The Impact of Team Outcomes, Brand Connection, and Game Attendance on the Corporate Image of a Stadium Naming Rights Sponsor

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Introduction

The impact of sport sponsorship on perceptions of the sponsor is a well-established line of research. For instance, there is a wealth of literature that has examined fan perceptions including, but not limited to image transfer, purchase intentions, attitudes, credibility, and corporate social responsibility of the sponsor (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Lee, 2004; Verity, 2002). In the case of stadium naming rights sponsors, however, the research available is underwhelming. And while naming rights are a form sponsorship, the large dollar amounts, longer contracts, and unique circumstances related to venue management require further inquiry among sport management researchers.

The purpose of the current study was to examine the impact of primary tenet outcomes, game attendance, and team connection on the corporate image, reputation, and credibility of a stadium naming rights sponsor. A unique context (MetLife Stadium in the New York City area) was selected for this study. In this case, the stadium under examination had two high profile primary tenets that experienced vastly different outcomes (success/failure) for the season under investigation. The New York Giants (NYG) won the Super Bowl while the New York Jets (NYJ) finished 8-8 and did not make the playoffs despite making the conference championship game the previous two seasons. Thus, NYG season was considered a success and NYJ season a failure.

Desired sponsorship outcomes come in many forms as motivations for becoming a sponsor vary greatly between organizations. However, the image, awareness, and identity of corporate sponsors have been well-regarded as important effects (Meenaghan, 1991). The current study, in particular, looked to corporate image as the standard for sponsorship impact (Alexandris, Tsaousi, & James, 2007; Johnson & Zinkhan, 1990). In addition, influential factors of corporate image in the form of company reputation and credibility were included as noteworthy outcomes of stadium rights sponsorships (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Weiss, Anderson, & MacInnis, 1999).

Method

Two hundred twenty-five undergraduate students from a large urban university in the New York City area were surveyed at the conclusion of the 2011-12 NFL season, with 183 fully completing the survey. Fifty-six percent of the respondents indicated that they preferred the NYG over the NYJ, and 44% of the respondents indicated having attended a game at MetLife Stadium during the most recent NFL season. Three dependent variables were identified to measure participants’ attitudes toward MetLife as a sponsor, namely corporate image, credibility, and reputation. Scales for these variables were adapted from the work of Johnson and Zinkhan (1990), Keller and Aaker (1992), and Weiss et al. (1999), respectively. Three variables were selected as subject variables including self-brand connection, game attendance, and preferred team. Self-brand connection was measured using the seven-item scale put forth by Escalas and Bettman (2003).

Results & Discussion

A full-factorial 2 (brand connection) X 2 (attendance) X 2 (preferred team) between-subjects multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted using the three dependent variables. The results yielded no significant differences based on team preference and brand connection; however, attendance was found to be a significant main effect factor with F(3, 179) =3.748, p=.012. Post-hoc tests revealed that fans who had attended at least one game at MetLife Stadium held more positive attitudes toward MetLife’s corporate image, credibility, and reputation. The interaction effects, however, between brand connection, team preference, and attendance were not significant.
In this study, the purpose was to determine the effect that team outcomes when combined with measures of involvement and connection to the sport brand, would have on cognitive outcomes of sponsorship (Cornwell et al., 2005), operationalized here as corporate image, reputation, and credibility. In general, it is expected that the image of a sponsee will be transferred to a sponsor, but findings in the literature tend to be mixed (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Walraven, Koning, & van Bottenburg, 2012). The results here lend support to the counterargument that positive brand transfer does not occur from sponsee to sponsor. However, the attendance results support the notion that involvement with the sport brand will have a positive effect on conative processing of sponsorships (Alexandris et al., 2007; Gwinner & Bennett, 2008; Walraven et al., 2012). In this presentation, the authors will discuss several important theoretical and practical implications associated with the findings, as well as the study’s limitations, and offer suggestions for future research.

References


