

# Connecting Event Impact Perception to Sponsor-Related Behaviours among Residents in the Host City

Sport Management

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This study examines how residents' perceptions of event impacts are associated with their attitude towards the event, sponsoring brand, and subsequently, their behavioural intentions concerning the sponsor's product. While sponsorship is a key revenue source in the sports industry, previous research has primarily focused on spectator sports, leaving participation-based sporting events underexplored. This study aims to investigate sponsorship complexities, particularly among residents, within the context of Naha Marathon, Okinawa, Japan. By doing so, this study addresses the growing popularity and corporate interest in events like marathons. Recognising that residents may form attitudes and responses to an event and its sponsors differently compared to spectators and participants, antecedents not yet explored in the sponsorship literature are measured. The study shifts the focus from sponsor-related factors to sponsee-related factors, aiming to provide new insights that help sponsors develop effective and sustainable sponsorship strategies that align with community expectations.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in social exchange theory, image transfer theory and the theory of planned behaviour. The relationship between residents' perception of event impacts and their attitude towards the event is examined through the lens of social exchange theory. This theory posits that

individuals seek favourable outcomes when engaging in social interactions. Based on this, the three first hypotheses suggest that perceived event impacts are positively associated with attitude towards the sponsor. Adopting a triple bottom line approach, the study assesses the perceived social, economic, and environmental impacts of the event, providing a comprehensive evaluation of perceived event impacts among residents. Image transfer theory tells us that images and attitudes held towards one object can transfer to another object that is associated with it. This theory is applied to build the next hypothesis, that attitude towards the event is positively associated with attitude towards the sponsor. According to the theory of planned behaviour, attitudes are crucial predictors of behavioural responses. This forms the basis for the hypotheses that attitude towards the sponsor will positively correlate with purchase intention and word-of-mouth. Additionally, attitude towards the event and the sponsor is hypothesised to mediate the relationship between perceived event impacts and behavioural intentions related to the sponsor's product.

The context of the study is the Naha Marathon, an annual event held in Okinawa, Japan, notable for its strong community involvement. Data was gathered through an online panel provided by Cross Marketing, an internet market research company. Collection commenced on the day

following the event and was continued for one week. Qualifying questions were utilised to determine respondents' knowledge about the Naha Marathon and its sponsors. The questionnaire, comprising 28 items including demographic information, adapted items from existing literature. All items were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*. After data cleaning, 322 responses were deemed fit for data analysis. Data were analysed using the IBM SPSS 29.00 and Amos 29.00 statistical software programs. Structural equation modelling was employed to test the hypotheses.

The findings indicate that social event impacts were significantly associated with attitude towards the event ( $\beta = .57, p < .01$ ), which in turn was significantly associated with attitude towards the sponsor ( $\beta = .67, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, attitude towards the sponsor was significantly associated with behavioural intentions related to the sponsor's product, including purchase intention ( $\beta = .62, p < .01$ ) and word-of-mouth ( $\beta = .52, p < .01$ ). The indirect effect between social event impacts through attitude towards the event and sponsor, and purchase intention ( $\beta = .24, p < .01$ ) and word-of-mouth ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ) was significant, indicating a mediating effect of the two attitudinal variables. However, economic and environmental event impacts did not exhibit such associations.

The theoretical implications underscore the importance of social exchange theory, image transfer theory and the theory of planned behaviour in understanding residents' perceptions of sporting events and sponsorship outcomes. However, the results show the need for further exploration to understand residents' prioritisation regarding event perceptions. Exploring different theoretical frameworks

might be fruitful in future research on the topic. Practical implications suggest that sponsors of events like the Naha Marathon should prioritise aligning their brand values with the positive social impacts of the event, such as community development and fostering civic engagement. Sponsors are advised to strategically integrate initiatives that meet community needs while aligning their business objectives to maximise sponsorship effectiveness.

While the study contributes to our understanding of sponsorship effectiveness in participation-based sports, several limitations are acknowledged. The cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to determine causal relationships, and the sole focus on the Naha Marathon constrains the general applicability of the results to similar contexts. Especially considering that the Naha Marathon 2023 marked the event's first occurrence in four years without any restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the study did not consider specific characteristics of the sponsoring companies, which could influence the results. Future researchers are advised to continue to explore various antecedents of sponsorship effectiveness in different contexts and over longer periods.

The original contribution of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of a rarely explored sample group in the sponsorship literature – namely residents – and antecedents of sponsorship not yet explored. This study advances our understanding of sponsorship dynamics in participation-based sporting events, underscoring the significance of social event impacts in shaping residents' attitudes and behavioural intentions, emphasising the importance of community engagement for sponsors.