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The use of the museum as a public relations agency by sponsors: the role of the media

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Abstract

The economic crisis suffered in Spain in the last ten years has forced management of the country's public museums to look for new sources of funding with which to compensate the reduction of public funding. Business sponsoring has been one of the most intensely studied channels. One of the consequences of the new scenario is the weak bargaining position of museums before sponsors. There are clues that suggest that a new model has arrived in Spain: museums are used as public relations agencies by businesses and the subtlety that once characterised the relationship between a sponsored museum and its sponsor disappears. The article lays out the development of business sponsorship in public museums in Spain, illustrating the changes that have taken place in this relationship. Through a content analysis of cases that answer to the new model and structured interviews with cultural journalists from written media, it is shown that sponsors do not achieve their objective, which is to factor the communication media into the equation to increase their brand notoriety and/or strengthen their corporate image.

Keywords

Museums, Businesses, Communication Media, Communication, Sponsorship, Spain.

*When businesses begin to take over museums and galleries,
instead of serving art they serve themselves.*

Victoria Camps (2015)

1. Introduction¹

The global economic crisis and the successive measures for adjusting public expenditure ordered by the Spanish Government brought a resounding, prolonged fall in public spending on culture as from 2008. In a working document on the Spanish model of funding for the arts and culture in the European context, the authors summed up in a single sentence the situation experienced in the world of culture in Spain as from that year: "everything that had once

¹ The article discusses the conversion of museums into public relations agencies for the businesses sponsoring them, following and respecting the terminology used by Chin-tao Wu (2007, p. 24). Nevertheless, the academic concept of public relations has a much broader and more complex reach and development and public relations agencies concern themselves with many more aspects than relations with the media.

appeared solid in the cultural world seemed to vanish into the thin air of the crisis” (Rubio, Rius & Martínez, 2014, p. 7).

To confirm this, it is enough to go over the yearbooks of cultural statistics published by the government in the period from 2008 to 2016. While spending on culture by the General State Administration accounted for 0.10% of the GDP in 2008, in 2016 this figure was 0.06%. Taking into account the way culture is governed in Spain, where a very important part is played by the autonomous communities and the local administration, it is essential to note the evolution of funds for the autonomic administration, which went from 0.20% to 0.09%, and for the local administration, which fell from 0.36% to 0.28% (a summary with all the data in Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, 2018, p. 45).

This situation affected the Spanish museum world, which since then has seen a rapid succession of changes of all sorts. One of them relates to funding: until 2008, public museums in Spain were financed mainly through subventions from the different public administrations; after that, these funds were cut drastically.² To illustrate this, the facts of the budget of Spain’s flagship museum, the Museo Nacional del Prado, are a good indicator. The state’s contribution during the period from 2007 to 2017 went from €28,388,254.63 in 2007 to €13,935,940 in 2017 (Museo Nacional del Prado, 2008, p. 164 and Museo Nacional del Prado, 2018, p. 284), a hefty reduction that has been offset by an increase in its own earned revenue. Whereas in 2007 it was self-financing to the tune of 34.39%, by 2017 the figure was 69.30%. This increase in self-generated revenue was not a concern before the crisis, as is shown by the fact that there is no mention of it in the action plans for 2005–2008 and 2009–2012, whereas in the action plans for 2013–2016 and 2017–2020 it was one of the declared aims.³

Alongside this, there has been another change, this one paradoxical. While cultural agents battled to have culture seen as one of the pillars of society, a fourth pillar along with economic, social and environmental development (Hawkes, 2001, p. 25), the fact is that society as a whole does not consider it as essential as, for example, health or education (Bonet & Donato, 2011, p. 7). On the other hand, people have shown more and more enthusiasm about visiting the great museums and the level expected of them has risen. They are expected to go on doing what they were already doing and they are given new responsibilities –in other words, they have to do more and better with less. Returning to the case of the Museo Nacional del Prado, with a smaller contribution by the state during the period 2007–2017, the number of visitors has gone from 2,663,174 in 2007 to 2,824,404 in 2017 (breaking the 3 million threshold in 2016 with 3,033,754 in 2016).

Both facts, the drop in state funding and the increased expectations on the part of society, have converged in the only way of combining them: reaching the maximum possible level of self-funding by generating their own revenue. Something that seemed obvious and inevitable as early as the end of the 20th century, when reference books like the *Manual de Museología* by Francisca Hernández already suggested it as a formula for funding in the future (1998, p. 134, 289–292), or when economic survival was considered the most immediate goal (Harney, 1998, p. 201). Nowadays, at the end of the second decade of the 21st century, it is being approached as one of their greatest challenges (Ayala, Cuenca-Amigo & Cuenca, 2019, p. 65, 71–73).

²A situation common to many other countries, as shown by the fact that it was discussed by the national committees of various European states of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) at the international conference ‘Public Policies towards Museums in Times of Crisis’ (Lisbon, 5–6 April 2013), which was the basis for the resolution “Viability and Sustainability of Museums through the Global Financial Crisis”, the so-called *Lisbon Declaration* adopted by the 28th ICOM General Assembly, Rio de Janeiro, Aug. 2013. http://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOMs-Resolutions_2013_Eng.pdf.

³ The four action plans of the Museo Nacional del Prado mentioned can be consulted on <https://www.museodelprado.es/museo/plan-de-actuacion>.

At this point, I shall pick up the metaphor of the robin used in 1988 by the museologist David Elliott, who at that time was the Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford (recorded by Fedi, 89, p. 89):

We in Britain have a small bird, with a red breast. It is called a robin and it is a bird which has to eat twice its weight in worms every day just to keep alive. Now, I am here... as the representative of the robin! What I deal with in my job is not worms, however, it is sponsorship.

There are robins in Spain too, and for years they have been starving and undernourished. To remedy the famine, there has been resort to other insects that were not part of their traditional diet: renting out rooms for private events or for filming, merchandising through their shops or fundraising (from three types of actors: businesses, non-profit organisations and individual donors). This alternative diet has healthy effects, like the increased independence in decision-making and the reduced chances of politicisation by the public powers, as discussed by Richard Lambert (Chairman of the Board of the British Museum, in Lambert, 2016, p. 7-8) or Daniel H. Weiss (Chairman and CEO of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in Goldstein, 2018), but it also contains counter-indications, like the increase in pressure from outside on account of the addition of another variable, that of private companies and foundations, which finally limit their freedom even more or condition their cultural work (as Fraser warns, 2018, and Butin demonstrates, 1998).

Sticking to the central point of this article, business sponsorship (businesses and corporate foundations) has been one way of feeding the main public museum facilities in Spain (Bonet & Donato, 2011, p. 7) and one of their main sources of income. Returning to the example of the Museo Nacional del Prado, sponsorship is the second source of the museum's income (the first is the sale of tickets); whereas in 2007 it amounted to €5,786,000, by 2017 this figure was €7,439,615, which was the equivalent of 16.38% of the museum's total income (Museo Nacional del Prado, 2008, p. 138; 2018, p. 285, 332). The case of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía is even more striking. With sponsorship as its second source of income, its earned revenue went from €715,230 in 2007 to €3,877,815 in 2017 (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2008, p. 142 ; 2018, p. 179).

The article focuses on Spain and analyses the evolution and the changes taking place over the last decade in the relationship, by means of sponsorship, between publicly-owned museums, businesses/corporate foundations and press.

As regards the first of these, publicly-owned museums, we shall look at a few facilities for two reasons: they have an organisational structure that gives them freedom to harvest and manage private resources and are the ones of most interest to sponsors because of their better positioning and social reputation.⁴ The situation reinforces a two-tier system (Pflieger, 2013, p. 13; Tobelem, 2013, p. 56): a few receive a large part of those resources through sponsorship, while the rest have to manage on meagre public funds and are left out. This fact was acknowledged by the Director of the Museo del Prado, Miguel Falomir: "There's a big difference between getting money for the Museo del Prado and getting money for the Museo de Vigo. The Museo del Prado, because of its impact and prestige, logically, attracts sponsors" (Cortes Generales, 2017, p. 13).

As regards the second actor, businesses and corporate foundations, the article focuses on them as the main sponsors of museums. Among the aspects most highly valued by them, the main ones are reinforcement of their brand image and responding to a policy of Corporate Social Responsibility (Losada & Rey, 2015, p. 55).

⁴ The discussion, basically, covers the Museo Nacional del Prado, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Mncars), Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC), Museu d'Art Modern de Barcelona (Macba), Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM), Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao and others.

Finally, as far as the press is concerned, it will come into the discussion because sponsor businesses consider it the best choice among the mass media when it comes to getting publicity for its sponsorship (Losada & Rey, 2015, p. 60).

Sponsorship is the ‘glue’ that joins the three protagonists of the article, the meeting-point used to analyse the relationship. Sponsorship as the “art of talking about oneself while talking about something else” (Gómez de la Iglesia, 2011, p. 27) or “the art of making lots of foam without much soap” (Patrick Dubourg, quoted in Sahnoun & Doury, 1990, p. 117). Today this unconventional communication technique has to be understood in two ways: either in relation to the commercial sphere and linked to the sponsor’s marketing strategy, or in relation to the social sphere and linked to the sponsor’s public relations as a manifestation of its Corporate Social Responsibility (Szybowicz & Magistrali, 1990; De Andrés, 1993; Capriotti, 2007; Clotas, 2008; Solano, 2008).

A ‘glue’ which, when applied to the field of culture, has traditionally been called patronage.⁵ Apart from the terminological controversy which is outside the scope of this article (Sahnoun & Doury, 1990, p. 32-33; García Nieto, 1994, p. 268), in view of its multiform, flexible and evolving characteristics and its focus on the sphere of businesses and corporate foundations, the article speaks of sponsorship, in line with business and museums themselves; when they refer to their collaboration agreement, the majority choose this term rather than the other.⁶

If we look a bit deeper into the intrinsic characteristics of sponsorship, three types can be differentiated according to Sahnoun and Doury: for notoriety, for image and for credibility (1990, p. 22-29). Looking at the particularities of the museum sector, image sponsorship has been the most frequent in Spain, a subtle form that tends to evoke or suggest rather than simply showing.

2. Museums and business: a relationship under construction

The object of this second section is to examine the relationship in Spain between business and corporate foundation sponsors and the publicly-owned museums they sponsor and, by extension, the presence of sponsors in the communications by museums over the last decade (2008-2017) and see how they have evolved.

2.1. The evolution of the relationship between sponsored museum and business sponsor

The financial crisis gave rise to a new scenario which has meant that public museums in Spain have intensified and adapted their relations with the external agents who now play a central role in their subsistence.

When Spanish museums had no need of agents outside the public administration to fulfil their mission, when the imperious need to find sponsors did not exist, the fact is that they were not too sure what form the relationship should take and what they were able to offer the businesses they approached for collaboration, even though it was something covered in the scientific literature on museology (Hernández, 1998, p. 291; Lord & Dexter, 1998, p. 73; Harney, 1998, p. 201-214; Mateos, 2012, p. 99-105).

Now that they need them so imperiously, museums are in no doubt that sponsorship is based on a mutual symbiotic relationship and that there must therefore be some return for the company. Museums now know that when a business uses sponsorship in its communications strategy what it is buying is a series of ready-made images that society

⁵ Whatever you call it, businesses and corporate foundations can always be sure of the 35% reduction in Corporate Tax, according to Law 49/2002, of 23 December, on taxation of non-profit organisations and of tax incentives for patronage.

⁶ This is the case, for example, of Acciona, Telefónica, Naturgy, Abertis, Fundación Banco Santander, Fundación AXA, Iberdrola, Museo Nacional del Prado, Mncars, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, MNAC, Macba or IVAM.

identifies with the organisation or activity being sponsored (Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999, p. 334). In the case in hand, museum sponsorship, these images obviously help to improve its reputation with the public. If the museum receives funds from the company, it knows that in exchange it must transfer to it those intangibles that make up its public reputation and share them.

This necessary remuneration is where one observes a certain evolution in the relationship: a type of sponsorship –image-enhancing– has been and is practised in which the sponsor respects and accepts the idiosyncrasy of the field of culture and this materialises in a subtle identification of the sponsor (Méndiz, 2007, p. 37–38). This seems to have changed in recent years, in which a new model has emerged that is similar to sponsorship for notoriety: a type more characteristic of the world of sport, transmitting no message and intended to be seen so as to bring the name of the business or the product to the attention of its potential clients, bombarding them with its presence in order to achieve this (Sahnoun & Doury, 1990, p. 22–29).

2.2. Evolution of the presence of the sponsor in the sponsored museum's communications

The evolution of the relationship between sponsored museum and sponsor company has also involved changes in the presence of the latter in the communications of the former: the old relationship that was simply concerned with the exchange of money for logos has evolved towards a closer relationship in which each party has to add value to the other and to society as a whole (Clotas, 2011, p. 92).

The presence of the sponsor business in the museum itself, in the communications messages originating in the museum and not needing mediators like the media or journalists, has always had its place as an essential part of the remuneration offered by the museum.

However, even if the museum has these channels of its own, even if these are a controlled method for spreading a message, media coverage is still a basic variable for museums and the businesses that sponsor them. Even though publicity is an uncontrolled method over which there is little power to intervene (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006, p. 80–81; Mateos, 2013, p. 172–173), it is characterised by something that makes it strategically important: news published by a journalist in the media is perceived as impartial, neutral and objective, and therefore endowed with greater credibility (Llamas, 2008, p. 277–278).

It is therefore essential for businesses that the media should report on their sponsorship, thereby reaching larger audiences (Parés, 1991, p. 103–108; Sleight, 1992, p. 79; Palencia-Lefler, 2007, p. 161–162; Clotas, 2008, p. 81–82). This may be one of the main motivations for businesses to become sponsors (Sahnoun & Doury, 1990, p. 39–40; Parés, 1991, p. 103; Sleight, 1992, p. 161; Clotas, 2011, p. 93). For that reason, the presence of the sponsors in the public relations materials and events generated by museums in their dealings with the media and journalists has also undergone significant changes.

While sponsors mainly play a secondary role in the communications of the sponsored museum, we are beginning to see cases where they play a leading role, conquering the first page of the dossier, the headline in the press release or the press conference. With this strategy of maximum visibility, what they want is to be sure of a central presence in the media.

There are hints that vouch for the arrival in Spain of something described years ago by the Taiwanese Chin-tao Wu in the world of art institutions in Great Britain and the United States (2007, p. 24) and that is the conversion of museums into public relations agencies for the sponsors. The empirical study that follows centres precisely on verifying the success or failure of this approach.

3. Empirical study

The empirical research began with a search for and selection of sponsorship actions by businesses and corporate foundations in public museum facilities in Spain during 2017, specifically those illustrating the model that gives maximum visibility to sponsors in museums' dealings with the media. For this, we tracked communications issued by the departments of communications of public museums in Spain that conform to this model.

Following this search for examples, three cases were finally chosen that were related with three cultural activities (all of them by the Museo Nacional del Prado between March and November 2017) sponsored by two companies (Acciona and Telefónica) and one corporate foundation (Fundación AXA):

Case 01. Project on *The Spirit of Painting. Cai Guo-Qiang at the Prado*.

Case 02. Exhibition on *Fortuny (1838-1874)*.

Case 03. Project for digitalisation and online consultation of the historical archives.

This provides a sample from which to verify whether the media accept the challenge, giving the sponsor that privileged place in news items or if, on the contrary, they put up resistance to this communications strategy agreed between the sponsored museum and the sponsor.

Object of the research: To verify whether the strategy of maximum visibility of sponsor businesses and corporate foundations in the communications by the sponsored museums eventually has the communicative success sought for in the media.

Working hypothesis: Applying a strategy of maximum visibility in the public relations materials and events generated by museums does not succeed in giving the sponsor a central role in the news items published in the media.

Methodology: To fulfil our object and confirm or refute the hypothesis, it was thought necessary to combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The first, empirical approach involved finding out whether the strategy of maximum visibility applied in the sample achieved the goal pursued in the written media. For this, the best option was felt to be to undertake an analysis of the content of the total of 21 news articles published in the Spanish general press covering three cultural activities organised by the Museo Nacional del Prado.

To complement the result of the quantitative part, it was felt necessary to apply a qualitative technique such as a structured interview, whose basic aim was to find out the opinions of eight cultural journalists from the Spanish general written media covering this type of information.

3.1. *The role of business in the materials and events used by the museum in its dealings with the media*

In this section I need to start by pointing out one aspect that is essential for understanding the new role of sponsor businesses in the materials and events produced and circulated by sponsored museums in their dealings with the press: the concept of newsworthiness.

When a museum establishes a whole series of public relations events to communicate to the media the signature of a sponsorship agreement with a business or corporate foundation, obviously the protagonist of the news is the sponsor, for which reason it ought to occupy a central position in each and every action. However, when the museum's public relations go into action to communicate a new activity or a cultural novelty, that is what is newsworthy. If there is a sponsor behind that activity, its role is as a supporting actor, for which reason it should not be the protagonist of the press material or events.

I shall give an example to illustrate the usual and most frequent *modus operandi*. When the Museo Nacional del Prado signs an agreement with the Fundación BBVA to organise a large exhibition in Madrid with the funds of the Hispanic Society of America, this is what is newsworthy. Therefore, it is perfectly logical that the name of the foundation should appear in the headline: ‘The Hispanic Society of America, Fundación BBVA and the Museo del Prado have signed two collaborative agreements for the presentation of a major exhibition of treasures from the Society’s collection’ (press release issued on 25th October 2016 by the Museo Nacional del Prado). However, when the time comes to hold the exhibition with funds from the Hispanic Society of America at the Museo Nacional del Prado, the cultural activity is what is newsworthy, not the sponsorship, which takes second place. For this reason it is not included in the headline of the press release: ‘Treasures from the Hispanic Society of America’ (press release issued 31st March 2017 by the Museo Nacional del Prado).

But we now have examples of a new strategy: even if the sponsorship is not what is newsworthy, the name of the sponsor is leaked directly in the headline of the press release, making it the protagonist in the museum’s public relations actions (see Table 1). A forced inclusion due to the news value of the sponsorship in the context of the presentation by the museum of a cultural activity. In all of them it is clear that the cultural activity or novelty being presented to the media is what is newsworthy, while the company’s sponsorship takes second place.

The fact that existing examples of the new strategy are still extremely rare advises caution, so they are presented as evidence of a new type of relationship between sponsor companies and sponsored museums.

Table 1: Summary of the role of the sponsor in the press releases issued by the museum.

ROLE OF THE SPONSORS IN THE MUSEUM’S PRESS RELEASE		
Case	Headline of the press release issued by the museum	Date of press release
01. Project on <i>The Spirit of Painting. Cai Guo-Qiang at the Prado</i>	“ACCIONA sponsors a project by the contemporary artist, Cai Guo-Qiang, at the Museo del Prado”	13/03/2017
02. Exhibition on <i>Fortuny (1838-1874)</i>	“The Museo del Prado and Fundación AXA are presenting Fortuny (1838-1874)”	17/11/2017
03. Project for digitisation and online consultation of the historical archives	“The Museo del Prado and Telefónica are collaborating to make the archive that documents the Museum’s nearly 200 years of history available on its website”	27/11/2017

Source: Compiled by the author.

Accompanying the press notes, the museum offers the media the graphic material illustrating the news items. In every case, the museum always includes among the graphic material an image of the representative of the sponsor company with the museum’s main actors (Chairman of the Royal Board of Trustees, Director, curators, heads of technical departments, etc.). These photographs come from their participation in another of the most important activities in the museum’s dealings with the media, the press conference, in which the sponsor’s representative is always present as another member of the board and taking part in the speeches.

3.2. The role of the company in news articles

Starting with the premise that the press is the mass media most highly valued by Spanish businesses for getting publicity for their sponsoring activity (Losada & Rey, 2015, p. 60), the

next step in the research was to search for and subsequently analyse the press articles in the Spanish media that had covered the three cases.

With a view to confirming the data obtained in this first step, in the second phase we looked for another case that was similar to the three analysed but that applied the usual model of moderate visibility of the name of the sponsor.

The object of this quantitative phase of the research was to identify the role that professional journalists assigned to the sponsor in their articles. In short, what position does the sponsor occupy in the news items as a whole?

3.2.1. Results of the content analysis. First phase

The sample or corpus of texts for analysis were the 21 articles published by different general news agencies and written media in Spain that covered and published the news issued by the Museo Nacional del Prado.⁷ The main aim of the analysis performed to collect the data was to find out whether or not the sponsor was named in the news articles and, if so, what position they took in them (see Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of the media impact of the three cases analysed and of the role of the sponsor.

SUMMARY OF THE MEDIA IMPACT OF THE THREE CASES ANALYSED		TOTAL
Articles		21
Includes the name of the company	A(ricle)01 A02 A03 A04 A05 A07 A08 A11 A12 A15 A19 A20 A21	13
In the headline	-	0
In the lead	A01 A03	2
In the body	A01 A02 A03 A04 A05 A07 A08 A11 A12 A19 A20 A21	12
In the body (opening paragraphs)	A01 A02 A03 A04 A05 A07 A08 A11 A12 A19 A20 A21	12
In the technical data	A15	1
Does not include the name of the company	A06 A09 A10 A13 A14 A16 A17 A18	8

Source: Compiled by the author.

The content analysis produces eloquent results about the media impact of the strategy of maximum visibility implemented by the museum in the three cases analysed:

1. Not one of the articles includes the name of the sponsor in the headline.
2. Only in two cases (9.52% of the sample) is the name included in the lead, the second most important part of the anatomy of a news article.
3. In 12 cases (57.14%) the name of the company is included in the body of the article. In every case, though, it appears in the opening paragraphs.
4. In eight cases (38.09%) it is not even mentioned.

Therefore, the hypothesis (remember: Applying a strategy of maximum visibility in the public relations materials and events generated by museums does not succeed in giving the sponsor a central role in the news items published in the media) is already resoundingly confirmed in the first phase of the research: however hard sponsor and sponsored try, journalists are in no doubt as to the concept of newsworthiness.

⁷ Europa Press, EFE, *El Mundo*, *La Razón*, *El País*, *ABC*, *La Vanguardia*, *El Periódico*, *El Diario*, *Vozpópuli*, *El Español* and *El Confidencial*.

It even seems obvious that professional journalists deliberately avoid it, as can be inferred from the article “Convenio para la exposición de Cai Guo-Qiang en el Prado” (“Agreement for the exhibition of Cai Guo-Qiang in the Prado”) published in *El Mundo* (sample A03). The writer focuses on the signing of the agreement between the Museo Nacional del Prado and Acciona, but does not include the name of the company in the headline, relegating it to the lead.

This phase of the research does not tell us whether the participation of leading members of the sponsor company at press conferences eventually earns them a mention in the press articles.

Finally, the fact that the graphic material includes images in which members of the sponsor company appear has no impact: none of the media publish photographs of this sort to illustrate the news article.

3.2.2. Results of the content analysis. Second phase

The second step in this quantitative approach to the research brought to light one example of moderate visibility of the name of the sponsor: the temporary exhibition *Rubens. Painter of Sketches*. The Museo Nacional del Prado presented it to the media (6 April 2018) and the headline of the press release was “The Museo del Prado and the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum are presenting the exhibition *Rubens. Painter of Sketches*”. In other words, the name of the sponsor (Fundación AXA) did not appear in the headline, but was relegated to the lead.

There followed an analysis of its impact in the media. This case and its media impact was compared with that of the Marià Fortuny exhibition (Case 02), in which we saw that the name of the sponsor was reflected in the headline of the press release (see Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3: Summary of the media impact of *Rubens. Painter of Sketches* and of the role of the sponsor.

MEDIA IMPACT OF <i>RUBENS. PAINTER OF SKETCHES</i>		TOTAL
Articles		9
Includes the name of the company	A(r)icle)22 A27 A29	3
In the headline	-	0
In the lead	-	0
In the body	A22 A27	2
In the body (opening paragraphs)	A27	1
In the technical data	A29	1
Does not include the name of the company	A23 A24 A25 A26 A28 A30	6

Source: Compiled by the author.

Table 4: Summary of the media impact of *Fortuny (1838-1874)* and of the role of the sponsor.

MEDIA IMPACT OF <i>FORTUNY (1828-1874)</i>		TOTAL
Articles		10
Includes the name of the company	A(r)icle) 08 A11 A12 A15	4
In the headline	-	0
In the lead	-	0
In the body	A08 A11 A12	3
In the body (opening paragraphs)	A08 A11 A12	3
In the technical data	A15	1
Does not include the name of the company	A09 A10 A13 A14 A16 A17	6

Source: Compiled by the author.

Having analysed the media coverage of these two newsworthy events, they were compared and the conclusion, basically, was that exactly the same thing happens in both cases: none of the media include the name of the sponsor company in the headline of their article.

Nevertheless, one *does* notice a difference: in the one that applies a strategy of maximum visibility, *Fortuny (1838-1874)*, the proportion in which the company is mentioned in the body of the article (40%) is slightly higher than in *Rubens. Painter of Sketches* (33.33%), where it is not applied. But the difference is so insignificant it hardly justifies applying it.

3.3. The opinion of cultural journalists

Alongside the content analysis of the 21 press items and the comparison between a news article in which maximum visibility is applied and another in which it is not, a group of eight cultural journalists from Spanish general written media was selected (of whom four work in Madrid and four in Barcelona),⁸ who underwent a structured interview consisting of five questions (see Table 5).

Table 5: Questions in the structured interview of cultural journalists.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW OF CULTURAL JOURNALISTS. QUESTIONS
Q01: During these years of economic crisis, have you noticed changes in the presence of sponsors in the public relations materials (press kits and releases) and events (press conferences) issued or organised by public museums?
Q02: When the sponsorship is not the newsworthy event, does the fact that the first page of a press kit issued by the museum is devoted entirely to the sponsor or that the headline of a press release issued by the museum reflects the name of the sponsor in any way condition your work as a journalist?
Q03: When the sponsorship is not the newsworthy event, does the fact that leading members of the sponsor companies play an active part in the press conferences held in the museum in any way condition your work as a journalist?
Q04: Have you ever felt or received more or less obvious pressure from the museum press officer not to overlook the sponsor in writing your report?
Q05: Are you reluctant to include the name of a sponsor company in your report (when the sponsorship is not the newsworthy event)? Why?

Source: Compiled by the author.

The aim of this qualitative phase of the research was to find out the opinions of journalists on the role of sponsor companies and their personal experience in dealing with the communications officers of sponsored museums and sponsor companies.

3.3.1. Results of the interviews

Out of all the answers, two of the journalists describe or express a couple of issues that deserve to be singled out before beginning on the detailed analysis of the answers to each question: the circuit that seems to exist between advertising and publicity and the weak points of the new scenario.

It is interesting to observe the connection between sponsor companies and the media, which connects publicity in the media paid for by the company with special treatment in the media, something that results in direct publicity for their sponsorship:

[...] I used to avoid mentioning the companies in the articles because the media should not publicise a brand without payment. But a lot of these companies were and are also advertisers in the cultural media and the directors or publicity officers began to demand that critics and journalists include that information. In other words, they do pay for

⁸ An undertaking of confidentiality guaranteeing the anonymity of the eight journalists who contributed to this part of the empirical study means I cannot give any more information than this.

indirect publicity, through mentions in the articles. The newspaper, supplement or magazine will give ample coverage to the exhibition or event that has been sponsored by its most faithful advertisers and will try to ensure the reviews are favourable.

With respect to the weak points surrounding sponsorship of public museums in Spain by business, one of the biggest problems is that most sponsorship is concentrated in a handful of companies:

[...] The only problem I see, one that is serious but not insurmountable, is that the sources of funding, with the present Spanish law and the scarce tradition in sponsorship, has brought a lot of power to a handful of institutions that sponsor almost everything, or almost everything of quality. Everybody turns to them. And with more diversity we would all stand to gain. Or with laws that allow small-scale sponsorship and more obvious support for this activity on the part of the administration.

Moving onto the analysis of the replies to the five questions, the journalists have certainly noticed changes in the presence of sponsors in the public relations materials and events issued or organised by museums (Q01). A new story, 'child of the crisis', that does not condition their work as journalists (Q02), something they are adamant about:

Obviously it doesn't condition me at all. What's more, it's highly unlikely it will be given space in the newspaper.

Never. In general I tend to completely ignore the sponsor, whether they come at the end or the beginning of the press kit, in the title or in the credits

It doesn't condition me, I pretty well ignore it, to tell the truth.

In one case, this conditioning is actually acknowledged, though in a way that is unexpected: "Only in one aspect: it makes me wonder if the exhibition or activity is in any way related to the brand, in its service."

On the participation by the representatives of the sponsor companies at press conferences (Q03), this is mainly seen unfavourably, a view that can be summed up as follows: they are seen as irrelevant due to their lack of journalistic interest, they are boring, they make press conferences too long and drawn out and are no more than a formality or, even worse, a waste of time for the journalist's long-suffering daily business. One of the professionals interviewed revealed a detail that corroborates this consensus in opinions on this aspect: "when the spokespeople for the sponsor companies start talking, we journalists stop taking notes."

The actual representatives of the sponsor companies seem to be directly responsible for this, as "They don't tend to be good communicators, even when it comes to the sponsorship venture."

The idea that their presence and participation could eventually help to have them talked about in the news reports is therefore clearly refuted in this qualitative phase of the research.

On the pressure to prevent the journalist forgetting to name the sponsor in his article (Q04), they are also adamant; if it has happened to them, it is unusual and only happens occasionally and very subtly. The result of the pressure is usually the same: it does not achieve what it attempts. In this respect, some are quite adamant. "No. I don't want to sound smart, but it would be a fine thing if a press officer tried to direct my work...!"

Finally, on the inclusion of the name of the sponsor company when the sponsorship is the newsworthy event (Q05), there is not the same agreement as there is on the other four questions. Some are in no doubt it should not be included:

It doesn't even cross my mind. There's no dilemma. You said it yourself: "it's not newsworthy."

I'm against it because I think the news isn't the sponsor and because I think the sponsorship doesn't do it for art's sake but to plug a brand.

For others the opposite is true, it should be included without a doubt:

[...] because as I see it, regardless of the company philosophy, without its contribution that project or exhibition would have been impossible or not so good.

It's a socially relevant fact and our line is to support the involvement of civil society in culture. We believe in the need for businesses, foundations and private individuals to take part in the activities of public and semi-public institutions.

In short, there is an obvious increase in the protagonism of the sponsors in press materials and conferences (when the sponsorship is not the noteworthy event), a *modus operandi* that is frowned on by journalists, which means it is a practice that does not condition them in writing their news articles. Whatever the case, if it does condition them it is against the interests of the sponsor companies, as their central role at public relations events (such as press conferences) is considered a waste of time.

As regards the more or less subtle pressure –by either sponsor or sponsored– brought to bear on the journalist not to forget the name of the sponsor, its lack of effectiveness and maximum danger advises against it. Although all the professionals involved in the subject know perfectly well that it is something that should never be done, it is still common practice, regardless of the fact that this is unequivocally and adamantly opposed by journalists.

On the inclusion of the sponsor's name when the sponsorship is not the newsworthy event, the difference in points of view reveals two antagonistic points of view that hinge on the acknowledgement of the role of the sponsors.

4. Conclusions

The economic crisis experienced in Spain, with the subsequent reduction in public subventions and the virtual disappearance of the support from community projects and foundations in the savings bank system has had a direct impact on public museums. In the case of the leading museums and faced with resizing their presence, reducing their activity to a minimum, the choice has been to maintain it, compensating for the loss of public resources by generating their own income, including sponsorship by businesses and corporate foundations.

Although it might seem that sponsorship is the panacea that can and must make up for drastic cuts in public spending, its unpredictable nature gives rise to uncertainty (Pflieger, 2013, p. 11), which rules it out as a magic wand to answer to the global need for funding museums (Lord & Dexter, 1998, p. 193–194). On this point, it is worth reproducing the statement made by the Director of the Museo Nacional del Prado, Miguel Falomir, during his appearance before the Culture Commission of the Spanish Parliament on 29th June 2017:

With regard to the financial strategy for the coming years, we would like to fulfil the expectation of reaching a budget of 50 million in 2020, with a contribution by the state of around 40%, reducing our self-funding to 60%. As I said, we are currently around 70%, but it's also true that this has been at the expense of setting the museum machinery at full steam, which is something that can be done from time to time, but not constantly. (Cortes Generales, 2017, p. 2).

During question time, in face of the enquiry by a member of the commission as to the museum's most pressing needs, the director's answer could not have been clearer nor more direct: "With respect to what the Museo del Prado needs, it's something that won't surprise you at all: money" (Cortes Generales, 2017, p. 9).

He repeated this later in an interview in which he made no bones about publicly denouncing what he sees as abuse in absolute and relative terms of the art collection he directs. To him, the fundraising the museum is forced to undertake is a practice that "saps

your strength and gives you the feeling you are diverting energy which should be devoted to more important things” and forces him, for example, to rent works out and charge an admission fee. “But as I’m not the Abbot of Fatima or Lourdes and I’ve got to pay wages and open the museum I have no choice but to rent and charge admission.”⁹

The imperious need of museums to obtain income with which to keep up their cultural activity, make improvements in their facilities and buy or restore works has meant that the traditional relationship in Spain between the sponsored museum and the sponsor company has seen certain changes. It seems obvious that when the sponsor is aware of the museum’s difficulties in squaring the budget, when it knows that it starts with a favourable bargaining position before the other party’s weakness, it makes demands that were not required before. This development was seen in the English-speaking world from the 1980s and is described by Naomi Klein in *No Logo* (2011, p. 61–62).

With the object of giving maximum visibility to their sponsorship, some sponsors have demanded a new role in the communications by the sponsored museum. From an important but secondary role to a central role whose main aim is to involve journalists and the media, the key for reaching the mass coverage these provide.

To bring journalists and media in line with sponsors’ interests, there are already examples that could be considered evidence of an attempt to turn museums into public relations agencies serving the prestige and reputation of businesses. The press materials issued by museums to publicise news in which the sponsorship is not clearly the newsworthy event are proof of this *modus operandi* as they include the name of the sponsor in the headline of the press release, the key piece in the relationship with the media.

However, even if the press releases issued by the museum include the name of the sponsor company in such a prominent position as the headline, the results show that no journalist gives it the same importance in the article, a similar result if we analyse the impact of the participation by the sponsor’s representatives in the key event in the relationship with the media, the press conference. It seems clear that for journalists the news is the cultural activity or novelty launched by the museum, not the company sponsorship behind that activity or novelty.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the strategy of maximum visibility granted by museums to the companies sponsoring them has no effect as far as its ability to filter into the media. Even if the museum makes every effort to achieve it, journalists remain impervious to this strategy. Neither is this result a novelty for the professionals involved in managing the sponsorship, who are quite familiar with that imperviousness of journalists and their reluctance to name sponsors in their articles (Sleight, 1992, p. 79, Antoine, 2003, p. 121–128, Gómez de la Iglesia, 2011, p. 45–49).

Returning to David Elliott’s metaphor of the robin (mentioned in the introduction) and the words of Miguel Falomir (reproduced in these conclusions), it is clear that the diet robins feed on no longer comes exclusively from one provider. And to make that new diet more palatable, all the stakeholders ought to respect in their work the particularities and the mission of the sponsored museums at the same time as they respond to the needs and the proper public acknowledgement of the contribution by sponsor companies, in order to strike a balance “where sponsor and sponsored preserve their power and where clear limits are drawn and preserved” (Klein, 2011, p. 66–67). Quite a challenge, in view of the fears and the mutual misgivings between the two sectors, as “the private sector is afraid of political interference, the public sector is afraid of excessive protagonism by the private sector, both are afraid that the other will want to impose its criteria” (comment by a member of the panel at *Fundación Contemporánea*, 2014, p. 11).

⁹ Interview by Ángeles García and Iker Seisdedos published in *El País* on 1st June 2018. Retrieved from https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/05/31/actualidad/1527784201_125415.html.

One good way of confronting this major challenge of funding would be to prepare a long-term financial strategy capable of responding to future recessions or financial crises, going beyond the application of short-term strategies which, while it is true that they have served to counter the effects of the recent crisis, have also generated worrying dysfunctions. A situation which, on the premise that the public administration should not neglect its responsibilities (Pflieger, 2013, p. 13), calls for an approach that strategically manages the relationship of museums with their stakeholders, who hold the key to reducing their vulnerability to economic cycles (Lindqvist, 2012). And since the funding of Spain's public museums swings between two antithetical worlds, state and market (Bolaños, 2013, p. 68), this financial strategy ought to find a virtuous third way that combines the two (Alexander, 1999, p. 34).

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