Messaging Effects on Donation Intention: The Case of a Non-Profit Sponsorship

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Marketing - Consumer Behavior (Other)  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
Abstract 2018-192  
Friday, June 8, 2018  
11:15 AM  
Room: Sable B

Introduction/Purpose
The size of the non-profit business sector has dramatically increased over the past 70 years. In the 1960s, there were approximately 300,000 non-profits in the United States (U.S.) (Jones, 2006); while today, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) recognizes over 1.8 million organizations as non-profit or tax-exempt (GuideStar, 2017). The majority of these organizations rely heavily on charitable contributions and government grants to subsidize their operating costs (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2015). As individual and government budgets tighten, intense competition to obtain revenues and remain viable in this crowded space has become increasingly commonplace. To achieve this objective, non-profits have adopted strategies similar to those of for-profit corporations. The most notable has been engaging in corporate sponsorships of sporting events. Sponsorship enables the non-profit to benefit from the spillover effects of the sport event (Chanavat, Martinent, & Ferrand, 2010). Through targeted message appeals (i.e., heartfelt images and evocative narratives), these spillover effects can increase event interest, drive revenue, and stimulate donations to the non-profit (Kim et al., 2015).

Previous studies have investigated factors influencing non-profit donations (Faircloth, 2005; Iyer, Kashyap, & Diamond, 2012), the influence of persuasive appeals on donations (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Griffin, Babin, Attaway, & Darden, 1993; Kemp, Kennett-Hensel, & Kees, 2013), and the influence of appeals on attitudes towards sport events (Jang, Ko, & Stepchenkova, 2014). However, to the researchers’ knowledge, no study has examined the effects of message appeals on donations for a non-profit sport event sponsor. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine:

RQ1: What types of sponsorship messages (i.e., appeals) are more likely to influence consumer perceptions of a non-profit sport event sponsor?

RQ2: What types of sponsorship messages (i.e., appeals) are more likely to influence non-profit donation intentions?

Theoretical Background
A non-profit’s partnership with a sporting event can benefit the non-profit by decreasing the amount of financial and human capital needed to execute the event. The positive brand image of the partner company also can spillover, or be transferred, to the non-profit organization. Spillover effects can be explained theoretically by McCracken’s (1986) Meaning Transfer Model where the meanings associated with the event and the partner corporation move from the event to the non-profit and then to the consumer. These associations can influence overall consumer perceptions of the non-profit and their attitudes regarding the non-profit’s commitment to furthering its mission and/or cause (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Ultimately, these associations can also impact consumer donations to the non-profit.

When creating a sponsorship brochure or marketing collateral to solicit donations, non-profits employ various images and messages to appeal to potential donors and partners. These advertising appeals can include warmth, inspiration, and information to persuade consumers (Eisend, 2009; Faseur & Geuens, 2006; McFarland, Challagalla, & Shervani, 2006; Drossos, Giaglis, Lekakos, Kokkinaki, & Stavraki, 2007). Each type of appeal can influence past and future donors and may potentially influence the strength of the significance of the spillover effects on a consumer perception’s of the non-profit and on the consumer’s intent to donate.

Methods/Analysis
For this study, the researchers partnered with the Shriners Hospitals for Children (SHC). SHC is a healthcare system that provides specialized care for children up to age 18 with orthopaedic conditions, burns, spinal cord injuries, and cleft lip and palate. Annually, the organization hosts a SHC PGA TOUR event, which is the Shriners Hospitals for
Children Open. The event includes over 150 corporate sponsors and over 1,000 volunteers (Shriners Hospitals for Children Open, 2017). Prior attendees, donors, and sponsors of the event will be sent an email link from the SHC organization requesting their anonymous participation in a survey. The survey participants will be randomized into groups based on the types of advertising appeals. Data will be examined using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test whether differences exist among the groups based on types of message appeal. Next, multivariate techniques will be used to analyze the influence of the consumer’s existing knowledge of the non-profit, perceptions and commitment of the non-profit, as well as non-profit brand congruence on the consumer’s intent to donate.

Implications
Academically, the findings of this study will contribute to the existing advertising literature on message appeals and non-profits. Theoretically, it will expand the Meaning Transfer Theory to the field of non-profits and will aid in identifying potential spillover effects of non-profit sport event sponsorship. From a practical perspective, although the Shriners PGA TOUR event will be the focus of the study, this research will guide other non-profits with identifying strategies to capitalize on their sponsorship of sporting events.