CSR Congruence and Consistency Strategy in Sport

Myungwoo Lee, University of Houston
Chansoo Jun, Kookmin University
Seung-Ho Shin (Advisor), Kookmin University

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Brand managers have been actively using athlete endorsers in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to maximize the effectiveness of CSR communications (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). However, positive consequences from the endorsers in CSR cannot be guaranteed due to the endorsers’ unexpected behaviors (e.g., transgressions) (Lee & Kwak, 2016). Some researchers revealed the negative effects of transgressed athletes on consumers’ responses to the CSR and attitude toward endorsed brands (e.g., Louie, Kulik, & Jacobson, 2001). Others uncovered that athlete endorsers’ transgressions did not necessarily impact upon consumer responses (e.g., Lohneiss & Hill, 2014).

Another challenge is that if brand managers take action on a new CSR initiative to deal with such transgressions, consumers perceive the CSR initiative as a tool for its own benefits or for covering up its negative issues that lead to raising skepticism about the CSR initiatives (Connors, Anderson, & Thomson, 2017). Given this contentious and lack of knowledge, little is known about how CSR initiatives after a transgression function as a role of a communication strategy to reduce the negative effects caused by the athlete endorser. Therefore, it is important to determine how endorsed brands can create CSR communication strategies to respond to negative situations to best protect the reputation of the endorsed brands.

To fill the void between CSR initiatives and CSR skepticism, this study adopts the concept of ‘authenticity’ in the CSR domain. The underpinning assumption of CSR authenticity is that if consumers perceive that an organization’s CSR endeavor flows forth from the characteristics of the organization, they may perceive that the CSR initiatives are consistent or congruent with the company’s core values that ultimately lead to having the perception of authenticity in CSR (Rekom, Go, & Calter, 2014). The purpose of this study is to examine the interaction effect of CSR congruence (between endorser transgression and CSR after the transgression) and CSR consistency (between pre and post transgression CSR initiatives) on CSR skepticism, brand authenticity, attitude toward the firms, and purchase intention. The current study further examines the mediating effect of brand authenticity between CSR skepticism and attitude toward the brand.

This study uses a 2 x 2 between-subject experimental design. Through an initial pretest (n=79), two transgression cases (Doping and Tax fraud) were selected as stimuli for this study. Data collection is an ongoing process from general consumers via the online method (i.e., Mturk). The questionnaires consisted of five sections: CSR skepticism, brand authenticity, attitude toward the brand, purchase intention, and demographic information. Collected data will be analyzed using multivariate ANOVA with CSR congruence and CSR consistency as independent variables with four dependent variables. Also a PROCESS (Hayes 2012) will be utilized to examine the mediating effect of brand authenticity between CSR skepticism and attitude toward the brand.

The contribution of this study involves CSR strategic development after endorser transgression issues. If a firm is involved in a negative issue and decides to utilize CSR communication to manage the wrongdoing, the outcomes of this study will provide insight into the effective CSR management strategy.