Attitudes towards NASCAR’s CSR in College Students

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Due to the growing global concern of environmental issues, many organizations have increased their corporate social responsibility (CSR). Kotler (1991) defines CSR as a societal marketing concept designed as doing business in a way that maintains or improves both society and the customer’s wellbeing. Today, CSR is expected by consumers and many base their purchases on desires to minimize harmful effects and to maximize beneficial impacts on society. Management is also beginning to recognize the public-relations value of reducing their environmental impact. Studies have shown that information on a company’s CSR can have a significant impact on behavioral intentions as well as evaluations of companies (Mohr, 2001). In this experimental study, we will observe the possible shift of attitudes and behaviors in identified fans and nonfans after exposure to NASCAR’s recent CSR efforts.

Although sport can cause a considerable amount of damage to the environment, sport organizations also have the significant potential to serve as a meaningful vehicle to promote environmentally beneficial ideas (Inoue, 2011). The National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing can be considered one of the most dangerous sports for our environmental future; operating the most theoretically unsustainable sport in the United States (Bodie, 2011). However, with an estimated fan base of 75 million (second only to football), NASCAR has the ability to expose millions of fans to more eco-conscious ideas. A pro-social agenda is also a powerful marketing tool that can not only change the perception of a company, but also shape their status and differentiate them in the market, resulting in a competitive edge (Walker & Kent, 2009).

This study will use four groups of current students at a northwestern university with a total of 80 participants. All participants will first read a general article relating to the product of NASCAR, then fill out a survey regarding their attitudes and behaviors toward the sport. After determining fan identification, fans will be split into two groups and non-fans will be split into two groups. A week later the groups will receive another set of articles. One group of fans and one group of non-fans will read articles discussing NASCAR’s current CSR efforts framed as a patriotic effort, focusing on their new “American-grown corn oil.” The second groups of fans and nonfans will read articles describing NASCAR’s current CSR efforts framed as environmental initiatives such as tree planting, recycling, and solar power.

After reading the articles, participants will fill out another survey measuring their attitude toward the CSR initiative, attitude toward brand, and purchase intention. Attitude toward CSR initiative and attitude brand will each be measured by eight 7-point semantic differential items modified from Chaisurivirat (2009). Examples: “I think NASCAR’s CSR initiatives are sincere/insincere,” “The NASCAR brand is trustworthy/untrustworthy.” Purchase intention will be measured through three future intent/behavior statements, “I plan to watch NASCAR in the next month,” rated on a Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). A two-way repeated ANOVA will then be used to see if there was a significant difference between the CSR framings. A manipulation check will test whether the CSR attitudes were successfully manipulated.

H1- NASCAR’s CSR framed as patriotism will have a more influential effect towards consumer attitudes and behaviors in fans than nonfans.

H2- NASCAR’s CSR framed as environmentally conscious will have a more influential effect towards consumer attitudes and behaviors in nonfans than fans.

The expected outcomes of this study will provide sport academics and managers with information regarding the effects of framing CSR on the attitudes of fans and nonfans. Implications and further discussion will be offered during the presentation.