Identification of Factors that Influence Consumer’s Purchasing Intentions Toward the Corporate Sponsors of the Paralympic Games

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The Paralympic Games, which provides sport competitions for elite athletes with physical disabilities, have played a critical role in enhancing public awareness and in providing sport opportunities for all people with disabilities. There has been a significant growth in the Paralympics movement over the past decades. The number of athletes has increased from 400 athletes from 23 countries in Rome in 1960 to 3,951 athletes from 146 countries in Beijing in 2008 (International Paralympic Committee, 2009).

Along with the increased popularity of Paralympic Games and enhanced public awareness towards disability issues, the growing number of disabled people in the world and their buying power started to form an important consumer market for the sponsorship of mainstream corporations in the Paralympic Games. According to the World Health Organizations (2003), an estimated 600 million people in the world have disabilities of various types and degrees. Disability prevalence rates are very high in many developed countries including the United States and Canada (The World Bank, 2009). For instance, there are 54 million people with disabilities in the United States, a figure that represents over 20% of the population (U. S. Census Bureau, 2005). Diversity, Inc. (2001) indicated that persons with disabilities in the U. S. have $220 billion in discretionary spending power. Furthermore, people with disabilities and their families posses a strong loyalty to corporations that are supportive of them (Hums, 2001).

Mainstream corporations (e.g., Coca Cola, VISA, and AT&T), which have traditionally avoided sponsoring the Paralympic Games, have now started to associate themselves with these games in order to reach the fastest growing consumer market of people with disabilities (Hums, 2001; Sutton, 1998). Worldwide Partners and sponsors of the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games included VISA, Otto Bock, Samsung, Atos Origin, Coca Cola, McDonald’s, and Volkswagen, among others. (IPC, 2009).

In spite of the significance of the Paralympic Games’ sponsorship for athletes with disabilities, only a few academic studies have been conducted on the sponsorship of the Games in the field of business marketing and sport marketing (e.g., Kabitsis, Harahousou, & Kostaris, 2007; Ozturk, Kozub, & Kocak, 2004). More importantly, there has been a lack of empirical research that has measured the effectiveness of the Paralympics Games sponsorship in terms of consumer’s perspective. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine consumers’ perceptions toward the corporate sponsors of the Paralympics Games. More specifically, this study will investigate factors influencing potential consumers’ purchasing intentions of products and brands of the Paralympics Games Sponsors.

Data was collected from 209 college students from two major Midwestern universities. Fifty-five percent of the participants were males, while forty-five percent were females. Eleven percent of the respondents had at least one member with disability in their household. In addition, twenty-four percent reported that they had one relative who has a disability, and seventeen percent had more than one relative who had a disability. Based on the previous literature on the Paralympic Games and corporate social responsibility (e.g., Dickinson, 1996; Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001), researchers identified three factors that can influence potential consumers’ purchasing intentions toward brands and products of the Paralympics Games sponsors, including attitudes toward the Paralympic Games, perceptions toward corporate social responsibility, and personal involvement with disability.

The results of the correlational analysis showed that purchase intentions were positively related to attitudes toward the Paralympic Games (r = .48, p < .01) and perceptions toward corporate social responsibility (r = .44, p < .01). In addition, perceptions toward corporate social responsibility were significantly correlated with attitudes toward the Paralympic Games (r = .50, p < .01). Multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the effects of the three factors on purchasing intention. The regression model of purchasing intention as criteria entering all of the three factors as predictors was significant, F(3, 206) = 26.38, p < .001. The results indicated that the three factors explained a significant amount of variance in purchasing intention (R-square change = .28, p < .001). The significant predictors included attitudes toward the Paralympic Games (β = .35, p < .001) and perceptions toward corporate social responsibility (β = .28, p < .001).

Tampa, Florida
June 1 – 5, 2010
Page 307
social responsibility ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$). Concerning demographic differences in attitudes toward the Paralympic Games and corporate social responsibility, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) indicated gender differences in attitudes ($F(1, 208) = 11.43, p < .05$). Female students ($M = 3.33, SD = 0.62$) had more favorable attitudes toward the Paralympic Games than their male counterparts ($M = 2.99, SD = 0.77$). ANOVA also revealed a significant difference in perceptions toward corporate social responsibility ($F(1, 208) = 7.66, p < .05$) between female ($M = 3.84, SD = 0.78$) and male students ($M = 3.53, SD = 0.83$). ANOVA also yielded significant differences in attitudes toward the Paralympics Games ($F(5, 207) = 2.40, p < .05$) between students who do not have individual with disability in their household ($M = 3.39, SD = 0.67$) and those who have one person with disability in their household ($M = 3.12, SD = 0.71$).

This current research will contribute to the body of knowledge on sport sponsorship by investigating Paralympics sponsorship, which has largely been ignored in the field of sport marketing. From a practical perspective, the results of this study will help sport marketers of current and potential Paralympic Games sponsors to develop effective promotional strategies to enhance their consumers’ purchasing behavior. In this study, perceptions toward corporate social responsibility were found to have a significant effect on purchasing behavior. Thus, it will be effective for potential sponsors of the Paralympics to develop credible brand messages which show that they care for people with disabilities and continuously attempt to make their communities better places, and support worthwhile causes.