An Analysis of College Students Perceptions of the 2006 NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Program

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Sponsorship is considered a tool marketers use to communicate with their target audience (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2000). Corporations perceive sponsorship as a method of increasing brand awareness, brand image and improving the image of the company (Stotlar, 2001). According to Danylchuk (2000), sponsorship is essential to the existence and survival of sport events at both the professional and amateur levels. While financial support for sport organizations is usually sought from sources such as tax support, government sources, fund raising and charities, these traditional methods are restricted, due to the current economic conditions, decreased government support, and increased emphasis on self sufficiency. As a result, other means of financing, especially sponsorship, has become popular and has grown noticeably over the past two decades. Several companies, including Pepsi, Anheuser-Busch, General Motors, Coca-Cola, Miller Brewing, Nike, and Daimler-Chrysler spend over $100 million on sponsorship. Sport has maintained its position as a primary category for sponsorship spending with 69% on expenditures, followed by cause-related marketing (9%), entertainment (8%), festivals and fairs (8%), and arts (6%). Sponsorship activities have also increased around the world. The growth of sponsorship expenditure reveals the effectiveness of sponsorship as a form of corporate communication.

Javalgi, Traylor, Gross, and Lampman (1994) examined the relationship between sponsorship and corporate image. The researchers found that corporate sponsorship can enhance corporate image. However, corporate sponsorship can deteriorate a corporate image negatively if consumers have prior negative attitudes toward the company participating in the sponsorship. Bennett, Henson, and Zhang (2002) conducted a study regarding recognition towards action sport sponsorship. Bennett et al. (2002) concluded that members of generation Y are interested in action sports and the sponsors of the events. The fact that 50% of the respondents recognized Mountain Dew as a sponsor of the X-Games was significant, since Pepsi placed an emphasis on marketing to this particular generation through Mountain Dew. The investigators stated that sport marketers may seek to increase athlete endorsements and event sponsorship when generation Y views sports events. Zhang, Won, and Pastore (2005) attempted to investigate college students’ attitude towards commercialization and their psychological attachment to an intercollegiate athletic program on the purchasing intentions of a sponsor’s product.

The NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Program was established in 1984, and modified at the beginning of the 2002-03 season. The program consisted of two levels, and was designed to promote and market activities surrounding NCAA championships. All of the 88 NCAA championships are supported by corporations participating in the NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Program (NCAA, 2004). The IEG Sponsorship Report (2003) revealed that corporate sponsorship revenue in the NCAA Division I increased from $766,000 in 1997 to $1.38 billion in 2001 (Tomasin, Frye & Stotlar, 2004).

The purpose of this study will be to investigate 300 college students’ perceptions of corporate sponsors of the 2006 NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Program. The self-reported survey questionnaire modified from Javalgi, et al. (1994), Pope and Voges (2000), and Johnston (2001) will be used for this study. The questionnaire will consist of 35 questions including eight dichotomous questions, one opened-ended question, 12 closed-ended questions, and 14 five-point Likert scale questions. Data will be collected using convenience sampling and quota sampling techniques. Research questions include 1) Does corporate sponsorship of the 2006 NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Program affect college students’ recognition of sponsors, 2) Does corporate sponsorship of the 2006 NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Program affect college students’ purchase intention of sponsors’ products and service, and 3) Does corporate sponsorship of the 2006 NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Program affect college students’ corporate image of sponsors?

The results may benefit the NCAA, companies who are already participating in the NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Program, and potential corporate sponsors. The findings may assist these individuals in the determining the value of the NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Program by providing information of its effect on college students’ recognition, purchase intention, and corporate image.


