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Determinants of community-based sponsorship impact on self-congruity

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Abstract

Sponsors increasingly shift from large professional to community-based properties, as these can deliver an engaged audience and enable sponsors to demonstrate their corporate social responsibility (CSR). This research comprises two studies and shows that community-based sponsorship may improve CSR image and, in turn, self-congruity, a key determinant of consumer behavior. Study one investigates perceived sponsor-club fit, confirming attitude and corporate positioning similarity as relevant predictors. Importantly, CSR image similarity does not impact fit, suggesting sponsorship opportunities for organizations independent of their initial CSR image. Study two shows perceived sponsor CSR image to mediate the relationship between the perceptions of a community-based property's CSR image and consumers' self-congruity with the sponsor. While perceived sponsor-club fit and sponsorship awareness moderate the relationship between property and sponsor CSR image, attitudes toward CSR moderate the association between sponsor CSR and self-congruity. The paper concludes with implications and future research directions.

Introduction

The modern sporting environment is replete with sponsored events. In the past 40 years, sponsorship has evolved from simple, short-term, corporate donations that enhanced the ego of management to strategic, long-term economic relationships between sponsor and sponsee

offering the opportunity to establish a competitive advantage (Fahy, Farrelly, & Quester, 2004). However, as costs and the number of corporate sponsors increase, and as pressure on businesses to support society increases (Aguilera et al., 2007; Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009; Lacey et al., 2010), some sponsors are now turning away from the large, professional properties to achieve commercial objectives through community-based sponsorships. By investing in the local community relevant to the organization, firms can demonstrate their commitment to the social fabric in which they operate (Kourovskaja and Meenaghan, 2013) and thus help to demonstrate their corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Lacey et al., 2010; Plewa & Quester, 2011), defined here as “the organization’s status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations” (Brown & Dacin, 1997, p. 68). For example, since 2009, the National Australia Bank has sponsored the Australian Football League’s (AFL) Auskick program to support 168,000 participants, 2,800 community centers and over 20,000 volunteers (National Australia Bank, 2013). Thus, the bank uses community sponsorship to communicate its CSR and benefit from being “a good sponsor.” This research investigates how community-based sports sponsorship creates perceptions of CSR and leads to desirable sponsorship outcomes, such as self-congruity.

In order to do this, however, three antecedents of perceived fit are first examined to investigate whether managers could, or should, sponsor events that do not share a natural perceived fit with the brand without jeopardizing marketing performance. The results of this first study also offer some guidelines for selecting a congruent property and explores whether brands with a low CSR image can benefit from the high CSR image of a sponsored property. A second study then demonstrates the substantial role of perceived fit, also commonly labeled congruence, relatedness or match, between the sponsor and sport property for community sport sponsorship. It also reveals the circumstances in which community sporting club sponsorship increases self-congruity.

Self-congruity refers to the match between a brand's image and the consumer's own self-concepts (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Sirgy, 1985), here conceptualized as actual self-congruity and thus the correspondence between the brand's image and the actual thoughts and feelings a consumer has about themselves (Sirgy et al., 2000). Self-congruity offers an important predictor of consumer behavior, such as brand attitudes and preferences, purchase motivations, brand choice, satisfaction, brand loyalty, and repeat purchases (Barone et al., 1999; Sirgy et al., 2000). Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) suggest that companies can enhance consumers' sense of similarity with the company if the company identity matches consumers' sense of themselves. However, no research has yet investigated self-congruity antecedents or whether community-based sponsorship can improve self-congruity by increasing perceptions of CSR; a gap this research aims to address.

Theoretical foundations

Community-based sport sponsorship

Sponsorship typically involves a three-way relationship between a sponsor, the property, and the consumer. In this exchange, the property receives a payment, and the sponsor obtains the right to associate with the property and leverage that association to communicate with a target market (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). Sponsorship objectives typically involve business goals, such as improved awareness, sales, and attitudes (Meenaghan, 2001). Furthermore, positioning-related objectives are common (Fahy et al., 2004), with sponsorship deemed a powerful vehicle for "publicizing and highlighting a transparent, consistent and socially responsible corporate image" (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009, p. 111). Previous research shows that image-oriented sponsorships can promote perceptions of CSR, for example in the context of non-profit organizations (Cornwell & Coote, 2005) or charitable activities (Menon & Kahn, 2003).

Sponsorship research primarily focuses on sponsorships of properties with large audiences or causes, charities, nonprofits organizations, and community-based events (D'Astous & Bitz, 1995). However, the increasing costs of commercial sports sponsorships (Pons et al., 2006) have led businesses to consider community-based sports sponsorships (Heckman, 2000), which can focus communications on one geographic region, target a more homogenous audience, support concentrated leveraging activities, and ensure a more uniform message (Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006; Pegoraro et al., 2009). Moreover, this strategy can enhance company's commitment to its community and its concern for citizens (Kourovskiaia & Meenaghan, 2013). According to Miloch and Lambrecht (2006), such community-based sports properties also offer greater returns on investments. Furthermore, research in cause marketing suggests that consumers prefer local causes to national ones (Drumwright, 1996).

Community-based sports properties have a strong potential to demonstrate CSR (Pegoraro et al., 2009), because consumers do not view their sponsorships as a form of promotion. Rather, firms appear to provide a service to society by sponsoring properties in need of support (Gwinner, 1997). Yet research into, and knowledge of, community-based sports sponsorship continues to be sparse, compared with the wealth of information available about the effects of larger sponsorships. This gap prevents further conceptual development and contributes to an inadequate understanding of sponsorship at this level.

Corporate social responsibility

Organizations and society are interrelated and do not operate as discrete entities (Wood, 1991). Businesses are responsible to help ensure society's survival by maximizing benefits and minimizing harmful behavior. Thus, CSR is "a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources" (Kotler & Lee, 2004, p 3). This commitment has a unique effect on consumer information

processing (Drumwright, 1996), in line with attribution theory, which explains perceptions of socially responsible behavior and predicts how consumers react to CSR programs (Turker, 2009). Attribution theory suggests that a natural human cognitive process tries to explain the motivations for behavior as either self-serving or altruistic (Dean, 2003; Kelley & Michela, 1980). Consumers attribute CSR behavior similarly, which influences perceptions of CSR, or “associations that reflect a brand’s character with respect to its social obligations” (Menon & Kahn, 2003, p. 317). Preliminary evidence shows that these perceptions of CSR can lead to various outcomes, such as attitudes, attractiveness, trust, identification, and, ultimately, purchase behavior (Barone et al. 2000; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2010; Marin et al., 2009; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). However, no study has yet explored the impact of consumers’ perceptions of CSR on self-congruity.

Study 1: Determinants of sponsorship fit

Despite a comprehensive focus on perceived fit within the marketing discipline, few scholars have sought to understand the predictors of this important concept. Hence, this first study contributes to the literature by investigating three antecedents of perceived fit in a community sport sponsorship context.

Antecedents of fit

Little research examines the antecedents of overall perceived fit (Olson & Thjomoe 2011; Roy & Cornwell, 2004). From a managerial perspective, especially for sponsors that do not enjoy an obvious basis for perceived fit with the relevant image in their market, identifying antecedents of congruence can improve the ability to choose sponsorship relationships. This study focuses on the effect of CSR similarity between the sponsor and the property on perceived fit. When people read sponsorship information, they access event and

brand schemas from memory and compare them to produce judgments about the congruence of the sponsorship (McDaniel, 1999). A match between the CSR image of the event (or in this context of the sporting property) and the CSR image of the sponsored brand should lead to more positive evaluations of the association.

Corporate positioning similarity also should exert a positive impact on overall fit. Becker-Olsen et al. (2006, p. 47) define corporate positioning as the consistency of the image conveyed by a firm, such that “Clear positive market positions ...help consumers understand how firms fit into the competitive landscape, provide a point of differentiation, reduce uncertainty about firms and their products, and increase purchase intentions.” Consumers may expect that firms with a clear positioning associate themselves with properties with consistent positioning; a lack of similarity would reduce the clarity of the firm’s position (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Olson and Thjomoe (2011) find that attitude similarity influences perceived fit positively, so attitude similarity may be another predictor of overall fit. Therefore,

H1: CSR similarity between the sponsor and the event increases perceived sponsor–event fit.

H2: Corporate positioning similarity between the sponsor and the event increases perceived sponsor–event fit.

H3: Attitude similarity between the sponsor and the event increases perceived sponsor–event fit.

Method

The empirical test of these hypotheses relied on an online survey instrument, developed for, and distributed to, the members of a local Australian Rules Football sporting club. This popular sport enjoys a strong following in local communities, and though each club can draw on an existing membership and sponsor base, they also need continuing sponsorship funding

to maintain and enhance operations on and off the field. The sporting club chosen for this study was deemed appropriate for this study for three primary reasons. First, it is strongly connected to its local community by name and tradition, with the majority of its members and supporters located in the local council or the State. Second, it engages primarily amateur players, commonly nurtured through local junior competitions. Third, the club places a particularly strong emphasis on social responsibility by initiating and/or supporting various programs benefiting the local and regional communities, with a particular focus on children.

The survey items came from existing scales in sponsorship, sport management, and CSR literature (see Appendix A). To calculate the similarity scores, the format proposed by Gwinner and Eaton (1999) and Olson and Thjomoe (2011) was used. The survey included the same questions about the sponsor and the club, which revealed the degree of similarity by indicating the absolute difference between the object and sponsoring brand. A score of 0 indicates perfect similarity; a score of 6 shows the greatest dissimilarity. A large communication company had recently decided to sponsor the club, enabling the collection of respondents' views *before* they learned about this sponsorship. The survey was distributed to 1,900 club general members via e-mail, with a reminder email sent two weeks following the initial contact. To increase response rate, respondents could opt to enter a draw to win an iPad or one of six shopping vouchers. Of the 1,900 club members with available e-mail addresses, 226 people responded (85% men and 72.6% employed full time, with a mean age of 47.62 years).

Results

The CFA with AMOS 19.0 and maximum likelihood estimation showed that the four-factor model yielded a good fit to the data: $\chi^2_{(54)} = 197.07$ ($p = .000$), comparative fit index [CFI]=.95, normed fit index [NFI]=.93, root mean squared error of approximation

[RMSEA]=.10. The factor loadings were significant ($p < .01$), in support of the convergent validity of all scales. The composite reliabilities (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012) exceeded .85, which demonstrated good reliability. This study also applied the specific formula for the reliability of difference scores (Peter et al., 1993):

$$r_D = \frac{\sigma_1^2 r_{11} + \sigma_2^2 r_{22} - 2r_{12}\sigma_1\sigma_2}{\sigma_1^2 + \sigma_2^2 - 2r_{12}\sigma_1\sigma_2}$$

where r_{11} and r_{22} are the reliabilities of the first and second component scores, σ_1^2 and σ_2^2 are the variances of these component scores, and r_{12} is the correlation between the component scores. All three differences scores were reliable, as their r_D were superior to .80.

As Table 1 shows, the average variance extracted exceeded the squared value of the correlations between constructs, in support of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As statistical assessments of CMV, Harman's single-factor test revealed a very poor fit ($\chi^2_{(65)} = 2770.08$, $p = .000$, CFI = .07, NFI = .07, RMSEA = .43), and the LCMF model did not provide any better fit ($\chi^2_{(53)} = 196.55$, $p = .000$). These results indicated an absence of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Insert Table 1 about here

The hypothesized model fits the data well ($\chi^2_{(51)} = 123.12$, $p = .000$, CFI = .97, NFI = .96, RMSEA = .08). Table 2 reports the standardized path coefficients. The R-square value for perceived fit was .26. Two of the proposed antecedents, corporate positioning similarity and attitude similarity, had significant impacts on perceived fit, supporting H2 and H3. However, similarity in CSR image did not significantly affect fit, so H1 did not receive support.

Insert Table 2 about here

Summary

The concept of perceived fit enjoys a substantial interest in the marketing literature, yet most researchers focus on its outcomes rather than its antecedents. In line with recent advances, this research identifies both corporate positioning similarity and attitude similarity as significant predictors of perceived sponsor–event fit in a community-based sponsorship context.

However, no relationship between the similarity in CSR image and perceived fit was found.

Although this study is the first to examine similarity in CSR image, the results match recent research by Olson and Thjomoe (2011), who found no significant impact of image similarity on overall fit. Moreover, the CSR image of the sponsor ($M=18.43$, $\sigma=3.34$) is significantly lower than the CSR image of the property ($M=22.65$, $\sigma=3.27$) in this study ($F=19.55$, $p=.000$).

Study 2: Community-based sponsorship impact on self-congruity

Having determined the antecedents of perceived fit, study 2 concentrates on modeling and understanding the process by which community-based sponsorships help firms achieve their communication objectives according to two main mechanisms: transfer model and self-congruity theory. These theories underlie the proposed conceptual model, which predicts that sport property CSR image influences positively sponsor's self-congruity.

Hypotheses and conceptual model

Transfer model. Smith and Westerbeek (2007) argue that perceptions of a sponsor's CSR depend on the property's demonstration of CSR, so that perceptions emerge through meaning transfer, as predicted in balance theory (Heider, 1958; McCracken, 1989). When perceptions of the property's CSR develop, positive images and goodwill toward the property shift to the sponsor, because consumers seek to avoid inconsistencies within their beliefs. Gwinner and Eaton (1999) show that image dimensions, such as sincerity, can transfer from property to

sponsor. Although sponsor CSR may develop without property CSR, sports organizations with a socially responsible image can transfer that image to the sponsor through their association.

H4: Perceptions of a community-based sport property's CSR relate positively to the sponsor's CSR image.

Sponsorship awareness. The transfer of CSR image from event to sponsor requires that consumers are aware of the sponsorship. Memory of the sponsor-event relationship should be key to build CSR in the mind of consumers thanks to sponsorship (Cornwell & Humphreys, 2013). Transfers of semantic meaning rely on conscious thought and happen only when participants are aware of the association (Kim et al. 1996; Meersmans et al. 2005). Although Galli and Gorn (2011) use indirect attitude measures and show that semantic conditioning can occur unconsciously, the cognitive interpretation of sponsorship requires higher-order conscious processing. Therefore, CSR transfer should be stronger for consumers aware of the sponsorship.

H5: Awareness of the sponsorship moderates the relationship between the community-based sport property's CSR image and the sponsor's CSR image, such that the relationship is stronger for consumers aware of the sponsorship.

Perceived fit and sponsorship. Sponsorship research often includes the idea of perceived fit (also referred to as congruence, relatedness, or match) between the sponsor and the sponsored event or activity. The extent to which the sponsor and the event are similar can depend on functionality, attributes, images, or other key associations (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Simmons & Becker-Olson, 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Strong perceived fit leads to more favorable responses to a sponsorship (Deitz, Myers, & Stafford, 2012), including image transfer (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999), sponsorship attitude and perceived sincerity of the sponsor (Olson, 2010). Furthermore, perceived brand-cause fit might moderate the

effectiveness of CSR (Berens et al., 2007), depending on the product class (Pracejus & Olsen, 2004) and the company's inferred motives (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Hence, in accordance with the dominant view,

H6: Perceived property–sponsor fit moderates the relationship between the sport property's CSR image and sponsor's CSR image, such that the relation is stronger for consumers who perceive the association as congruent.

CSR value and self-congruity. Consumers often purchase goods to express their identity and likely evaluate brands or events according to the match between the products' images and the consumer's self-concepts (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Barone et al., 1999). This self-congruity matching process arises when a value-expressive brand triggers a consumer's self-schema, which contains self-knowledge related to the product's perceived image (Sirgy, 1985). Self-congruity influences pre-purchase behaviors (e.g., brand attitude, preference, and choice, purchase motivation) and post-purchase behaviors (e.g., consumer satisfaction, brand loyalty, repeat purchase) (Sirgy et al., 2000). It also affects consumer behavior through motives such as needs for self-consistency or self-esteem (Sirgy, 1985).

The literature remains silent on the antecedents of self-congruity. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) suggest that improving company identity may enhance perceived similarity. Based on this finding, it might be proposed that a sponsor's improved CSR image may foster self-congruity with the sponsor. However, such association is likely to depend on the consumer's predisposition towards CSR. Only if consumers view firms' altruistic activities towards the society in which they operate in as important (Walker & Kent, 2008), and thus only if they value CSR, will a heightened CSR image lead to a greater match between a brands' image and the consumer's own self-concepts. In line with this thought, Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) find that attitude toward the CSR domain moderates the relationship between CSR awareness and consumer–company identification.

Hence, improved CSR image is proposed to enhance self-congruity, if the consumer believes in the importance, and thus values, CSR.

H7: The sponsor's CSR image enhances consumers' perceived self-congruity with the sponsor.

H8: The value of CSR moderates the relationship between the sponsor's CSR image and self-congruity, such that the relation is significant only for consumers with favorable attitudes toward CSR.

Overall, sponsor CSR should mediate the relationship between property CSR and self-congruity. Figure 1 contains the conceptual model for Study 2. It should be noted that common marketing variables, such as brand affect or purchase intent, were not included in the research model for the sake of parsimony. Prior research (e.g. Barone et al., 1999; or Sirgy et al., 2000) has conclusively established the role of self-congruity as a powerful driver of brand affect or purchase intent.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Method

To test this model, an online survey of members of the same sporting club as in Study 1 was undertaken. For this study, one of the focal club's sponsors, a large electrical appliance retailer, represented the primary focus of the investigation. This substantial sponsorship attracted significant communication in the time prior to the survey as part of an activation strategy enacted throughout the weeks of the season, so consumers' awareness of the association was expected to be high.

The survey was distributed to 1,900 club general members via e-mail, with a reminder email sent two weeks following the initial contact. To increase response rate, respondents could opt to enter a draw to win an iPad or one of six shopping vouchers. In total, 319 valid responses were received, for an effective response rate of 16.8%. The final sample size meets

Nunally's (1978) criterion of at least 10 observations per item for structural equation modeling. Of these respondents, consistent with the membership population, 84.3% were men, and 67.7% employed full time. The mean age was 48 years, and only 7.5% were 30 years or younger, while 23.3% were at least 60 years of age. While the sample was skewed towards older respondents, particularly males, this is not expected to be of concern here as previous research has confirmed age and gender as not relevant for sponsorship effectiveness (Coppetti et al., 2009; Stotlar, 1993). Respondents attended an average of 6.25 games a year, and 28.5% stated that they commonly attended all games, whereas 8.5% declared they did not usually attend games but stayed involved with the club through other means. Eighty respondents (25%) were not aware of the studied sponsorship. Comparisons of respondents and non-respondents according to the member features contained in the database (age, gender, occupation, postcode, matches attendance, type of membership) revealed no significant differences, so non-response bias was not a significant problem.

The survey items came from existing scales in sponsorship, sport management, and CSR literature (see Appendix A). The measure of sponsorship awareness relied on a test of sponsor recognition with 13 alternatives. As Pleyers et al. (2007) suggest, recognition-type measures decrease the risk of underestimating the number of people who are truly aware, compared with recall-type measures.

Results

The test of the psychometric properties of the scales and the distinctiveness of the variables relied on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with AMOS 19.0 and maximum likelihood estimation. The five-factor model yielded a good fit to the data: $\chi^2_{(119)}=395.524$ ($p = .000$), CFI=.943, NFI=.92, RMSEA=.085. For all scales, the factor loadings were significant ($p < .01$), in support of convergent validity. The composite reliabilities, all above .80, indicated

good reliability. In support of discriminant validity, the average variance extracted exceeded the square of the correlations between constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), as detailed in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Common method variance. This study followed Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) recommendations to limit the potential for common method variance (CMV) bias. First, the survey questionnaire separated the predictor and criterion variable sections, ensured response confidentiality, and explicitly assured participants that there were no right or wrong answers. Second, statistical analyses tested for CMV. A single-factor model (Harman's single-factor test) revealed a very poor fit with the data ($\chi^2_{(119)} = 3287.875, p = .000, CFI = .343, NFI = .337, RMSEA = .289$). A baseline measurement model with an additional latent common method factor (LCMF), on which every item in the model could load (in addition to loadings on original constructs), provided a better fit ($\chi^2_{(118)} = 213.925, p = .000$), and the indicator loadings on theoretical factors all remained significant. In addition, correlations among substantive latent factors are virtually the same, whether generated by the CFA with or without the LCMF. In summary, there is some evidence of CMV bias but not sufficient to explain the relationships observed (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Hypotheses testing. The test of the structural equation model in Figure 1 used AMOS 19.0 for the full sample. The introduction of the main effects of perceived brand–club fit and CSR value helped to identify the type of moderation (Sharma et al., 1981). The hypothesized, fully mediated model with interactive effects fit the data well ($\chi^2_{(146)} = 280.617, p = .000, CFI = .972, NFI = .944, RMSEA = .054$). Table 4 reports the standardized path coefficients.

Insert Table 4 about here

As Table 4 shows, members' perceptions of the CSR of their club relate to perceptions of sponsor CSR, in support of H4. The potential for the property CSR to influence the CSR image of sponsors likely derives from the sense that sport organizations that demonstrate CSR appear closely linked to local communities. Greater involvement by the sports organization in the local community increases the sponsor's access to the focal audience, which in turn increases opportunities to strengthen sponsor CSR. Furthermore, sports organizations that create a socially responsible image may transfer that image to supporting sponsors (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Following conceptual discussions of the potential influence of sports property CSR on sponsor CSR (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007), this research provides some preliminary empirical evidence of this process.

The test of H5 required splitting the sample into two groups (aware vs. unaware). A multi-group analysis shows that the path loading from property CSR image to sponsor CSR image is .24 ($p < .01$) for the unaware group, smaller in magnitude ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.93$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$) than the path loading for the aware group (.40, $p < .001$). In line with prior research (Kim et al., 1996; Meersmans et al., 2005) and H5, the relationship of property and sponsor CSR images is stronger for participants aware of the sponsorship. However, CSR image still can be transferred without sponsorship awareness, through an unconscious transfer of meaning (Galli & Gorn, 2011). Therefore, the full sample was retained for further analyses.

To test the proposed moderation effect of perceived fit on CSR image transfer in H6, sport property CSR image \times perceived fit, was used as an indicator of latent interaction. The formula from Ping (1995) and Cortina et al. (2001) details how to fix the loading and error of the indicator. Reducing multi-collinearity entailed standardizing the predictors prior to forming the interaction term (Cohen et al., 2003). Table 4 shows that the interaction of sport property CSR image and perceived fit is positive and statically significant in relation to sponsor CSR image. Because perceived brand–club fit exerted a positive direct impact on

perceived CSR sponsor image, perceived fit provided a quasi-moderating variable of the relationship between property CSR and sponsor CSR (Sharma et al., 1981).

The direct effect of perceived fit on perceived sponsor CSR image mirrors recent findings in cause-related marketing contexts, which confirmed a positive association between firm-cause fit as well as thoughts, purchase intentions and choice (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004). Furthermore, it is in line with Deitz et al. (2012), who recently showed perceived fit as impacting sponsorship response. Perceived fit can influence the sponsor's perceived CSR image through persuasion processes other than image transfer. In prior research, altruistic brand motivations and brand credibility mediated the relationship between perceived cause-brand fit and sponsor CSR image (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Rifon et al., 2004).

To interpret the interaction between property CSR and perceived fit more clearly, a plot of regression lines of property CSR on sponsor CSR includes 1 standard deviation below and above mean level of perceived brand-club fit (Aiken & West, 1991) (see Figure 2). When perceived fit is high, property CSR has a stronger impact on sponsor CSR. A significance test of the two slopes (Aiken & West, 1991) confirms that only the first slope is significant (high fit, $p < .05$; low fit, $p > .05$). Community-based sport property CSR image thus does (or does not) influence sponsor image when subjects perceive the association between sport club and sponsor as highly (barely) congruent.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Table 4 also shows that sponsor CSR image has a strong and statistically significant impact on self-congruity, in strong support of H7. In line with prior research on consumer-company identification, this result shows that when consumers perceive a company as socially responsible, they view that organization as similar to themselves. A further test of

mediation compared a partially mediated model (i.e., path from sport property CSR image to self-congruity) with the baseline model using chi-square differences (e.g., Bentler & Bonnet, 1980). The added direct path was not statically significant, so perceived sponsor CSR image fully mediated the relationship between community-based sport property image and consumers' self-congruity with the sponsor. Although Zhao et al. (2010) consider that there is no need to first establish an effect to be mediated, a bivariate regression establishes that perceived sport property CSR image has a significant total effect on self-congruity ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, a multi-group analysis shows that sport property CSR image positively influences self-congruity but only for respondents aware of the sponsorship (aware $\beta = .36$, $p < .01$; unaware $\beta = -.03$, $p > .05$). Hence, community-based sponsorship fosters the relationship between perceived sport property CSR and self-congruity with the brand.

Table 4 shows that the interaction of sponsor CSR image and the value of CSR is positive and statically significant in relation to self-congruity with the sponsor, in strong support of H8. Attitudes towards CSR, on the other hand, have no impact on self-congruity. Therefore, CSR acts as a pure moderator of the relationship between perceived sponsor CSR image and self-congruity (Sharma et al., 1981). The regression lines of sponsor CSR on self-congruity at 1 standard deviation below and above the mean attitudes toward CSR (Figure 3) are plotted. When CSR value is high, the sponsor's perceived CSR image has a stronger impact on self-congruity. The significance test of the two slopes confirms that only the first slope is significant (high CSR value, $p < .05$; low CSR value, $p > .05$).

Insert Figure 3 about here

Sponsor CSR image matters to consumers with more positive attitudes toward CSR but not to those whose attitudes toward CSR are less positive. The outcome of activities aimed at enhancing CSR image, such as community sponsorship, depends on the consumers'

own value system. Consumers who feel strongly about CSR are more likely to make judgments based on this criterion (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001) and emerge as the only ones exhibiting greater self-congruity. This finding is particularly relevant for understanding the value of CSR for individual consumers and the impact of CSR programs on consumer responses, which in turn can clarify how and why sponsoring local, community-based sports organizations works (Walker & Kent, 2008).

Summary

This second study provides empirical evidence of how sponsoring a community-based sports property with a high CSR image can improve self-congruity by increasing perceptions of sponsor CSR. However, an increase in self-congruity is not universal but depends on individual value systems. Only if consumers value CSR does CSR image increase levels of self-congruity. Sponsorship of local sporting properties can transfer CSR images from the club to the sponsor, both consciously and unconsciously. While sport property CSR image relates more to sponsor CSR image for consumers aware of the sponsorship, the relationship remains substantive even for respondents unaware of this association. One may suggest that these findings are due to an halo effect whereby respondents who evaluate positively the CSR image of the property, are also more willing to evaluate positively the CSR image of the sponsor. However, the lack of common method variance bias and the substantial role of sponsorship awareness in the relationship between the CSR images of the property and the sponsor all but rule this explanation out, supporting instead the notion that community-based sponsorship impacts favorably the CSR image of the sponsor.

The results also confirm the substantial role of perceived fit for community-based sponsorship effectiveness. Property CSR image only influences perceived sponsor CSR image when consumers perceive the association between the brand and the club as congruent.

Perceived fit also has a direct positive effect on sponsor CSR image. However, companies often sponsor causes or local properties to improve their CSR image. Companies with a low CSR image might aim to sponsor sports properties with a good CSR image. But is this effort really worthwhile? Do consumers perceive the association between a property with a high CSR image and a sponsor with bad CSR image as incongruent, thus ruining the community-based sponsorship benefits? Results study 1 answer these questions, showing no significant effect of CSR image similarity on sponsor-club fit. Hence, in combination, the findings of both studies suggest that companies with low CSR image can achieve good outcomes from sponsoring properties with positive CSR images.

Conclusion

Despite the potential of community-based sports, few exploratory studies examine sponsorships at community levels (Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006; Pegoraro et al., 2009). In particular, a knowledge gap persists regarding whether the sponsorship of community-based sports can achieve perceptions of CSR, as well as how the CSR image of a property may influence the effectiveness of this process. This research contributes to the sponsorship, CSR, and self-congruity literatures.

First, the sponsorship literature benefits from a greater understanding of how community-based sponsorships create perceptions of CSR, leading to desirable outcomes such as self-congruity. Community-based sponsorship can transfer CSR images, both consciously and unconsciously. However, sponsorship awareness strengthens the relationship between the property's and the sponsor's CSR image, confirming the ability of community-based sponsorship to improve CSR image.

Second, perceived fit has a substantial influence on sponsorship effectiveness, so that the relationship is stronger for respondents who perceive the association as congruent,

although study 2 did not assess the circumstances in which perceived fit strengthens the relationship between property sponsor CSR images (cf. Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004). Third, study 1 confirmed Olson and Thjomoe's findings (2011): Image similarity and similarity in CSR image in particular, do not drive overall perceived fit. In contrast, clarity of positioning and attitudes similarity are good predictors of fit.

Fourth, the CSR image transferred from the property to the sponsor is likely to impact perceived similarity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) and thus improve consumers' self-congruity with the brand; if consumers value CSR. While this finding provides important insights, further research should identify other antecedents of self-congruity.

As with all research, however, these results are subject to several limitations. For example, it only investigates one community-based sporting club. Additional research should replicate the investigation with various types of sports, sponsors, and sponsorship scenarios. Rigorous empirical work should also determine whether consumers perceive the sponsorship of various community-based organizations as CSR and what other outcomes sponsors might expect. Further research may also examine how external stakeholders (e.g., community members) respond to a sponsorship in terms of attitudes and behaviors towards the sponsor. The cross-sectional nature of the data also limits the ability to draw strong inferences about the sequence of variable. A longitudinal study would offer a robust method to test these causal relationships further.

Future studies could further investigate congruence, for example considering longitudinal effects through learning (Woisetschläger & Michaelis, 2012) or considering the relevance of separating image and perceived functional fit (Bigné, Currás-Pérez, & Joaquín Aldás-Manzano's, 2012) for achieving CSR image transfer. Furthermore, while fit was measured in this study as a unidimensional construct (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000), other scholars have adopted a bidimensional (Fleck & Quester,

2007) or multidimensional (Zdravkovic et al., 2010) approach. It may well be that CSR similarity influences one of these dimensions of fit.

Managerial implications from this research are clear: Sponsors faced with increasingly unstable financial environments (O'Reilly, 2009) must understand better how to capitalize on community-based sports organizations to support the effective redirection of sponsorship budgets from professional to community-based sponsorships. In particular, the results show that companies can improve self-congruity through community-based sponsorship provided community members have positive attitudes toward CSR. To leverage this positive effect, sponsors should increase sponsorship awareness and select a congruent community property to sponsor. Managers should also seek a property with similar attitude and corporate positioning to ensure high property–sponsor fit.

However, as CSR image similarity might not influence perceived fit; companies may also seek to improve their CSR images through sponsorships of worthy but ill-fitting causes, without necessarily putting at risk sponsorship performance. Similarly, community-based sports organizations should be very conscious of their CSR image. In addition to increasing local community support and the team's support base (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), improving their CSR image can attract new sponsors. At a societal level, this research may well benefit communities that host local sports organizations. More resources provided by sponsors seeking to demonstrate CSR may enable local sports properties to increase their activities and contributions to the community.

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Table 1. Study 1: psychometric properties of the scales

| | ρ | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---------------------------|--------|-----|------|------|------|---|
| 1. CSR similarity | .86 | .68 | 1 | | | |
| 2. Positioning similarity | .86 | .67 | .15 | 1 | | |
| 3. Attitude similarity | .97 | .91 | .23 | .41 | 1 | |
| 4. Fit | .99 | .97 | -.10 | -.31 | -.51 | 1 |

Notes: ρ = Composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 2. Study 1 results

| Path Modeled | | Coefficient |
|----------------------------------|------|-------------|
| CSR similarity | →Fit | .02 |
| Corporate positioning similarity | →Fit | -.14* |
| Attitude similarity | →Fit | -.49*** |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Study 2: psychometric properties of the scales

| | ρ | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------------------|--------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Sponsor CSR image | .93 | .77 | 1.00 | | | | |
| 2. Sport property CSR image | .86 | .62 | .46 | 1.00 | | | |
| 3. Self-congruity | .94 | .83 | .40 | .28 | 1.00 | | |
| 4. Congruence | .98 | .95 | .39 | .19 | .41 | 1.00 | |
| 5. Value of CSR | .80 | .58 | .12 | .14 | .16 | .14 | 1.00 |

Table 4. Study 2 results

| Predictor | Sponsor CSR Image | Self-Congruity |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Sport property CSR image | .31*** | |
| Fit | .35*** | |
| Fit×Sport property CSR image | .24*** | |
| Sponsor CSR image | | .34*** |
| Attitude toward CSR | | .07 |
| Sponsor CSR image×Attitude toward CSR | | .28*** |
| R ² | .35 | .20 |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Notes: Structural path coefficients are completely standardized.

Figure 1. Conceptual model, Study 2

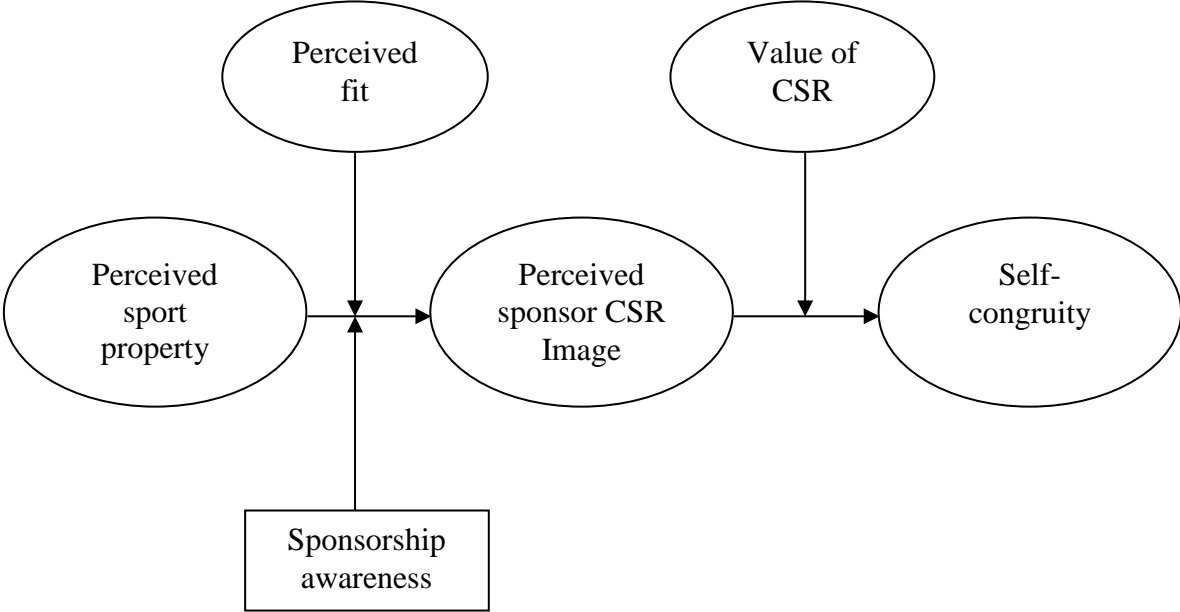


Figure 2. Interaction between property CSR and club–brand fit in predicting sponsor CSR

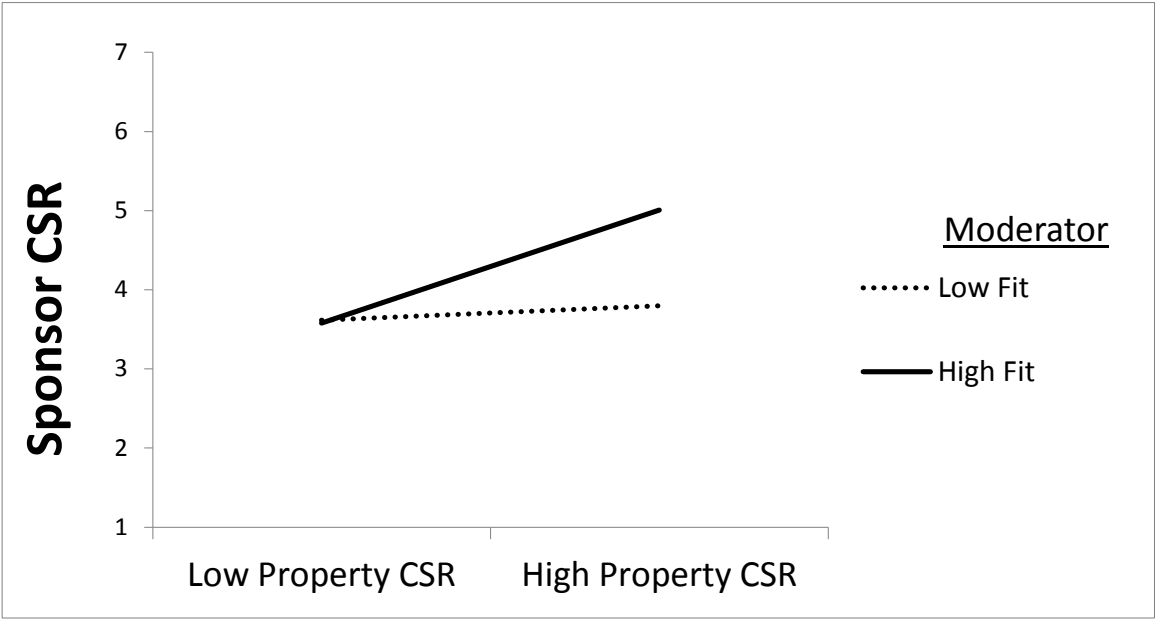
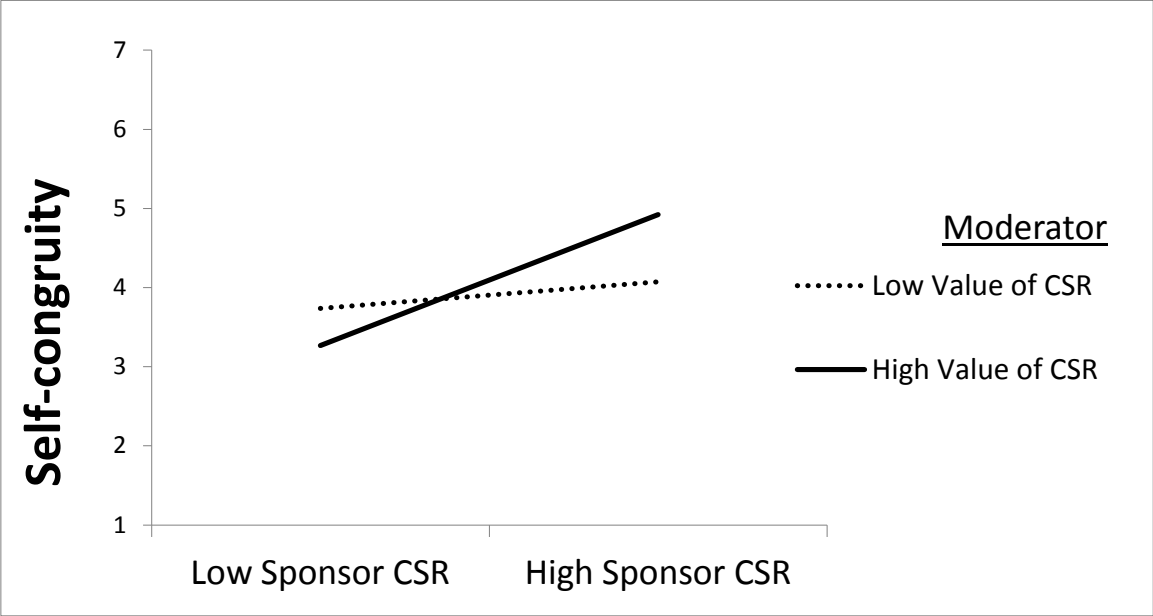


Figure 3. Interaction between sponsor CSR and attitudes toward CSR in predicting self-congruity



Appendix A. Measurement items, sources, and item loadings

| | Type | Item loadings |
|--|--------|--------------------------|
| Perceived sponsor CSR image (Dean, 2003; Menon and Kahn, 2003) [Brand] fulfils its social responsibilities. [Brand] gives back to society. I think that [Brand] acts with society's interests in mind. [Brand] acts in a socially responsible way. | Likert | .90 .88 .87 .85 |
| Perceived sport property CSR image (Dean, 2003; Menon and Kahn, 2003) [Property] fulfils its social responsibilities. [Property] gives back to society. I think that [Property] acts with society's interests in mind. [Property] acts in a socially responsible way. | Likert | .78 .80 .88 .90 |
| Self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1997) The [Brand] reflects who I am. The [Brand] is consistent with how I see myself. People who are similar to me use [Brand]. | Likert | .96 .99 .68 |
| Perceived fit (Rifon et al., 2004) Not compatible/Compatible Not a good fit/A good fit Congruent/Not congruent | SD | .99 .97 .97 |
| Value of CSR (Walker and Kent, 2008) Companies should regularly make donations to charity. Companies should donate some of their products to people in need. Companies should support local community organizations and programs. | Likert | .77 .78 .77 |
| Corporate positioning (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006) [Company] conveys a consistent image. I understand what [Company] does. [Company] clearly represents who they are. | Likert | .77 .81 .88 |
| Attitude (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006) Good/Bad Favorable/Unfavorable Positive/Negative | SD | .95 .97 .95 |