comments and perceptions on the initiatives promoted by the firm on the occasion of sponsorship. No data have been given by the furniture factory on the measures adopted because it considers them confidential information but evaluation is performed by the firm on an annual basis. It is interesting noting that the indicators used by the gambling firm are quite similar to the ones applied by the utilities and the oil company and so is the rationale underlying their sponsorships which also in the case of the gambling firm is referred to the company's social responsibility whereas for the furniture factory such investments are strictly related to the firm's marketing strategies. Similarities between the utilities, the oil company and the gambling company appear also as regards to evaluation's perceived benefits, beyond current practices. For these in fact evaluation results represent a useful tool to effectively communicate CSR to the public and the firm's stakeholders; furthermore, in agreement with the furniture company, they also consider them a valuable guide for scheduling future sponsorships. On the whole, only the sponsorship managers of the companies that currently have evaluation practices in use believe it may be functional to obtain financial support within the firm for future sponsorships. All interviewees claimed they were interested in carrying out such activity in the future with the sponsorship manager of one of the utilities stating "evaluation could be a useful tool to better target future investments".

Information needs. Interviewees were then asked to mention the sponsorship's elements they would be more interested in measuring within post-event evaluation. The most cited themes were: the event's success in terms of attendance figures and participants' satisfaction –an aspect stressed in particular by one of the utilities and the oil company- as well as media exposure to measure both through quantitative and qualitative measures; other respondents also mentioned corporate reputation and sponsor recognition while the sponsorship manager of one of the utilities was unable to answer. A list of 11 possible evaluation measures drawn from the literature review was then presented to all experts asking them to indicate how relevant it is to assess each of them, and a five-point Likert-type scale was used for this purpose. Significant convergences transpired amongst the managers of the utilities, the oil company and the gambling company. If on the one hand they agree with the furniture factory in rating reputation and awareness as the most relevant elements to assess (5) for the this type of firms the event's socio-cultural and environmental impact is an equally important measure (4.5) as well as the overall quality of the sponsorship's delivery and management (4.7) and the actual use of the benefits granted in the sponsorship agreement (4.6). Other important measures include the event's success (4.5) and media exposure (4.4) whereas networking and business development effects (3.7) and the event's economic impact (3.5) were considered moderately important. For all interviewees the measurement of sponsorship's effects on staff members (2.7) is of little importance. Further comments were made by some experts on the measurement of sponsorship's effects in terms of business development with the manager of one utility stating that such aspect may represent an important rationale for sponsorship engagement but "what are you then going to measure and disclose? It's a critical theme"; similar statements were made by another interviewee. Although one expert was more positive towards the possibility of reporting such outcomes, one may argue that this aspect of sponsorship evaluation touches upon confidential information which may be more appropriately assessed by the firm internally. Overall major emphasis is put on the evaluation of marketing related-objectives in

5 See for example Lacey et al.'s study (2009).

a B2C context and for the utilities, the oil company and the gambling company also on the event's socio-cultural and environmental impact with the sponsorship manager of one of the utilities saying that the measurement of this latter aspect is relevant since reducing the event's environmental impact and raising public awareness on this issue represent two of the firm's objectives. In order to understand the rationale underlying such considerations, additional questions were made to the sponsorship managers of these firms to investigate perceived benefits and barriers in assessing the event's impact on the community and the environment. All believe that their measurement would be useful for testing sponsees' skills and reliability and that they would benefit also in terms of communication showcasing, through tangible data, their social responsibility with the manager of one utility saying "it would be valuable especially in this time of crisis in which we are thinking about moving some of our advertising funds in CSR activities". Such statements support the view of Guerzoni (2008) and Bracalente and Ferrucci (2009) and more generally they support the portion of the literature that advocates for impact assessment within sponsorship evaluation. Two interviewees out of four also said that such measures would help them gain a wider understanding of culture-related investments' worthiness while also assisting their decision-making process. The barriers consist mainly in them being a costly and time-consuming practice and in sponsees' lack of competences while two also mentioned the scarcity of consistent evaluation tools and the "difficulty in finding catchy outputs which is mostly important".

When respondents were asked to mention possible metrics to calculate their most relevant aforementioned aspects, three were unable to answer while those who did cited the most popular and easy-to-measure parameters such as number of event attendees, number of citations in the media, % of respondents who identified the firm as sponsor, and the manager of one utility also mentioned environmental impact metrics: % of energy that comes from renewable sources, ratio of recycle waste compared with non-recycled. Although this answer confirms how relevant such an aspect of sponsorship evaluation may be to this type of firm, overall the unfamiliarity with evaluation transpires again and was expressly stated by one interviewee.

Evaluation's role within the decision-making process.

If the answers provided up to now have allowed to uncover sponsors' information needs as well as post-event evaluation's benefits and barriers, the final section of the survey attempted to examine the role of evaluation within businesses' decision-making process, therefore achieving the last objective of the research. In particular, interviewees were asked to which extent a well-done evaluation based on the measures they had previously judged relevant could influence their sponsorship renewal decisions and how the opportunity to acquire a post-event evaluation report based on the aforementioned elements would weigh on their choice to activate a new agreement. Managers were positive with regard to the first question with one in particular saying that "from a technical perspective, such data would allow me to support, amongst senior managers, the opportunity to re-sponsor one event rather than the other". Regarding the second question, respondents were less positive with one utility manager saying that such benefit wouldn't influence their judgments. Overall the opportunity to acquire a well done sponsorship report from the sponsee based on shared parameters is considered moderately relevant in the decision-making process because respondents fear the results may be faked. They believe that effective evaluation should be carried out by the sponsor or an independent third party, a view also shared by Masterman (2007). Therefore a well-done evaluation which matches businesses' information needs represents only partially an ingredient that adds competitiveness to sponsorship proposals whereas it has a relevant influence, though not vital, within the renewal process especially if performed internally or by an independent third party.

CONCLUSIONS

The research, in investigating information needs, barriers, benefits and role of ex-post evaluation within the decision-making process of Italian businesses which regularly sponsor cultural events, allowed to identify significant convergences among firms not selling consumer goods but services within the energy and gambling sectors and whose sponsorships are primarily motivated by CSR. These types of businesses are interested in a comprehensive evaluation which contemplates the following elements: reputation, awareness, quality of the sponsorship's execution, the event's success and its socio-cultural and environmental impact; second-order measures include the effects generated by the sponsorship in a B2B context and the event's economic impact. Compared to consumer goods industries, for this type of businesses the assessment of the event's impact on the community and the environment is of particular value since it represents a useful tool for showcasing the firm's social responsibility while also testing sponsees' skills and reliability. Emphasis is also put on measuring the event's success in terms of audiences' feedback and perceptions towards the event and the possible marketing activities promoted by the firm around it while also looking at conventional attendance figures. The research results therefore show

the need to improve current post-event evaluation practices by adopting a comprehensive approach that contemplates the aforementioned dimensions. Also, since according to the managers interviewed, one of the major issues in conducting effective evaluation resides in the difficulty in attributing, especially for these types of firms, corporate reputation-related outcomes to a cultural sponsorship, longitudinal studies could be conducted before, during and after the event on attendees to isolate the event's impact versus prior knowledge and perceptions as well as studies which compare attendees and non attendees (Lacey et al., 2010). However, the difficulty in conducting an accurate evaluation remains when sponsorship's objectives and audiences are broad which is often the case when sponsorships are orientated towards the betterment of society and a demonstration of corporate citizenship (Ryan, Fahy, 2012) as for the businesses analysed. Other barriers that should be addressed in order to improve current practices include: sponsees' lack of expertise around event impact assessment, a narrow view of evaluation amongst sponsorship managers and the high operating costs of evaluation and event impact studies. For these businesses-types the improvement of current practices through the adoption of the aforementioned measures would benefit the sponsor-sponsee relationship as it would effect the renewal process though mainly from a technical point of view rather than impacting final business decisions. Moreover, evaluation would be mostly valued if conducted by an independent third party -or the firm itself- a part from the assessment of the event's impact which is considered a liability of the sponsee. Overall a comprehensive approach to evaluation would not boost competitiveness to sponsorship proposals but it might help build lasting bonds based on trust and reliability.

The research findings provide cultural organizations with insights into how to revise and structure their evaluation reports while highlighting the opportunity for them to partner with an external independent party in order to fully accomplish a meaningful assessment. It also attempts to contribute to the sponsorship scholarship by providing greater knowledge of the barriers and desiderata around post-event evaluation of firms which view their sponsorships as a CSR tool -rather than a strictly commercial investment- and operate in sectors which have a strong impact on society and the environment.

However, the research conducted is restricted to the viewpoint of sponsoring businesses and, in particular, of a certain businesses-type. Further research should be conducted on sponsees in order to acquire a wider picture of evaluation's actual value within the sponsor-sponsee relationship and of existing barriers that limit effective evaluation practices; motivations, barriers and information needs of other types of business sponsors should also be further investigated.

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