

Mediating Effects Of Self-Sponsor Image Congruence on Relationship Between Team Identification and Sponsor Identification

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In today's cluttered marketplace, brand managers are increasingly using sport sponsorships as a means of reaching their target audience (Musante, 2006). While one of the primary goals of sport sponsorship is brand exposure to a target audience, brand managers also believe that sport association is an effective way to establish, strength, or change the sponsor's image (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Meenaghan, 1991). In sponsorship studies, researchers have focused on explaining the process by which sport sponsorship leads to the enhancement of the sponsor's image and consumer identification with sponsor (Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

In the sport management field, many studies based on social identification theory have revealed that the stronger team identification, the more likely the individual would identify with sponsor associated with the team. Gwinner and Eaton (1999) showed that team identification affects spectator behavior such as support for team sponsors, which is transferred to an individual's psychological attachment to its sponsor. This transfer of team identification to identification with sponsor becomes evident in empirical studies (Pritchard & Negro, 2001). Therefore, sponsorship activities bring about a transfer of team identification to identification with sponsor.

According to self-congruity theory, human needs for self-consistency and self-esteem motivate individuals to compare themselves to brands and determine their consistency with the brand image (Sirgy et al., 1997). Based on the theory, the literature reveals that self-congruity with sponsor is a key influencer of promotion effectiveness; and suggested that increased image fit leads to greater processing of information about sponsor, and that greater knowledge about the connection between self and sponsor boosts the image transfer from team to sponsor (see Grohs & Reisinger, 2005). In a sense, it is anticipated that self-sponsor image congruity will play a significant role in transferring team identification (team ID) to sponsor identification (sponsor ID).

Despite the growing interest in the role of self-image congruity in sponsorship effectiveness, little empirical research has been conducted to explore the mediating effects of self-sponsor image congruence on relationship between team ID and sponsor ID. Accordingly, based on social identity theory, image congruence, and attitude theory, the following hypotheses were developed: 1) team ID positively affect both sponsor ID and sponsor attitude; 2) team ID indirectly affect sponsor ID via self-sponsor image congruence; 3) sponsor ID positively affect sponsor attitude. The purpose of this study is twofold: first to develop and test a theoretical research model delineating the relationships between team ID, sponsor attitudes, sponsor ID and self-sponsor image fit; and second to examine if self-sponsor image congruence mediates the relationship between team ID and sponsor ID.

For the purpose of this study, home games for 10 teams belonging to Korea's professional soccer league (a.k.a., K-league) were selected as prime sites to reach loyal fans. During the 2010 K-League season, data collection was conducted by five trained graduate students. A total of nine hundred and thirty-five (935) subjects were recruited using a convenience sampling technique. Of the 935 participants, 68.8% (n = 643) were male and 31.1% (n = 291) were female. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 77 years old with 34.6 yrs being the average age.

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 current study implemented a three-stage procedure: 1) a full measurement mode test, 2) structural regression model test, and 3) the test of the mediating effect of self-sponsor image congruence on the relationship between team ID and sponsor ID. The Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS) 18 was used to test the aforementioned analysis.

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Based on the overall results of the confirmatory factor analysis, it is deemed that the measurement model is acceptable with good model fit [χ^2 (113) = 361.187, $p = .000$; CFI = .986; TLI = .983; SRMR = .020; RMSEA = .048] and there is strong evidence of reliability and validity in the measurement scale the item loadings ranged from .785 to .957. Construct reliabilities and average variance extracted for each latent variable exceeded the recommended standard of .70 and .50 respectively (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The results of the proposed structural model test indicated a good model fit with χ^2 (113) = 361.187, $p = .000$; CFI = .986; TLI = .983; SRMR = .020; RMSEA = .048.

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 paths between team ID and sponsor ID (path coefficient = .05, CR = 1.861, $p = .063$) and between team ID and sponsor attitude (path coefficient = .01, CR = 0.281, $p = .779$). Following Holmbeck's (1997) suggestions, three steps were taken to examine mediating effects of self-sponsor image congruity on relationship between team ID and sponsor ID: 1) direct-effect model test, 2) a fully-mediated structural model, 3) a partially-mediated structured model. A Chi-squared difference test between models was conducted.

In the direct-effect model, a path between team ID and sponsor ID is significant (path coefficient = .12, CR = 3.404, $p = .000$). In the fully-mediated structural model, the results of path analysis showed significant relationship between team ID and self-sponsor image congruity; and between self-sponsor image congruity and sponsor ID (path coefficient = .10, CR = 2.963, $p = .003$; and path coefficient = .71, CR = 23.648, $p = .000$ respectively). Last, the results of the partially-mediated structured model test indicated that team ID is not significantly associated with sponsor ID. A Chi-squared difference test between the fully-mediated model and the partially-mediated model revealed no significant differences ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.47$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). This confirmed that result indicates that self-sponsor image congruity fully mediates the relationship between team ID and sponsor ID.

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 self-sponsor image congruity in transferring team ID to sponsor ID. It is expected that the findings enable corporate 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 contexts. The implications and practices will be discussed and future research directions are provided in this presentation.