How Sponsorship Works: A Meta-Analytic Review

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Abstract 2012-225

Marketing

Friday, May 25, 2012

20-minute oral presentation (including questions)

(Visions Lounge)

Sponsorship is a vital part of funding for a wide range of sport organizations and an essential marketing communication vehicle for firms across various industries. Commensurate with its importance in practice, sponsorship has been the focus of great academic interest. As the amount of research grew, so did the need for accounts that integrate the knowledge gained from the past research to better understand how sponsorship works. A few narrative reviews attempted to consolidate the research findings in this area (Cornwell, 2008; Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005; Meenaghan, 2001; Gwinner, 1997; Smith, 2004). Despite the important contributions of these earlier works, there is still a lack of a research systematically synthesizing and quantitatively integrating results in this research stream. To fill this void, we conduct a research synthesis using meta-analysis. Our research has three main objectives: (1) to systematically summarize, update, and expand theoretical explanations of how sponsorship works; (2) to provide an overall assessment of empirical support for these theoretical accounts; and (3) to attempt to resolve disagreements in the literature and identify the previous research limitations and opportunities for the future research.

Attribution theory, matching-congruence, identification, involvement, and mere exposure theory emerge from the literature review as primary accounts of the sponsorship process and we meta-analytically examined these theoretical explanations through the following procedures. We used multiple methods to develop the database for the research synthesis: (1) computerized databases search using the search terms in various combinations (i.e., sponsorship, sponsorship effect, endorsement, advertising, promotion, and marketing); (2) citation-index search using Social Sciences Citation Index; (3) manual search of marketing journals that are likely to contain research on sponsorship (4) unpublished dissertations and theses search through ProQuest Dissertation and Theses; (5) search of conference papers via the listings of conference proceedings; (6) contact with well-established sponsorship researchers to obtain their working papers and forthcoming articles; and (7) ancestry methods, reviewing reference lists of the retrieved studies for additional studies.

The search produced a total of 1,233 studies covering the period from 1980 to up to July, 2011. We used the following criteria when designating studies for inclusion. First, the studies had to quantify one or more association between antecedents and outcomes in the proposed theories. Second, we selected only studies that were written in English. Third, we systematically screened for overt and covert duplicate studies to remove bias due to duplicate study effects. Next, we included both published and unpublished studies to reduce potential effects of publication bias. Finally, the meta-analysis included studies that contained sufficient statistical data to calculate an estimate of effect size. In total, 147 studies met the criteria for inclusion. Two authors and one independent coder who were not familiar with the study completed the coding. Initial intercoder agreement among three coders was 89%. The coders examined and discussed discrepancies until reaching consensus. For studies that reported multiple effect size estimates of the same relationship, we used the average to avoid statistical interdependence. Altogether, the present meta-analysis integrated 28 effect sizes based on 44,133 participants drawn from 147 studies. The effect size metric chosen for the analysis was the correlation coefficient r. Before these correlations were synthesized, we used Hunter and Schmidt's (2004) methods to correct the correlations (r) from each study for attenuation due to measurement error and artificial dichotomization at the level of individual effect size estimate. We used random-effects model to test the overall effect sizes across studies. We examined the homogeneity of an effect with Q statistic. To estimate the publication bias or file drawer problem, we used classic fail-safe N (Rosenthal, 1979), and funnel plot.

Regarding matching-congruence theory, the meta-analytic results support the positive influence of fit between the sponsor and the event or activity on the various sponsorship outcomes (awareness, $r = .33$; attitude, $r = .37$; image
transfer, \( r = .41 \); behavioral intention, \( r = .39 \). Fit was also closely related with the various variables of sponsorship communication process (identification, \( r = .36 \); involvement, \( r = .34 \); motivation, \( r = .39 \)). For attribution theory, consumer attributions about the motivation for sponsorship had significant impact on sponsorship outcomes (attitude, \( r = .44 \); behavioral intention, \( r = .43 \)). Motivation also had significant positive relationship with identification (\( r = .30 \)) and fit (\( r = .39 \)). With regard to identification theory, results provide evidence for the positive relationship between identification and sponsorship outcomes (awareness, \( r = .10 \); attitude, \( r = .28 \); image, \( r = .34 \); behavioral intention, \( r = .35 \)). Many variables of sponsorship communication process were significantly linked with identification (involvement, \( r = .20 \); prestige, \( r = .38 \); fit, \( r = .36 \); relationship quality, \( r = .70 \)). Regarding exposure theory, mere exposure had significant influence on sponsorship outcomes (awareness, \( r = .36 \); attitude, \( r = .14 \); image transfer, \( r = .41 \); image, \( r = .34 \); behavioral intention, \( r = .09 \)). For involvement theory, the results provide evidence for the impact of involvement on sponsorship outcomes (awareness, \( r = .21 \); attitude, \( r = .18 \); behavioral intention, \( r = .42 \)). Involvement had a significant relationship with fit (\( r = .34 \)) and identification (\( r = .20 \)) as well. In addition to the pairwise analyses, we conducted meta-analytic structural equation modeling (MASEM) to examine hypothesized research model and the results will be presented.

One main contribution of this study lies in providing a systematic review accumulating knowledge from the previous research on sponsorship. In addition, the meta-analysis reported in this study provides a quantitative integration of the empirical findings about various theoretical accounts of the sponsorship communication process. We examined relationships between the focal variables of primary sponsorship communication process theories and offer quantitative evidence for generalizability of the relationship. Finally, our results also provide concrete information for sponsors who strive to identify factors influencing effectiveness of sponsorship and improve their investment results. Several limitations common to meta-analytic reviews are also present in our research. For example, our meta-analysis could be conducted only for the relationships with the sufficient number of empirical observations. Goodwill and image transfer have been widely discussed in the literature, but empirical examinations of the concepts have been limited. Therefore, it would be fruitful to empirically investigate those concepts in the future research.