Sponsoring or Sponsored: The Influence of Social Sponsorship in Professional Sport

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20-minute oral presentation (including questions) 1:45 PM
Abstract 2019-052 Room: Napoleon D3

Sponsorships linked to social causes (i.e., social sponsorships) have emerged as a new form of strategic philanthropy for sport teams and leagues, due to increased criticism of sport commercialization (Anderson & Stone, 1981) and the hedonism-centric context of professional sports (Wankel, 1993). Social sponsorships are a viable means of social messaging because professional sport teams and leagues have a popular and visible pulpit for information diffusion. Whether proactive or reactive (i.e., in the wake of a scandal), social sponsorship can help facilitate the interactive relationship between two parties to maximize competitive strategies (Fahy, Farrelly, & Quester, 2004), which manifest as attributions that consumers assign to organizational activities.

Study Purpose. The purpose of the research is to examine the influence of social sponsorship attribution effects on fan prosocial and patronage intentions in professional sport. The following research question was developed to guide the investigation: Do corporate and social sponsorships influence prosocial and patronage intentions differently through three perceived attribution effects? Hypothesized moderators in the relationship are team and sponsor identity.

Attribution theory offers a central idea to explain how people know and/or feel about a certain organization (Kelly, 1967). The underlying tenet of attribution theory is that there are certain perceived motives ascribed by consumers towards organizational actions that can influence consumer attitude (Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006). Such associations play an important role to help individuals perceive organizational traits, which leads to varying organizational responses (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006). Ellen and colleagues tested various social attributions, including (1) value-driven (e.g., caring about the cause of social behavior), (2) stakeholder-driven (e.g., the expectations of different stakeholders), (3) egoistic-driven (e.g., blatant self-centered reasons), and (4) strategic-driven motives (e.g., the typical business objectives such as making a profit). Later, Walker, Heere, Parent, and Drane (2010) examined the mediating effect of these attributions on consumer attitudes toward the social efforts of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which supported previous research.

Data will be collected via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (mTurk). This experimental research will be designed to randomly select respondents to read manipulated articles concerning different fictitious social sponsorship deals (i.e., UNICEF, a general firm with moral-based CSR, a general firm with instrumental-based CSR, and a general firm without CSR). The questionnaire will also include control variables, predictors (i.e., the types of sponsorship), moderators (i.e., team and sponsor identity), mediators (i.e., perceived value-, stakeholder-, egoistic-, and strategic-driven motives), and outcome variables (i.e., donation intention and patronage intention). The collected data will be tested by Multiple Regression Modeling in SPSS and mediated moderation effect in PROCESS (Hayes, 2017).

The research is expected to address salient contributions to academic and practical fields regarding social sponsorships. In academia, the results should offer insights regarding how perceived motives work and their impact on social sponsorship. The research will also contribute to sport practitioners with helping them understand how fans respond to different social sponsorships.