Consumer Attitude Toward Corporate Sponsors: A Comparison Between Professional vs. Amateur Sport Event Sponsorship

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In the (sport) marketing and advertising literature, numerous researchers have provided empirical support for the positive influence of sponsorship for corporate sponsors including (1) increased brand exposure/recall/awareness (Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005; Javalgi, Taylor, Gorss, & Lampman, 1994; Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001), (2) the image enhancement of sponsors and their products (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Javalgi et al, 1994), and (3) increased positive attitudes towards the corporate sponsor (Nicholls, Roslow, & Laskey, 1994; Ruth & Simonin, 2003; Speed & Thompson, 2000). When considering consumers’ positive responses toward sponsors is a main outcome of sponsorship involvement, it is a key concern for corporate partners and sport properties to understand specific attributes that help develop positive consumer attitudes in their sponsorship decision process. However, few studies systematically examined the influence of sponsor attributes in predicting consumers’ attitude to date. In particular, the differential impact of sponsor characteristics (i.e., prominence, sincerity and ubiquity; Speed & Thompson, 2000) on consumers’ attitudes toward the sponsors in different event contexts is lacking.

According to the theory of selective attention (Mackintosh, 1975), consumers selectively pay attention to a particular attribute of an object when the attribute can uniquely explain or provide sufficient information about the object (Mackintosh, 1975). Then, the increased attention to a specific product among alternatives increase the likelihood choose the product (Janiszewski et al., 2013). Additionally, consumers’ sponsor evaluation mechanisms can vary depending on the event types (e.g., international vs. local events; professional vs. amateur sport events).

Against this background, the purposes of the present study were to: (1) identify key attributes of sponsors that positively influence consumers’ attitudes toward sponsors; and (2) to examine the moderator role of sport event type. To pursue the objectives of the study, the authors adapted Speed and Thompson’s (2000) sport sponsorship framework, particularly, consumers’ perceptions toward the sponsor (prominence, ubiquity, and sincerity) and congruence with the sponsored sports property and their relationship with consumer attitude. The primary goal of sponsorship involvement is to create a positive consumer attitude toward a sponsor and/or its brand. Therefore, consumer attitude was selected as a main dependent variable. The researchers developed and tested following hypotheses:

H1: Consumers’ perceived prominence of the sponsor in the market is positively related to their attitude toward the sponsor.
H2: Consumers’ perceived ubiquity of the sponsor is positively related to their attitude toward the sponsor.
H3: Consumers’ perceived sincerity of the sponsor is positively related to their attitude toward the sponsor.
H4: Consumers’ perceived congruence between the sponsor and the sponsored property is positively related to their attitudes toward the sponsor.
H5: Event type plays a moderating role in the relationship between consumers’ perceptions of the sponsors and their attitudes toward the sponsors.

We recruited study samples from spectators of two distinct sport events; (a) FIFA World Cup – international and professional sport (n = 202) and (b) a NCAA Division Football Bowl Subdivision university sport event (n = 319). The researchers analysed the data using R 2.15.2 (R Development Core Team, 2012). The measurement model showed a good fit: χ²/df = 146.01/67 = 2.18; CFI = .98; TLI = .98; RMSEA = .05; SRMR = .03. Reliability (Reliability coefficients, AVEs) and validity measures (factor loadings and correlations, AVE values) support that the measurement scale is psychometrically sound. The researchers conducted invariance test and the results of a series of
Hierarchically nested multiple-group CFA indicate that strong factorial invariance holds with the study samples. To estimate the treatment (i.e., average treatment effect; ATE based on the latent mean difference) and moderating effects of sponsored event type between sponsor characteristics and attitude, we fitted the multiple-group SEM. The overall goodness-of-fit statistics showed an acceptable fit of the data ($\chi^2 = 279.17$, $df = 134$, $\chi^2/df = 2.08$, $CFI = .97$, $TLI = .95$, $RMSEA = .07$, $SRMR = .04$).

The results showed that the differences between the latent means of Ubiquity ($-.15$, $p = .11$) and Sincerity ($-.13$, $p = .24$) were not statistically significant. However, for the FIFA group the latent means for Prominence ($-.46$, $p < .001$), Fit ($-.34$, $p = .01$), and Attitude toward Sponsor ($-.38$, $p < .001$) were significantly lower than the latent means of college group. In terms of hypothesis testing, for college group, Prominence ($\beta = .60$, $p < .001$) and Sincerity ($\beta = .45$, $p = .001$) of the sponsor significantly influenced their Attitude toward Sponsor, while Ubiquity ($\beta = .20$, $p = .09$) and Fit ($\beta = -.31$, $p = .11$) were not significant. For the FIFA group, Prominence ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$) of the sponsor significantly influenced their Attitude toward Sponsor, while Ubiquity ($\beta = .02$, $p = .86$), Sincerity ($\beta = .11$, $p = .31$), and Fit ($\beta = .15$, $p = .38$) were not significant.

In sum, the current study found that consumers selectively pay attention to certain characteristics of sponsor, which ultimately influence their attitude formation. Therefore, this result supports primary assumption of selective attention model (Janiszewski et al., 2013; Mackintosh, 1975). This study sheds light on sponsorship study, particularly the importance of examining sponsor characteristics in predicting consumer attitude and the event type as a moderating variable. Detailed theoretical and managerial implications will be discussed in the presentation.