

Transfer of brand image through sport event sponsorship

Jung Ung Park, Sungkyunkwan University

Taebee Kim, Sungkyunkwan University

Yu Mi Kim, Sungkyunkwan University

Kyungro Chang, Sungkyunkwan University (Advisor)

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Abstract 200**

In today's high-clutter advertising environment, firms consider sponsorship as a major communication tool, and tend to allocate large amounts of resources to sponsorship arrangements. Sponsorship is a mutually beneficial business arrangement between sponsors and those sponsored for achieving defined objectives (Head, 1981). For sponsors, brand awareness and image development have subsequently been identified as the major "commercial objectives" of sponsorship (Marshall & Cook, 1992; Scott & Suchard, 1992). The awareness building effect of sponsorship, however, has received much more attention than the image transfer effect (Meenaghan, 1999).

Brand image has been defined as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in memory" (Keller, 1993, p. 3). Brand associations are developed from a variety of sources including product use, informational sources (e.g., advertising, packaging, word-of-mouth), and association with other entities. The "association with other entities" source is of particular relevance to sponsorship activity. Keller (1993) has suggested that when a brand becomes associated with an event, some of the associations linked with the event may become linked in memory with the brand.

An increasing body of evidence now supports the fact that image transfer takes place as a result of sponsorship (Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999; Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1991; Otker & Hayes, 1986). Despite this, only limited research exists into how sponsorship works in effecting image change (Gwinner 1997). As such there is a need for a greater theoretical understanding of how associations (image) transfer from the sponsored brand to that of the sponsor.

The main objective of this study was to investigate the degree to which a sporting event's image was transferred to a brand through event sponsorship activity. To achieve the purposes, three hypotheses were proposed: (H1) An event's image will transfer to a sponsoring brand's image when they are linked through sponsorship; (H2) The image transfer will be stronger when there is a similarity between brand image and event image; and (H3) Consumers' purchase intentions will be stronger when there is a similarity between brand image and event image. To test the hypotheses an experiment was conducted using one between groups factor (sponsorship: aware and unaware) and one repeated measures factor (similarity: image based and functional based).

Three hundred and twenty undergraduate sport management students participated in the experiment. Results showed that image transfer was stronger when consumers aware sponsors correctly and when there was either functional or image based similarity than when there was no similarity. Results also showed that purchase intentions were stronger when there was functional similarity than there was image based similarity.

Several implications can be drawn from the results of this study. First, it is important to consider the image of the event, as this image may become associated with the brand. In terms of the sponsoring brand, the results suggest several aspects of sponsorship that should be considered when deciding on potential event affiliations. One aspect that should be considered, in light of image transfer benefits, is the degree of similarity between the event image and the brand image. Finally, firms should consider whether image transfer benefits will actually have any influence on consumers' attitudes towards their brand and ultimately their purchase intention.