
FANS' RESPONSE to SPORT SPONSORSHIP and ITS EVALUATION

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Abstract

• Aim of the Study

Current study is an attempt to contribute understanding of sponsorship in sports context and aims to evaluate sport sponsorship effectiveness by investigating antecedents, namely sincerity, team attachment, perceived fit between the team and sponsor, and past social media consumption, of attitudes and purchase intentions towards the sponsoring firm. More specifically, this paper seeks predictors of effective sport sponsorship in Turkey, by examining the responses of fans to a sponsorship in which a leading Japanese automotive company and one of the most prominent Turkish football clubs are included. Although the objectives of the sponsor firm may vary, attitudes towards the sponsor and purchase intentions of consumers, rather than brand recall and media exposure, is used in order to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness, following Crompton (2004) and therefore the current study uses intentions to purchase products of sponsor as the ultimate dependent variable. It is believed that sponsorship has a leveraging effect on the sponsoring brand's equity (Keller, 2007), increasing positive attitudes towards it, and leading to purchase intentions in the eyes of the target audience.

• Literature review and Background

Global sponsorship spending in 2013 is estimated as \$53.3 billion (IEG, 2013) and spending on sponsorship is expected to increase more in the future with sports dominating the pie of sponsorship revenue. Although the growth of investment in sponsorship is higher than that of in advertising and sales promotion (IEG, 2013), the research on sponsorship is still less developed than its aforementioned counterparts in communications mix (Walraven, Koning, & Bottenburg, 2012) and so more studies are needed to shed light on determinants of effective sponsorship.

Turkish football league is one of the biggest football economies in

Europe but compared to the size of sports economy in Turkey, there is still untapped potential for companies that want to engage in sport sponsorship (Ekmekci, 2013). Furthermore, most of the previous studies in sport sponsorship literature were made by using western samples and there are almost no studies on this subject in Turkey.

- Methodology

After a thorough review of sponsorship literature and the inspection of models that have been previously used, an initial conceptual framework was developed and the rarely used factors and possible gaps in the literature were identified. The developed model to examine the effects of perceived sincerity, perceived fit between the sport team and sponsor, team attachment, past social media consumption on attitude towards sponsor and intentions to purchase sponsor's products. Because perceived sincerity has been used as a dependent variable only twice in the extant literature, it was included in the study and perceived fit and team attachment were hypothesized as determinants of it in order to further explore this dimension. Attitudes toward sponsor and purchase intentions have been frequently used as the ultimate dependent variables to measure sponsorship effectiveness and this study similarly incorporates these two constructs. Social media is a recent phenomenon that has become integrated into our lives and it also influences sponsorship. It offers a new field where firms can directly interact with and engage consumers and today it is considered as a new area to measure sponsorship effectiveness (Meenaghan, 2013). Therefore, a new construct is developed which measures fans' utilization of social media for receiving information about their favorite sport team and its impact on purchase intentions are sought. A single cross-sectional research design is implemented. Data is collected through a self-administered structured survey from fans of a professional football team in stadium before the start of a game. The measurement model is tested using confirmatory factor analysis and hypothesized model is tested by using SEM.

Results/ Implications

Turkey is chosen as the context of this study since spending on sport sponsorship has increased unprecedentedly in the country in recent years and there is ample room for further investment in sponsorship. Even though the country shows similarity to global trends in sports sponsorship, there is almost no study regarding the topic. Results of the study empirically proved that when sport consumers perceive a fit between sponsor firm and the sport team, they are more likely to believe that motives of the sponsor are sincere, and sincerity perceptions, in turn, lead to positive attitudes toward sponsor and intentions to purchase products of sponsor. Moreover, fans who are highly attached to their sport team are more likely to use social media channels for receiving information about the team and sport team focused social media consumption has a direct positive impact on purchase intentions. Perceived fit positively influences the purchase intentions as well. This study illuminates on determinants of purchase intentions in

sponsorship. Companies should pay attention to these dimensions in order to receive positive response to their sponsorship. The model should be tested in future studies by utilizing different sport contexts.

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