

The Influences of Brand Image and Sport Sponsorship on Brand Equity: A Mediating Effect of Sport Sponsorship

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ABSTRACT

Following with the increase of income, people gradually make good use of their weekends to join different sports and become more interest in sport events. This would allow entrepreneurs to have chances to sponsor or co-sponsor sport events to increase their exposure rate, brand image, and brand equity through constant media reports. The purposes of this study are to (a) understand whether business sport sponsorship will influence the brand image, (b) explore whether brand image will influence the brand equity and (c) test a mediating effect of sport sponsorship. The questionnaire was used to collect data from two sport events. The results show that business sport sponsorship is a significant impact on brand image, the brand image is positive influence to the brand equity, and the mediating effect of sport sponsorship on brand image and brand equity is supported.

INTRODUCTION

With more and more people emphasis on sports, no matter it is Asia Game in Doha, Olympic Game in Beijing, Chien-Ming Wang, or Hong-Chih Kuo in Major League Baseball Game, TV ratings for sports are greatly increasing, and it opens a gate for enterprises to sponsor sport events. Over last ten years, the amount of global sponsorship reached US\$19.2 billion including sports, entertainments, and public welfare activities. Sponsorship for sport events and arts occupies 88% and 6% respectively, and the remnants are public welfare activities (Cheng, 1999). The reasons for businesses to sponsor a sport because they want to connect activities and products together from sponsorship and persuade target customers to accept sponsors' brand into their daily life (Huang, 2004). Therefore, the object of business sponsorship is to increase its brand image and brand equity in the end. The purposes of this study are as follows: (a) to understand whether business sport sponsorship will influence the brand image, (b) to explore whether brand image will influence the brand equity and (c) to test a mediating effect of sport sponsorship. The questionnaire was used to collect data from two spot events.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sponsorship

Sponsorship is relatively new compared with other marketing terms. In early days, corporate sponsorship behavior meant that business organizations used money and other intangible resources to do some meaningful contributions to the society via activities such as environmental protection, social welfare, education, physical education, medical care or art and culture performance. The purposes for the majority of corporate sponsorships are to improve corporate image or contribution to the society (Guo, 1994). According to the Economic Intelligence Unit, (EIU), sponsorship is defined as follows: (a) corporate sponsors provide intangible resources such as money and labor or service and expertise to a certain activity including sports or arts, and (b) they can offer commercial function products, or it will become a sales promotion (Hung, 2001). However, sponsorship is not asking donations from sponsors but business organizations want build a cooperative relationship with activities organizations in order to achieve individual goals and mutual benefits (Tseng, 2004).

Many scholars used the concept of social exchange to study sponsorship behavior and considered that sponsorship is a process of beneficial exchange and can create infinite business opportunities to business organizations, and sport sponsorship can maintain business organizations and activities organizations commercial partnership (McCarville & Copeland, 1994; Feng, 1999; Cheng, 2001; Hung, 2001; Su, 2003). Business organizations provide sponsorships including tangible resources such as money, materials, and facilities and intangible resources including technology and service, and the sponsorship receivers will offer places and certain rights in return, so they can fulfill their own goals and achieve mutual benefits with each other (Tseng, 2004; Su, 2003; Hung, 2001; Yang, 2005; Ju, 2003). Sandler and Shani (1993) assume that business organizations are most concerned about the use of sponsorship activities with certain products to build cooperative relationship in order to enhance product or service awareness, visibility and image (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Business uses sponsorship activities to achieve its marketing and media targets or other specific targets, and it can acquire business opportunities from those activities (Ju, 2003; Yang, 2005; Lai, 2006).

Sport Sponsorship

Sponsorship is an expense which pays for activities such as sports, entertainments, arts and cultures or non profit organizations (Lai, 2005). Sport sponsorships account for two and third of all corporate philanthropic activities (Taylor & Gratton, 2000/2005). Hsiao (1995), Hung (2004), and Tseng (2004) consider that the motives of corporate sponsorship are to improve corporate image, corporate awareness, and sales. Speed and Thompson (2000) find that consumers have a symmetric perception from cooperate sponsorship on sport events. They also suggest that the key factor for good responses relies on the feelings of sponsor attitudes. When corporations support a game, they will consider whether consumers are relatively fond of the game and whether they can acquire benefits from sponsorship activities (D'Astous & Bitz, 1995). Thus, business organizations provide material resources such as money, labor, technology or equipment to sport organizations in order to receive benefits such as corporate or product names which connect with sport events from sport organizations. So, corporate sponsorship is not only a pure public welfare activity but also a commercial partner relationship which sponsors and sport organizations can benefit each other through marketing activities (McCarville & Copeland, 1994; Shan, 2002; Cheng, 1998; Schaaf, 1995).

Zou (2005) deems that the motives of corporate sponsorship are not donations but the augment of corporations' image, awareness, revenues, and public relationship as well as the social responsibility fulfillment. Wu (2005) believes that corporate sponsorship activity is a unique marketing idea which can promote physical education activity and product marketing theory. In addition to the increase of corporate image, corporate awareness and the fulfillment of social responsibility, corporate sponsorship can keep a good relationship with community and help to compete with competitors (Feng, 1999; Geng, Burton, & Blakemore, 2002). From sponsorship and product marketing viewpoint, Huang (1999) indicates that the reasons for corporations sponsor sport events because they want to (a) promote new products, increase product awareness, and model product image to consumers, (b) advance corporate image and awareness, and (c) perform corporate philanthropy and owners' personal will, reduce taxes, and enhance social relationship and employees' motivation. Cheng (1998) proposes that a successful sponsorship strategy is the fifth element in the promotional mix. A product can be very unique in a changeable and quite similar market if sport sponsorships can be integrated into the promotional mix. Accordingly, although a corporation sponsorship is for social responsibility and image, in reality, it wants to promote its exposure rate. However, if a corporate sponsorship emphasizes too much on social responsibility, it will lose a chance to understand the real meaning and value of sponsorship. In addition, it can not develop a reasonable investment and reward system, and businesses can not obtain advertising and promotional effects from their sponsorship and attain their business goals (Huang, 2003).

In summary, the major goals of corporate sport sponsorship are (1) advance business image and awareness (Hsiao, 1995; Hung, 2004; Tseng, 2004; Zou, 2005; Feng, 1999; Geng, Burton, & Blakemore, 2002; Huang, 1999; Huang, 2003), (2) promote brand awareness in order to increase customer purchase intention (Huang, 1999; McCarville & Copeland, 1994; Shan, 2002; Cheng, 1998; Schaaf, 1995), (3) boost media report and exposure rate (Hsaio, 1995; Huang, 2007), (4) increase sales growth rate (Hung, 2004; Tseng, 2004), and (5) improve community and customer relationship and enhance employees cohesiveness and satisfaction (Zou, 2005; Feng, 1999; Geng, Burton, & Blakemore, 2002; Huang, 1999).

Sport Sponsorship Effectiveness

What are benefits for sport sponsorship? Liao (2001) identifies that corporate sponsors can receive a lot of exposure rates, corporate image, awareness, and consumer preference can also be increased. Liao (2001) further concludes that sponsorship activity is significantly and positively related to perception of sponsorship intention, recognition of corporate image, and product purchase intention from consumers. There are three types of media exposure rate measurement: the appearance frequency in TV, News, Magazines and broadcasting (Chaing, 1999; Liao, 2001; Ju, 2003; Wang, 2005; Huang, 1999; Hung, 2001; Wu, 2005), the recognition and remembrance of corporate sponsor or brand image from consumers viewpoint, (Chaing, 1999; Liao, 2001; Ju, 2003; Wang, 2005; Wu, 2005), and checking whether sales increase before and after corporate sport sponsorship (Liao, 2001; Ju, 2003; Wang, 2005; Hung, 2001; Wu, 2005). When a corporation is sponsoring an activity, it has to express that it is not for commercial benefits but for philanthropic motivation. In the meantime, a corporation should not sponsor too many activities because it will make the corporation do have not enough resources supporting a sport game which leads consumers to feel that the corporation are not serious. Also, if consumers prefer a corporation sponsoring a sport event, it can obtain benefits from corporate awareness, brand association, and brand image (Ju, 2003).

Brand

When talking about brand, three critical issues need to be emphasized: (1) how to build a strong brand, (2) how to maintain competitive position without change when time goes by, and (3) how to extend brand name leverage to expand businesses (Lee, 2003). Brand is often used to represent the reputation of manufacturers following by the increase of sales (Mariotti, 1999). Thus, the American Marketing Association defines a brand as “ a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p.256),”and the basic function of brand is to deliver the messages of best quality guarantee of a product and to provide a set of congruence of product attributes, benefits, and services (Kotler, 1996). Brand is one of the most important and ever lasting assets in a business because a strong and power brand stands for a group of loyal customers, and it is the foundation of competitive advantage and resource of earning (Aaker, 1991; Kotler, 1996). A powerful and high value brand will influence purchase decision of a consumer (Lai, 2006; Lin, 2004). Hung (2003) believes that enterprises have to build a brand to create their value and brand operation must start form brand equity building. To sum up, brand is a major asset in a corporation, and it not only brings brand image and brand value to a corporation but also helps consumers to differentiate a product and increase purchase intention.

Brand Image

Since 1950, the studies of consumer behavior have considered that brand image was a key for a product to be succeeded. A clear brand image can make consumers have a primarily recognition on a product quality and reduce purchase risk. A successful brand image operation can create an obvious segmentation to a competitor (Kim, 2001; Hung, 2003). Brand image is an important element in the marketing strategy, and consumers will judge product quality from brand image which may influence their purchase decision (Yu, 2004). Keller (1993) and Chen (2004) also regard that brand image will associate brand perception with consumers' memory. During the purchasing process, brand characteristics will influence consumers' decision, and marketing activities and consumer personal attributes will also influence brand image and purchase intention of consumers. So, a strong brand should have a clear brand image such as brand personality, organization association, feeling, and self expression to represent consumer commitment by the corporation. Further, Lin (2004) suggests that if a business wants to build the relationship between brand and customers, it should extend brand with brand personality, organization association, symbol, feeling image, self expression benefit and symbol benefit.

Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) develop three types of brand image from consumer advantage viewpoints: functional brand image, symbol brand image, and experience brand image. Moreover, Hung (2003) maintains that brand image is an approach to build relationship between brands and consumers, and it will arouse consumers purchase intention and motivation. In addition, some researches discuss brand image from businesses and consumers prospect.

For a consumer, brand image comes from a set of users' memory which connects brand awareness and brand association including tangible images such as exterior design, package, and logo, and intangible images such as product concept, feeling, attitude, and personal experience from consumers which are total perceptions of a business brand (Kim, 2001; Hung, 2003; Wan, 2006; Lin, 2006; Wu, 2007).

Brand Equity

Brand equity refers that a business connects and implants brand name, logo or symbol into consumers mind and is an intangible asset with a long term operation. It can create tangible and intangible added value, that is, an extra value compared with competitive brands in the marketing activities and sales services. Brand equity is the sum of positive assets that represents overall attitude from consumers and that can influence purchase decision. Brand equity includes five elements: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and proprietary brand assets (Chen, 2003; Huang, 2006; Aaker, 1991). From consumer viewpoint, brand equity relies on consumer perceptions to build brand advantage and brand loyalty (Lee, 2006). Furthermore, some scholars define brand equity from financial and marketing viewpoints:

1. Financial viewpoint. Brand equity is a brand name that gives an added value to a product or a service. Consumers are more willing to pay high price to acquire a product with a higher added value. Moreover, brand equity can be used an evaluation basis for internal performances or external merge plans for a business (Su, 2002; Wu, 2006).
2. Marketing viewpoint. Brand equity is (a) effective view: the sum of assets and debts of businesses and consumers, (b) added value view: representing market share, market control ability or price premium, (c) competitor view: building a long term advantage or differentiation in relative to competitors, and (d) customer view: the marketing effects in response to the difference of brand recognition and the overall value association for consumers. Although scholars have different viewpoint, they all hope to increase marketing effectiveness, build brand loyalty, improve profitability, and distinguish with competitors (Su, 2002; Wu, 2006).

Brand Image, Brand Equity and Sponsorship

In discussion of the relationship among brand image, brand equity and customer response, Chen (2004) concludes that brand image will influence brand equity, and functional and symbol image are both important dimensions to brand image. Yu (2004) also verifies that TV shopping corporations have to intensify functional brand image in order to increase brand equity, and Huang (2006) concludes that if a high-tech industry wants to expand its market share in university students, it must increase brand image and brand equity. Faircloth, Capella, & Alford (2001) testify that brand image will positively affect brand equity, and brand attitude will indirectly affect brand equity through brand image (Yu, 2004; Chen, 2003; Ju, 2003). Huang (2007) finds a result that sport sponsorship has a positively influence on brand image and further increase consumer purchase intention. In addition, if consumers can have a positive response from sport sponsorship, a corporation can raise its brand image and its brand equity will further promote (Huang, 2007; Yang, 2005; Hung, 2004; Tseng, 2004).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Structure

According to the research motivations, purposes, and literature reviews on above, the study proposes the research structure as shown in Figure 1. Sport sponsorship is independent variable, brand equity is dependent variable, and brand image is mediating variable.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Brand image will significantly influence sport sponsorship.

H2: Sport sponsorship will significantly influence brand equity.

H3: Brand image will significantly influence brand equity.

H4: Sport sponsorship will mediate the effects between brand image and brand equity.

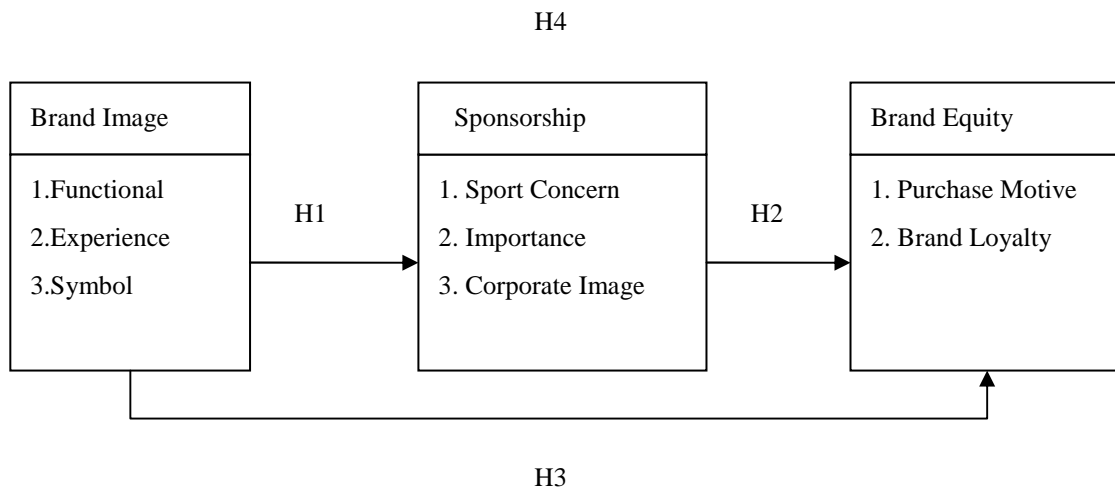


Figure 1. Research Structure

Research Object and Data Collection

The reliability analyses for the pilot test are 0.857, 0.883, and 0.869 respectively. The questionnaires were collected from spectator who participates the baseball game hold by Yunlin Community College and a slow pitch softball game hold by the National Yunlin University of Technology. Totally 400 copies of questionnaires were dispatched, and 360 copies were collected. The return rate is 90%, and excluding invalid questionnaires, the effective response rate 87%.

Definition and Measurement

The questionnaire adopts a 5-point Likert scale, and the definition of research dimensions are as follows:

1. Sport sponsorship. It means consumers attitude and recognition toward sport sponsors. The study develops 15 items to measure sport sponsorship by referring to scales of Speed and Thompson (2000) and D’Astous and Bitz (1995).
2. Brand Image. It means consumers brand recognition and brand which develops different brand concepts according to consumers benefits. The study develops 16 items to measure brand image by referring to the scales of Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986), Kim (2001), Huang (2003), Wan (2006), Lin (2006), and Wu (2007).
3. Brand Equity. It means the creation of tangible and intangible added values of a business. When it is compared with other competitive brands, it means extra value that represents overall consumer attitude toward to the brand and the influence of purchase decision. The study develops 15 items to measure brand equity by referring the scales of Chen (2003), Huang (2006), and Aaker (1991).

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Factor and Reliability Analysis

The study uses principal component Analysis with Varimax rotation to extract major factors. First, the study uses Bartlett Sphericity test and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test to examine whether there are common factors among sport sponsorship, brand image, and brand equity. The results show that KMO values are all less than 0.90, that is 0.901, 0.934, 0.929 respectively, and p values of Bartlett Sphericity test are all less than 0.001. The results indicate that there are common factors among these measurement items and fit for factor analysis. In addition, the accumulative explained variance is 63.9%, 65.118%, 55.358% respectively, which are all higher than 55%. The results demonstrate that the measurement items have construct validity. The study also conducts a reliability analysis by using Cronbach’s α to test the internal consistency. The Cronbach’s α values are between 0.830 and 0.888, it identifies that the questionnaire has a high internal consistency.

Regression Analysis

The study also uses simple regression analysis to examine the relationship among sport sponsorship, brand image, and brand equity. As shown in Table 1, sport sponsorship significantly relates to brand image ($\beta=0.626$, $p=0.000$), brand image has a significant influence on brand equity ($\beta=0.626$, $p=0.000$), and sport sponsorship significantly affects brand equity ($\beta=0.661$, $p=0.000$). The results confirm that sport sponsorship will influence brand image. If a corporation wants to promote its brand image, it should make consumers have a highly recognition on sport sponsorship, and its brand equity can also be increased. Therefore, hypothesis one (H1), hypothesis two (H2), and hypothesis three (H3) are supported.

Table 1. Regression Analysis

	ΔR^2	F	β	t	Sig.
Sport sponsorship to brand image	0.392	223.280	0.626**	14.943	0.000**
Brand image to brand equity	0.607	537.485	0.780**	23.184	0.000**
Sport sponsorship to brand equity	0.436	267.764	0.661**	16.364	0.000**

*: $p<0.05$ **: $p<0.01$

Mediating Test

The study follows Baron & Kenny (1986, p.1177) suggestions to examine the mediating effects in three steps: (1) the independent variable must be shown to affect the dependent variable in the first equation, (2) second, the independent variable must affect the mediator in the second equation; and (3) the mediator must affect the dependent variable in the third equation. If these conditions all hold in the predicted direction, then the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable must be less in third equation than in the second. Perfect mediation holds if the independent variable has no effect when the mediator is controlled.

Step 1, brand image (functional, symbol, and experience image) is regressed with sport sponsorship (sport concern, importance, and corporate image). The results show that brand image is significantly affected to sport sponsorship ($\beta=0.457$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.413$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.331$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.347$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.406$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.345$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.594$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.596$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.443$, $P=0.000$), as shown in Table 2. Step 2, brand equity is the dependent variable, and brand image and sport sponsorship are independent variables. The results reveal that brand image (functional, symbol, and experience image) are significantly and positively affected to brand equity ($\beta=0.671$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.732$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.666$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.582$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.659$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.517$, $P=0.000$). Furthermore, Sport sponsorship (sport concern, importance, and corporate image) are significantly and positively affected to brand equity ($\beta=0.415$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.531$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.513$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.473$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.499$, $P=0.000$; $\beta=0.479$, $P=0.000$).

Table 2. Meditating test of sport sponsorship on brand image and brand equity

		Model 1			Model 2				Model 3					
		Sport Sponsorship			Brand Equity		Brand Equity		Brand Equity					
		Sport Concern	Importance	Brand Image	Purchase Intention	Brand Loyalty	Purchase Intention	Brand Loyalty	Purchase Intention			Brand Loyalty		
Brand Image	Functional Image	.457** (0.000)	.347** (0.000)	.594** (0.000)	.671** (0.000)	.582** (0.000)			.608** (0.000)	.553** (0.001)	.566** (0.000)	.463** (0.000)	.465** (0.000)	.460** (0.000)
	Symbol Image	.413** (0.000)	.406** (0.000)	.596** (0.000)	.732** (0.000)	.659** (0.000)			.676** (0.000)	.619** (0.000)	.662** (0.000)	.559** (0.000)	.546** (0.000)	.579** (0.000)
	Experience Image	.331** (0.000)	.345** (0.000)	.443** (0.000)	.666** (0.000)	.517** (0.000)			.594** (0.000)	.548** (0.000)	.546** (0.000)	.405** (0.000)	.392** (0.000)	.380** (0.000)
Sport Sponsorship	Sport Concern						.415** (0.000)	.473** (0.000)						
	Importance						.531** (0.000)	.499** (0.000)						
	Corporate Image						.513** (0.000)	.479** (0.000)						
Adj. R ²		.219	.173	.410	.622	.463	.406	.373	.622			.463		
F		33.490	25.151	81.481	190.987	100.811	80.077	69.931	190.987			100.811		

** $P<0.05$

Lastly, adding mediating variable (sport sponsorship) to examine the effect of brand image on brand equity. The result illustrates the effect of brand image (functional, symbol, and experience image) on brand equality is significant, and β values are less (See Table 1). Therefore, H4 is supported that sport sponsorship is a mediator between brand image and brand equity.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The purposes of the study are to examine the effects of sport sponsorship on brand image and brand equity of a business. The study finds that sport sponsorship has a positive influence on brand image. The result is the same as the findings of Huang (2004), Tseng (2004), Zou (2005), Cheng, (2002), Ju (2003), and Liao (2001). The study suggests that businesses will support sport sponsorship to increase their exposure rate and also brand image and brand equity so that consumers can have better brand awareness and further influence their purchase intention. The study also finds that brand image is positively related to brand equity. The result is the same as the findings of Huang (2006), Yu (2004), Chen (2003), Ju (2003), and Faircloth, Capella and Alford (2001). It indicates that if a business wants to expand its market share, it has to raise its brand image.

The results also demonstrate that sport sponsorship has a mediation effect between brand image and brand equity. It shows that when corporations sponsor sport events and make most of their efforts to report the activities through media, it will influence sponsors' symbol and experience image and further affect consumer purchase intention to buy a similar type of product. Moreover, when sponsorship activities connect directly with a product, it will indirectly influence consumers' view of the product function. For example, Nike and Adidas often patronize baseball games. It not only provides sport games to the public but also offers a good chance for consumers to discuss their products.

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