Determinants of Consumers' Attitude Formation toward Sport Sponsorship: An Empirical Analysis

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Researchers and practitioners have developed and implemented various sponsorship evaluation frameworks that include systematic selection of sponsors and event properties (Speed & Thomson, 2000; Tripodi, 2001). However, Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy (2005) argued that many investigations of sponsorship effects have not posited theoretical explanation of how sponsorship works in the mind of the consumer. Meenaghan (2001) also suggested that because the target market of corporate sponsors is the sport consumer who watches and participates in sponsored sporting events, consumer variables needs to be measured in the context of sponsorship effectiveness. In addition, there has been no consistency with respect to the predictor variables and outcomes being measured (Cornwell et al., 2005; Speed & Thompson, 2000; Walliser, 2003).

The purpose of the current study was to advance our understanding of sponsorship effectiveness by (a) identifying determinants of sport consumers' perceptions toward sport sponsorship and (b) examining the relationship between the perceptions and sponsorship response and the role of the sponsor-event fit in predicting consumers' sponsorship response. For the purpose of our study, by adapting and extending Speed and Thompson's (2000) conceptual model, we developed and tested a research model that hypothesized whether customer's perceptions of sport sponsorship positively influence their attitude toward sport sponsorship. In the research model, customers' perceptions of sponsorship are defined by two determinants: (a) event factors (event quality, trust, commitment, and prestige of the event) and (b) sponsor factors (prominence, sincerity and ubiquity of sponsor). Consumers' sponsorship perceptions are hypothesized to positively influence their attitude toward sponsors or brands. Sponsor-event fit plays a moderator role in the relationship between sponsorship perceptions and attitude formation.

In this study, the authors conducted two (2) studies. The target population for study I and II was college students in an NCAA Division I-A university. In both studies, sponsors from 10 different industries such as automobile, Internet, apparel, restaurants, insurance, bank, and wireless carriers were chosen. The main purposes of Study I were to: (a) examine the psychometric properties of the selected measurement items and (b) refine the items, with the goal of deriving a psychometrically sound and parsimonious instrument that best assesses determinants of sponsorship response and other constructs of interest. A total of 285 usable surveys was included in data analyses. The average age of the participants was 22 years old (M = 21.94, SD = 3.69). Thirty-nine percent of the respondents were male and 61% were female. Most of the participants were White (50%), followed by Hispanic (31%), Asian (8%), African-American (8%).

Measures for Trust and Commitment were selected from Kim (2009). Measures for Ubiquity, Sincerity, and Team-Sponsor Fit were adapted from Speed and Thompson (2000). Four items from Dabholkar, Shepherd, and Thorpe (2000) were used to measure Service Quality. Measure for Prestige were taken from Mael and Ashforth (1992). The measures for Prominence were developed for the current study based on Johar, Pham, and Wakefield’s (2006) conceptualization of prominence. Attitude was measured by four items from Lee and Cho (2009). The response format for all of the items except items for Attitude was a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Attitude was measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale (1 = unfavorable, 7 = favorable; 1= dislikable, 7 = likable). Items measuring demographic characteristics of participants were also included in the questionnaire. To avoid response bias from order effect, the items were randomly placed in questionnaire.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement properties of the selected measures using the Mplus 5.2 software (Muthén and Muthén, 2008). The final measurement model included 27 items: Trust (3 items), Commitment (3 items), Service Quality (3 items), Prestige (3 items), Prominence (3 items), Ubiquity (3 items), Sincerity (3 items), Fit (3 items), and Attitude (3 items). As indicated by $\chi^2/df = 462.35/288 = 1.60$, RMSEA = .05, CFI = .96, SRMR = .04, the revised measurement model achieved good fit for the data. All factor loadings were significantly larger than zero. AVE values ranged from .48 for Sincerity to .85 for Commitment. Reliability coefficients ranged from .72 for Sincerity to .93 for Commitment. Taken together, the results provide evidence for convergent validity of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2005).
The purposes of Study II were to: (a) validate the measurement scales obtained in study I, (b) empirically evaluate the hypothesized model of determinants of sponsorship response, and (c) test moderating effects of the sponsor-team fit on the relationship between the general constructs of determinants of sponsorship response and attitude toward the sponsoring company. A total of 460 usable surveys were obtained from a major Southeastern university and included in the study. Of the remaining participants, 62% were male and 38% were female. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 47 years (M = 21.24). Of the respondents, 5% were Asian, 8% African-American, 26% Hispanic, and 60% Caucasian. The measurement and simultaneous models were estimated using the Mplus 5.2 software (Muthén and Muthén, 2008). The measurement model fits the data very well (S-B $\chi^2$/df = 472.52/288 = 1.64, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .97, SRMR = .04). All factor loadings were significant in the predicted direction (p < .05), all AVE values were greater than .50, ranging from .53 for Sincerity to .84 for Commitment and all reliability coefficients are larger than .70, ranging from .77 for Sincerity to .94 for Commitment. These results provide support for the convergent validity of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2005).

The simultaneous equation model achieved good fit for the data (S-B $\chi^2$/df = 462.15/242 = 1.91, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .96, and SRMR = .08). The loadings for the four first-order factors on the second-order Team factor ranged from .70 for Commitment to .98 for Trust. The loadings for the three first-order factors on the second-order Sponsor factor ranged from .53 for Sincerity to .88 for Prominence. The loadings for the second-order Team and Sponsor factors on the third-order General factor was .47 and .98 respectively. The third-order General factor significantly influenced Attitude toward the Sponsoring Company factor (standardized $\gamma = .80$, S.E. = .05, $z = 17.58$). The General factor explained 64% of the variance in the Attitude toward the Sponsoring Company factor. The LMS results showed a significant negative moderating effect of Sponsor-Team Fit ($\gamma = -.16$, S.E. = .05, $z = -3.11$) on the relationship between the General Factor and Attitude toward the Sponsoring Company factor. This significant negative moderating effect indicates that the path coefficient of the relationship between the General factor and Attitude toward Sponsorship decreases when the Sponsor-Team Fit increases.

We believe that this proposed conceptual model will contribute to the body of knowledge of sport sponsorship by extending our understanding of sport sponsorship effectiveness, particularly focused on consumers’ sponsorship perceptions and attitude formation. As of yet, the moderator role of sponsorship fit or match has not been investigated in the sport sponsorship context. Thus, understanding the determinants of sponsorship response and the role of sponsor-team fit will make both scientific and practical contributions. In this presentation, we will discuss research and practical implications.