Attitudes Toward Bandwagon Sponsors

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The purpose of this paper was to examine sport consumers’ attitudes toward bandwagon sponsors. More specifically, an attempt was made through an experiment to understand whether sport consumers perceived the image of a sponsoring company to be favorable when entering into a sponsorship contract after the major success of a sport team.

Corporate sponsorship has increased tremendously in the past several decades (Cornwell, 2008). Spending on corporate sponsorship continued to grow worldwide reaching $46.3 billion dollars in 2010 (IEG, 2011). With the increased spending on sponsorships, both practitioners and academicians have turned their focus to the effectiveness of this specific medium. Much attention has been dedicated to sport consumers’ brand awareness, brand attitude, and purchase intentions of corporate sponsors’ products. However, there is a dearth of research with respect to the managerial decision-making aspects of sponsorships (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). According to Meenaghan (2001), the timing of entry into a sponsorship contract with a sport organization is one of the important managerial decisions for companies as fans of a team generally perceive early sponsors to be more committed, while late arriving sponsors (usually after the major success of a team) are deemed as bandwagon sponsors only seeking commercial interest. In the past, Cornwell, Pruitt, and Clark (2005) investigated the effects of announcements of official sponsorship contracts with US major leagues on stock prices. No study to our knowledge has explored the effects of entry timing on sport consumers’ attitudes. Therefore, it is the purpose of this research to investigate sport consumers’ attitudes toward these bandwagon sponsors.

Within the sponsorship effectiveness literature, attitude has been one of the most often utilized constructs. According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), attitude is “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (p.1). Previous studies have used brand attitudes, attitude toward sponsorship, and goodwill among others to understand sponsorship effectiveness (e.g., Dees, Hall, Tsuji, & Bennett, 2010; Lee, Sandler, & Shani, 1997; Speed & Thompson, 2000). These constructs have been used as previous studies have successfully linked them to future purchase intentions of sponsors’ products (e.g., Dees et al., 2010; Gwinner & Bennett, 2008; Madrigal, 2001).

According to Meenaghan (2001), sponsors receive goodwill through sponsoring teams and events. That is, sport fans view sponsors as those companies helping their favorite team. However, goodwill is contingent upon the overall behavior of sponsors, level of commitment, level of sports sponsored, and entry and exit of timing of sponsorship contracts (Meenaghan, 2001). Of particular interest in the study is the entry timing of the sponsor. In this instance, fans may negatively view sponsors who enter into a contract after the major success of a sport team as opposed to sponsors who support the team prior to the success.

When companies engage in sponsorship activities with sport organizations, they usually make an official announcement using press releases. Usually, these press releases include the information of the sport organization or the sport event, relevant contractual information, and often articulate the relationship between the sponsor and the sponsee. Cornwell et al. (2006) had shown that articulation of the relationship between sponsor and event is crucial in increasing the level of awareness of consumers. In other words, sport fans need information on the linkage between the sponsor and the sponsee to formulate a lasting impression of the relationship. It is logical to think that an announcement of the sponsorship contracts would then eventually lead to form perceptions and attitudes toward the sponsor and sponsee. Based on this literature, the following hypotheses were formed:

1. Sport consumers’ attitudes toward the press release of early sponsors will be significantly higher when compared to the press release of bandwagon sponsors.

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2. Sport consumers’ attitudes toward the promotional flyer of early sponsors will be significantly higher when compared to the promotional flyer of bandwagon sponsors.

3. Sport consumers’ attitudes toward the press release of early sponsors will be significantly higher than the promotional flyer of early sponsors.

4. Sport consumers’ attitudes toward the press release of bandwagon sponsors will be significantly lower than the promotional flyer of bandwagon sponsors.

Sample for the study (n = 245) were university students in southern Japan. Students were recruited to participate in the study in exchange for extra credit. A majority of the sample was female (51%) with an average age of 20.71 (SD = 3.12) years. Upon agreement of participation, students were randomly handed one of four booklets containing sponsorship information and a set of questions. The study took place one week following the FIFA Women’s World Cup Final where the Japanese women’s team took home the gold medal.

A two by two factorial design was used to examine the effect of early sponsors (signed prior to the team’s major success) as compared to bandwagon sponsors (signed after the team’s major success) and the effect of a press release (with articulation of sponsor timing of entry) as compared to a promotional flyer (without articulation of sponsor timing of entry). First manipulation was between an early sponsor of the Nadeshiko League (Japanese Women’s Soccer League) and a fictitious bandwagon sponsor. The second manipulation was between a press release that articulated the timing of entry of league sponsors and a promotional flyer that did not articulate the timing of entry of league sponsors. The press release contained information with respect to the recent major success of the Japanese women’s soccer league players, the sponsor’s relationship with the Nadeshiko League, as well as the sales promotion that was to be carried out within a day of the experiment. The promotional flyer did not contain any information with regard to players’ success or the timing of entry of the sponsor’s contract, but promoted a discounted product from a league sponsor. Results of the study as well as conclusions, implications for sport managers, and future research will be discussed.