

Maximizing the impact of title sponsorship to enhance employees' perception toward the respective organization

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**Communication
Abstract 2009-063**

**May 29, 2009
8:00 AM**

**25 minute oral
(Richland A)**

Worldwide sponsorship spending will reach USD \$37.6 billion in 2006. This represents an 11% increase over 2005 estimates (European Sponsorship Association, 2006). Corporate investment in sponsorship is estimated at approximately \$28 billion in 2004. More than 70% of sponsorship dollars were invested in sport and sports events (Crompton, 2004). Sponsorship constructs a relationship in the consumer's mind between the brand and an organization event (Crimmins & Horn, 1996). Sponsorship seeks an organization's rights to affiliate with an event, so that the sponsor can benefit from that affiliation or association. Building effective marketing communication procedures is critical to the success of sports organizations and corporate businesses in a highly competitive market environment (Belch & Belch, 2007). Sports sponsorship has emerged tremendously as a very efficient marketing communication medium in promoting brand awareness, brand image, corporate image, and corporate cognition (Berrett & Slack, 1999; Javaigi, Traylor, Gross & Lampman, 1994; McDonald, 1991). In addition, the effectiveness of sponsorship leads to an increase in public awareness of a firm, the enhancement of corporate image, an increase in corporate sales, and increased media exposure levels (Cornwell, Pruitt & Van Ness, 2001). Although a number of research projects have determined that sports sponsorship affects customer behavior, including recall of the sponsorship (Slattery & Pitts, 2002), attitude toward the corporate (Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2002), and intention to purchase the product, few studies have examined how title sponsorship effects internal customers (employees). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the relationship among corporate title sponsorship activities, recognition of corporate image, and corporate identification by internal customers.

Academia and practitioners have long agreed with the view that a well-executed sports sponsorship can contribute to the image of a corporation. Corporate image is defined as "the impressions of a particular company held by some segment of the public" (Johnson & Zinkhan, 1990, p.347). The enhancement of corporate image is a primary aspect of the communication objectives for corporate sponsors. Previous studies assessed consumers' attitude towards sponsors to evaluate corporate image (Sandler & Shani, 1993). The social identity theory is formed by three central concepts, namely categorization, identification, and comparison. Especially, identification is defined as the personal commitment and emotional involvement people have with the group. It argues that individuals from the same group increase group salience and perceive group homogeneity, and it proposes that people try to achieve or maintain a positive social identity through the group (Tajfel, 1982). Through the lens of the social identity theory, corporate title sponsorship would support internal customers in sharing the identity and thus become motivated to increase their commitment to the corporation. In 2007, data were collected through a mailed survey to employees of a major electric corporation (Samsung) located in South Korea. The firm is a title sponsor of the Korea Baseball League (KBL). Some 430 surveys were collected using convenience sampling, and 392 were used as meaningful samples after excluding 38 unsuitable ones. Of the 392 respondents, 80% (N = 314) were male and 20% (N = 78) were female. The respondents were between 20 and 29 years old (45.9%) and 30 and 39 years old (41.8%). Approximately 235 (87.8%) of the respondents had worked less than 4 years. A questionnaire was developed to assess title sponsorship on internal customers' corporate cognition and preference, corporate image, and corporate identification. To measure corporate cognition, 11 items from the study by Pope and Voges (1994) were adopted. Preference of title sponsorship activities (6 items) was measured by Park's study (2000). Corporate image (13 items), including distinguished corporate image, promising corporate image, social contribution image, and marketing image, were measured by adopting items from the study by Winters (1998). Five items from the study by Kim (1997) were adopted. Perceived organizational prestige scale (Ashforth & Mael, 1992) was adopted to assess corporate identification. The constructs were revised to reflect the nature of the institution being studied. A 5-point Likert scale was adopted for all items, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive statistics, internal consistency measures (Cronbach's alpha) values, and multiple regression analysis were obtained using SPSS 15.0. Cronbach's α coefficients for the constructs related to title sponsorship on internal customers' corporate cognition, corporate image, and corporate identification were first calculated to examine internal consistency of the factors. The coefficient was .84 for corporate cognition, .93 for preference of title sponsorship activities, .86 for distinguished corporate image, .76 for promising corporate image, .84 for social contribution image, .89 for marketing image, and .90 for corporate identification.

The results of the research are as follows. First, the level of recognition, which is a subordinate factor of title sponsorship, had a statistically significant ($p < .05$) influence on corporate identification by internal customers, whereas level of preference of title sponsorship had a statistically significant ($p < .05$) influence. Second, the level of recognition of title sponsorship did not have a statistically significant ($p > .05$) influence on corporate identification by internal customers, but level of preference of title

2009 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2009)

sponsorship had a statistically significant ($p < .05$) influence on it. Third, distinguished corporate image, promising corporate image, and social contribution image of the company, which were subordinate factors of corporate image, had a statistically significant ($p < .05$) influence on corporate identification by internal customers.

The findings of this study indicated that corporate title sponsorship is not only an effective tool for corporations to enhance their reputations, build brand image, and increase consumer cognition, but it is also an effective tool for internal customers (employees). Internal customers' perception, attitude, and behavior are positively affected by its corporate title sponsorship. Internal customers who have an interest in the corporate title sponsorship of sports have a strong sense of firm identification. In addition, strong identification among internal customers could potentially create a bond between internal and external customers.