Examining the Effect of Orientation toward Sport on Sponsorship Effectiveness: Hierarchical Effect Model

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Motivation is a key concept in consumer research as it is a driving force that prompts consumers toward a goal-directed behavior. By using motivation, scholars have long attempted to explain and predict consumer behavior. However, asserting the limitation of using motivation alone, Pons et al (2006) recently suggested the use of an alternative concept, orientation toward sporting events (OSE) which encompasses two important behavior aspects: motivation and value. OSE is referred to as an individual’s inclination toward adopting a product, which has three dimensions: socialization seeking, sensation seeking, and cognition seeking. Parsons and Shills (1967) highlighted the predictable nature of OSE, which enable to predict and explain stable and durable consumption behavior overtime. The OSE model has been widely accepted, and recently extended by self-image congruity theory.

Over the years, sponsorship studies in the sport management field have become diverse which continue to evolve today. Most researchers in the past have attempted and focused on explaining the association between the sponsor and the sport and/or event and how consumers identify with a sponsor. It is found in more recent studies the application of the self-image congruity theory to the sponsorship context (Palmer & Plewa, 2009; Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2008). According to self-image congruity theory, individuals desire and select products that is consistent with their self-image. Furthermore, the literature suggest that when there is an increased image fit, sponsorship effectiveness becomes more evident in that attitude, satisfaction toward a sponsor, and brand loyalty increases.

According to social identity theory, individuals tend to exhibit a favorable attitude toward in-group members and individuals or groups who support in-group norm, value, and belief. Based on the theory, the literature reveals that the level of identification with sport team leads to greater processing of information about sponsor, and that greater knowledge about the sponsor enhances the favorable attitude transfer from team to sponsor (see Grohs & Reisinger, 2005). In a sense, it is anticipated that higher level of team identification lead to sponsor ID, brand preference, and favorable attitude toward its sponsor.

Based on the findings of the literatures on social identity theory, self-image congruity theory, and attitude theory, this study presents a theoretical model that proposes attitude toward sponsor could be predicted in a hierarchy of six research constructs: orientation toward sporting events (OSE), sport-self congruity, sport consumption satisfaction, team identification (team ID), sponsor-self congruity, and sponsor identification (sponsor ID). In order to test the appropriateness of the model, the following hypotheses were developed: H1) orientation toward sport will be a significant predictor of self-sport congruency, H2) self-sport congruency will be a significant predictor of viewing satisfaction, H3) viewing satisfaction will be a significant predictor of team ID, H4) Team ID will be a significant predictor of Self-sponsor image congruency, 5) Self-sponsor image congruity will be a significant predictor of Sponsor ID, 6) Sponsor ID will be a significant predictor of Sponsor attitude.

For the purpose of this study, home games for each of 13 teams belonging to Korea’s professional soccer league (a.k.a., K-league) was selected as prime sites to reach loyal fans. During the 2010 K-League season, a total of one thousand and forty (1,040) subjects were recruited using a convenience sampling technique. Of the respondents, 935 were deemed suitable for final data analysis. The demographics of the subjects are as follows: 643 (68.8%) males and 292 (31.2%) females; 166 (17.8%) college students, 474 (50.7%) employees, 109 (11.7%) private business owners, 19 (2.0%) unemployed, 103 (11.0%) housekeepers and 19 (2.0%) others. Also, the respondents’ average age was 34.7.

All of the scales were adopted from previous research with some modifications. All responses were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale with response categories anchored by strongly disagree = 1 and strongly agree = 5, except for attitude toward sponsor on a 5-point semantic differential scale.
The reliability of the scale factors was assessed by observing the Cronbach's alpha coefficients, the internal consistency estimates (Cronbach, 1951), and the reliability for all nine factors were found to meet the minimum level of .70 recommended by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994), and ranged from .888 to .969. The analyses include confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify the factor structure of the scales employed and structural equation model (SEM) procedures to test the proposed relationships in the model, using AMOS18. Based on the overall CFA results, it is deemed that the measurement model is acceptable with good model fit and there is strong evidence of reliability and validity in the measurement scale.

In order to simultaneously test all the hypotheses, a full structural model was developed with a path from each of three dimensions of sporting event orientation (i.e. Socialization, sensation, and cognition seeking) to team ID via soccer-self image congruity and viewing satisfaction, a path from team ID to sponsor ID via sponsor-self congruity, and a path from sponsor ID to attitude toward sponsor. The model was tested using the maximum likelihood method of parameter estimation, and the fit indices for the model were found to be acceptable with $X^2 = 3128.48$ ($p < .000$), CFI = .947, TLI = .943, RMSEA=.050. Therefore, the full structural model was concluded as fitting the data.

Having found that the structural model fits the data, a path analysis using SEM was conducted in order to examine the research hypotheses. The results of path analysis supported all research hypotheses except a path between socialization seeking and soccer-self image congruity. Two dimensions of the sport event orientation had a significant influence on soccer-self image congruity (path coefficient = .26, $t = 5.08$, $p < .001$ from Sensation seeking; path coefficient = .51, $t = 11.22$, $p < .001$ from Cognition seeking respectively), a path between soccer-self image congruity and team ID via viewing satisfaction (path coefficient = .58, $t = 17.3$, $p < .001$ from soccer-self image congruity; path coefficient = .65, $t = 13.6$, $p < .001$ from viewing satisfaction respectively), and a path between team ID and sponsor-self image congruity through sponsor-self image congruity (path coefficient = .11, $t = 3.13$, $p < .05$ from team ID; path coefficient = .71, $t = 23.76$, $p < .001$ from sponsor-self image congruity respectively). The results also indicated that sponsor-self image congruity has a positive effect on attitude toward sponsor (path coefficient = .46, $t = 14.2$, $p < .001$). Since all of these results indicated a statistically significant relationship, all hypotheses except H1 were accepted. Thus, this result supports the notion that the sport event orientation positively influences sponsor attitude. In conclusion, the proposed structural model fits the data well and all hypothesized relationships except H1 were confirmed at a reasonably strong level.

The findings of this study provide sport researchers and practitioners with important theoretical and practical implications. A key aspect of the study is a role of orientation toward sport and self-sponsor image congruity in sponsorship effectiveness. It is expected that the findings enable sport marketers to develop effective communication techniques or marketing strategies using appropriate channels to reach their prospective consumer. In addition, the findings contribute to the existing body of identification and sponsorship research by applying to the sport context. The implications and practices will be discussed and future research directions are provided in this presentation.