Impact of Green Stadium Initiatives on Donor Intentions toward an Intercollegiate Athletic Program

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The tainted environment has become an important global concern, not just for mainstream businesses, but for organizations in the sport industry as well. Jagemann (2003) noted that sport can be a considerable cause of damage to the environment due to the use of non-renewable resources, emission of hazardous substances during construction and operation of sport facilities, and production and disposal of sport-related equipment. For examples, the 2006 Super Bowl in Detroit produced 500 tons of greenhouse gas from transportation and utilities; during the 2006 World Cup in Germany, each match produced an estimated 10 tons of garbage and used approximately three million kilowatt-hours of energy, similar to the annual consumption of 700 European households (Schmidt, 2006).

In recent years, many sport organizations have made laudable efforts to reduce or eliminate the impact of sport events on the environment. Since 1996 when requirements for environment protection officially became the third dimension of the Olympic Movement, each city submitting a bid to host Olympic Games has been required to create a comprehensive environmental program. Of professional sport teams, the Washington Nationals were the first to achieve a Leadership in Energy and Environment Design (LEED) certification for their stadium. Since its construction, the stadium has used 20% recycled products, high-efficiency lighting (i.e., 21% less energy than conventional lighting), air-cooled chillers that save six million gallons of water annually, and low-flow faucets and toilets which reduce water consumption by 30% (Buranen, 2008). On the heels of this professional movement towards “greener” stadiums, some college athletic programs have also started investing in green stadium initiatives (GSI) by retrofitting or building new sustainable stadiums. For example, Penn State’s Medieval Field was the first baseball stadium in the U.S. to receive the LEED certification. TCF Bank Stadium of the University of Minnesota was the first football stadium in the U.S. to be awarded the LEED Silver Certification (Reichard, 2009). The University of Florida’s Ben Hill Griffin Stadium was the first building in Florida and the first athletic facility in the nation to achieve LEED platinum certification (Privett, 2009).

Nevertheless, partially due to the current economic downturn, a majority of intercollegiate athletic programs are facing financial challenges, making it difficult for GSI investments. Many higher education institutions and their athletics programs have experienced a steady decline in funding from state and federal government (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Consequently, college sports are continually looking for alternative sources of revenue; in particular, one solution of revenue generation is through fundraising, which is widely considered as a top priority by intercollegiate athletic programs. To a great extent, the importance placed on fundraising is because such efforts can greatly influence the institution’s ability to realize various strategic goals (Mann, 2007). By 2005, alumni donations to U.S. universities accounted for the largest part of all donations, accounting for a total of 26% (Gottfried & Johnson, 2006). Given the importance of fundraising, it is vital to evaluate those factors that motivate donors to support athletic programs. Previous research findings indicate that donor-supported organizations would have increased fundraising success if they seriously carry out their corporate social responsibilities (CSR) (Frame, 2005; Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004). Sustainable fundraising (Berkhout, Hertin, & Jordan, 2002) needs to be discussed in terms of trustbuilding, beliefs, and attitudes among organizational stakeholders. Socially and environmentally responsible activities by the university can be influential to the behavioral intentions of private sector donors. Following the theory of planned behavior (TPB), this study sought to investigate the relationships of athletic donors’ behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, control beliefs, attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control to donation intentions to GSIs.

Based on a comprehensive review of literature, a questionnaire was developed that included the following sections: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, control beliefs, attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavior control associated with donating to the green stadium initiatives, and donor behavior intentions. For sample description purpose, sociodemographic variables (gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, household income, education level, occupation, and university affiliation) were also assessed. Following questionnaire construction, content validity was assessed by a panel of 5 sport management academicians. Each panel member was asked to examine the relevance, representativeness, and clarity of the items in each conceptual area of the questionnaire. With minor wording improvement, all items were retained based on 80% agreement among panel members. Following the scale refinement procedure, data collection took place on the campus of a major university located in the Southeast region of the US. A total of 186 graduating students (i.e., in their senior year of school) voluntarily participated in this study. Respondents were of diverse demographic and academic backgrounds. Following the principles of ordinary least square (OLS), hierarchical regression analyses were conducted, which revealed that attitude and subjective norm fully mediated the
impacts of behavioral beliefs and normative beliefs on donor intentions toward GSI. Sobel’s (1982) test confirmed this result by revealing significant t-values across the outcomes. Research findings of this study indicated that, instead of the theory of planned behavior, the theory of reasoned action developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1980; 1975) showed a more complete explanation for the sequential relationships of beliefs, attitude, and donation intentions to support GSI. More specifically, this study revealed that beliefs about the consequences of donating to GSI had a positive impact on attitude toward the behavior, and normative beliefs were positively related to subjective norm. While subjective norm and attitude toward behavior were significant predictors of behavioral intentions, perceived behavior control was not found to be predictive of behavioral intention with the presence of attitude and subjective norm. Further discussions are conducted on developing educational and promotional programs to enhance beliefs, generate positive attitude, and develop supportive norms and implications for practitioners are offered in practical parlance.