Finding the Perfect Match: Dimension Analysis and Development of the External Sponsorship Congruence Scale

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One of the challenges with effective sport sponsorships is marketing clutter and the negative impact it has on sponsor recall accuracy (Cornwell & Relyea, 2000; Rumpf, 2012; Seguin & O’Reilly, 2008). Previous research has shown sponsorship congruence plays an important role in recall (Cornwell et al., 2005; Fleck et al., 2012; Jagre et al., 2001; Olson & Thjomoe, 2011), ultimately influencing consumer attitudes and behavior (Close & Lacey, 2013; Gwinner & Bennett, 2008; Simmons & Becker-Olson, 2006). An important aspect of sponsorship congruence is external congruence, or the level of similarity between a sponsor and sponsored entity (Prendergast et al., 2010). External sponsorship congruence has been examined in previous literature, however conceptualization and measurement of external congruence is inconsistent and lacks structure, leaving a gap in the understanding of congruence theory within a sport sponsorship context.

The current study addressed this issue by critically analyzing how external congruence constructs have been conceptualized, operationalized, and measured within marketing, consumer behavior, and sport sponsorship research in the last 20 years. Based on this literature, a comprehensive external congruence scale was developed. As outlined by Churchill (1979), Hinkin (1995), and Hinkin et al., (1997), traditional scale development studies take one of two methodological approaches, deductive or inductive, to generate and examine scale items. The current study is unique in that it utilized both approaches to refine previous external sponsorship congruence measures and develop new measures that had only been conceptualized.

First, three diverse focus groups were conducted to examine existing and new facets of external congruence. A total of 46 external congruence items were generated from these focus groups. A subsequent panel comprised of 14 marketing and sport sponsorship experts reviewed coding and literature analysis, as well as potential construct items, to ensure concept and face validity of said items.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using survey data distributed via mTurk. Listwise deletion was implemented and a total of 260 responses were used for factor analysis. After data was checked for normality, an Eigenvalue and scree plot analysis revealed a six-factor structure provided the best fit for the following external sponsorship congruence factors: Brand Equity (Sponsor), Brand Equity (Event), Geographic (Sponsor), Geographic (Event), Functional, and Audience congruence. A subsequent CFA confirmed the acceptable model fit of the six-factor structure ($X^2 = 421.104, df = 193, p = .001; \text{TLI} = 0.949; \text{CFI} = 0.957; \text{RMSEA} = 0.063; \text{SRMR} = 0.047$). Additionally, Cronbach’s alpha, AVE scores, and composite reliability scores for each factor were examined and results provided evidence of scale reliability and validity based on the sample as outlined by Kline (2016).

The final External Sponsorship Congruence Scale (ESCS) consisted of six constructs comprised of 23 items: Brand Equity (Sponsor), Brand Equity (Event), Geographic (Sponsor), Geographic (Event), Functional, and Audience congruence. Results of the ESCS extends sponsorship congruence literature through the development of a comprehensive measure that can be used by both academics and practitioners to assess the role of external sponsorship congruence. Implications and future research will be addressed in detail.