The Influence of Product Categories On Sponsorship Effect: Sponsors' Product By FCB

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As an effective communication method, sponsorship has been widely used by corporations to reach to consumer audience (IEG, 2012). As the amount of dollar invested in sponsorship increases, so does the number of sponsorship research. One of the popular topics in sponsorship research is examining influencing factors that drive sponsorship results (Meenaghan, 2001), which includes congruency between sponsors and events (Cornwell, Humphreys, Maguire, Weeks & Tellegen, 2006), individuals’ identification with an event (Capella, 2002), leveraging activities related to sponsorship (Davies & Tsiantas, 2008) and role of articulation (Nickell, Cornwell, & Johnson, 2011). However, little attention has been given to the influence of sponsors’ product categories on sponsorship effect.

In advertising, how people behave, think, and feel toward different kinds of products and services has been examined to better understand the mechanism of advertising (Vaughn, 1980). These factors also need to be considered in the context of the sponsorship considering sponsorship is a communication vehicle much like advertising. Therefore, this study is aimed to conceptualize a framework which explains how sponsors’ product category would influence sponsorship effect in terms of consumers’ attitude and purchase intention.

To classify sponsors’ product, Vaughn’s FCB grid was used, which has two dimensions of product involvement (high and low) and information processing (thinking/feeling). Product involvement refers to the degree to which an individual is involved with a given product on a regular basis (Zaichkowsky, 1985) and products can be classified as high- or low-involvement depending on factors such as price, importance to self, the level of risk involved in the product’s purchase, and so forth (Dholakia, 1997). It is hypothesized that the sponsorship effect for high involvement products would be less than that of low involvement products, because consumers are known to go through more thorough information search and evaluation for high involvement products.

As the other dimension of FCB grid, “information process” means different information process for an array of products. Vaughn (1980) argues that some products predominantly require “thinking” while others require “feeling” in their information processes. Considering that sports is the subjects of commitment and emotional attachment (Madrigal, 2001), it can be assumed that the attached emotion is likely to transferred to the sponsors whose product categories would require feeling-related information processing. Therefore, products which categorized into dimension of feeling rather than thinking would have better sponsorship effect in terms of consumers’ attitude and purchase intention.

The proposed conceptual model also assumes that the influence of product category on sponsorship effect will be moderated by individual’s identification with the event as much literature evidenced the influence of fan identification on various behavioral reactions of fans (Capella, 2002; Wann & Branscomb, 1993).

A pilot study was conducted to select four potential product categories which fit each dimension of FCB grid (i.e., thinking-low involvement, thinking-high involvement, feeling-high involvement, and thinking-low involvement). Eight potential product categories of likely sponsors were pre-selected and their product involvement and thinking/feeling levels were measured by FCB classification question (Vaughn, 1986) by 143 college students at major division I school. Mean scores were calculated for each product, and four product categories were selected for each quadrant of FCB grid. Two T-tests were conducted for the selected between high-low involvement products and thinking-feeling products and the results shows that there are significant group differences.

Based on the product selected in the pilot test, the main study will be conducted at a sporting event at the mid-Atlantic region. The questionnaire will be composed of four sections: 1) FCB classification questions, 2) attitude and purchase intention of each selected product, 3) identification level with the event and general attitude toward the sponsors, and 4) demographic questions.

This proposed framework contributes to the literature of sponsorship as it addresses the influence of product category of sponsors, a seemingly influencing factor on sponsorship, in the context of sport sponsorship. As
participating sponsors of sporting events and teams get more and more diversified, this framework would provide relevant information to the decision makers of sponsorship.