

The role of corporate social responsibility (csr) in sport event sponsorship

Kevin Filo, Griffith University

Dan Funk, Griffith University

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Abstract 256**

Sport events benefiting a charitable cause have a large participant base from which to draw. In 2002, almost 62 million US adults (30% of the adult population) reportedly participated in sport. In addition, \$13.6 billion was spent on the consumption of sport (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004-05). While sport participation continues to represent a prominent aspect of leisure and recreation, there has also been a pronounced shift towards support of charitable causes for both individual consumers and corporations (King, 2001). Accordingly, estimated charitable giving reached a record of \$248.52 billion in the United States in 2004 (American Association of Fundraising Counsel, 2005). Using the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) as its theoretical framework, this paper examines the mediational role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on the relationship between sport participation motivation, event attachment and purchase intent of a sport event's sponsors' products.

Demonstrating socially responsible behavior has become increasingly important for corporations. CSR involves effectively balancing a corporation's economic, social and environmental performance (Collins, Steg and Koning, 2007) and is comprised of sincerity, trustworthiness and law-abidance (Zhihai, 2007). CSR has emerged as a worldwide trend involving a variety of different parties including corporations, states, international organizations, and civil society organizations (Sahlin-Anderrson, 2006). Corporations can use CSR to enhance their overall image (Dowling, 1986), and this enhanced image can contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage for the organization (Amis, Pant and Slack, 1997). Research suggests CSR can be exhibited through sport via sponsorships, donations, gifts in-kind, cause-related marketing, and employee volunteering (Smith and Westerbeek, 2007).

The current study uses Funk and James' (2001; 2006) PCM as its theoretical basis as it builds upon prior research to account for a variety of discrete social-psychological, cultural-education, and situational motives operating within its framework. Prominent within the PCM framework is a discussion of core motives for sport and recreation participation. Most notably, Beard and Ragheb (1983) advanced four dimensions of leisure motivation: intellectual, social, escape, and competency motives related to leisure needs. Each of these four dimensions have been highlighted in the existing literature on motivation (e.g. Crompton, 1979; Crompton and McKay, 1997; Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987; Zhang and Lam, 1999). These recreational motives represent core factors that can contribute to event participation in general. However, additional consideration in the form of contextual motives may also serve to fulfill needs within consumers and lead to participation (Funk and James, 2004). For sport events that have a benefiting charity, the charitable component and attachment to the event may represent additional aspects.

Factors related to charitable giving may serve to motivate contributors towards participating. Donors may be motivated by reciprocity, self-esteem, need to help others, and the desire to improve the charity (Amos, 1982; Hibbert and Horne, 1996; Marx, 2000; Ritzenheim, 2000). These motives can attract and increase event participation as well as lead to attachment (Filo, Funk and O'Brien, 2007). Attachment is the overall importance of the event to the participant, and embodies the event taking on emotional, symbolic and functional meaning (Funk and James, 2006).

A sample of participants in the 2007 3M Half Marathon and Relay in Austin, Texas completed an online questionnaire following completion of the event. This event represents an established participatory sport event aligned with a charity, in which a portion of the event revenue benefits the Capital Area Food Bank of Texas. Participants were given a multi-attribute questionnaire that included: (a) 12-items to measure a composite for recreation motivation (Beard and Ragheb, 1983), (b) 12-items to measure a composite for charity motivation (Amos, 1982; Hibbert and Horne, 1996; Marx, 2000; Ritzenheim, 2000), and (c) nine-items to measure attachment to the event (Funk and James, 2006). All items were measured on 7-point Likert-scales anchored by (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). To measure CSR, two Likert-scale items using seven-point scales (1 = not at all favorable, 7 = extremely favorable) were used to assess how sponsorship of the event caused participants to view 3M and how sponsorship of the event caused participants to view a sponsoring company, and two Likert items using seven-point scales (1 = not at all likely, 7 = extremely likely) to measure purchase intent of the sponsors' products. The questionnaire was administered online one week following the event. Participants were sent an e-mail with a link to the questionnaire. The e-mail was sent to 3,500 participants, with 689 usable questionnaires returned for a response rate of 19.7%.

Consistent with the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986), a three-step test of mediation was conducted using multiple linear regressions (MLR) to examine the relationships. Step 1 examined the relationship between CSR and recreation motivation, charity motivation, and attachment. Step 2 examined the relationship between purchase intent and recreation

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motivation, charity motivation, and attachment. Step 3 examined the relationship between purchase intent and recreation motivation, charity motivation, and attachment along with CSR simultaneously. Results from Step 1 indicate a significant relationship exists between CSR and recreation motivation, charity motivation, and attachment ($p < .05$). The results from Step 2 indicate a significant relationship exists between purchase intent and these same three variables ($p < .05$). According to Baron and Kenny, partial mediation exists if a regression coefficient in Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3 is significant ($p < .05$) and full mediation exists if a regression coefficient in Step 1 and Step 2 is significant but not in Step 3. Results from Step 3 indicate CSR mediates the relationship between purchase intent and recreation motivation, charity motivation, and attachment ($p < .05$). CSR fully mediates the relationship between purchase intent and both recreation motivation and charity motivation, while partially mediating the relationship between purchase intent and attachment. The findings suggest that core and contextual motives will not influence purchase intent, unless participants perceive event sponsors to be socially responsible, while attachment to the event is a significant predictor of purchase intent.

The findings suggest marketers should consider participant attachment when choosing sport events with which to align. The current research demonstrates that the personal meaning elicited by the event for consumers should be an additional factor to consider in selecting effective sponsorship opportunities. In addition, corporations should look to leverage CSR towards brand loyalty. CSR is one way to foster trust in a brand (Brady, 2003; Willmott, 2003), and brand trust contributes to brand loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Event sponsors should highlight their alignment with the sport event, and the trust this establishes with consumers, through marketing communication.