

Triggers and Configurations of Relationship Fading in Cultural-Sponsorship Relationships

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to describe, analyse, and understand the triggers and configurations of relationship fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships. A dyadic case study examines a three-year cultural-sponsorship relationship between a business sponsor and a sponsored museum. The triggers of relationship fading are broadly elaborated into structural triggers and situational triggers. The structural triggers are further categorised into negative structural triggers and positive structural triggers, and the situational triggers are further categorised into negative situational triggers and positive situational triggers. Negative triggers of relationships fading accelerate the fading of cultural-sponsorship relationship, whereas positive triggers hinder such fading. Most of the triggers are passive and indirect—that is, the triggers of relationship fading gradually reduce the sponsor's motivation to invest and develop the cultural-sponsorship relationship. The perceptions of the business sponsor and the sponsored museum are combined into a configuration matrix of relationship fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships. The configuration matrix can be used to analyse the composition and the dynamics of perceptions during relationship fading. Successful management of cultural sponsorship requires the interacting actors to be aware of the structural and situational triggers that can lead to the fading, and potentially, the ending of such a relationship.

Introduction

Sponsorship has become increasingly popular among companies that operate in consumer markets. More recently, it has also attracted interest from industrial marketers (Bruhn 2003; Meenaghan 1998; Smith 2004). Many sponsors aim to achieve favourable publicity by increasing public awareness of their connections with sports, the arts, and other social activities. Sponsorship creates exposure for products or services and to develop and promotes brand awareness through favourable associations (Drennan and Cornwell 2004; Keller 2003; Roy and Cornwell 1999).

Sponsorship can involve profit-making and non-profit-making organisations in both the public sector and the private sector. Those who are sponsored can include individuals and permanent or project-oriented organisations. Various criteria can be used to classify sponsorship. These include the form of sponsorship contribution, the number and type of sponsors involved, the degree of commercialism, the time span, the geographical coverage, and the level of professionalism (Bruhn 2003; Dolphin 2003; Olkkonen 1999; Witcher, Craigen, Culligan and Harvey 1991).

Sponsorship can be defined as a mutually beneficial business relationship between the sponsor and the sponsored. The benefits that firms seek from their sponsorship investments are of two broad types. First, sponsorship can contribute to public awareness of a product or corporate image. These benefits relate to the marketing-and-visibility dimension of sponsorship. Secondly, stakeholder relationships can be established and developed through sponsorship as a result of important representatives of the various stakeholders attending a sponsored event. These benefits relate to the stakeholder-management dimension of sponsorship. The benefits for sponsored organisations or events usually come in the form of financial resources, products, services, and know-how (Copley 2004; Dolphin 2003; Drennan and Cornwell 2004; Meenaghan 1998; Sleight 1989).

Although sponsorship is common in developed societies, there has been little academic research in this field. Research has been mainly concentrated on three areas: (i) definitional issues—that is, establishing explicit definitions and typologies of sponsorship; (ii) promotional issues—measurement of the effects and effectiveness of sponsorship; and (iii) managerial issues—the objectives of companies in using sponsorship as an aspect of their marketing programs. Of these, the managerial viewpoints of the sponsor have received greatest emphasis in the literature. Issues of interest have included: (i) the importance of realistic, concise, and quantifiable objectives; (ii) effective planning and implementation; and (iii) the integrated use of other marketing-mix variables in association with sponsorship (Clark, Cornwell and Pruitt 2002; Cornwell 1995; Cornwell 1997; Cornwell and Maignan 1998; Crowley 1991; Harvey 2001; Meenaghan 1991a; Quester and Thompson 2001). Much of the research on sponsorship has been empirically driven, and has demonstrated a lack of theory development. It has also been characteristically normative—including many guidelines for best practice in sponsorship management (Bruhn 2003; Cornwell, Roy and Steinard 2001; Dolphin 2003; Farrelly, Quester and Mavondo 2003; Gardner and Shuman 1987; Olkkonen 2002; Witcher, Craigen, Culligan and Harvey 1991).

Cornwell and Maignan (1998) offered a large cross-disciplinary review of international research conducted on sponsorship. Their extensive study identified five research streams: (i) the nature of sponsorship; (ii) managerial aspects of sponsorship; (iii) measurement of sponsorship effects; (iv) strategic use of sponsorship; and (v) legal/ethical considerations in sponsorship. Given the relative novelty of research on sponsorship, it is not surprising that much of the literature has defined sponsorship in terms of other promotional communications. In particular, many articles have stressed the importance of managerial aspects of sponsorship activities. These include objectives and motivation, constituency and audience, organisational structure, personnel requirements, and budgeting. Several researchers have evaluated the effects of sponsorship, but with inconsistent findings (Cornwell and Maignan 1998).

Based on their extensive literature review, Cornwell and Maignan (1998, 16) identified certain gaps that should be addressed in future studies of sponsorship phenomena: (i) lack of a classification scheme that allows for a clear differentiation of sponsorship from other communication and promotional techniques; (ii) poor understanding of the relationship between stated objectives and achieved results of different types of sponsorships; (iii) lack of established measures for, and convergent findings about, the impact of sponsorship on different consumers and publics; and (iv) lack of underlying theoretical

and conceptual foundations on which to base scholarly inquiry. The last is probably the main weakness of previous academic research, and the present study therefore addresses this problem.

The present study approaches sponsorship phenomena from a relational perspective—a perspective that has received very little attention in previous research on the subject, despite Meenaghan (1998), and Amis, Slack and Berrett (1999) having previously called for research examining sponsorship from this perspective. Moreover, in view of the fact that many sponsorship arrangements are based on long-term contractual arrangements, empirical research on sponsorship has been noticeably deficient in terms of relational perspectives (Dolphin 2003; Farrelly and Quester 2003; Farrelly, Quester and Mavondo 2003; Olkkonen 2002; Quester and Thompson 2001).

Previous research on sponsorship has mainly concentrated on sports sponsorship, often at the expense of any other type. Indeed, sports sponsorship has become the benchmark for sponsorship research and management (Amis, Slack and Berrett 1999; Crowley 1991; Musante, Milne and McDonald 1999; Olkkonen, Tikkanen and Alajoutsijärvi 2000a; Quester and Thompson 2001; Speed and Thompson 2000). Sponsorship investment has been historically directed towards sports primarily because of its attraction as a communication tool. Sports enjoy extensive electronic media exposure, and this can be employed to entice audiences across a range of demographic and psychographic profiles in a variety of markets. In particular, sports sponsorship usually delivers young male audiences that are typically difficult to reach by more traditional marketing communications. Sports sponsorship can also be used to transcend cultural, lingual, and geographical boundaries to reach international audiences (Abratt, Clayton and Pitt 1987; Bennett 1999; Cornwell 1995; Meenaghan 1991b; Meenaghan 1998; Olkkonen 2001; Quester and Thompson 2001).

In contrast to sports sponsorship, cultural sponsorship enjoys a significantly lower public profile and a smaller share of sponsorship investment. Cultural sponsorship is less lucrative because it is frequently perceived as being exclusivist, relatively inaccessible, and lacking in mass appeal. Arts audiences are typically older, more affluent, more highly educated, and less numerous than sports audiences. Museums and festivals usually attract less media publicity than sports events, and although they are attractive as a niche vehicle, they have less appeal to commercial sponsors who wish to target large market segments. Cultural sponsors are believed to pursue image objectives, rather than market objectives (Quester 1997; Quester and Thompson 2001).

Despite these difficulties, investments in cultural sponsorship are likely to grow as a result of the increasing saturation and costs of larger sports events. There are also indications that sponsors are becoming concerned about the commercial risks of being associated with ethical problems related either to sports and athletes, such as positive drug testing (Quester 1997; Quester and Thompson 2001; Witcher, Craigen, Culligan and Harvey 1991).

The purpose of the study is to describe, analyse, and understand the triggers and configurations of relationship fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships. First, the study discusses different interaction modes in cultural-sponsorship relationships. Secondly, the study elaborates the concept of relationship fading. Thirdly, the study identifies general and specific triggers of relationship fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships. Fourthly, the study elaborates fading configurations in cultural-sponsorship relationships. Finally, the study provides conclusions and managerial implications for successful management of cultural-sponsorship relationships.

Interaction Modes in Cultural-Sponsorship Relationships

Cultural-sponsorship relationships can be understood as co-operative, long-term, and mutually beneficial business relationships between two actors—the sponsor and the sponsored. In addition to these principal parties, other intermediaries, for example advertising and sponsoring agencies, can also be involved in sponsorship arrangements. Managing cultural-sponsorship relationships is especially demanding because it involves relationships between quite different aspects of society—business and the arts.

Not all interactions in a cultural-sponsorship relationship are of equal importance. Some events are routine, and are absorbed into the stream of interactions that constitute the relationship, whereas others are critical events that have a decisive influence on the development of the relationship. A critical event that increases the level of satisfaction is regarded as a driving event in the development of a relationship; a critical event that decreases the level of satisfaction is interpreted as a checking event. Some critical events increase perceived uncertainty regarding a relationship's continuation, whereas others reduce it. Critical events can also function as turning points or breaking points in the development of a relationship (Halinen 1997, 65).

Cultural-sponsorship relationships are composed of higher-level and lower-level elements. In general terms, various elements of business relationships have been distinguished in different relational contexts, and several frameworks have been used to describe them. Ojasalo (1999, 144) identified assignment and interaction as hierarchical lower-level elements of a relationship in the context of professional services. Assignment-level interactions contribute directly to the goals of an assignment. However, relationship-level interactions refer to interactions that contribute to the relationship in general. Liljander and Strandvik (1995, 147-149) classified interactions into episodes and acts in the context of customer relationships. These authors defined an episode as an event of interaction that has a clear starting-point and a clear end-point, and which thus represents a complete service exchange. Within the episode several acts can exist.

Holmlund (1997) classified interactions into detailed aggregation levels in the context of business relationships. According to Holmlund's (1997) framework, interactions can be categorised into actions, episodes, sequences, and relationships. Lower levels of interaction are embedded in higher levels because they are part of the aggregated higher levels in a hierarchical order. This categorisation into different levels—actions, episodes, sequences, and relationships—encompasses the whole relationship at several levels of interaction (Holmlund 1997, 96-97). The most detailed type of interaction is comprised of actions—which form the lowest hierarchical level of interactions. Actions consist of individual initiatives by firms and are the smallest unit of analysis in the interaction process. Actions can relate to any kind of exchange element—including products and services, information, money, and social contacts. Interrelated actions can be grouped into interactions on a higher episode level. Episodes are defined as several interconnected actions, and represent a minor natural entity on the next hierarchical level within the relationship. Every episode involves a series of actions—for instance, a negotiation process consisting of a number of actions. Interrelated episodes can, in turn, be grouped into a sequence, which forms a larger and more extensive entity on a higher interaction level. This level can be defined in terms of a contract, a product, a campaign, or a project. A sequence can involve a certain period of time, and sequences can overlap, so that episodes belonging to one sequence can also be part of another sequence. The completion of a sequence constitutes a vulnerable period of time in a relationship during which the partners can make crucial evaluations. A relationship refers to the level of analysis encompassing the entirety of the interaction between the partners. This level thus comprises all sequences, which, in turn, are comprised of all episodes, which, in turn, consist of all actions within a relationship. Sequences can follow each other directly, can overlap, or can follow after longer or shorter intervals (Holmlund 1997, 96-97).

The interaction levels proposed by Holmlund (1997) represent a useful way of categorising interaction in a cultural-sponsorship relationship. Interaction levels refer to diverse aggregation levels and timeframes for interactions between the business sponsor and the sponsored entity. The traditional use of two aggregation levels of interactions (that is, short-term episodes and long-term processes) is rather limited when it comes to analysing the content of a particular cultural-sponsorship relationship or capturing differences in the structures of cultural-sponsorship relationships. This categorisation of interaction levels is not a static structural conceptualisation. Rather, it is dynamic in the sense that it captures how interactions on the lower levels are able to affect interactions on the higher hierarchical levels in the cultural-sponsorship relationship.

The Concept of Relationship Fading

An extensive body of literature has emerged on relational perspectives of marketing (Coviello, Brodie, Danaher and Wesley 2002; Hunt and Morgan 1994; Möller and Wilson 1995). Contributions vary from consumer relationship marketing to inter-organisational relationship and network approaches (Ford

1997; Gummesson 2002; Håkansson 1982; Håkansson and Snehota 1995; Turnbull, Ford and Cunningham 1996). One of the key issues has been the way in which inter-organisational relationships develop—and various models of this process have been proposed (Alajoutsijärvi, Möller and Tähtinen 2000; Ford 1980; Helm 2002; Hocutt 1998; Michalski 2002; 2004; Pressey and Mathews 2003). However, more attention has been given to the growth of relationships than to the decline and ending of relationships. The implicit assumption is that an understanding of relationship growth is sufficient to ensure lasting relationships and avoid potential relationship ending (Åkerlund 2004). Consequently, temporal models of business relationships give little attention to the potential for relationship fading. In particular, there is a paucity of studies on the phase preceding the ending of any relationship—that is, the phase during which there exists probable fading of the relationship (Grønhaug, Hejnesand and Koveland 1999; Åkerlund 2000; 2004).

The concept of relationship fading refers to the phase in which a relationship seems to be weakening and declining. Such relationship fading can precede a permanent ending of the relationship, or it can represent a temporary weakening of the relationship without leading to a definite ending of the relationship. Relationship fading can thus be associated with relationship ending, but it can also be associated with staying in the relationship (Grønhaug, Hejnesand and Koveland 1999; Åkerlund 2004).

Relationship fading can be characterised as a process of a permanent or a temporal weakening in the relationship strength, where the outcome of the process is not yet known (Åkerlund 2004, 37). We define relationship fading as a process whereby the strength of the relationship is permanently or temporally weakening and declining due to active or passive contextual and structural or relational and processual reasons, but in which the outcome is not yet known (see analogically, Åkerlund 2004). The nature of fading is active, if an actor is looking for a decline in the relationship, or passive, if the fading takes place with no active or deliberate actions. The reasons for the fading might be the relationship itself or in the context surrounding it. A fading process in a business relationship might result in a business actor continuing the relationship with the service provider, or it might result in a business actor ending the relationship with that provider. There can be several reasons for continuing in the relationship—including improvements in the relationship or lack of alternatives (Åkerlund 2004).

General Triggers of Relationship Fading

Triggers of fading are critical events and incidents that can directly or indirectly initiate the fading process in a relationship (Roos and Strandvik 1996, 3-4). A trigger can lead directly to a weakening or to an ending of the relationship. Alternatively, it can indirectly initiate the fading of a relationship to a weakening or to an ending process—without directly causing the weakening and declining or the potential ending of the relationship (see analogically, Roos and Strandvik 1996, 3-4).

A trigger of fading in a relationship is any element that affects the present status of the relationship such that a process is initiated that leads to a weakening or to an ending of the relationship. A trigger is an issue that starts the process—but it is not necessarily the only element that finally leads to the weakening or to the potential ending of the relationship. If parties to the relationships are able to identify the triggers of fading they can attempt to modify the process of fading in a relationship (see analogically, Roos and Strandvik 1996, 3-4).

The specification of triggers of fading is useful in that it places the discussion of a fading relationship in a wider context. By considering a relationship between two interacting actors as an entire process, it is possible to offer a classification of triggers in four categories according to changes in the overall relationship. Based on the ideas of Roos and Strandvik (1996, 4) these might be: (i) changes in the cultural-sponsorship relationship between the organisations; (ii) changes in the characteristics of the sponsor and the sponsored in the relationship; (iii) changes in potential competitors; or (iv) changes in the entire contextual business environment. Figure 1 depicts the locus of triggers in the fading process in the context of a cultural-sponsorship relationship (see analogically, Roos and Strandvik 1996, 4).

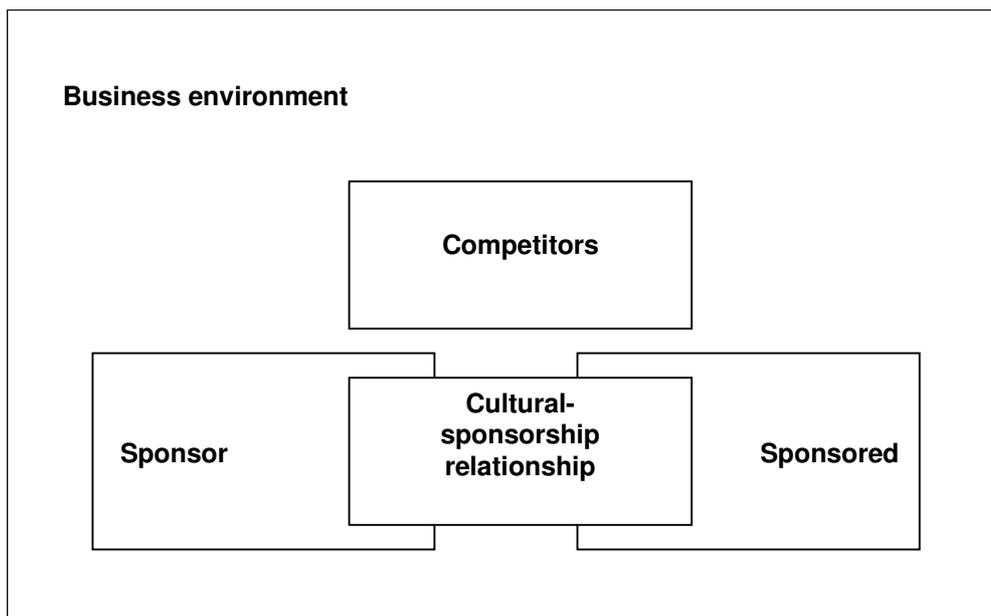


Figure 1. Locus of triggers in the fading process of a cultural-sponsorship relationship (modified from Roos and Strandvik 1996, 4)

In studying the trigger effect on customers, Edvardsson, Gustafsson and Roos (2002, 257) identified three groups of triggers—(i) situational triggers; (ii) influential triggers; and (iii) reactional triggers. A situational trigger can stem from entities outside an ordinary customer-service provider relationship. A change in the customer's financial situation or a demographic change might be such a trigger. An influential trigger can have its origins in a change in a competitor's offerings—such as an aggressive advertising campaign or the launching of a new club-membership card. A reactional trigger is produced by a change in the service quality perceived by the customer—with deterioration in the core service offering placing the relationship on a fading path (Edvardsson, Gustafsson and Roos 2002, 257).

In studying relationship ending, Halinen and Tähtinen (2002, 169-171) distinguished between three groups of factors that influence relationship ending: (i) predisposing factors; (ii) precipitating events; and (iii) attenuating factors and events. This classification is based on the role of these issues in the ending process, particularly the direction of their influence. The first two categories promote the ending of relationships, whereas the third category hinders such a process (Halinen and Tähtinen 2002, 169–171, Tähtinen 2001, 50-56).

Predisposing factors already exist when the parties enter into a relationship. These pre-existing elements make the relationship vulnerable to ending. Predisposing factors are fairly static and inherent to the relationship (Halinen and Tähtinen 2002, 170; Tähtinen 2001, 50-51). This could be as simple as the fact that two people have never liked one another, or have always had doubts about the abilities of one another. A variety of circumstances might have forced them into a reluctant relationship, and the predisposing factors remain.

Precipitating events bring change to the existing relationship, and can function as impulses for the parties to take action to end their relationship. These events might be sudden and dramatic, or might be part of a series of events that create increasing pressure for a change in the relationship (Halinen and Tähtinen 2002, 170; Tähtinen 2001, 52-53). Such events might include a sudden change in available technology that renders the existing service provider's offering obsolete, or a gradual change in the demographics of the market that induce a rethinking of strategy and a reconsideration of whether an existing service relationship is providing relevant service in light of the changed circumstances.

Attenuating factors and events reduce the effects of predisposing factors and precipitating events. If the perceived importance of attenuating factors and events is high, a business actor is likely to continue the relationship (Halinen and Tähtinen 2002, 171; Tähtinen 2001, 53-56). Examples of attenuating factors and events might be the lack of availability of an alternative provider, or the high capital costs of making a change in arrangements or in contracts.

Specific Triggers of Relationship Fading in Cultural-Sponsorship Relationships

The inner context of a business relationship refers to the general structural and processual characteristics that are considered typical of inter-organisational relationships. Structural characteristics address issues such as continuity, complexity, symmetry, and informality. Processual characteristics address issues relating to the process features of the relationships, and include adaptation, co-operation, and conflict (Håkansson and Snehota 1995).

The starting-point for understanding the specific triggers of relationship fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships should employ a fundamental division of social phenomena into: (i) relatively permanent structures; and (ii) relatively transient situational processes with diverse critical events and incidents occurring in the cultural-sponsorship relationship. Consequently, the triggers of relationship fading are first broadly elaborated into structural triggers and situational triggers. Based on the ideas of Tähtinen (2001, 50-56), Halinen and Tähtinen (2002, 169-171), and Edvardsson, Gustafsson and Roos (2002, 257) the triggers of fading in the focal cultural-sponsorship relationship can be slightly refined. However, instead of using the terms “attenuating”, “precipitating” and “predisposing” triggers, we—in the name of conceptual clarity and logic—categorise the structural triggers into negative structural triggers and positive structural triggers, and the situational triggers into negative situational triggers and positive situational triggers. Negative triggers of relationships fading accelerate the fading of cultural-sponsorship relationship, whereas positive triggers hinder such fading. The structural and situational triggers of relationship fading are illustrated in Figure 2.

The link between relatively permanent structures and the relatively transient situational processes is a central feature of the theoretical framework proposed here. The triggers of relationship fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships can be both structural with relatively high endurance and situational with single critical events and incidents occurring in the relationship. The structural and situational triggers can occur on various contextual levels—varying from the macro-environmental level to the personal level. The cultural-sponsorship relationship can also include various moderating elements that reduce the effect of various triggers of fading.

Structures are relatively permanent in time and space, but they can change over time. Structural triggers refer to the contextual issues that are relevant to the cultural-sponsorship relationship under scrutiny. Structural triggers operate on the various levels of contexts and can refer to different kinds of shared norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, rules, policies, and wisdom concerning appropriate conduct within cultural-sponsorship relationships. Structural triggers might originate from a macro-environmental, organisational, network, relationship, or personal level. They are obviously shaped by the interpretations of the parties to the relationships. The present study proposes that general structures can often be found behind many critical events and incidents that appear to be unique, singular, or situational.

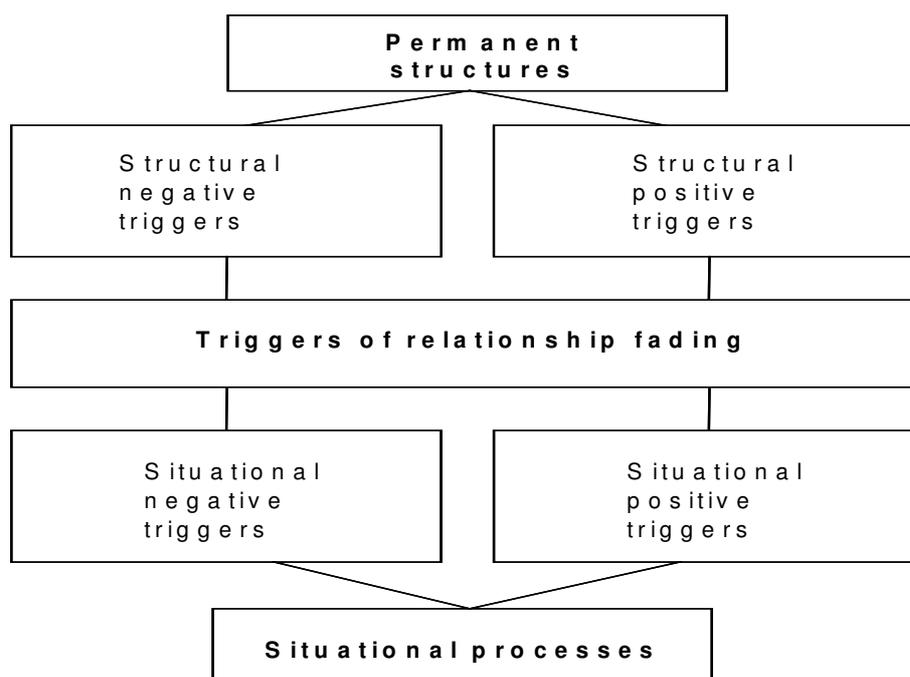


Figure 2. Structural and situational triggers of relationship fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships

Relatively transient situational processes, in contrast, refer to situational human agency flavoured with a variety of actions—that is, to a series of critical events and actions linked to a relationship. Critical events and actions occur situationally at certain times within the specific cultural-sponsorship relationship as well as outside it—that is, in the outer context (for example, connected network level, field of business or macro-environmental level) in which the relationship under scrutiny is embedded (Giddens 1984).

Longitudinal Research Design and Dyadic Case Analysis

The present study used a longitudinal approach to analyse the content and development of relationships fading between a business sponsor and a sponsored museum. A longitudinal approach was adopted to reveal the past, present, and future dynamics of fading in the cultural-sponsorship relationship. Without temporality there is no scope to reveal the dynamics of relationships fading. Longitudinal research, which focuses on the study of processes, provides clear advantages compared with cross-sectional research. First, it assists in the construction of logically consistent models of processual phenomena. Longitudinal research facilitates attempts to establish causality—in that temporal precedence of events can potentially be shown. Secondly, a longitudinal study allows the researcher to acquire a rich understanding of the contextual setting. However, major disadvantages of longitudinal studies are that they are time-consuming and that they oblige researchers to concentrate on single cases (Pettigrew 1997).

At least three different longitudinal approaches are available for studying the process of fading in sponsorship relationships (i) retrospective studies, which examine relationships from historical perspective; (ii) follow-up studies which investigate relationships in real time; and (iii) futures studies which consider the possible futures of a relationship. The reconstruction of histories over long periods of time allows the identification of continuities, different periods in relationship development, recurrent cycles, and breaking points. However, in such retrospective studies, there is a danger of rationalising different occurrences and reinterpreting these events. In contrast, following events in real time tends to

draw attention to real changes in the relationship. However, in such real-time studies there is a risk of over-emphasising the complexity of events and minor changes (Dawson 1997; Pettigrew 1997). In the present study, which involved time-bound phenomena in the form of relationships fading, a retrospective approach was used.

The study is used a dyadic approach incorporating the perspectives of two actors participating in a focal cultural-sponsorship relationship. Although it is widely recognised that relationships are dyadic in nature, dyadic models are rare. In this study, the term 'dyadic case' is used to refer to a cultural-sponsorship relationship between a sponsored museum and a business sponsor. A dyadic approach takes corresponding perceptions from both partners in a dyad into consideration, rather than focusing on only one partner's view of its relation to another (Holmlund and Strandvik 1998). The dyadic approach was important in the present study because both partners were active and both partners had perceptions of the fading relationship. With this dyadic perspective, the overall nature and fundamental components of the cultural-sponsorship relationship can be better understood.

The single-case study approach is appropriate for understanding the process of fading in settings in which the phenomenon under scrutiny is embedded in complex relationships, and in which the existing body of knowledge is presently insufficient. Business relationships are embedded in a set of interrelated levels of analysis that can be characterised as the outer and inner contexts of the focal actors (Holmlund 1997; Pettigrew 1997). This provides a contextual and temporal embeddedness (Holmlund and Strandvik 1998, 8). Consequently, a further advantage of a single-case design is its ability to provide full and in-depth insight into dynamic phenomena in inter-organisational relationships (Yin 2003).

The study involved data collection from several periods of time and multiple sources of data were utilised in the form of semi-structured interviews and specific documentary material. In longitudinal case studies, interviews can be used to collect data on what individuals identify as being a particularly memorable moment or incident. A major concern with this method relates to recall and the tendency for individuals to rationalise past actions. Sometimes, the informants might also merely provide socially acceptable answers or answers, which they believe the interviewer wants to hear. Documentary evidence is useful for constructing a chronology of the key events because documents provide more precise and consistent data and can be obtained unobtrusively (Dawson 1997, 401).

The dyadic and single-case study examined a three-year cultural-sponsorship relationship involving one dyad—a sponsorship relationship between the Museum of Contemporary Art (Kiasma) and a media company (MTV3). The study followed the temporal development of the dyadic relationship from 1997 until 1999. Key persons were interviewed from both sides of the dyad. The perceptions and interpretations of employed persons determined the content and orientation of the dyad. Two interviewees were selected from Kiasma and two from MTV3. These four persons were known to be the key persons in the focal sponsorship relationship and its processual development, and all were closely involved in the focal sponsorship relationship during the whole study period. The approach of the study was therefore genuinely dyadic—taking into account the perspectives of both the sponsor and the sponsored.

The validity and reliability of the case study should be understood as a fit between theory and reality. In case studies, validity can be considered as a continuous process that is integrated with theory. This requires the researcher to assess assumptions constantly, to revise results, to retest theories, and to reappraise the limitations originally recognised in the study (Yin 2003). Traditionally, the problem of external validity has been a major barrier in conducting case studies. Critics typically state that a single case offers a poor basis for generalising (Yin 2003). However, such critics are implicitly drawing a contrast between a case-study situation and survey research. Such an implicit reference to samples and larger populations is inappropriate when dealing with case studies—because case studies rely on analytical and contextual generalisation, rather than statistical generalisation. Analytical generalisation strives to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theory (Yin 2003). The result of a qualitative analysis goes beyond the local context in which the study has been conducted. The process of abductive reasoning leads from a specific single-case to concepts and frameworks that are applicable across a wider range of contexts.

The important issue is that any assessment of the validity and the reliability of the study should encompass the whole research process. In the present dyadic single-case study, validity and reliability were increased by selecting the interviewees carefully, by using several informants from both parts of the focal dyad, by recording the interviews, by writing memos from the tapes, and by obtaining feedback from the informants concerning the case descriptions and analyses. In addition, certain facts were checked afterwards with the informants via email.

Fading Configurations in Cultural-Sponsorship Relationships

Perceived dissatisfaction between interacting partners gives a potential starting-point for relationship fading. The perceptions of the business sponsor and the sponsored museum can be combined into a configuration matrix of relationship fading. The configuration matrix can be used to capture both the composition and the dynamics of perception configurations in relationship fading. The matrix of relationships fading presented here builds on the ideas proposed by Holmlund and Strandvik (1998, 10) in the context of the perceived quality of the business relationship between seller and buyer.

Perceptions of the business sponsor and the sponsored museum are depicted in the matrix of relationship fading on the horizontal and vertical axes respectively. For illustrative purposes, both partners' perceptions can be categorised as positive (+), neutral (0), or negative (-). Nine different dyadic perception configurations can occur between the business sponsor and the sponsored museum, as depicted the configuration matrix of relationship fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships in Figure 3 (see analogically, Holmlund and Strandvik 1999a, 10-11).

Critical incidents and events represent instances of potential fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships—because they create situations in which the attention levels and sensitivity levels of parties are raised. According to Holmlund and Strandvik (2000, 136), dyadic perceptions of criticality can have unilateral or bilateral dimensions. In a dyadic cultural-sponsorship relationship, the unilateral dimension refers to a one-sided critical experience, whereas the bilateral dimension refers to a mutual critical experience. Perceptions of critical incidents can initiate actions that affect relationship fading in the cultural-sponsorship relationship (see analogically, Holmlund and Strandvik 2000, 136-143).

The axes represent the relative experience frame of the business sponsor and the sponsored museum. The low and high ends of the axes reflect the floor and ceiling for perceptions, and are based on the dyadic partners' experience and knowledge of alternatives. This corresponds to the discussion of comparison standards in service-quality studies. The categories reflect three types of evaluation (+, 0, -), which can be related to actor behaviour. The closer to the lower left-hand corner the relationship is depicted the closer the perceptions of the partners are to each other (Holmlund and Strandvik 1998, 10-11; Holmlund and Strandvik 1999b, 689). Moreover, the original matrix of Holmlund and Strandvik is slightly refined in the present study such that positive perceptions can vary from highly positive to fairly positive and negative perceptions from highly negative to fairly negative. Neutral perceptions can range from neutral with a negative tone to neutral with a positive tone.

The configuration matrix of relationships fading contains certain sections (A, E, and I) in which the perceptions of the business sponsor and the sponsored museum match. The other sections (B, C, D, F, G, and H) represent situations in which perceptions differ between the business sponsor and the sponsored museum. Section E represents a dyad of mutual indifference. Bilateral perception refers to mutual perception whereas unilateral perception refers to one-sided perception. Bilateral or unilateral perception can be negative, opposite or positive. Sections A, C, G, and I represent bilateral perception in the business dyad. Sections B, D, F, and H represent unilateral perception in the business dyad. These sections can denote conflict situations for the interacting partners because the perceptions differ between the business sponsor and the sponsored museum (see analogically, Holmlund and Strandvik 1999a, 11-14; Holmlund and Strandvik 1999b, 689).

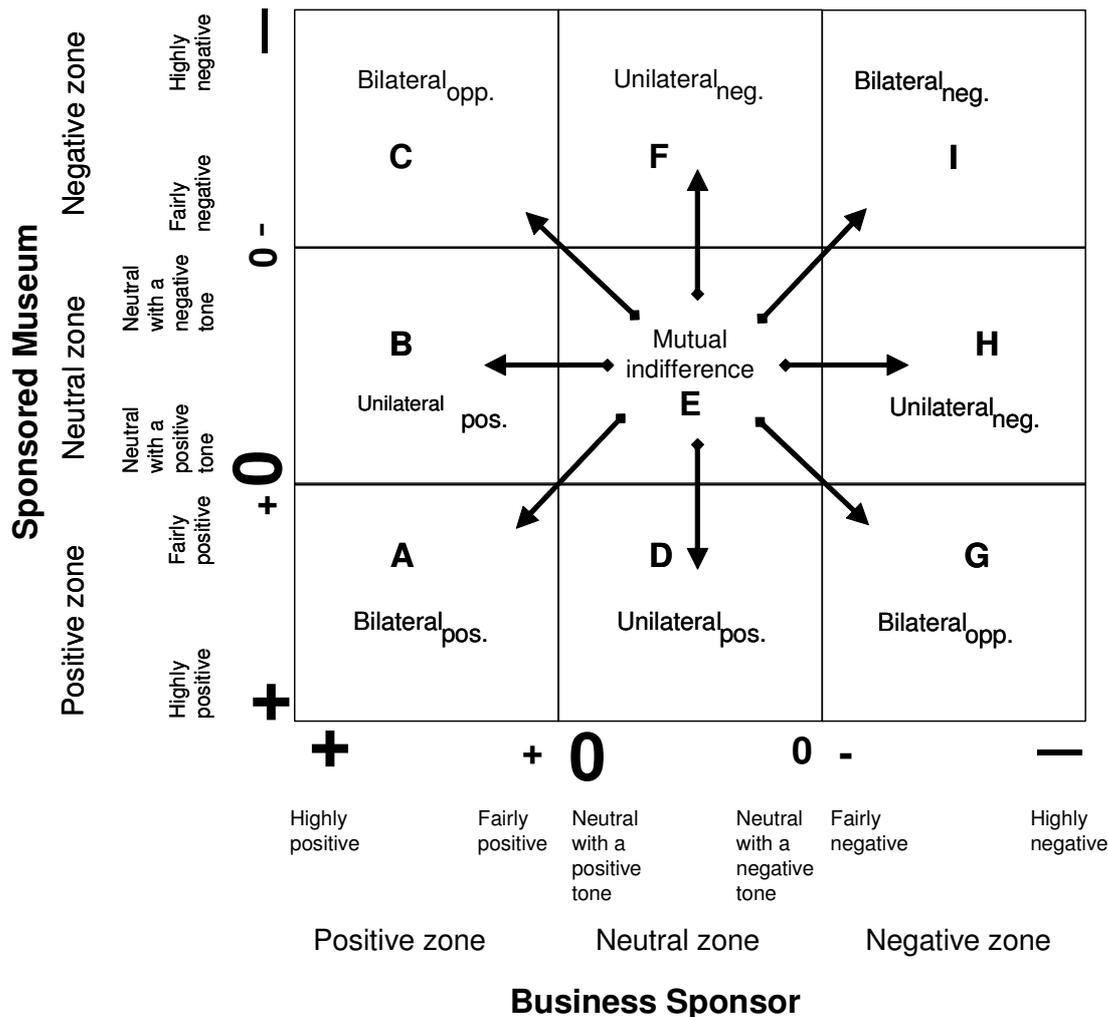


Figure 3. Configuration matrix of relationship fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships (modified from Holmlund and Strandvik 1999a, 10-11)

This study takes into account the perceptions of both partners in a dyadic setting between the media company MTV3 and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Kiasma). Relationship fading from 1997 to 1999 between the business sponsor (MTV3) and the sponsored museum (Kiasma) is illustrated in the configuration matrix of relationship fading in Figure 4. Positioning relationship fading in a certain section of the matrix is not an easy task. It is often the case that interaction in relationships includes positive, neutral, and negative elements simultaneously—that is, differing perceptions can prevail among the representatives of the same organisation concerning the usefulness and functionality of a particular relationship. In this situation, the various perceptions have to be taken into account when positioning relationship fading in the configuration matrix. The positions of the focal relationship in the configuration matrix represent the present authors' overall assessment of the central actors' perceptions concerning the quality of the cultural-sponsorship relationship during different time periods. The process of relationship fading is described in the matrix by using four circles that are linked together with arrowed lines. The arrows indicate the direction of the process whereas the size of each circle reflects the intensity of interaction between MTV3 and Kiasma during relationship fading.

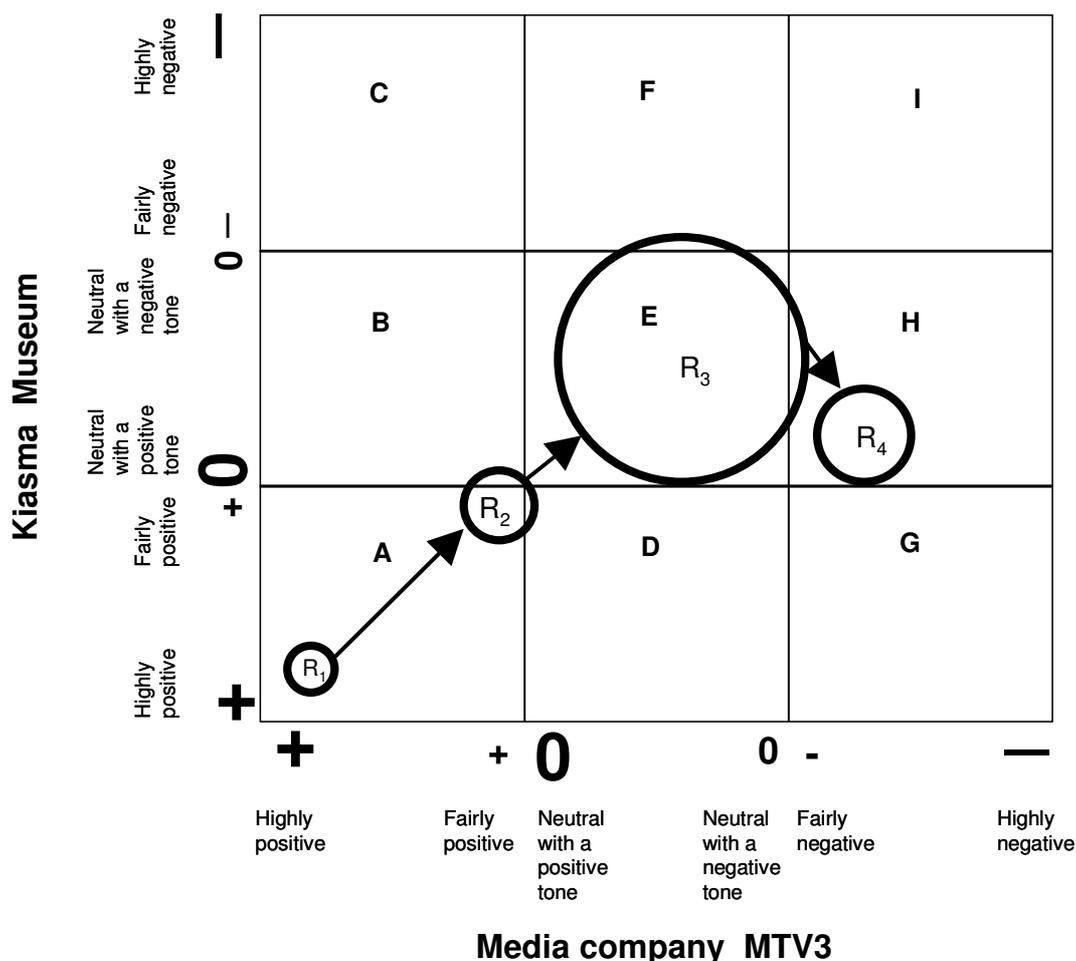


Figure 4. Configuration matrix of relationship fading between Kiasma and MTV3

During the first year (1997), the relationship was perceived as being bilaterally highly positive—as indicated by circle R₁ in section A. At that time, the relationship did not involve full-scale operational co-operation because the Kiasma building was still under construction. Although some of Kiasma's staff members were somewhat suspicious of entering into sponsorship relationships with business enterprises—mainly due to the differing values and norms prevailing in the fields of art and business—the relationship atmosphere was quite positive and full of expectation during this stage. Kiasma had received so much media attention that the opening of the museum itself was perceived as an exciting prospect for MTV3 and also for Kiasma.

At the beginning of 1998, before the museum's opening, MTV3's program division started to make programs in Kiasma. However, some problems arose in the production of programs. First, there were problems with Kiasma's poor acoustics, which made broadcasting activities very difficult. Secondly, there were conflicts between people from MTV3's program unit and those from the museum. The conflicts arose from the way in which the program unit was conducting the activities. During 1998 MTV3 broadcast various programs in Kiasma, but several problems caused program production from Kiasma to be stopped by the end of 1998. Some of MTV3's representatives were disappointed when they discovered that the Kiasma building could not be used as their broadcasting venue. During this stage (January 1998 - May 1998), the overall perception of the relationship was still bilaterally positive, but the relationship had moved into a new position (circle R₂). In spite of the difficulties in broadcasting programs, and the associated conflicts, the relationship atmosphere as a whole was still good and full of positive expectations for future co-operation.

The new museum was opened to the general public in May 1998, accompanied by a significant increase in interaction between the parties. This change is indicated by the large circle (R₃) in the

configuration matrix. During this very hectic and active phase, MTV3 and other sponsors started to utilise Kiasma extensively, which had huge novelty and publicity value at this time. Consequently, everything was rushed—which caused many problems and conflicts. MTV3 arranged dozens of stakeholder events in Kiasma. After the prolonged media publicity about the new Museum of Contemporary Art, many people wanted to visit Kiasma when it opened, including the sponsors and their stakeholders. In addition to hosting events that were agreed beforehand, MTV3 began to arrange its own stakeholder events, meetings, and seminars in the new museum. During this phase, when the co-operation really started, several problems arose. Organising an event in Kiasma did not always go smoothly, and many events had problems of various kinds. When the museum was open, it was not possible to arrange stakeholder events because the museum's management did not want to close off any VIP areas during opening hours. In addition, there were too many persons for sponsors to contact when organising an event in Kiasma. In the absence of a single co-ordinating person from the museum, various issues such as lights, audio-video systems, and catering had to be handled with different persons, and these people were not always eager to fulfil sponsor's wishes. There were also conflicts concerning what could be done in the museum and what could not be done. Many of these problems were caused by the inadequate contractual arrangements and by the fact that the event organisers seemed to be ignorant of the content of the sponsoring agreement. However, in spite of the difficulties and some conflicts, the arrangement was also perceived to include many positive elements. Consequently, this time period—from the opening of the museum for about six months—the relationship as a whole was perceived as bilaterally neutral, as indicated by circle R_3 in section E.

During 1999, the sponsorship relationship between Kiasma and MTV3 was not as intensive as it had been in the summer and autumn of 1998. MTV3 continued to receive the agreed visibility, and continued to organise meetings, lectures, presentations, and other stakeholder events in Kiasma. However, both the visibility and the staging of events were less intensive than previously. After the hectic events surrounding the opening—when Kiasma still had novelty value—the level of utilisation began to decline. Enthusiasm within MTV3 towards the sponsorship seemed to have vanished. Indeed, it prepared for an ending of the relationship. After 1999, Kiasma was still willing to continue sponsorship with MTV3, and it negotiated with MTV3 about possible further co-operation, but MTV3 decided not to continue with the sponsorship. According to MTV3's representatives the benefits offered by Kiasma were insufficient. The sponsors was actually claiming something more for its investment. This was justified because Kiasma had now lost its novelty value. Although there was some willingness to continue the co-operation in MTV's marketing-communications unit, there was no broader organisation-level acceptance of further Kiasma sponsorship. MTV3's decision not to continue was probably also affected by the negative attitudes of the program unit, which obviously arose due to the technical difficulties and interpersonal conflicts that occurred in spring 1998 when the unit started making programs in Kiasma. Furthermore, MTV3 was suffering from a decline in profitability in 1999 due to a reduction in sales of advertising time and a rise in TV program costs. As a result, MTV3 had to trim its operations and cut costs. This was therefore not the best time for negotiating the possible continuation of the sponsorship contract with Kiasma, the benefits of which were difficult to assess. In summary, during this phase, the relationship can be said to have been unilaterally negative—as indicated by circle R_4 in section G.

The configuration matrix of relationship fading offers a powerful and flexible tool that allows conflicting views in the cultural-sponsorship relationship to be revealed and described. The configuration matrix enables good visualisation—making it possible to recognise and analyse dyadic business relationships in which one or both partners are dissatisfied with the relationship (Holmlund and Strandvik 1999b, 689-690).

Conclusions and Managerial Implications

This study has revealed that the triggers of relationship fading emanated from both the structural context in which this time-bound cultural-sponsorship relationship was embedded and the situational process itself. Consequently, the triggers of fading in the focal cultural-sponsorship relationship were both structural with relatively high permanency and situational with single critical events occurring in the relationship. Most of the structural and situational triggers were passive and indirect—that is, they initiated and contributed to the long process of fading, after which the studied cultural-sponsorship relationship ultimately came to an end. The triggers of relationship fading affected the development of

the relationship by gradually reducing the sponsor's motivations to invest and develop the cultural-sponsorship relationship. Figure 5 illustrates the structural and situational triggers of fading in the Kiasma–MTV3 relationship.

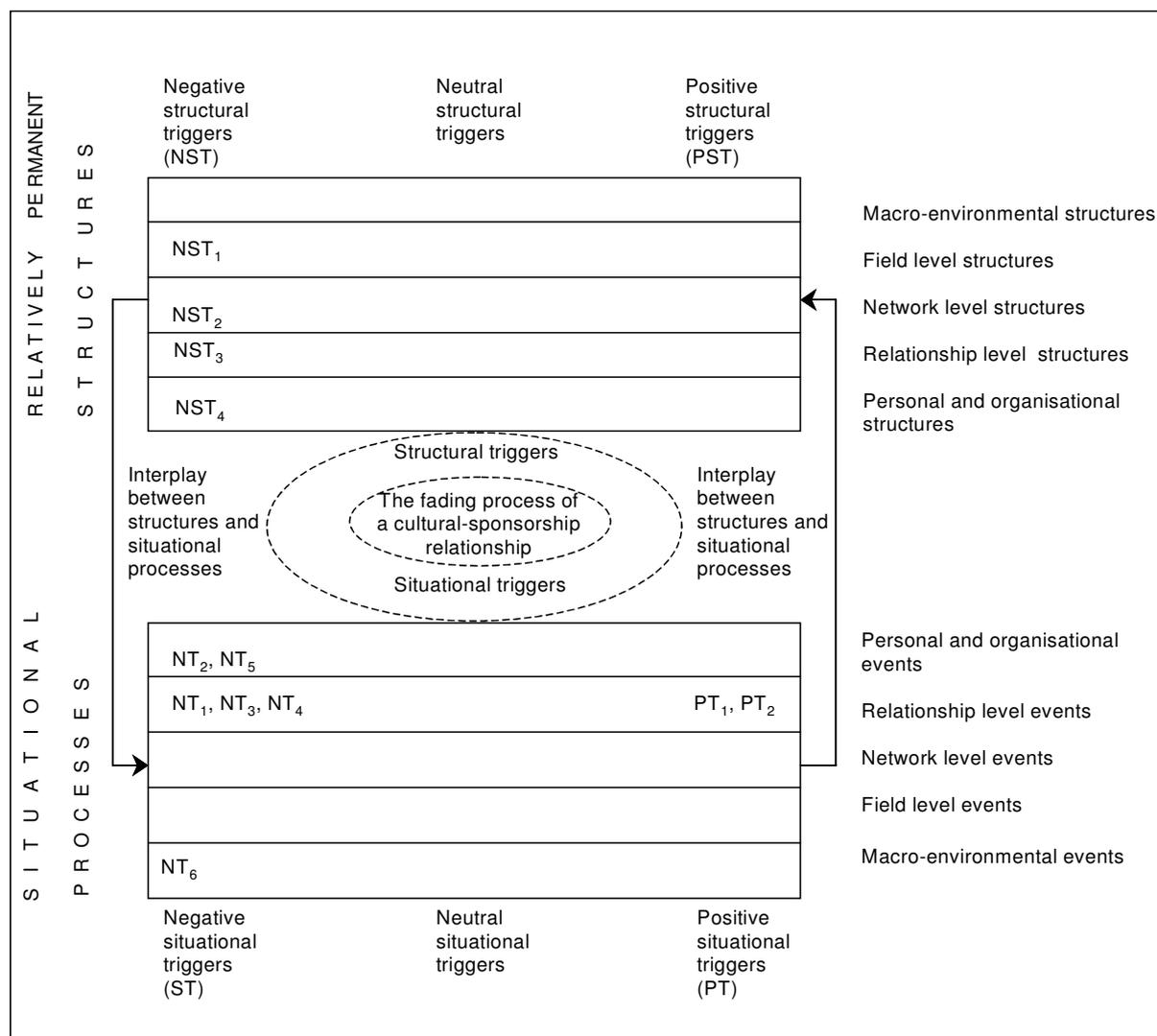


Figure 5. Structural and situational triggers of fading in the Kiasma–MTV3 relationship

Some of the relatively enduring negative structural triggers existed for a long time before the relationship ended. These negative structural triggers occurred on various contextual levels—from the organisational field to the personal. The signing of the contract can be regarded as a positive situational trigger (PT₁ in Figure) because the contract guaranteed that the sponsorship arrangement would continue for at least three years. However, the contract can also be regarded as a negative situational trigger in the relationship between Kiasma and MTV3 because the contract was signed long before the new museum was opened. It was therefore incomplete in the sense that the parties to the relationship had different opinions with respect to what was agreed in the contract—thus producing misunderstanding and conflicts. Closing an incomplete contract can therefore be considered a negative situational trigger (NT₁) that was partly responsible for the relationship beginning to fade.

MTV3's merger with another of Kiasma's sponsors, the Aamulehti Group, can also be considered a negative situational trigger (NT₂). The merger caused changes in the contact persons involved with the

sponsorship, and although MTV3 and the Aamulehti Group continued as independent sponsors, the merger complicated the co-operation. This development can therefore be classified as another negative situational trigger that accelerated the fading of the relationship. Other negative situational triggers can be discerned in the conflicts and difficulties occasioned by MTV3's transmission of programs from Kiasma (NT₃); conflicts caused by rush and overload of Kiasma's organisation after the museum opening (NT₄); a diminution in interest in Kiasma from the mass media after the initial enthusiasm (NT₅); MTV3's deteriorating position—which diminished the company's motivation to develop the relationship (NT₆).

Kiasma's representatives were conscious that they did not have the marketing competence required to manage sponsorship relationships. Kiasma therefore utilised a specialist outside consultancy, Image Match, to help it to find sponsors and negotiate the subsequent agreements. Kiasma also employed a marketing manager with a business economics degree and a corporate marketing background. Hiring marketing professionals as relationship promoters between the business field and the arts field can be regarded as a positive situational trigger (PT₂) that has a smoothening effect on relationship fading caused by adverse structural circumstances. These opposing structural circumstances relate to inherent differences between the arts and business—differences in values, norms, and beliefs; and differences in operating logics. These inherent differences can be regarded as field-level negative structural triggers (NST₁).

These inherent differences were also apparent at network, relationship, and organisational and personal levels (NST₂, NST₃ and NST₄). All firms in the focal sponsorship network—including MTV3—saw Kiasma sponsorship as a marketing investment that should primarily enhance the network firms' own businesses. Despite the best efforts of Image Match to soften the collision between these two disparate worlds of the arts and business, there were still some suspicious attitudes towards sponsorship co-operation in both Kiasma and MTV3. As far as Kiasma was concerned, suspicion arose from certain norms and values that prevailed in the world of the arts—in particular, the widespread view that the market-based values of cultural sponsorship represent a threat to artistic freedom and independence. On the other hand, there were also suspicious attitudes in the MTV3 organisation with respect to the usefulness of cultural-sponsorship activities in general and contemporary art in particular—both as an art form and as a sponsorship target.

It is evident that the triggers of fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships cannot be understood by analysing only a single level of context—for example, macro-environmental, field of arts and culture, field of business, connected network, organisational, or personal. Nor can they be understood in terms of a single dimension—structural or situational. Rather, if the process of fading in a cultural-sponsorship relationship is to be properly understood, it is necessary to take into consideration the interplay among several contextual levels, as well as the interplay among relatively permanent structures and relatively transient situational processes. Although the difference between structural and situational triggers is not always straightforward—due to the interplay between relatively permanent structures and relatively transient situational processes—it is meaningful to separate potential structures and actual processes (Giddens 1984). This conceptual separation facilitates further systematic analysis of the phenomenon of relationship fading by allowing the more enduring structural triggers of fading to be separated from the more transient situational coincidences.

Intensive contextual and processual approaches are still required in this kind of research. By taking an holistic view of the full range of factors involved—(i) various levels of contexts; (ii) relatively permanent structures and relatively transient situational processes; and (iii) positive, neutral, and negative implications—this study has aimed to make a contribution to the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework for the study of fading in inter-organisational relationships.

In terms of managerial implications, the analytical framework and empirical results presented here facilitate managerial identification of potential structural and situational triggers of fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships. To manage such relationships effectively, the interacting actors have to take into account the probable fading of cultural-sponsorship relationships, and the reasons for this occurring. After these reasons have been identified, it is possible to pay attention to the critical events and incidents that indicate a fading relationship, and to try to influence them in a positive way.

Because cultural sponsorship is not the core competence of most firms, it is vital that sponsorship activities do not tie up too many human resources. To avoid fading, it is essential that the operational procedures and routines linked to the basic forms of exchange are carefully developed. It can take time for the sponsor and the sponsored to find a mutually satisfactory balance with respect to shared norms, values, and beliefs concerning the appropriate way of conducting the cultural sponsorship. It is essential to allocate enough resources to planning the co-operation and forms of exchange.

To avoid fading in cultural-sponsorship relationships, it is important that the agreed forms of exchange are beneficial to the sponsoring firm—in the sense that the compensations are easily linked to marketing communications and to the management of important customer and other stakeholder relationships. From the viewpoint of cultural organisations, it is vital that their existing operations in the form of exhibitions are linked to the sponsor's value-creation process as directly as possible. It is also vital that clear contracts serve as a means of reducing the uncertainty that exists in ambiguous and abstract exchanges in cultural-sponsorship relationships. Contracts can be considered principal vehicles for conducting and co-ordinating exchange processes in cultural-sponsorship relationships. However, co-operation between the actors must not be restricted to fulfilling the contract clauses in a dutiful and mechanistic manner. It is crucial to build up a trusting and reliable atmosphere in the cultural-sponsorship arrangements.

Effective interpersonal communication between personnel from each organisation facilitates a shared interpretation of expectations and goals, and a common understanding of the processes and responsibilities necessary to achieve these goals. The respective organisational cultures of focal partners might be markedly different. If so, this requires a shared commitment to communication if marketing capabilities and opportunities are to be established. Through two-way communication, partners in the cultural-sponsorship relationship are able to build, enhance, and maintain relationships, as well as to recapture the value of fading relationships (Farrelly and Quester 2003; Lindberg-Repo and Grönroos 2004; Olkkonen, Tikkanen and Alajoutsijärvi 2000b).

Collaborative communication is an indispensable attribute in managing cultural sponsorship successfully. This requires frequent communication, bi-directionality, and formality. Collaborative communication determines the perceptions that one party holds about its partner in the cultural-sponsorship relationship. Consequently, collaborative communication might well act as a mediating variable that filters, fosters or hinders the understanding that a business sponsor and a sponsored museum have of each other (Farrelly and Quester 2003). To avoid fading in cultural-sponsorship relationship, both partners must communicate openly to establish goal congruence, and to define the responsibilities of each in promoting the relationship. Interpersonal communication can be regarded as a processual element in cultural-sponsorship relationship. It is evident that cultural-sponsorship relationships are evolving as a result of interpersonal communication that occurs situationally in communicative and cognitive processes between the business sponsor and the sponsored museum. In cultural-sponsorship arrangements, interpersonal relationships can be as strong a cohesive force as the resources that are exchanged. If the interpersonal relationships are good, conflicts are more easily avoided or solved.

It is also vital to make cultural-sponsorship arrangements as routine as possible. Beneficial exchanges in institutionalised cultural-sponsorship arrangements minimise the need for extra human resources—because there is no need for time-consuming and anxiety-producing discussions on what either party might or might not do. Furthermore, when the basic forms of co-operation have been established, time and resources can be devoted to novel ways of co-operating.

Successful management of cultural-sponsorship requires the interacting actors to be aware of the structural and situational triggers of relationship fading that can lead to the fading and potential ultimate ending of such a relationship. In this case, the central structural predisposing triggers reveal many managerially relevant issues concerning the basic nature of cultural sponsorship. Moreover, using culture-oriented marketing professionals as relationship promoters between the business community and the arts community is an important issue in managing cultural-sponsorship relationships.

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