

Introduction

As a crucial marketing asset, consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) has been studied in a broad array of professional fields, with consistent findings of its positive influence on promoting consumer preferences and purchase intentions (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995), elevating consumer-perceived quality toward products (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991), improving consumer evaluation of brand extensions (D.A. Aaker & Keller, 1990), and enhancing resilience in product-harm crises (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000). Understandably, corporations are always seeking efficient ways to build strong CBBE.

Large numbers of sport events, from local and small-scale events to international and megaevents, provide great communication platforms for sponsors to build, strengthen, and maintain their CBBE. Among various sport events, college football as one of the most influential sport platforms has been garnering tremendous attention from both consumers and sponsors. In the 2014-15 season, the attendance of college football events reached 49 million (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2014); over 185 million viewers watched the college football regular season through major ESPN platforms including ABC, ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU, and ESPNEWS (National Football Foundation, 2015); and three playoff games drew 29.8 million viewers (National Football Foundation, 2015). Accordingly, tremendous sponsorship transactions have been distributed to the field of college football, which is evidenced by the typical value of \$20 million per year for title sponsorship of each playoff game (Sport Business Journal, 2015). However, the tangible guidance for corporate sponsors to efficiently use event sponsorship to communicate and build their CBBE is limitedly. To enrich this, the current project highlighted the key role of brand-event personality fit (BEPF) in corporate sponsors' brand communications and empirically examined its impact on sponsors' CBBE in the context of major college football events.

Hypothesis Development

Schemas are hypothetical cognitive structures representing a person's expectations in a certain domain that will guide one's perception, thoughts, and actions (McDaniel, 1999). According to schema theory, fans develop schemas related to specific events on different levels through their prior knowledge, and they process promotional communications by matching cues derived from sponsorship communications to their prior stored schemas regarding those events (Stoltman, 1991). Therefore, schema theory predicts that sport-event fans are likely to perceive the sponsoring brands that are consistent with the events and decline the discrepant brands because the former are strongly associated with their stored schemas (Jensen, Wakefield, Cobbs, & Turner, in press).

Schema theory also suggests that in addition to affecting consumer cognition, fit information positively influences consumer affective evaluation of sponsorships in that schemas contain knowledge from both cognitive beliefs and relevant affections (Fiske & Pavelchak, 1986). That is, the affective judgment derived from a sport event could also be transferred to the specific sponsor(s) that may fit fans' schemas regarding the event personality. In the context of sport sponsorship, the positive impact of schema fit on consumer behavior has been supported by multiple studies (e.g., Jensen et al., in press; Lee & Cho, 2009; Macdougall, Nguyen, & Karg,

2014; Mueller & Roberts, 2008; Pichot, Tribou, & O'Reilly, 2008). On the basis of previous findings, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: BEPF would positively influence consumers' brand awareness-association.

H2: BEPF would positively influence consumers' perceived quality.

H3: BEPF would positively influence consumers' brand loyalty.

In addition, classic conditioning research in advertising indicates that conditioned consumer responses (toward sponsoring brands) also relied on consumer attitude toward the unconditioned stimulus (i.e., sport events in the current research; Speed & Thompson, 2000). In sponsorship research, an individual's attitude toward the sponsee is also identified as a crucial factor influencing his or her consumer behavior (Shimp, Stuart, & Engle, 1991; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Therefore, to better assess the influence of BEPF on CBBE, consumer event attitude was embraced in the tested model as a major control variable, leading to the following hypotheses:

H4: Event attitude would positively influence consumers' brand awareness-association.

H5: Event attitude would positively influence consumers' perceived quality.

H6: Event attitude would positively influence consumers' brand loyalty

Project Design and Data Description

The Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game, a large-scale, annual college football event held in Atlanta, GA, LISA, during the season-opening weekend was selected, primarily due to its strong media influence and clear brand personality: The Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game is typically televised on a national television network and thus possesses a strong nationwide influence, not only among the college football fans but also among general consumers. Unlike multisport events (e.g., Olympic Games), the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game is a single-sport event and therefore has the salient and uncompounded personalities that would facilitate the current study's focus on BEPF. Research participants were students in a large public university located in the southeastern United States who confirmed they had been exposed to the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game via attending the live event or watching it on television or the Internet. Participants were consumers of 18 years of age or older who voluntarily participated in the study.

The personality of the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game was measured by the modified Geuens et al.'s (2009) brand-personality scale, which included 12 personality traits under five dimensions: (a) responsibility, including traits of down-to-earth, stable, and responsible; (b) activity, including traits of active, dynamic, and innovative; (c) aggressiveness, including traits of aggressive and bold; (d) simplicity, including traits of ordinary and simple; and (e) emotionality, including traits of romantic and sentimental. Each personality trait was graded on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not characteristic at all* to 7 = *very characteristic*).

The BEPF between the event and the selected sponsors was measured by the BEPF scale, which assessed the fit of 12 personality traits under five factors (i.e., responsibility fit, activity fit, aggressiveness fit, simplicity fit, and emotionality fit). The question was stated as "Do you think that X (a sponsoring brand) and Y (a sponsored sport event) are a good matchup in each of the following traits?" Each item was graded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 =

strongly agree). Consumer attitude toward event was assessed by the revised Scale of Attitude toward the Advertiser developed by Bruner and Hensel (1992), which includes two 7-point semantic differential items (i.e., 1 = *bad* to 7 = *good* and 1 = *dislike* to 7 = *like*).

A sponsor's CBBE was examined by the CBBE scale developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) that contained 10 items under three factors including brand awareness/association, perceived quality, and conative brand loyalty. Each of these items was graded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). In addition, three items measuring gender, age, and ethnicity were included in the survey form. The questionnaire was preceded with a screening question: "Do you realize that X (a sponsoring brand) sponsors the most recent Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game?" An individual was included as a participant only after he or she positively confirmed awareness of the sponsorship relationship.

After the content validity check with three experts in the relevant field and a pilot study, the questionnaire was distributed individually to research participants. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the six brands (i.e., AT&T, Chick-fil-A, Coca-Cola, Delta, Georgia Power, and Home Depot) and was asked to assess the fit between personality traits of that brand and those of the event.

A total of 327 respondents who confirmed their awareness of sponsorship between the assigned brand and event participated in Study 2. Excluding 45 questionnaires due to severe number of missing items (i.e., over 20%), valid data from 282 respondents were included in the data analyses, which represented the six sponsors: AT&T ($n = 46$), Chick-fil-A ($n = 48$), Coca-Cola ($n = 49$), Delta ($n = 44$), Georgia Power ($n = 46$), and Home Depot ($n = 49$). Of the respondents, 64.9% were men and 35.1% were women. In terms of age, 56.0% were 18-21 years old, 34.8% were 22-25 years old, 4.3% were 26-30 years old, and 5.0% were above 30 years old. There were 76.2% White, 13.3% Asian, 10.0% African American, 2.5%, American Indian, 3.2% Hispanic, and 3.2% mixed ethnicity or other.