Corporate Social Responsibility: Fostering Disability Sport Organizations through Authentic Prosocial Sponsorship

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Research on prosocial behaviors has gained increased attention in sport marketing and management literature. In particular, prosocial engagement from firms has demonstrated how organizations can have the potential to acquire various beneficial outcomes from such initiatives. Unlike sponsorship where firms expect the beneficiary return from their investment, the initial motive of corporate social responsibility is a genuine attempt to give back the benefits that businesses have acquired from the time it was first derived (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). The latter will be viewed positively by stakeholders due to the authentic elements that are attached within the firms’ prosocial acts. This so-called perceived authenticity is central to marketing; however, many businesses tend to ignore this phenomenon, which as a result, creates mistrust and skepticism among their consumers and/or stakeholders.

The purpose of the study is to investigate how consumer attitudes toward the sponsoring brands are affected when Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and/or Commercial Sponsorship (CS) are offered to the sponsored properties (sport organization and disability sport organization) by sponsors with a high or a low sport image. Additionally, the study seeks to examine the mediating effect of consumers’ perceived authenticity on the relationship between the types of support (CSR and CS) and attitudes of consumers toward the sponsoring brands.

Two pretests will be performed in order to: i) select two categories of sponsoring firms, one with a high sport image, and one with a low sport image, and ii) identify the brands that most associate with the sponsoring firms. Data collection process for the main study will take place in December 2019 through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants will be randomly assigned to a 2 (congruity: high vs. low) × 2 (sponsorship type: CSR vs. CS) × 2 (organization type: sport organization vs. disability sport organization) condition. To be more specific, the study hypotheses will be tested with a total of eight experimental groups using scenario-based experimental design. Participants will be given a press release about a firm engaging in either types of sponsorship act. Data will be analyzed with a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to determine the model fit, convergent validity, and discriminant validity using EQS 6.4 software under full information maximum likelihood. In addition to the multi-phase CFA, a Structural Equation Modeling will be conducted to examine the direct and indirect effects of the constructs.

Due to a dearth of interests from scholars on disability sport, the study's findings are expected to address a meaningful contribution to the disability theory in the sport literature. Furthermore, this study provides implications for sport marketing managers that, unlike sport organizations where sponsors should have a high sport image to gain positive behaviors from consumers, it is not the case in disability sport organizations. In other words, any firm, even firms with a low sport image such as needle company or cosmetic company, are welcome to support the sport for the disadvantaged group. This will not only benefit the sponsors, but also greatly contribute to the development of the sport for persons with a disability.