

We Play the Same Game, But Do We Share the Same Passion? A Comparison of French and Australian Emotional Reactions During Sport Events

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Despite their omnipresence in sports events and their key role in attracting patrons to sporting events, sport-related emotions have not been extensively studied. Examining the two dimensions of valence and intensity, this paper compares the emotional response of two groups of French and Australian spectators during two major events of the world tennis calendar: Roland Garros and the Australian Open. This paper provides evidence that French and Australian patrons experienced comparable emotions, and explains the differences observed. Contrary to our expectations, the data reveals that emotions affect the formation of attitude toward both events differently.

INTRODUCTION

“Sport generates fandom that is more intense, more obtrusive, and more enduring than it is for other forms of entertaining social activities without direct participation in the spectated events”. (Zillmann and Paulus, 1993, p. 604)

Sports events play a central role in modern societies. Whether we consider them as entertainment, business opportunities, inspiration for physical and mental strength, or social binds, sports have become embedded in today’s social intercourse. Studies have even shown that sports and sport events can impact a country’s economic growth or social balance (Soccernomics, 2006).

Sports events have progressively become the *place to be* for many brands willing to address consumers outside of the traditional, unidirectional and impersonal advertising context. Indeed, since they can convey strong images (Pracejus, 2004) to large audiences as well as targeted consumers (Bennett, 1999), sports have become a privileged context and reference for local companies’ and multinationals’ communication campaigns. Sport has also become a familiar area for academics studying sociology, psychology or marketing, and has proven to be particularly interesting for those investigating the tenets of the sponsorship persuasion process (Rifon, Choi, Trimble and Li, 2004).

Specifically, sports events constitute an ideal empirical setting to investigate emotions from a consumer behaviour perspective. Whether it involves collective performances or individual achievements, a sport event always offers a wide array of emotions, with varying degrees of intensity and valence.

Despite sport's obvious capacity to elicit emotions, academics have long considered emotions as a secondary variable in the sponsorship persuasion process, privileging cognitive variables and mechanisms. Professional practice also shows that most brands willing to invest in sponsorship keep ignoring the property's emotional content in their decision-making process. A possible explanation might be found in the perceived elusiveness and volatility of sport emotions, as opposed to more permanent factors, such as attendance profile and event media coverage (Thwaites, 1995; Kuzma, Veltri, Kuzma, and Miller, 2003).

However, considering the global appeal of major sports events and the universal nature of emotions (Izard, 1977), one could expect that the emotional responses elicited by a sport event may well be a common denominator for sport enthusiasts all over the world, regardless of cultural background. Therefore, demonstrating that two similar events happening in two different countries can trigger similar emotional reactions may well help validating sports-related emotions as a variable of interest for both event organisers and potential sponsors.

This paper presents the results of an empirical study which aimed at (1) empirically assessing the universality of emotions by comparing the emotional responses of French and Australian spectators during two similar major tennis events: Roland Garros and the Australian Open, and (2) confirming the impact of emotions on spectators' attitude towards the event, which is acknowledged as a strong predictor of sponsors' appreciation (Bal, Quester and Plewa, 2010). The results are expected to contribute to the literature dealing with emotions and cross-cultural differences, with a particular focus on sport event management and sponsorship. Using Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) continuous approach for emotions, hypotheses are presented that compare both audiences' emotional responses and their influence on attitude toward the event. Following the development of hypotheses, the research methodology is detailed and results are discussed. The paper concludes with future research directions and managerial implications.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Following Zajonc's (1980) seminal contribution, affect has become a topic of interest in many academic fields (sociology, psychology, consumer behaviour, neurosciences, etc.) and now benefits from an advanced and well-articulated corpus of knowledge. Affective notions of emotion, feeling or mood are now precisely differentiated, and their respective effects on human behaviours clearly defined (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999; Hyder and Heath, 2005).

Since then, emotions have been increasingly studied in marketing, and in persuasion research in particular, with the view that understanding consumers' emotional reactions is as important as understanding their thoughts to explain purchase behaviours (Batra and Ray, 1986; Edell and Burke, 1987; Graillot, 1998). Consequently, emotions have been conceptualized, operationalized and measured in many persuasion models, such as Petty and Cacioppo's (1981) *Elaboration Likelihood Model* or MacInnis and Jaworski's (1989) *Pure Affective Transfer*.

In terms of conceptualization, Poels and Dewitte's (2006) meta-analysis of emotional measurements in advertising emphasizes the existence of two recurrent approaches of the emotional phenomenon: the discrete (Izard, 1977) and the continuous approach (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

The discrete view depicts emotions like colours. Just as every colour can be obtained by mixing several basic colours, Izard (1977) considers every emotion as a subtle combination of several fundamental emotions. This view applies particularly to researchers willing to assess the consequences of a (group of) particular emotion(s) on a dependant variable. However, this approach presents a fundamental limitation as recent neurological findings question the idea that specific emotions rely on dedicated neuronal substrates (Davidson, 2003). In the absence of any specific emotional substrate associated with 'basic' emotions, Izard's (1977) assumption that all emotions are combinations of few

key ones appears severely compromised. Another approach is thus necessary to cover more aspects of emotional reactions and allow a better integration within persuasion models.

As an alternative, Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) continuous approach to emotions suggests a dimensional conceptualisation. According to these authors, every emotional response can be represented on a tridimensional basis, made of pleasure (*i.e.* valence), arousal (*i.e.* intensity) and dominance (*i.e.* feeling of control over the emotional reaction). This continuous approach is relevant when investigating the consequences of an overall emotional response, instead of a particular emotion. Moreover, even though these three dimensions maximise the restitution of the variance of any emotional response, several studies have established that intensity and valence are sufficient to represent a broad spectrum of emotional responses in most situations (Derbaix and Poncin, 2005).

Given the limitation of the discrete view of emotions and the potential offered by the continuous approach to assess separately emotional intensity and valence, Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) approach was deemed the most appropriate to conceptualize the emotional phenomenon in our study. Consequently, our research hypotheses consider a bi-dimensional view of emotions, based on valence and intensity.

Hypotheses Development

As a social phenomenon, every sponsored property has its own symbolic and affective content (Ferrand and Pages, 1999) that can be used as a differentiation lever. In the sport context in particular, events constitute a reservoir of affects made of happiness, surprise, satisfaction or disappointment, affording consumers a global affective experience that attracts and retains them. Surprisingly, despite the fact that the relationship between the consumer and the property has been acknowledged as a fundamentally non-verbal and affective one (Broach, Page and Wilson, 1995; Ferrand and Pages, 1999; Madrigal, 2001), few studies have tried to assess what emotions are actually felt by sports events patrons. This lack of consideration for the emotional responses elicited by the event is particularly surprising in the light of major academic works, which described sports events sponsorship as an indirect form of persuasion (Crimmins and Horn, 1996), exerting an emotive rather cognitive influence on consumer behaviour (Quester, 1996).

When studying sports events-related emotions, Bal, Quester and Plewa (2009) distinguished two groups of affective reactions: those elicited by the sport drama *per se* (*i.e.* sport-related emotions) and those happening out of the sport field (*i.e.* non sport-related emotions). Within each of these two groups of affective responses, different sub-categories were differentiated, which are presented in figure 1.

Furthermore, one question whether all spectators experience the same emotional responses when attending a sport event. Indeed, as suggested by Batra and Ray (1986), emotional reactions should be regarded as a personal state rather than as a characteristic of the stimulus causing them. For instance, that spectators from different countries can experience similar events differently might be evoked to explain differences in spectators' emotions, leading to the conclusion that any differences in emotional responses of the patrons could be attributable to both event- and cultural-related factors.

FIGURE 1
CATEGORIZATION OF EVENT-RELATED EMOTIONS (Bal, *et al.*, 2009)

- Sport-related emotions
 - Game stake and suspense
 - Players' performances
 - Individual's references to own sport experiences

- Non sport-related emotions
 - Sponsors' on-site marketing activities (draws, contests, etc.)
 - Crowd animation and behaviour
 - Interpersonal emotions, linked to exchanges with friends or other supporters
 - Event organization (queuing time, ease of access, quality of information, etc.)

However, given the universal nature of some emotional responses (Izard, 1977), spectators from diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g. Australian and French) would also be expected to experience comparable emotions when exposed to similar stimuli (top-level tennis games), in similar contexts (grand slam tournaments: the Australian Open and Roland Garros), and for the same duration (one day). While there is no doubt that these two events are marketed differently and attended by different people, the universality of the emotional phenomenon (Izard, 1977) would support that similar emotional responses should be reported by spectators during both events. Hence, our first two hypotheses state:

H1: Patrons from Roland Garros and the Australian Open report similar levels of distinct emotions.

H2: Patrons from Roland Garros and the Australian Open report similar levels of emotional intensity and valence.

Furthermore, notwithstanding the role of more cognitive variables (appreciation of the event organisation, queuing time at entry gates, quality of the information relayed, etc.), emotions have been described as the main reason to attend live sport events (Madrigal, 2001). They should therefore positively affect the general appraisal of the event. In other words, the more emotional the games, the better the spectators' experience of the event and, ultimately, the better their attitude toward the event. Consequently, based on the two dimensions of emotional intensity and valence, derived from Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) continuous view, we can expect the emotional responses elicited by the event to be positively linked to attitude toward the event. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Emotional intensity is positively related to attitude toward the Australian Open and Roland Garros.

H4: Emotional valence is positively related to attitude toward the Australian Open and Roland Garros.

Finally, since there is no apparent reason for differences between French and Australian patrons in relation to the impact of emotions on attitudes, our last hypothesis suggests:

H5: Emotional responses affect similarly the attitude toward the event at the Australian Open and Roland Garros.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To test our hypotheses and allow for comparisons, two identical data collections were held during two of the most important events of the world tennis calendar: Roland Garros 2008 ($N_1 = 437$) and the Australian Open 2009 ($N_2 = 375$). Roland Garros is an authentic and traditional tournament, where tennis remains the centre of all attractions; while the Australian Open is more of an entertainment, where tennis is one of the many shows patrons can attend. Both events share enough similarities – relating to the sport (organization, number of players, stakes), media (attendance profile, expected broadcast) and marketing (same publicity, tournaments promotion) aspects of the event – to allow for comparisons. They also target comparable western audiences (French and Australian).

Data was collected during the first five days of each event, using a mall-intercept technique. Each construct was measured using previously validated multi-item scales, after three independent judges – unaware of the research topic – had translated them from English to French.

Emotional responses were measured using Christensen's (2006) scale, asking respondents to indicate on a 7-point scale (from 0-6) the extent to which they felt a list of ten emotions (five positive, five negative), while watching tennis matches. This scale has been developed in the specific context of sponsorship and proposes sport relevant emotions only, namely: *anger*, *disappointment*, *enjoyment*, *happiness*, *hope*, *joy*, *sadness*, *sorrow*, *trust*, and *worry*. Interestingly, factor analyses ran separately on the Australian and the French samples led to the selection of the same group of six distinct emotions – forming two sets of positive (*enjoyment*, *happiness*, *joy*) and negative (*Sadness*, *Sorrow*, *Disappointment*) emotions – representing 70.3% and 73.1% of the variance of patrons' emotional responses respectively.

Following factor analyses, weighted composite scores were calculated for both constructs of emotional *intensity* and *valence*, using the formulas shown in Figure 2. These computed composite scores reflect and measure the emotional responses elicited by the sporting aspects of both events, as opposed to their commercial aspects.

FIGURE 2
WEIGHTED COMPOSITE SCORES FOR EMOTIONAL INTENSITY AND VALENCE

$$\text{Emotional Intensity} = \sum_{i=1}^n (\text{Score}_i * \text{Loading}_i) + \sum_{j=1}^n (\text{Score}_j * \text{Loading}_j)$$

$$\text{Emotional Valence} = \sum_{i=1}^n (\text{Score}_i * \text{Loading}_i) - \sum_{j=1}^n (\text{Score}_j * \text{Loading}_j)$$

Attitude toward the event was measured using Speed and Thompson's (2000) 'Personal Liking of the Event' scale, developed in the context of Olympic sponsorship. Reduced to the same three items on both sample after factorial analyses, this seven-point Likert scale presents a satisfactory reliability for the Australian Open ($\alpha = 0.70$) and a more modest one for Roland Garros ($\alpha = 0.66$).

RESULTS

Our first hypothesis proposed that patrons from Roland Garros and the Australian Open should report a similar experience of the ten discrete emotions measured with Christensen's (2006) scale. Table 1 presents the results of the independent-samples t-tests conducted to compare emotional responses between the two samples. In particular, similarities and differences were tested in relation to individual emotions as well as the valence and intensity of the overall emotional response.

As shown in Table 1, the data reveal that seven out of the ten considered emotions presented significant differences between our two samples, with a globally higher experience of all negative emotions reported by French patrons, while Australian patrons described higher levels of enjoyment and happiness. However, despite significant differences, deltas between French and Australian's discrete emotions means appear moderate, as they are lower than half of the standardized deviation for the majority of emotions. Consequently, H1 is only partially supported.

Our second hypothesis suggested no significant difference in terms of emotional intensity and valence between patrons from Roland Garros and the Australian Open. However, the pattern revealed in the data at the discrete level was mirrored at the dimensional level. Indeed, French patrons reported an average emotional intensity score significantly higher than Australian patrons ($\text{Intensity}_{\text{RG}} = 13,147$ vs. $\text{Intensity}_{\text{AO}} = 11,885$; $p < 0,001$), and an average emotional valence score significantly higher than Australian patrons ($\text{Valence}_{\text{RG}} = 6,414$ vs. $\text{Valence}_{\text{AO}} = 8,363$; $p < 0,001$). Hence, H2 is rejected.

**TABLE 1
RESULTS FOR HYPOTHESES 1 AND 2**

	Roland Garros Means (Std Dev.)	Australian Open Means (Std Dev.)	Δ	t-tests & probabilities
Enjoyment	4,515 (1,293)	4,917 (1,045)	- 0.402	4,847**
Joy	4,049 (1,446)	4,208 (1,364)	- 0.159	1,613 (p > 0.05)
Happiness	3,866 (1,377)	4,467 (1,176)	- 0.601	6,611**
Hope	3,307 (1,774)	3,272 (1,903)	+ 0.035	0,233 (p > 0.05)
Trust	2,572 (1,774)	2,648 (1,955)	- 0.076	0,524 (p > 0.05)
Disappointment	2,237 (1,859)	1,397 (1,666)	+ 0.840	6,758**
Worry	1,578 (1,805)	0,923 (1,315)	+ 0.655	6,016**
Sorrow	1,372 (1,676)	0,624 (1,204)	+ 0.748	7,314**
Anger	1,198 (1,736)	0,712 (1,319)	+ 0.486	4,492**
Sadness	1,103 (1,526)	0,499 (1,054)	+ 0.604	6,610**
Intensity	13,147 (4,542)	11,885 (3,313)	+ 1.262	7,746**
Valence	6,414 (3,906)	8,363 (3,264)	+ 1.949	4,564**
% of regular players	32.7%	18.7%	+14.0	**

** Significant difference at a 1% level

The two following hypotheses proposed a positive influence of emotional intensity (H3) and valence (H4) on attitude toward the event. These hypotheses were tested separately through two structural equations models (Roland Garros vs. Australian Open) using maximum likelihood estimations, with satisfying psychometric performances. As shown in Table 2, emotional intensity had a positive and significant impact on attitude toward both Roland Garros (S.E.: 0.445; p < 0.001) and the Australian Open (S.E.: 0.282; p < 0.001), leading to the support of H3. Furthermore, data revealed that emotional valence (S.E.: 0.373; p < 0.001) had also a positive and significant impact attitude toward Roland Garros (S.E.: 0.227; p < 0.001) and the Australian Open (S.E.: 0.307; p < 0.001). Hence, H4 is also supported.

**TABLE 1
RESULTS FOR HYPOTHESES 3 AND 4**

	Roland Garros S.E. (p)	Australian Open S.E. (p)
Intensity → Attitude toward event	0.445 (p < 0.001)	0.282 (p < 0.001)
Valence → Attitude toward event	0.227 (p < 0.001)	0.307 (p < 0.001)
X² ; df ; probability	6.968 ; 3 ; 0.138	7.303 ; 4 ; 0.121
RMR – RMSEA	0.034 – 0.041	0.040 – 0.047
GFI– AGFI	0.994 – 0.976	0.992 – 0.971

Our fifth hypothesis proposed no significant difference between both samples in terms of how emotional responses affect the attitude toward the event. However, as shown in Table 2, the explanatory

power of each emotional dimension is different for both events. Indeed, while emotional intensity and valence have a comparable influence on attitude toward the Australian Open (S.E.: 0.282; $p < 0.001$ vs. S.E.: 0.307; $p < 0.001$), emotional intensity appears to influence the attitude toward Roland Garros almost twice as much as emotional valence does (S.E.: 0.445; $p < 0.001$ vs. S.E.: 0.227; $p < 0.001$). Hence, H5 is rejected.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There is no doubt that sports events convey a broad range of affects, with varying degree of emotional intensity and valence (Broach, *et al.*, 1995; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003). However, research on these emotions has remained limited to date. From a sponsorship persuasion perspective, few studies have actually tried to assess the effects of sports emotions (Pham, 1992; Walliser, 1996; Christensen, 2006). This lack of consideration for the emotional responses elicited by the event is surprising, given that sport sponsorship has been described as an indirect form of persuasion, relying on the fundamentally affective relationship that exists between the consumer and the sponsored property (Crimmins and Horn, 1996; Quester, 1996).

This paper aimed to address this gap by comparing the emotional response of two groups of French and Australian tennis spectators who attended Roland Garros and the Australian Open respectively. While our data revealed a number of significant differences, especially in relation to negative emotions, we believe those differences to be contextual rather than cultural. Indeed, the French data collection took place during days that were rainy enough to lead to the postponement of several matches, causing a general feeling of frustration amongst members of the public that could explain an over-rating of negative emotions.

This weather-related explanation is also supported by the resemblance of both events' emotional profiles. As shown in Figure 3, the emotions used to describe patrons' affective reactions during Roland Garros and the Australian Open draw similar emotional profiles, suggesting that individual emotions evolve similarly in relation to one another at both events. Indeed, the area representing French patrons' emotions may be described as a *geometrical translation towards negative emotions* of the area representing Australian patrons' emotions.

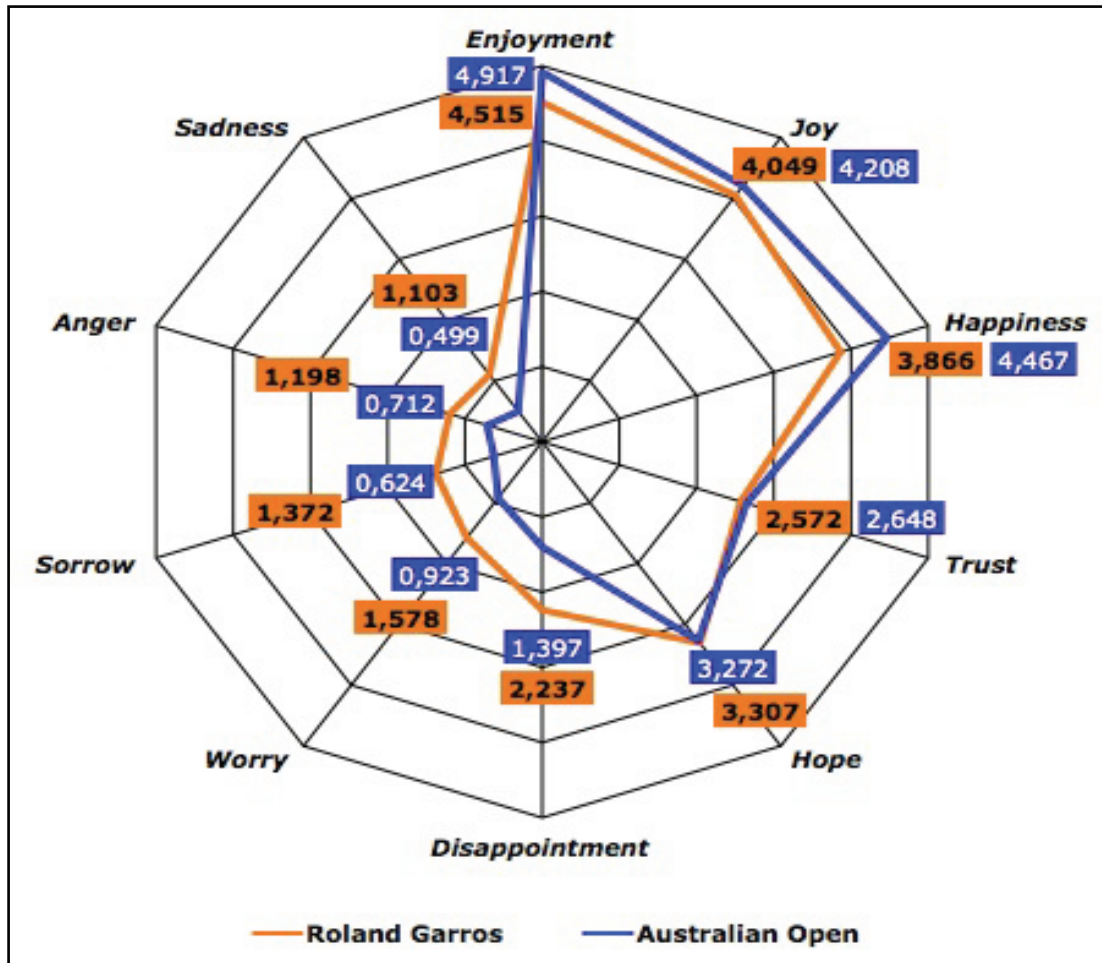
Therefore, despite significant differences at both discrete and dimensional levels, we believe that comparable emotional reactions can be expected during two similar sports events, happening in similar meteorological conditions, in two different occidental countries such as France and Australia. If the emotional responses were essentially explained by cultural factors – meaning that one population would fully live their affective experience, while the other population would control and/or hide it – one would expect to find different emotional profiles; which does not appear to exist here.

Furthermore, although our data clearly shows that emotional valence and intensity influence the attitude toward both events, they appear to do so differently in France and Australia. Their respective explanatory power is equal at the Australian Open; while emotional intensity has twice the influence of emotional valence on the attitude toward Roland Garros.

A possible explanation might be found in the higher involvement of French patrons. Indeed, while patrons' involvement were not been measured *per se*, two elements lead us to think that French spectators were more involved in the event than their Australian counterparts. First, the French data collection revealed a significantly higher percentage of regular tennis players than during the Australian Open (32.7% vs. 18.7%; $p < 0,001$); which is often considered as an antecedent to sport event involvement (Roy et Cornwell, 2004; Pons, Murali and Nyeck, 2006). Second, as shown in Table 2, French spectators reported a significantly higher average emotional intensity than Australia spectators ($Intensity_{RG} = 13,147$ vs. $Intensity_{AO} = 11,885$; $p < 0,001$), suggesting that French patrons were more aroused during the event than the Australians. Since intensity refers to the expression of an emotional experience more than to its content (Moore and Harris, 1994) – and is consequently more instantaneous than valence – we suggest that the higher involvement of French patrons might explain why intensity has a stronger predictive power than valence on attitude toward the event. This leads to the conclusion that French spectators still

prefer a pleasant experience, but that the arousal of that experience will be of greater importance in developing their liking of the event, because they are more involved. Influences are much more balanced for Australian patrons, for whom emotional valence and intensity shape their attitude toward the event similarly.

FIGURE 3
EMOTIONAL PROFILES OF ROLAND GARROS AND AUSTRALIAN OPEN



From a managerial perspective, these results emphasize the universality of emotions in a sport context. If every sport conveys its own range of emotions, our findings suggest that brands – and particularly sponsors’ brand – could expect comparable emotions during two similar events of a same sport. As such, emotions can be considered as an intrinsic characteristic of any sports event, in the same way as the attendance’s demographic profile or the media coverage.

Therefore, given that different sports such as tennis, golf, cycling, football and so on elicit different types of affective reactions, brands can use these sport-related emotions as a differentiation variable in their selection of the best sport and/or property to sponsor. Future research should examine emotions across a number of sporting contexts and different audience sizes; and also investigate how spectators’ emotions affect the different variables of the sponsorship persuasion process.

Finally, the simultaneous acknowledgement of the universality of the emotional phenomenon and of the different influences they can have should convince sponsors to consider these emotions in their

measurement of sponsorship effectiveness. Since no consensus has yet been reached on how these emotions affect sponsorship effectiveness, empirical research investigating the roles played by emotions in the sponsorship persuasion process would appear long overdue as well as useful for both theory and practice.

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