
Fans' CSR Perceptions In The Context of Professional Sport Sponsorship

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Abstract:

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THE AIM OF THE PAPER

Sport sponsorship can be closely tied to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and could by itself affect positively consumers' CSR perceptions of sponsor firm. Kim, Stout, & Cheong (2012) assert that cognitive component of sponsor image involves CSR beliefs. Sponsorship can create a socially responsible image of the sponsor in the minds of consumers. Plewa & Quester (2011) presents a conceptual framework for explaining the link between sport sponsorship and CSR perceptions and urges future research to investigate this relationship. To our best knowledge, there is no empirical study that has examined fans' CSR perceptions of a sponsor firm in a professional sport team context. The current study aimed to investigate the impacts of team attachment, sincerity, and fit on CSR perceptions which in turn is expected to influence fans' behavioral intentions in a professional sport sponsorship context.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

CSR has been received a great deal of attention by both practitioners and researchers. CSR defined as satisfying the expectations of all societal stakeholders to maximize the company's positive impact on its social and physical environment, while providing a competitive return to its financial stakeholders. Stakeholder theory suggests that corporations should be responsive to economic, legal, ethical and discretionary aspects of stakeholder interests. In sport contexts, studies have been focused on diverse topics such as strategic implementation of CSR in sport (Breitbarth & Harris, 2008), fan perception, CSR & brand image, CSR in professional sport and unique features of sport for CSR initiatives.

Sponsorship is strategic partnership between a sponsor and sponsored property. Perceived sincerity, perceived fit and team attachment were found to have a positive influence on consumers' sponsorship responses (Speed & Thompson, 2000). Based on the previous discussion following hypotheses were developed.

H1. Perceived sincerity will be positively associated with perceived CSR of sponsor firm

H2. Perceived fit will be positively associated with perceived CSR of sponsor firm

H3. Team attachment will be positively associated with perceived CSR of sponsor firm

Prior research showed that consumers support socially responsible firms when shopping

H4. Perceived CSR of sponsor firm will be positively associated with fans' behavioral intentions for sponsor's products

METHODOLOGY

Basketball is the second most popular sport in Turkey. Sponsorship between a food manufacturing company and a major Turkish professional basketball team which holds 6 league titles and competes at Euroleague, which is the highest level tier basketball event in Europe, is the focus of this study. A total of 299 completed questionnaires are collected in the arena before the beginning of a basketball game. A recent study provided a reliable and multidimensional scale, by using a Turkish sample, for measuring CSR perceptions. The current study adapted this scale, which has dimensions of CSR to society, customers and government, for measuring fans' CSR perceptions of sponsor firm. Team attachment is assessed by using James and Ross's (2002) scale, whereas perceived sincerity and perceived fit is measured using the scale developed by Speed & Thompson (2000). Fans' behavioral intentions were measured with three items related to their intentions to purchase and recommend products of sponsor. Psychometric properties of scales are assessed via CFA and then hypothesized model is tested by using structural equation modeling (SEM).

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study revealed that perceived sincerity, perceived fit and team attachment have positive impact on CSR perception of sponsor firms in professional sport context. This result indicated that, under right circumstances, sponsors could be perceived as socially responsible firms without any CSR activity. It is also found that there is a positive relationship between CSR perception and fans' behavioral intentions. These findings could also be related to the general information of fans on social responsibility and brand credibility of sponsor firm. Hence, future research should elaborate on fans' approaches towards general social responsibility and brand credibility of sponsor firm.

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