

The importance of sponsorship fit in firm-sport organization relationships

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Aim of abstract/paper

The aim of the paper is to examine whether the perceived importance of sponsorship fit differs between sponsoring firms and sport organizations.

Theoretical background

The research related to image similarity between sponsor and sponsee has gathered much attention in the sponsorship literature. The sponsor-event fit has been shown to affect on different consumer responses, such as attitude towards sponsor or brand as well purchase intentions of sponsors' products (e.g. Speed & Thomson, 2000; Close & Lacey, 2013). Therefore high level of fit (or congruence) between a sponsor and a sponsee has been regarded as one the most important predictor of sponsorship effectiveness especially in the context of sport-events (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008). However the fit between a sponsor and sport organization has gathered less attention in the literature. Therefore it is interesting to study how firms and also sport organizations perceive the importance of fit in their sponsorship relationships.

The fit is studied in two separate dimensions. Along with Speed and Thomson (2000) sponsor-organization fit is understood in this study as a "general fit" between sponsee and sponsor and it is determined by the degree to which respondents perceive the pairing of organizations as a good fit. Geographical compatibility refers to the extent to which the sponsoring firm and sport organization have ties to the same geographic area" (Zdravkovic, Magnuson & Stanley, 2010).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Measures of the study was adopted from the existing literature. Data was collected through telephone survey in Finland. Data consists of 65 responses of firms and 49 responses of sport organizations. Both domestic and internationally operating firms are included in the sample. Data-analysis is performed in different steps. First, explorative factor analysis and Varimax rotation solution was provided to validate the constructs of the study. Second, sum variables was calculated together with reliability analysis. Third, variance analysis was used to determine the importance of the fit dimensions among two different groups, firms and sport organizations.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

In data-analysis the provided two factor solution showed a good fit (all factor loading between 0,82-0,97). Also the testes of Keyser (.735) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity (Sig. 0,00) as well as total variance explained (79,96 %) showed that data fits to factor solution and constructs have good internal reliability (Cronbach's alfas 0.913 and 0.930).

According to the results of the study the perceived importance of sponsor-organization fit as well as geographical compatibility differs between the two studied groups. While the sponsor-organization fit was rated higher among sport organizations (mean 4,47) than firms (3,70) rated firms the importance of geographical compatibility higher (mean 3,62) than sport

organizations (mean 2,97). These findings are statistically significant ($p < 0,001$).

The results of the study reveal that sport organizations perceive the sponsor-organization fit more important dimension in the sponsorship relationships than geographical fit. On the other hand, for firms both dimensions of fit are of equal importance. Thus it seems that, compared to firms, sport organizations overvalue the importance of sponsor-organization fit but at the same time the geographical fit is a matter of lesser importance in their sponsorship relationships.

The results also indicate that for firms it is more important that there exists also geographical ties in sponsorship relationships. Firms, however do not necessitate that there exists strong organizational fit between a sponsor and a sponsee. Interestingly, this result differs especially from the consumer evaluations of the importance of sponsor-sponsee fit in the existing literature. As earlier research has pointed out the congruence between a sponsor and sponsored event is beneficial in achieving positive consumer responses (e.g. Gwinner & Bennett, 2008). Against that the findings of this study is somewhat surprising; it seems that for firms sponsor-organization fit does not really seem to play that big role in their sponsorship relationships than one might expect. On the other hand, literature has recognized that also low-fit sponsoring can generate positive effects for a firm (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Moreover, it is possible that firms have some other motives than positive consumer responses in their sponsorship relationships. However, more research regarding the sponsor-sport organization fit is needed. Future studies could possibly test the effects of sponsorship fit in longer term sponsor-sport organization relationships.

References

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