

Purchase behavior and attitudes towards the sponsor's product of the rival team

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Literature review

Sport sponsorship literature suggests that companies invest in sport related sponsorship expecting that the positive image fans hold towards their favorite team will be transferred to their brand (Dalakas and Lewin, 2005). Brand related sponsorship outcomes have been studied extensively (Roy and Cornwell, 2003). Aaker (1991) and Keller (2009) suggested two related models for estimating brand equity, which include variables such as brand awareness, loyalty, associations, perceived quality, engagement, etc. An idiosyncratic aspect of sport is that fans commonly dislike and hold negative attitudes towards their rival team (Dalakas and Lewin, 2005). These negative attitudes are transferred to the rival's team sponsor once fans are highly identified with their favorite team (Dalakas and Lewin, 2005). Studies which empirically test the above models in regard to sport sponsorship context are scarce, especially capturing the effect of the negative attitudes of fans towards the rival team. Apart from brand related outcomes, sponsors' involvement in such activities aims at sales growth. For this reason purchase intention is commonly studied (Gwinner and Bennet, 2008), however to better understand the concrete sport sponsorship outcomes, real purchase behavior needs further investigation.

Aim

The purpose of the present study was to explore differences in sponsor's product brand equity and purchase behavior which are attributed to team affiliation (fans versus rivals). A conceptual model was developed to address the role of rivalry on purchase behavior, brand loyalty and other key variables of brand equity models (i.e. awareness, perceived quality, engagement). Effects of team identification and fit, were also explored in the context of the study.

Methodology

Data were collected from February to March, 2016 concerning the new sponsorship (announced on July, 2015) between a top team in the Greek basketball league and a very popular videogame console of an international technology company. A self-administered survey was used for data collection in the arena during games, at the academy and in public places. The total sample consisted of 363 respondents (189 fans of the sponsored team and 174 of its rival). All measures (team identification, fit, awareness, perceived quality, engagement, loyalty and purchase behavior) were borrowed from literature (e.g. Keller, 2009), while purchase behavior was measured by asking whether respondents have bought the sponsor's product since the beginning of the 2015-16 basketball season. A 7-point Likert scale was used to measure all items, where 1= "strongly disagree" and 7= "strongly agree". The statistical programs SPSS 22 and AMOS 21 were used for data analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were employed.

Results-discussion

The conceptual model was run simultaneously with the two subsamples (fans versus rivals) and explored differences between path coefficients. Results showed an overall good fit ($\chi^2=132.731$, $df=30$, $\chi^2/df=4.42$, $p=.00$, $CFI=.93$, $IFI=.93$, $RMSEA=.07$). All 11 relationships tested were found significant for fans, whereas in the sample of rivals there were only 5. In particular, concerning rivals, team identification exerted positive and significant influence on brand awareness ($\beta=.20$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, rivals' brand awareness influenced their engagement with the brand ($\beta=.34$, $p<.01$) and perceived quality ($\beta=.43$, $p<.01$). In the same way rivals' brand loyalty was influenced by brand engagement ($\beta=.51$, $p<.01$) and perceived quality ($\beta=.46$, $p<.01$). In terms of significant differences in the coefficients, results highlighted five differences. Fans' team identification ($\beta=.28$, $p<.01$) differed from rivals on influencing fit. Similarly, the impact of brand awareness ($\beta=.28$, $p<.01$) on fit was different between the two subsamples. The influence of fit on brand engagement was significant only in the sample of fans ($\beta=.29$, $p<.01$), signifying the difference between the two subsamples. Finally, purchase behavior was explained significantly by brand engagement ($\beta=.27$, $p<.01$) and perceived quality ($\beta=.15$, $p<.05$) only in the sample of fans. In contrast, no difference proved significant between fans and rivals on explaining brand loyalty.

The model explained a significant proportion of variance of fans' ($R^2=68\%$) and rivals' ($R^2=54\%$) brand loyalty, but an interesting finding was that purchase behavior was explained ($R^2=12\%$) in a significant proportion only in the case of fans and not of rivals. This result extended the present literature by identifying specific effects of rivalry on the purchase behavior of the sponsor's product. Contrary to previous research (Dalakas and Lewin, 2005), results indicated no impact of rivalry on sponsor's product brand loyalty, demonstrating that it is possible for rivals to express loyalty towards a product, even if it sponsors the team they dislike more. Given that all variables measured influenced attitudes and behaviors, these results present interesting implication for practice.

References

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