Analyzing Sponsorship Effectiveness in Sport: A Cross-National Study

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While many researchers have attempted to measure sponsorship’s return on investment (Jea Ko, Kim, & Clausen 2008; Olson, 2010; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009), little research exists gauging its cross-national effectiveness. Thus, in order to have a more complete understanding of consumer behavior, and further improve consumer research, the validity of consumer behavior studies developed in one country should be assessed in other countries as well (Craig & Douglas, 2005; Salciuviene, Auruskeviciene, & Lydeka, 2005; Wong, Rindfleisch, & Burroughs, 2003). This study served two purposes: (1) to test the cross-national application of five important sponsorship outcomes (i.e., sponsorship awareness, sponsorship fit, attitude toward the sponsor, gratitude and purchase intentions), and (2) examine what sponsorship effects (i.e., sponsorship awareness, sponsorship fit, attitude toward the sponsor, and gratitude) would influence purchase intentions for a jersey sponsor at a cross-national level.

Sponsorship awareness may be country-dependent and therefore, less useful in a global environment (Amis & Cornwell, 2005). However, sponsorship awareness has not been empirically examined in cross-national studies. The interdependent self-concept is common in many non-Western cultures (e.g., India) and is characterized by emphasizing goals of a group to which one belongs, attention to fitting in with others, and appreciation of commonalities with others (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, the sponsorship fit issue is an important matter that needs to be accounted for when companies evaluate sponsorship arrangements that span international borders. However, little is known about sponsorship fit and its relationship with purchase intentions at a cross-national level. The attitudes toward a sponsor can also vary across countries. For example, a potential area of concern is jersey sponsorship in North America. Some fans consider jersey sponsorship on game uniforms “untouchable territory” that should remain free from financial exploitation (Lukas, 2009). Kim, Smith and James (2010) found that feelings of gratitude significantly predicted consumers’ intent to purchase the sponsor’s products in the U.S. The location of Kim et al. (2010) study, the U.S., may have been impacted by national culture, as trust, which is linked to gratitude (Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff, & Kardes, 2009), has been found to be influenced by national culture (Doney, Cannon, & Mullen, 1998). Considering culture’s ability to form personality, which in turn modifies consumer behavior (Samli, 1994), and bearing in mind that most aspects of consumer behavior are culture-bound (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011), culture may impact purchase intentions in distinct areas differently. For example, previous research has indicated Singaporeans had higher purchase intentions than Americans, while no disparities were found between Thais and Americans (Pornpitakpan & Green, 2007).

To measure sponsorship effectiveness, a web-based survey was utilized where participants rated the effectiveness of Chelsea Football Club’s (CFC) jersey sponsorship. The survey remained active for six weeks, and resulted in 355 usable surveys, which were collected from American (n = 121), British (n = 103) and Indian (n = 131) CFC fans. The online questionnaire was conducted in English, due to it being the most commonly used language in the selected countries. The online survey included items adopted from previous literature to measure five areas: sponsorship awareness (Walsh, Kim, & Ross, 2008), sponsorship fit (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008), attitude toward the sponsors (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008), gratitude (Palmatier et al., 2009), and purchase intentions (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008; Hong, 2011). The items were arranged in the same order for all three countries and contained identical designs. The researchers used the multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFAs) with covariates (MIMIC) model, as MGCFAs is the leading approach to inspect cross-national measurement invariance (Behling & Law, 2000; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998), and because MIMIC models have smaller sample size requirements (Brown, 2006; Woods, 2009), and therefore, better suited the current study’s data set. The MGCFAs with MIMIC modeling was first tested by establishing a feasible CFA using the full sample. Next, the covariates of each country were added to
inspect their direct effects on latent factors and observable variables (Brown, 2006). The inclusion of direct effects from countries resulted in an improved final MIMIC model fit, $\chi^2(101) = 314.321$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df=3.112$, TLI = .92, CFI = .94, GFI = .91, RMSEA = .077. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze demographic characteristics and correct sponsor recognition rates. The researchers also utilized chi-square analysis to determine whether differences existed between countries and awareness levels. One-way ANOVA tests were performed to determine if significant differences existed for respondents between countries and their sponsorship fit, attitude toward the sponsor, gratitude, and purchase intentions. Furthermore, regression analyses were employed in order to assess what sponsorship effects would explain purchase intentions for each country.

A unique finding of this study is that the attitude toward the sponsor was assessed to be a true global outcome of the sponsorship process in that no differences among the countries’ respondents were discovered in terms of attitude toward the CFC jersey sponsor. In addition, attitude toward the sponsor was the strongest predictor of purchase intentions across all three countries. The findings suggest that attitude toward the sponsor is impervious to Hofstede’s (1991) cultural dimensions, most likely because highly identified sport fans were found to view other fans of the same team as special, and bonded with one another (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Therefore, sport fans from individualistic countries, which are characterized by loose ties among people (Hofstede, 1991), will likely be disposed to neutralize this “shortcoming” of loose ties. Furthermore, the favorable attitudes highly identified sport fans have toward their peers will extend to team sponsors (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Thus, there are special circumstances related to sport that international corporations should be aware of when they attempt to build more effective international sponsorship projects. Another significant contribution of this study is the indication that sponsorship awareness, sponsorship fit, gratitude and, most importantly, purchase intentions were not applicable at a cross-national level. The researchers noticed higher values of purchase intentions only among Indian and American fans. Moreover, purchase intentions were influenced by different sponsorship outcomes across countries. This study demonstrates, for the first time, that previous purchase behavior findings are similar in sponsorship research. The results of this study indicate that international companies should be cautious when attempting to use standardized international sponsorship strategies. While this research has provided important insights to the continued understanding of sport sponsorship, it also has some limitations. For example, this study looked only at an international organization, and as such, the results would not apply to small or locally based companies.