

Influence of a Sport Organization's Ecology Efforts and the Resulting Support of Corporate Partners and Behavioral Intentions of Fans

Brian P. McCullough, Seattle University
Galen Trail, Seattle University

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The United Nations announced the Sports for Climate Action Framework (2018) to encourage the sport sector to be more environmentally responsible by using its platform to promote environmental behaviors. However, the sport sector as a whole has been slow to respond, because of a lack of support from within (upper management, employees; McCullough & Cunningham, 2010) and from without (fans, corporate partners; McCullough, Casper, & Pfahl, 2016) the organization. However, an incentive for management and corporate partners to support sustainability endeavors would be if both could see financial and social ROI. Thus, an assessment is necessary to evaluate the possibility and process by which this can be accomplished. Such research and practical tools are needed to assist the sport sector to deepen its environmental commitment by increasing the sophistication and impact of sustainability campaigns (Trail, 2016).

To this end, Trail and McCullough (2019) proposed the Sport Sustainability Consumer Evaluation Model (SSCEM) model to specifically evaluate sustainability campaigns and the subsequent behavioral intentions to engage in a specific environmental behavior. However, the SSCEM did not address three key variables that we think need to be evaluated: ascription of responsibility (Casper, Pfahl, & McCullough, 2014, 2017), fit between the team and sustainability initiatives, and responsiveness to messaging from the team. In addition, we want to see if those constructs positively impact support for green corporate partners (financial ROI) along with increasing sustainability behavior intentions in the fans/spectators (social ROI).

Specifically, we proposed that perceived fit between the team and environmental sustainability would predict responsiveness to environmental messaging from the team directly (Hypothesis 1a) and indirectly through ascription of environmental responsibility to the team (Hypothesis 1b). Ascription of responsibility would predict sustainability behavioral intentions directly (Hypothesis 2a) and indirectly through responsiveness to messaging from the team (Hypothesis 2b). Furthermore, we proposed that attachment to the team would increase responsiveness to messaging (H3) above that of team/sustainability fit. Lastly, we proposed that responsiveness to messaging from the team would increase support for green corporate partners both directly (H4a) and indirectly through increased sustainability behavior intentions (H4b).

To test this model, we collected information from a national sample using a Qualtrics panel (N = 205). We found that the model fit adequately well (RMSEA=.073; $c2/df=2.1$; ECVI=.662) and that most of our hypotheses were supported. In addition, we found that Team/Sustainability Fit explained 61.1% of the variance in Ascription of Responsibility. Furthermore, 43.0% of the variance in Responsiveness was explained by Fit, Ascription, and Attachment to the Team, while 64.9% of the variance in Sustainability Intentions was explained by Ascription and Responsiveness. Lastly, the entire model explained 68.4% of the variance in Support for Green Corporate Partners.

Future research can potentially extend the SSCEM by adding these concepts, which would explain additional variance and assess actual responsiveness to team messaging about sustainability. Sport practitioners can use this model to show green corporate partners the impact of messaging by the team on corporate partner sales (financial ROI) and show social ROI through increased fan sustainability intentions.