The Influence of Exposure to Sponsorships in Media on Intention of Product Purchase: Consumer Behavior of the 2010 FIFA World Cup

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A body of research examined the influences of sports media exposure to commercial messages on consumer behaviors in both communication and sport management venues. In mass communication research, most studies have been done in the effects of advertising and corporate public relations on consumer responses (e.g., Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Gower, 2008; Zigmond & Dorai-Raj, 2009). Sport management research has been focused on attitudes and intention of purchase of sponsored brands (e.g., Cornwell, Pruitt, & Clark, 2005; O’Reilly, Nadeau, Séguin, & Harrison, 2007). Several studies tested the relationship between exposure to branded sponsors in media and brand image attitudes in the FIFA World Cup (Neijens, Smit, & Moorman, 2009; Portlock & Rose, 2009; Shin & Turco, 2005) and brand recall (Levin, Joiner, & Cameron, 2001). Meanwhile, relatively little research speculated the processing elements from exposure to sponsored brands to behavioral intention. That is, an empirical answer is still needed about the simultaneous effects of consumers’ persuasive process after media exposure to sponsored brands in international sports events on decision making.

The current study fills the research void by examining the directional relationships between media exposure and social-psychological responses among sports media audiences. Grounded in the theory of planned behavior (TPB), this study attempts to explain the sequential paths from exposure to sponsored brands to psychosocial components, such as attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, which influence purchase intention among the U.S. audience of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. This study aims at providing researchers with a theoretical addition to media sponsorship research in sport marketing. Study results may also lend implications to professionals about persuasive processes of media sponsorship effects in sporting events.

Data collection was conducted at two universities (located in the Midwest and Southwest regions of the United States) faculty, staff, and students were asked to participate via an online survey. The online survey was carried out during a one-month period following just after the end of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa (July 11, 2010). The questionnaire with questions of the TPB items, media use, demographics, and past behavior about the FIFA World Cup and sports was distributed to the university communities. This study used a convenience sampling method and a total of 6,200 email accounts were contacted for survey participation at the Midwestern university. With two follow-ups as reminders, 802 responses were returned and representing a response rate of 13.03%. At the Southwestern University, an email solicitation with the same survey link was sent to a total of 2,452 email accounts via the university’s school affairs office by randomly choosing a college. The one-month survey solicitation with two follow-ups resulted in 182 responses, or a response rate of 7.42%. The composite response rate from the two universities yielded 10.22%. After eliminating incomplete questionnaires, a total of 650 responses (539 from the Midwestern University and 111 from the Southwestern University) were obtained for main analysis.

This study examined the relationships among media exposure and TPB variables using hierarchical linear regression models to detect the role of control variables. Exposure to individual medium was not a compelling contributor to the construction of positive attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control toward the sponsored brands when they were separately entered in the model. All three psychological states were positive predictors of purchase intention with perceived control in its lowest contribution.

The initial model in SEM yielded a fit slightly lower than an acceptable level with $\chi^2 = 489.94$, $df = 164, p < .001$, NFI = .955, CFI = .970, RMSEA = .055. Hu and Bentler (1999) suggest that the research should use a combination of the above relative fit indices such as the NFI, CFI and the RMSEA to minimize Type I and Type II errors under various conditions. A value of .90 stands as the agreed-upon cutoff for overall fit indices, but a more recent trend has adopted a higher level of acceptance, .95. An RMSEA should be at or below 0.05 for a “well-fitting” model, and at or below 0.08 for a “reasonably fitting” model. If it exceeds .10, the model clearly needs work. In addition to the high RMSEA, the estimates of the relationships in the model suggested that no significant relationship was found for perceived control. Therefore, a revised model was tested without the latent variable for model improvement. The new model testing yielded an acceptable fit with one modification index suggestion for the RMSEA improvement ($\chi^2 = 315.75$, $df = 114, p < .001$, NFI = .969, CFI = .980, RMSEA = .052). By freeing up the link between the residuals of attitude and subjective norm, the final model turned out acceptable ($\chi^2 = 257.81$, $df = 113, p < .001$, NFI = .974, CFI = .985, RMSEA = .044).
The cross-sectional analysis demonstrates that individual effects in separate models for media exposure and the TPB variables do not significantly explain the influence. Meanwhile, the composite model testing reveals that media exposure contributes to forming positive attitudes toward the sponsored brands and important others’ role in decision making. Particularly, media exposure failed to predict intention directly. Therefore, the FIFA World Cup audience would not create their intention to purchase sponsored brands without exposure to media. The FIFA World Cup audience first exposes to multiple media outlets for the event information. Then they build positive attitudes and get influenced by others who may use the media together. These processes of the FIFA World Cup information through media formed their intention to purchase the brands. Hence, media exposure in the FIFA World Cup is an important precursor to experiencing the sponsored brands indirectly, consistent with previous research about the influence of media exposure on the TPB variables (e.g., Bae & Kang, 2008; Corbett, 2002). The results are congruent with other marketing studies using the TBP or the concept of consumer attitudes that attitude is a stronger predictor of intention than subjective norm (Lee & Cho, 2009; Lee, Murphy, & Swilley, 2009).

This study found that media exposure does not directly lead to the intention of sponsored products after building favorable attitude and listening to important others. The simultaneous influence of media exposure and the TPB variables suggests that an expanded model of the TPB is possible in consideration of the role of media exposure. This approach is new in the sport marketing venue, which needs further development in future research. The TPB fits well in model testing, suggesting the potential of the theory to be used in other sports event studies. The non-significant relationship of perceived control needs further investigation by adding contributors to connecting perceived control with intention. A comparative study in the countries with different levels of interest in the FIFA World Cup (e.g., the U.S. vs. England) would provide what factors play significant roles in the intention of purchasing sponsored products.