

Partnering for Corporate Social Responsibility in the context of mega-sport event sponsorship

Authors: Wojtek Kulczycki, PhD candidate; Benjamin Pfister, Master student; Joerg Koenigstorfer, Full Professor

Institution: Department of Sport & Health Management, Technische Universität München, Campus D Uptown Munich, Georg-Brauchle-Ring 60/62, 80992 Munich, Germany.

E-mail: wojtek.kulczycki@tum.de , benjamin.pfister@tum.de , joerg.koenigstorfer@tum.de

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Aim of the paper

Linking corporate social responsibility (CSR) to mega-sport event sponsorship is a prominent leveraging tool. Event sponsors often partner with stakeholders in order to design and implement CSR activities in the context of events (Uhrich, Koenigstorfer, & Groeppel-Klein, 2014). To date, however, it remains unknown whether and how the selection of the partners influences the relationship between individuals' attitudes towards event-governing bodies and attitude towards sponsors. This study aims to fill this research gap and looks at the effects of a football-World Cup sponsor's CSR activities in partnership with the FIFA vs. the Brazilian government vs. a control condition (i.e., CSR without partnership) on the perception of sponsors.

Theoretical background

Based upon the associative network theory assuming that individuals form cognitive structures that guide perception and link associated objects (Anderson & Bower, 1973), we hypothesize that attitudes towards the event-governing body positively relate to individuals' attitude towards the sponsor as they share common structures (Hypothesis 1). Considering recent findings on partnership-based CSR (Jamali & Keshishian, 2009), we further postulate that those CSR activities for which event-governing bodies and sponsors partner increase the positive relationship between attitude towards the event-governing body and attitude towards the sponsor (as opposed to situations where the sponsor's CSR activities do not include any partnership or a partnership with the government of the hosting country) (Hypothesis 2). Lastly, we postulate that there is a mediation effect of attitude towards the event-organizing body on behavioral intentions to engage in positive word-of-mouth about the sponsor via attitude towards the sponsor (Hypothesis 3a) and that the indirect effect is stronger for CSR activities for which sponsors partner with event-governing bodies (vs. situations where the sponsors' CSR does not include any partnership or a partnership with the government of the hosting country) (Hypothesis 3b).

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

To test our hypotheses, we conducted an experimental study. One hundred sixty participants (M = 32-years-old, 57.5% female) took part in the study. They were recruited in pedestrian areas in Rio de Janeiro during the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Participants had mid levels of involvement into the World Cup. In the study, we manipulated the CSR activity of a sponsor in the context of the event using fictitious press releases. In the

first condition, a sponsor (here: a manufacturer of electronic products) partnered with FIFA to implement CSR activities during the 2014 FIFA World Cup. In the second condition, the same sponsor partnered with the Brazilian government to implement the same CSR activities during the event. In the third condition, the same sponsor implemented the CSR activities on its own (same event and same activities).

The variables were measured using established scales with satisfying validity and reliability. We ran a regression model using attitude towards the event-governing body as the independent variable, attitude towards the sponsor as the mediator, and behavioral intentions to engage in positive word-of-mouth about the sponsor as the dependent variable. The manipulated factor (partnership-based CSR: FIFA vs. Brazilian government vs. no partnership) was treated as the moderator of the relationship between attitude towards the event-governing body and attitude towards the sponsor.

Results, discussion, and implications

The relationship between attitude towards the event-governing body and attitude towards the sponsor is positive in all conditions (supporting Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, the relationship is stronger ($b = .79$) in the condition, in which the FIFA and the sponsor partnered for CSR (as opposed to no partnership [$b = .37$] and a partnership with the Brazilian government [$b = .46$]). These results support Hypothesis 2. The mediation effect of attitude towards the event-organizing body on behavioral intentions to engage in positive word-of-mouth via attitude towards the sponsor was significantly positive in all conditions, but higher in the condition, in which the FIFA and the sponsor partnered for CSR (as opposed to the two other conditions), supporting Hypotheses 3a and 3b.

The implications of the study are that (1) sponsors depend on the perception of the event-governing body with regard to consumers' attitude formation, (2) common CSR activities increase the dependency and this mechanism affects intentions to engage in positive word-of-mouth, and (3) CSR activities that are decoupled from the event-governing body make attitude formation processes more independent from the body. The latter is particularly relevant when the bodies are perceived to be corrupt, such as for FIFA. Future research may look at the peculiarities of the sponsorship and CSR activities in more detail, such as the degree of usage of the official sponsorship rights (e.g., display of logos).

References

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