

Adidas and the World Cup Sponsorship: Will Adidas Give FIFA the Red Card?

TEACHING NOTES

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

Case Synopsis

This case looks at the sponsorship relationship between Adidas and FIFA. The two organisations have a longstanding relationship as Adidas has been a main sponsor of the FIFA World Cup, the biggest sporting event in the world, for over 40 years. The partnership provides Adidas with broad licensing and marketing rights, as well as, the production of the official match ball. Given fierce competition, the World Cup is a unique opportunity for Adidas to create brand awareness and to defend leadership in its key category football.

However, in recent years, FIFA has had many organisational issues. Speculation of bribery and corruption have surrounded not only FIFA but also the president of the organisation, Sepp Blatter. The main incident took place on May 27, 2015 when 14 highly ranked FIFA executives were arrested in a luxury hotel in Zurich just a few days before the annual FIFA congress. Since then even more pressure has been placed on FIFA to reform the organisation. After the arrests, all eyes are on the sponsors' reactions it is said that they are the only ones with the power to push for true reforms. Adidas stakeholders start to get nervous about a negative spillover effect on the Adidas brand image. When four large American sponsors publicly call for Sepp Blatter's suspension, Adidas is left weighing the different options and deciding how to act and proceed.

Learning Objectives

The aim of the case study is to highlight the managerial dilemma between commercial dependency of the sponsored event and the reputational risk for the brand, resulting from the interconnectivity of sponsor and sponsee. In order to assess these questions, it is vital to understand the functions of sponsorship and the implications for the sponsor's brand in the event of one partner being subject to a crisis. Roper and Fill (2012) determine four functions of sponsorship, namely building brand awareness, image transfer, indirect communication and integration.

Sponsoring and Brand Awareness Building

Sponsorship is defined as the "provision of assistance, financial or in-kind, to an activity of a commercial organisation for the purpose of achieving a commercial objective" (Meenaghan, 1983, p. 83). These objectives encompass building positive brand awareness or perception (image) (Roper & Fill, 2012). Adidas regards this form of brand building as an integral part of their brand strategy and commercial success (Adidas, 2014a). However, a successful sponsorship outcome is hampered if the event or the sponsored partner is subject to a crisis. Firstly, while highly attractive events provide a large platform for building brand awareness and perception, their size in terms of popularity simultaneously increases the risk of a negative spillover effect if unfavorable information is linked to the event (Schnittka, Sattler, Fasky, 2013). With the World Cup being the biggest sport event in the world, Adidas certainly attained the most valuable sponsoring platform in their core category of football. However, the high media coverage and emotional involvement also pose a threat to the brand. Negative sponsorship information adversely influences the structure of the

sponsoring brand's associative network, ultimately reducing positive associative links and resulting in lower brand equity (Krishnan, 1996). Consequently, negative information from a highly attractive sponsee is more detrimental for the sponsor's brand. This renders the World Cup and FIFA's controversies as a prominent threat to the brand's image.

Sponsoring and Brand Image Transfer

Brand image is defined as the "perception of a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller, 1998, p.69). Roper and Fill (2012) suggest that associations between sponsor and an event can be transferred. Smith (2004) further indicates that this Brand Image Transfer (BIT) is determined by the stakeholder's image of a sponsor, namely the assessment of the fit of partners. A good fit increases positive image transfer but is also more detrimental if negative information about the sponsored organisation or event becomes public (Grohs & Reisinger, 2014). Roper and Fill (2012) suggest that a fit between the sponsor and the event can be based on two dimensions, namely function and image. Adidas and the World Cup represent a perfect fit with regard to sponsorship (Appendix 2). This equips Adidas with great leveraging power for its brand but it also exposes Adidas to greater risks of facing negative spillover effects (Schnittka, Sattler, Fasky, 2013).

Using the CBIRM matrix (Urde & Greyser, 2014) one can see that Adidas' identity is closely aligned with the sponsored event. While the reputation elements of the 'performance and competition diagonal' are very much dependent on the sponsorship (e.g. recognisability), the elements of the 'relationship vertical' seem to be most exposed to a negative effect from FIFA's scandal (e.g. responsibility) (Appendix 3; Urde & Greyser, 2014). Furthermore, the stakeholders' assessment of the partner's quality determines the BIT, which might decrease in times of crisis. In order to assess the impact of a crisis, the crisis can be evaluated along the four factors of brand elements, crisis situation, company initiatives and results of initiatives (Greyser, 2009). These four factors show the detrimental extent of FIFA's crisis and possible negative effects for the sponsoring partner (Appendix 4).

Sponsoring and Indirect Communication

Sponsoring allows the stakeholders to perceive the sponsor indirectly through a third party (Rope & Fill, 2012). Sponsoring the largest football tournament for more than 40 years adds credibility to Adidas as a sports company. However, at the same time the sponsor has little control over the presentation of the event and its associations (Crompton, 2015). Sponsoring a controversial event or partner equals a silent approval for these actions (Schnittka, Sattler, Fasky, 2013). Thus, calling for Blatter's removal could turn out to be a positive push on Adidas' perception in public. However, a strategic exit from a sponsoring partnership, when the sponsee received negative publicity, can have a negative effect on the brand image for the sponsor (Messner and Reinhard, 2012) if perceived to be self-serving. If Adidas can communicate indirectly to be standing back from a highly profitable business for the greater good, a positive effect on the company's reputation can be expected. Stakeholders' response to this withdrawal depends on the level of trust towards the sponsor (Messner and Reinhard, 2012). Therefore, as Adidas' relationship with FIFA has been interwoven for decades and the company failed to speak up immediately compared to other sponsors, there is a risk that the public will believe that Adidas is just trying to save itself.

Sponsorship and Integration

Roper and Fill (2012) propose that sponsoring initiatives are more efficient when used in combination with other communication tools. This might create a lock-in effect for sponsors. In this respect, ending the partnership would not only mean a loss of advertising space over future World Cups but would directly set an end to the sales of diverse merchandise products, like the official match ball.

Results

The brand reputation is derived from and influenced by the brand identity (Urde & Greyser, 2014). It is shaped by the brand essence (“core of core”) (Urde, 2009, p.620). Sports and its respective values like Performance, Passion, Integrity and Diversity form the core of the Adidas brand. Usually the brand core is a strong tool in times of crisis (Greyser, 2009). Yet, the FIFA corruption scandal creates a mismatch between the core values of Adidas and its reputation. Authenticity, which is the integral asset for any brand (Greyser, 2009), might be questioned by stakeholders due to Adidas’ relationship with FIFA and the World Cup. Adidas should find a way to credibly communicate its brand core in this sponsorship relationship by pushing for internal reforms in FIFA. A first step has been taken by joining the other sponsors and jointly demanding further supervision rights on FIFA’ reform process (ABC, 2015). The enforced involvement not only represents a strong reciprocal interdependence between sponsor and sponsee, but also a strong connection between the reputation and brand values of partners on both sides.

Teaching Plan

In order to achieve the depicted learning outcome, we believe the following four-step structure as best suited for the case presentation in class. In total, the presentation and discussion will take between 35 and 45 minutes.

1. Case Background Leading up to Management Decision (15 minutes)

The purpose of this background presentation is to provide the students with the necessary information for a controversial and compelling discussion. The presentation shall not only ensure cognitive understanding but raise emotional involvement, tension and empathy with the involved characters. Therefore, we propose to introduce the facts needed in form of a short role play with a three-act structure, based on the pivotal events. Right from the beginning the students should be addressed in their assigned role as board members.

1. Act (Setup): Board Meeting before the latest FIFA scandal - “Adidas, Football and the World Cup”
 - Elaborate on football as Adidas’ core category
 - Provide insights on reputational heritage of Adidas and the company’s long history in sponsorship
 - Outline the relationship between Adidas, FIFA and the World Cup

2. Act (Incident): 14 FIFA Officials under Arrest!
 - Present the unfolding events on 27th of May. Provide facts of what happened as well as reactions from different parties. To highlight the scale of FIFA’s corruption issue, a short overview of FIFA’s malpractice in the past shall be given.

We suggest to use original video clips to underline the authenticity and drama of the case.

3. Act (Dramatic climax leading to managerial question): Crisis Board Meeting at the Adidas Headquarter, October 7th 2015
 - Four American investors demand for Blatter’s immediate removal
 - Adidas is confronted with pressure from shareholders and media and decisions on how to further react need to be taken

The crisis meeting introduces the managerial question and thus represents sets the stage for the upcoming discussion

2. Managerial Question and Discussion (15 minutes)

Based on the information gained over the case presentation, as well as, by making use of insights from the course curriculum, the following question shall be discussed by the students:

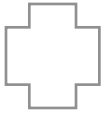
What actions should the Adidas board members take in regards to their sponsorship of the World Cup and their relationship with FIFA?

In order to keep a controversial discussion going and to ensure that the managerial dilemma is considered from different angles, the discussion leader can introduce follow-up questions if necessary:

- What are the alternatives? What are their consequences?
- Is Adidas’ brand threatened by the recent incidents?
- Can Adidas thrive without the World Cup sponsorship?
- Should Adidas rethink its future sponsorship strategy?
- Is the inherent dependence and risk related to the event and the organizing body too high?

The classroom board shall be used to sum up and structure central student comments. The following table can stand as an example of how the discussions’ ideas might be clustered:

Key Issues	Alternatives (and consequences)	Actions
Adidas is about to lose its core category football to its main competitor NIKE	A Back up with Blatter. Use Influence & long term relation to push for reforms (might evoke neg. media reactions, public opposes Blatter)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inform worried shareholders and internal stakeholders about further actions 2. Press statement: Disapproval of malpractice & call for reform 3. Get involved in internal reform process at FIFA 4. Communicate to public: "We take our responsibility – we will not let football fail!"
The World Cup is pivotal for Adidas in terms of brand awareness building & merchandising		
The World Cup offers a 'total match' sponsorship (functional and emotional fit), no better opportunity to promote core category football & brand values	B Keep partnership but call for Blatter's suspension like the other sponsors did (worse situation with other President? / might decrease Adidas influence on FIFA)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inform worried shareholders and internal stakeholders about further actions 2. Press statement: Blatter must be suspended (CEO) 3. Back up with other sponsors – form a coalition for change
Long-term partnership with FIFA is a highly valuable competitive advantage on a competitive sports market		
The close relation with FIFA might result in a negative spillover effect on Adidas	C Detach FIFA scandal from Adidas brand. 'Wait and See'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Press statement: Disapproval of malpractice & call for reform. "Adidas is not FIFA"
Risk of becoming involved in malpractice? (How to make honest business with a thoroughly corrupt organization?)	D End Partnership with FIFA (loss of Sponsorship! Threat of NIKE taking over)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Announce end of ("Protection of Adidas core values – make toleration of malpractice impossible") (CEO) 2. Address the football community: "We fight for you & football!" 2. Start a strong brand campaign on football: "We are all in or nothing!" "Football is in our DNA – as is fair play!" 3. Push creative 'ambush marketing' for upcoming World Cups
Sponsorship should rise pride among employees – In this case opposite effect?! Negative example for employees		
Shareholders and public opinion already strongly oppose FIFA		
'Only the sponsors have the power to push for reform in FIFA' – Public call for intervention		



As students present issues, alternatives and actions the case presenter should write them down on the board. After analyzing and evaluating the choices, the students in their role as board members shall vote on the actions they find most relevant and decide upon the direction that Adidas should take in regards to the future sponsorship of FIFA and the World Cup. Optionally, one student might be asked to present the chosen alternative to the waiting media in the end.

3. What actually happened (5 minutes)

After the discussion, the choices that Adidas actually made, shall be briefly presented. Since the case just happened very recently not all outcomes are fully available. As the case evolves and changes over time, more can be added to this part of the case.

4. Discussion of alternative choices and solutions (10 minutes)

In the end, ten minutes should be reserved in order to discuss the company's choice as well as alternative solutions. A final round of questions, comments and personal reflections shall close the case. A short summary from the discussion leaders can help to shed light on the central outcome of the discussion and the central learnings from the case. In order to pinpoint the reputational dilemma based on the intense collaboration of sponsor and sponsee as well as the sponsor's dependence of the event, it can be helpful to use the CBIRM model.

Refelction

Our group was quickly formed after the case was presented to the class. Right away we started to discuss possible situations and companies to use for our case. We were all fairly split on which case to go with, but when we met with Mats Urde to discuss our options, he quickly helped us understand the options and decide on which one to go with.

Once we decided on FIFA, we got down to work. Originally our plan was to focus on just FIFA and their organisational issues, but we were having trouble finding a focus and a relevant case question. The case question was hugely significant and as Mats Urde (2015b) explained, "The ideal is to have a question(s) with alternative answers and solutions that invite the class to relevant discussion related to the learning objectives". Since this was such a challenge, we chose to look at the case in a different way. We decided to focus the case from a sponsorship perspective. We chose Adidas as we felt they were the greatest match with FIFA and most closely tied to FIFA.

The greatest positive throughout the case writing experience was how well we worked together as a team. The three of us all had our own ideas that we brought to the table, but we were also willing to listen to one another. We all understood our objectives and had a clear goal of what we wanted to accomplish with this case. We met every week and set clear deadlines so we all understood the next steps.

Our case writing has not been without its challenges. First, we found that after switching to a sponsorship focus, we were basically doing two companies rather than one. Writing about both Adidas and FIFA, and their complex relationship, came with many

challenges. We wanted to present the case and the organisations in the most clear and precise way so we continually had to look back, rethink, and evaluate what we were including. There is so much information on FIFA and the corruption scandal that has surrounded the organisation, so deciding on what to include and what not to include was a major challenge.

Another major challenge for us was to decide on the case question. We wanted something that would make those participating in the case toss back and forth between which way Adidas should go and what they should do. Our group, as the case writers, was continually focused on making sure we had the best possible question and we had lengthy decisions about what we thought participants would think. When writing the case and the case question, we had to constantly think ‘ok what would the participants think here’ but also consider how the case presenter would best be able to present the information and how they could best present the case so that it had a proper flow. We tested our case out on a few students we knew who were not involved in the “corporate brand management and reputation” class and received positive feedback about our case and the question we had prepared.

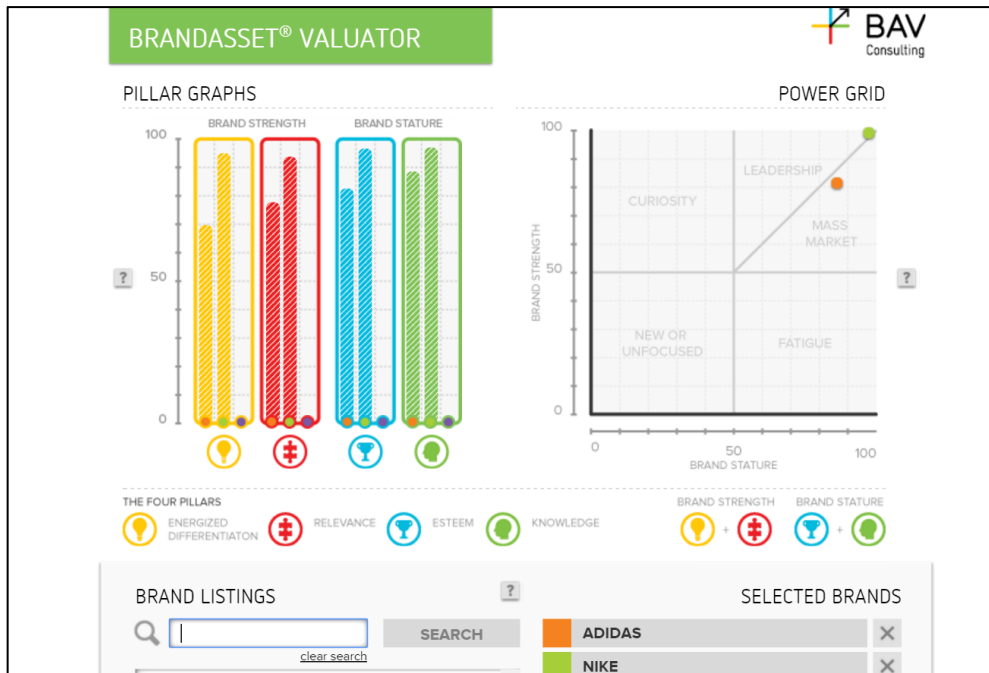
This case is extremely current, which makes the case relevant and exciting, but also made it challenging for us since the situation kept evolving. Quite recently, new information and actions surrounding FIFA and the sponsors came out. This made our case even more interesting, but it also challenged us since we could not keep changing and updating our paper and presentation. We decided to choose a date and made that the cut off for information. Anything after that date was not included in our case paper or presentation.

We have learned a lot of valuable lessons from writing this case. Firstly, we learned how important different sponsorships relationships are. We gained valuable insight as we dived into the sponsorship between Adidas and FIFA. How brands relate to one another, how brand reputation can transfer between companies and how difficult it can be to organize and decide what actions to take when being confronted with a scandal. We experienced that we can foster and develop those decisions by using relevant models and information; for example, the CBIMR (Urde, 2015a), used as an analytical tool, and the Dimensions of Sponsorship Dimensions model (Poon & Prendergast, 2010). Secondly, we learned how case writing can be both extremely valuable, and intensely difficult. Developing this case so to provide the relevant information, but also cutting down on all the information available showed us what is important to consider when analyzing a crisis and an organisation.

We have not presented our case in class so we do not know how class will react and how the decision will go, but we believe we have created a very accurate and compelling case. The information we have included, with the teaching notes, will aid anyone that is interested in presenting our case to have an informative, educational, and successful case decision. Our paper and presentation is well prepared, organized, and informative and we look forward to presenting it in class.

Appendix

Appendix 1:



Appendix 1: Comparison of Adidas' and Nike's brand value (Adapted from BAV Consulting, 2015)

Appendix 2:

<p>F- Match <i>(high functional congruence but low image congruence)</i></p>	<p>Match <i>(high in both functional and image congruence)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>high functional fit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ same category (football): ✓ Adidas football as core category, World Cup=largest football event worldwide, FIFA = the organization governing football ✓ Adidas products related to event ✓ Adidas = heritage in this category • <i>high emotional fit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ same values/ missions ✓ long and emotional associations with football
<p>No Match <i>(low in both functional and image congruence)</i></p>	<p>I-Match <i>(low in functional congruence but high image congruence)</i></p>

Appendix 2: Dimensions of sponsorship interaction (adapted from Poon & Prendergast, 2010)

Appendix 3:

<p>Relevance The Football World Cup as perfect fit to present new technologies and products.</p>	<p>Trustworthiness Questionable due to intertwined relationship with corrupt FIFA!</p>			<p>Differentiation Replaceable by main competitor NIKE. Main advantage: Long heritage in football and relationship with FIFA.</p>
	<p>Value Proposition Truly global, unique product portfolio, rich heritage in football</p>	<p>Relationships Reliable & supportive => make athletes better!</p>	<p>Positioning Leading in Innovation, design and outstanding customer experience</p>	
<p>Recognisability The football World Cup as perfect fit to communicate brand values and create awareness. BUT opposite effect during crisis.</p>	<p>Expression Partner of outstanding athletes; iconic three-stripe design</p>	<p>Identity Core Performance Passion Integrity Diversity</p>	<p>Personality Passionate for sports, driven, diverse company & global brand</p>	<p>Credibility Being the official partner & outfitter for World Cup enhances credibility. BUT opposite effect during crisis.</p>
	<p>Mission & Vision Real passion for sports: Be global leader in the sporting goods industry</p>	<p>Culture Integrity, fair-play, team player</p>	<p>Competences Track record & long heritage in Innovation, technology, design</p>	
<p>Willingness-to-support World Cup is needed to demonstrate Market Leadership.</p>	<p>Responsibility Questionable due to intertwined relationship with corrupt FIFA!</p>			<p>Reliability The football World Cup as a way to present outperforming products.</p>

Appendix 3: CBIRM of Adidas and its Reputation with Regard to FIFA and the World Cup (Adapted from Urde 2015a)

Appendix 4:

Brand Elements (of FIFA)	Crisis Situation (for FIFA)	Company Initiatives (from FIFA)	Results of Initiatives (from FIFA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § brand core of football and company culture § core values in sports, like integrity and fair play under attack > already weak reputation before the most recent incidents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § High media pressure § High stakeholder involvement § most prominent brand ambassador (Blatter) under attack § threat to FIFA's brand positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § limited transparency (corruption report only partly published) § no visible change in actions (Blatter running for president) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § increased distrust in FIFA § call for Blatter's removal from various stakeholders

Appendix 4: Crisis Analysis for FIFA

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