Employee Related Sponsorship Outcomes

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Today sponsorship is a frequently applied marketing tool among corporations and academic interest on sponsorship has increased substantially as a result. Much of this research is heavily focused on the impact of sponsorship on consumers’ attitudes toward the sponsor (e.g. Biscaia & Correia, 2013; Speed & Thompson, 2000), intentions to purchase sponsors’ products (e.g. Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012; Chavanat, Martinent, & Ferrand, 2009) and perceptions of sponsor image (e.g. Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). However, sponsorship has the ability to target multiple audiences and serve multiple purposes at the same. Although internal marketing has been regarded as one of the objectives of sponsorship, the impact of sponsorship on employees of sponsoring firm has yet to receive an elaborate examination (Farrelly & Greyser, 2012). Although there have been calls to investigate sponsorship’s impact within the sponsoring firm (Cunningham, Cornwell, & Coote, 2009; Farrelly & Greyser, 2007), such research has been limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impacts of sponsorship on employees’ commitment and identification with their company. More specifically, the current research incorporates constructs of perceived fit between the sponsor and the sponsee, employees’ identification with the sponsored athletic program, perceived sincerity of the sponsoring firm, and perceived benefits to the sponsor firm as precursors of employees’ commitment and identification with company.

Social identity theory suggests that individuals form social identities to distinguish themselves from others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and they can possess a repertoire of social identities which are not temporally exclusive (Stryker & Burke, 2000). For example, they could identify themselves as employees of an organization and fans of a sport program. Further, one’s identification with the sponsored entity is positively associated with favorable responses toward the sponsoring organizations (e.g. Gwinner & Bennett, 2008; Madrigal, 2001). Additionally, highly identified fans are more likely to believe that the sponsor’s motives for supporting the sponsored property are sincere (Kim, Ko, & James, 2011; Olson, 2010). Given the tenets of social identity theory, we anticipate that employees’ identification with the sponsored athletic program will impact their responses to the sponsorship in the following way:

H1: Identification with the athletics program will be positively related to perceived sincerity of the sponsoring organization.

Additionally, congruence between the sponsor and the sponsee has been investigated in sponsorship studies and it is typically a significant predictor of positive consumer responses (e.g. Close & Lacey, 2013; Lee & Cho, 2009). That is, when consumers perceive a fit between the sponsoring company and the sponsored entity, they tend to evaluate the sponsorship more positively. Thus we predict:

H2: Perceived congruence between the sponsoring company and the athletics program will be positively related to perceived sincerity of the sponsoring organization.

Organizations invest in sponsorship in order to achieve certain marketing goals. As a result, it seems plausible that employees would like to see some benefits to their organization from the sponsorship engagement. If employees are also highly identified fans of the sponsored athletic program, according to social identity theory, they may be more likely to perceive the positive benefits of the sponsorship (i.e., have biased attributions, Madrigal & Chen, 2008) than those who are less identified fans.
H3: Identification with the sponsored athletic program will be positively related to perceived benefits of the sponsorship.

Attractive corporate associations lead employees to strongly identify themselves with their organization (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). For employees who are identified with the sponsored athletic program, their organization’s support to the athletic program through sponsorship can be a source of favorable association. More specifically perceiving the sponsor firm’s motives to be sincere and believing in the benefits of the sponsorship are expected to have a positive impact on employee-company relationship.

H4: Perceived benefits of the sponsorship will be positively related to employee-company identification
H5: Perceived sincerity of the sponsor organization will be positively related to employee-company identification

Finally, employee-company identification is a significant predictor of organizational commitment (e.g. Kim, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2010; Saks, 2006). We therefore hypothesize:

H6: Employee-company identification will be positively related to employees’ commitment

Questionnaires will be sent to employees of sponsors of an athletic department in the Northeastern United States. Perceived fit (4 items) and sincerity (4 items) scales will be adapted from the scales developed by Speed & Thompson (2000). Identification with the athletic department will be measured by the scales developed by Robinson et al. (2004). Employee-company identification (3 items) and commitment (4 items) will be assessed with Kim et al.’s (2010) scale. The benefits scale will be developed for this study. A CFA will be utilized to assess the psychometric properties of scale items and the proposed model will be tested with SEM. The expected findings will extend the scarce literature on sponsorship’s impact on employees. Results of this study may reveal precursors of positive employee response to sponsorship and shed light on a disregarded aspect of sponsorship. Other implications to theory and practice will be fully discussed in the presentation.