



Original Article

Event Sponsorship and Brand Loyalty: Mediating Role of Attitude Toward Sponsored Events and Sponsoring Brand

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Abstract: This research is to investigate the impact of event sponsorship on consumers' brand loyalty through attitudes toward sponsoring brand and sponsored event. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was conducted to test hypotheses with the survey data of 282 Vietnamese youth who have ever watched and followed the Rap Viet 2020 event. The findings indicated that congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image, self-congruity with sponsoring brand image, and attitude towards sponsored event had a significant positive effect on attitude towards sponsoring brand. Attitude towards sponsoring brand, self-congruity with sponsoring brand image, and self-congruity with event image had a significant positive effect on brand loyalty. Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image, self-congruity with sponsoring brand image, and self-congruity with event image had a significant positive effect on sponsored event attitude. The congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image, self-congruity with sponsoring brand image influence sponsoring brand loyalty by mediating the effects of event attitude and sponsoring brand attitude. Self-congruity with event image influenced sponsoring brand loyalty by mediating event attitude and sponsoring brand attitude. Based on the research's empirical analysis, some implications were proposed to help sponsor and sponsee managers on how to improve the effectiveness of sponsorship activities.

Keyword: Brand loyalty, attitude towards sponsoring brand, attitude towards sponsored event, congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image.

1. Introduction

Many researchers have studied various elements of event sponsorship, ranging from the nature of this activity to management and its impact [1]. Basically, much research is

conducted about topics such as the definition of sponsorship events [2], distinguishing event sponsorship from other marketing communication activities [3], awareness, public opinions about event sponsorship, and characteristics [4]. Other aspects about

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management in sponsorship are also studied by many scholars around the world [5]. Mohd Sah, Wan Abdul Ghani [6] investigated the variables of event sponsorship influencing consumers' purchase intentions, customers' attitudes toward events as the most significant factor. This research claimed that event sponsorship has an impact on purchase intentions, which, in addition to the sponsorship effectiveness literature, is influenced by event participants' attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, Sirgy, Lee [7] claimed that the match between event visitors and the sponsorship activity has a favorable effect on brand loyalty when two conditions are met: customers are aware of the brand sponsoring the event and customers are interested in the event. Many studies have investigated and expanded their research about the impact of event sponsorship on brands. For example, Gwinner, Larson [8] conducted research about the influence of event sponsorship on sponsoring brand image. Lardinois and Derbaix [9] proposed that event sponsorships have an impact on brand awareness. The common types of event sponsorship are sports, music, regional events, tourist destinations and television programs.

This research focuses on investigating the impact of funding through cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral aspects and evaluates the influence of each specific factor on brand loyalty. The author conducted a case study of a television program in the field of culture and entertainment.

2. Literature review

According to Aaker [10], customer loyalty is widely defined as the awareness, belief, and loyalty attitude, preference, and trust of customers toward a certain brand. To retain consumer loyalty, the brand itself must have measures and research on perception, human psychology, and behavior. Following the literature review, event sponsorship brings various benefits to sponsors, including: direct communication and engagement with stakeholders [11]; demonstration of brand difference in the market [12]; enhancement of corporate image and identity [11] and increasing

brand awareness and image [13]. All of the above researches lead to brand loyalty and also demonstrate the relationship between event sponsorship and customer brand loyalty [14]. Shin, Lee [15] and Boronczyk and Breuer [16], both confirmed that the correlation between event sponsorship and brand loyalty is built on the theory of congruence, or in other words, the fit between the sponsored event and the sponsoring brand.

The concept of congruence was first mentioned in social psychology to test human memory and analyze attitude formation [17]. According to the principle of cognitive consistency, people value harmony between their thoughts, feelings and behaviors and they are motivated to maintain this homogeneity [18]. According to Osgood and Tannenbaum [19], congruence is the perception of conformity between objects. People evaluate different objects and form attitudes based on perceived similarities between them. Combining two different objects will accelerate the congruence process [20], which will lead to a change in attitudes to maintain cognitive consistency [21], and identity between subjects with different attitudes [18]. Cornwell and Maignan [22] originally proposed congruence theory as a theoretical tool for determining if the image of a sponsoring brand is compatible with the participants' image of the sponsored event. Many concepts of "similarity" are used in event sponsorship theory, such as congruence, consistency, and congruence between sponsor brand image and event image [23]. Furthermore, Sirgy, Lee [7] suggested that sponsoring brand loyalty results from three types of congruence: congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image, self-congruity with sponsoring brand image, and self-congruity with event image. The relationship between sponsorship activities and brand loyalty means customers of a specific brand are more likely to develop brand loyalty when they gain recognition of sponsorship of an event that they are aware [13].

2.1. Attitudes toward the sponsor and the event

The development of a favorable attitude toward the sponsor is suggested in the literature

as a pivotal factor for sponsorship effectiveness [24], and the theory of planned behavior [25] provides an important theoretical foundation to this notion. According to Ajzen [25], an attitude toward an object plays a significant role in predicting a person's behavioral intentions and can affect his/her behavioral response to the object. An attitude is often defined as a "psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" [26], and attitudes can be formed through direct experiences with an entity or exposure to knowledge and messages [27]. A person's beliefs about an object represent the basis of his/her attitude toward that object, with beliefs being viewed as the linkages between an attitude-object and its attributes, characteristics, outcome, goal, or value [28]. Keller [29] supports the idea that attitude toward the sponsor represents the consumer's overall evaluation of a brand sponsoring an event, and Meenaghan [30] operationalized this construct as a favorable disposition toward the sponsor. In conclusion, the existing research suggests the following. First, as attitudes toward the event become more favorable, attitudes toward the sponsoring brand will also become more favorable [22]. Second, as attitudes toward the sponsor brand become more favorable, purchase intentions [31] and brand loyalty [32] increase.

2.2. Congruity between sponsoring brand image and sponsored event image

Tsiotsou and Alexandris [33] emphasized the importance of image congruity as a theoretical concept to facilitate explanations of how sponsorship works. An audience's increased awareness of the congruency of event sponsors results in more favorable opinions of sponsoring brands [34]. According to Hutabarat and Gayatri [35], one of the elements affecting sponsorship responses that can assess consumer attitudes and intentions is event sponsor relevance. The congruity of the sponsoring brand's image with the sponsored event, the genuineness of the sponsoring brand, and brand attitude are all

elements that encourage favorable public response about event sponsorship activities [36]. Furthermore, Kressmann, Sirgy [37] proved that congruence in event image and sponsoring brand image has a direct and indirect positive impact on brand loyalty. The hypotheses are:

H1: Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image is related positively to sponsoring brand attitudes.

H2: Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image is related positively to sponsoring brand loyalty.

Research of Cornwell and Maignan [22] showed that the relationship between event image and brand image has an impact on the target audience's attitude towards sponsor brand. Research proposed that as the congruity between the event image and sponsoring brand image increases, the ability to convey the image of the event and the brand also increases. Furthermore, the target audience that recognizes image transmission has a positive attitude towards the event. As a result, their impression of the brand's image improves. According to Gwinner [38] and Gwinner and Eaton [39], the target audience's favorable attitude toward the sponsored event will result in their favourable emotions toward the sponsoring brand. Martensen, Gronholdt [40] asserted that a positive (negative) emotional experience with an event leads to positive (negative) emotional responses and attitudes towards the sponsoring brand through a trigger propagation process [41]. Furthermore, the public has a good impression of the event, and its sponsors are more likely to attend the event and purchase the sponsor's goods and services. Positive customer attitudes towards companies and brands have long been associated with business outcomes, such as increased revenue and brand loyalty [15]. Furthermore, McLean, Osei-Frimpong [42] discovered that customers' favorable feelings regarding brand products over time are related to increased purchase frequency and brand loyalty. Hence, the following hypotheses were tested:

H3: Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image is related positively to sponsoring brand loyalty.

H4: As event attitudes become more favorable, attitudes towards sponsoring brand become more favorable.

H5: Attitudes towards a sponsoring brand are related positively to sponsoring brand loyalty.

2.3. Self-congruity with sponsoring brand

Image transfer from sponsored event to sponsoring brand is also influenced by self-congruency with sponsoring brand image [43]. The congruence between the individual's self-concept and the value expressive attributes of the object is characterized as self-congruity [44]. The degree of perceived resemblance between visitors' self-images and event pictures is thus referred to as self-congruity with event image. This also leads to the positive attitude of event participants toward sponsoring brands when they have awareness of the self-congruency between sponsored event and sponsoring brand [45]. Further behavioural analyses of Ogba and Tan [46] showed that brand image has a favorable impact on key marketing and organisational components, including the impact of brand image on customer expression of loyalty and commitment. The research suggested that a good brand image should positively impact customers' loyalty, which in the long run should also influence customer perceived quality, enabling satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypotheses were tested:

H6: Self-congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image is related positively to attitudes towards sponsoring brand.

H7: Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image is related positively to attitudes towards sponsoring brand.

H8: Self-congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image is related positively to sponsoring brand loyalty.

Sirgy, Lee [7] concluded that self-congruency between event participants and the sponsored event image have a positive impact on brand attitude. According to the self-congruence literature of Sirgy [44], people choose, participate in events and consume goods and services that reflect their self-image. Hence, people have higher motivation to

hold certain beliefs about themselves (a conception of themselves) and act in certain ways (e.g., purchasing, and consuming goods and services, participating in events related to their attribute) to enhance their own definition of themselves.

According to the self-congruence literature of Shin, Lee [15], self-image congruence positively affects brand loyalty directly and indirectly through functional congruency, product involvement, and brand relationship quality. Mazodier and Merunka [47] also examine the mediating effects of event and brand attitudes on the relationship between self-congruity with event image and sponsoring brand loyalty. Results from a research of Shin, Lee [15] showed that self-congruity has a significant influence on functional image as well as emotional attachment. Functional image is found to have a stronger effect on emotional attachment. Also, self-congruity, functional image, and emotional image have significant influence on loyalty. Interestingly, emotional attachment is a very strong predictor of brand loyalty and consumer decision. Therefore, this research had the following hypotheses:

H9: Self-congruity with event image is related positively to attitudes towards sponsored event.

H10: Self-congruity with event image is related positively to sponsoring brand loyalty.

In summary, Figure 1 reflects the conceptual model and hypotheses

3. Research methodology

3.1. Pretest

Prior to the main research, quantitative and qualitative pretests were conducted. The qualitative pretest aimed at identifying participants' general awareness of events and identifying events most frequently watched and followed for incorporation in the main research. Twenty respondents who were students at the National Economics University in Hanoi were asked to list events that they watched and followed the most and with which they were most familiar. The pretest identified two events:

Rap Viet 2020 and the Heineken Countdown party 2021. As part of the qualitative pretest, an additional N = 162 participants were selected from students at the National Economics University in Hanoi who had watched and followed Rap Viet 2020 during the past two

months. The level of internal consistency in each construct was acceptable with Cronbach’s Alpha with estimates ranging from 0.834 to 0.941. The results indicated good reliability for the six variables; therefore, all measurement items were included in the main research.

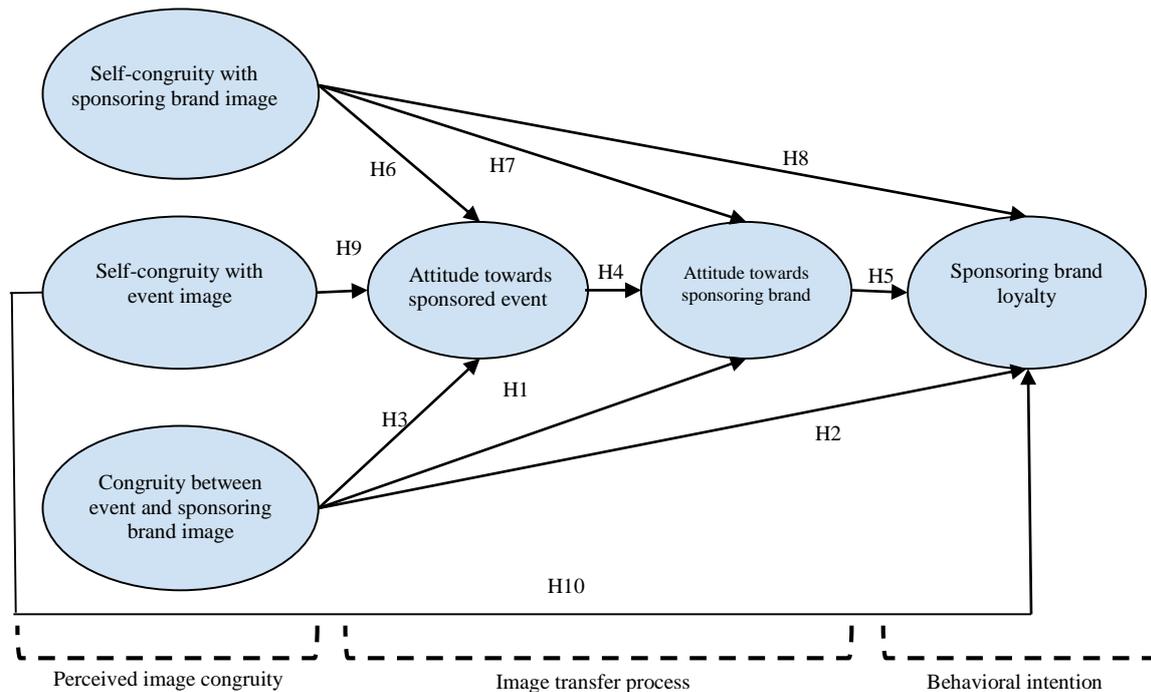


Figure 1: Conceptual framework.

Source: Own calculations.

3.2. Measurement

The proposed model included six latent variables. Although various measurement instruments were available to assess all latent variables, these scales have never been tested in the current context. Thus, first, different scales for each construct were created based on several relevant studies and then were modified to fit the research setting. All construct items were measured on five-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”.

Each congruity scale consisted of five items. Self-congruity with event image measurement items were derived from research of Mazodier and Merunka [47] and Sirgy, Lee [7]. Similarly,

self-congruity with sponsoring brand image was used items developed by Woisetschläger and Michaelis [48]. Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image was measured with five items by Shin, Lee [15]. Event attitudes and the sponsoring brand attitudes were measured with five items using the traditional attitudinal aspects of liking and favorable deposition by Bruner, Hensel [49]. Sponsoring brand loyalty was measured with five items by Shin, Lee [15].

3.3. Sample and data collection

This research employed a web-based, self-administered questionnaire. The main survey questionnaire used a convenience sample of the

research population of customers who had ever watched and followed the Rap Viet 2020 event. The survey was conducted from December 1 to 25, 2020 after the Rap Viet 2020 finale was held. Of 299 completed questionnaires, 282 questionnaires were retained for data analysis; 17 questionnaires were due to missing values or extreme outliers. More than half were female (67.4%), and the majority was aged 18-22 years (81.6%). A total of 79.1% of the respondents were university students. SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 20.0 were used for the data analysis. Following Anderson and Gerbing [50], a two-step approach was adopted. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the measurement model fit and factor structure of each scale. Second, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the measurement model. The Chi-squared statistic was significant (Chi-square = 842.815, $df = 384$, $p < 0.01$). Other indices showed that the fit of the measurement model was acceptable (Chi-square/ $df = 2.195$; GFI = 0.839; TLI = 0.918; CFI = 0.928; RMSEA = 0.065). The reliability and validity of the multi-item scales for the six-factor measurement model were then assessed (Table 1). Cronbach's Alphas were 0.834 or above, demonstrating good reliability. Further, all standardized factor loadings for all items were found to be significant ($p < 0.01$), and discriminant validity was confirmed, as the average variance extracted (AVE) was greater than the square of the correlations between constructs (Table 2). These results suggested that the hypothesized measurement model was appropriate for further analysis.

Table 2: Summary of the measurement model

Constructs	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	A.V.E	Label
Attitude towards sponsored event	5	0.941	0.942	0.782	AE
Sponsoring brand loyalty	5	0.920	0.921	0.700	LSB
Self-congruity with sponsoring brand image	5	0.907	0.910	0.671	SHSI
Attitude towards sponsoring brand	5	0.925	0.925	0.714	ASB
Self-congruity with event image	5	0.853	0.853	0.546	SCEI
Congruity between event and sponsoring brand image	5	0.834	0.830	0.510	SSEII

Source: Own calculations.

4.2. Structural model

SEM analysis was conducted to evaluate the proposed model and test the hypotheses. The suitability of the model is accepted: Chi-square/ $df = 2.587$; $p = 0.000$; GFI = 0.837, TLI = 0.914, CFI = 0.926, IFI = 0.926, RMSEA = 0.067). The model and path coefficients are shown in Figure 2 and Table 2.

H1, which hypothesized a positive relationship of the congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image and attitude towards sponsoring brand, was supported ($\beta = 0.110$, $p < 0.05$). However, there was no effect of congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image

on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.070$, $p = 0.185$), indicating a lack of support for hypothesis H2. H3, which predicted a positive relationship between congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image and attitude towards event, was also supported ($\beta = 0.393$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 4 was supported with the result that attitude towards event is significantly related with attitude towards sponsoring brand ($\beta = 0.355$, $p < 0.001$). H5, which predicted a positive relationship between attitude towards sponsoring brand and brand loyalty, was also supported ($\beta = 0.515$, $p < 0.001$). Accordingly, hypothesis 7 and hypothesis 8 were supported. Self-congruity with sponsoring brand image had effect on attitude towards sponsoring brand ($\beta = 0.236$, $p < 0.001$).

There was also a significant relationship between self-congruity with sponsoring brand image and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.187, p < 0.001$). However, there was no effect on attitude towards event ($\beta = -0.031, p = 0.539$), indicating a lack of support for hypothesis H6. Self-congruity with event image had

a significant effect on attitude towards event ($\beta = 0.334, p < 0.001$). Thus, hypothesis H9 was supported. However, there was no effect on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.064, p = 0.182$), indicating a lack of support for hypothesis H10.

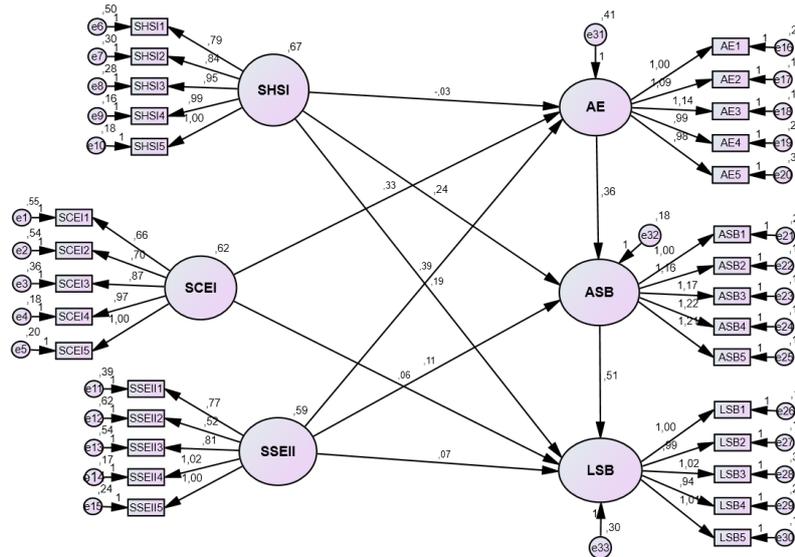


Figure 2: Structural equation model with parameter estimates
Source: Own calculations.

Table 2: Estimated path coefficients

Hypothesis	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Description
H1 ASB <--- SSEII	.110	.042	2.582	.010	Accepted
H2 LSB <--- SSEII	.070	.053	1.324	.185	Not accepted
H3 AE <--- SSEII	.393	.059	6.656	***	Accepted
H4 ASB <--- AE	.355	.047	7.511	***	Accepted
H5 LSB <--- ASB	.515	.085	6.048	***	Accepted
H6 AE <--- SHSI	-.031	.051	-.615	.539	Not accepted
H7 ASB <--- SHSI	.236	.038	6.250	***	Accepted
H8 LSB <--- SHSI	.187	.049	3.815	***	Accepted
H9 AE <--- SCEI	.334	.056	5.923	***	Accepted
H10 LSB <--- SCEI	.064	.048	1.335	.182	Not accepted

Note: *** < 0.001.

Source: Own calculations.

4.3. Tests of mediation effects

For further analysis, the mediating effects of attitudes toward sponsored event and sponsoring brand were investigated. A bias-corrected

bootstrap-function with 1,000 samples [51] was used to investigate mediating effects. To examine the mediating effects of sponsoring brand attitudes, the effects of Attitude towards sponsored event, Self-congruity with sponsoring

brand image, Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image on brand loyalty were examined; the results indicated a partial mediation effect: Attitude towards sponsored event (indirect effect: $\beta = 0.205$, $p = 0.001$), Self-congruity with sponsoring brand image (total effect: $\beta = 0.328$, $p < 0.001$; direct effect: $\beta = 0.187$, $p < 0.001$; indirect effect: $\beta = 0.141$, $p = 0.001$), Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image (total effect: $\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.05$; direct effect: $\beta = 0.070$, $p > 0.05$; indirect effect: $\beta = 0.147$, $p = 0.002$). To examine the mediating effects of sponsored event attitudes, the results show that there is an indirect relationship from self-congruity with event image (indirect effect: $\beta = 0.168$, $p = 0.001$), congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image (total effect: $\beta = 0.303$, $p < 0.05$; direct effect: $\beta = 0.110$, $p < 0.05$; indirect effect: $\beta = 0.193$, $p = 0.001$) to brand loyalty.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

This research results demonstrated the positive impact of event sponsorship on brand loyalty and estimated the level of influence of each factor. Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image and Self-congruity with event image had a positive effect on attitude towards the event. Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image, Self-congruity with sponsoring brand image and attitude towards event had a positive effect on Attitude towards sponsoring brand. Attitude towards sponsoring brand and Self-congruity with sponsoring brand image had a positive effect on brand loyalty. There is an indirect relationship of Attitude towards sponsored event, Self-congruity with sponsoring brand image, Congruity between event image and sponsoring brand image to brand loyalty through sponsoring brand attitudes. The result does support the conclusion of Shin, Lee [15].

5.2. Implications for managers

5.2.1. Implications for sponsoring brand managers

- Consider the importance of event perception and positive event rating. If attendees have a positive attitude toward the event, the brand will most likely attract a positive attitude as well.

- Administrators must evaluate issues such as the image, product, field, etc. between the event and the sponsoring brand when deciding to sponsor. It's critical to select events where the target audience perceives a high degree of self-image, event image, and sponsoring brand image matching. As a sponsorship administrator, you must carefully assess the event sponsors, sponsorship recipients, and the decision to enter a sponsorship contract. Administrators might choose another appropriate event or invest in other positive leverage efforts to verify that event sponsorship activities are linked to consumers' perceptions and behaviors, as well as the public purpose of attending the event.

- The similarity of the brand and the number of event visitors make an important contribution to the transfer of a favorable event image to a sponsored brand image, so both brand managers need to pay attention to similar structures for successful funding planning. The role of similarity with sponsor brand image is also highly appreciated. The results indicate that high similarity with sponsored brand image will develop a more favorable attitude towards the brand, which in turn positively affects brand loyalty.

- The purpose of sponsorship is to reach a group of customers and the public participating in the event. Therefore, managers need to have appropriate strategies to approach customers and the public with creative and unique ideas. As sponsorships becomes more popular, competition among brands increases. Therefore, administrators should have strategies to remind the public to remember and associate events and brands. There is a clear impact from awareness to customer attitudes, behavior, and, importantly, brand loyalty.

- The increased digital age has an impact on many aspects of life. Media is also increasingly diverse, attracting more audiences because of the

benefits it provides. Sponsors can thus consider the fact that TV shows are sponsored to meet this condition and sponsorship can leverage the influence of the brand on this event type.

5.2.2. Implications for sponsees

- When participating in collaboration, the sponsored party must identify as well as clearly orient the aims and objectives. Identifying commercial brands with images that are compatible with the event image will help optimize the sponsorship activities. Additionally, information about the congruence between the visitors' self-images and the event image is critical for attracting sponsors. Because visual transmission is crucial in sponsorship brand impacts, event organizers must establish PR methods to increase participants' good opinion about the event.

- Sponsored party should strike a balance between attracting additional funding sources and strengthening connections with existing sponsors.

- Event organizers should select sponsoring corporations that are comparable to and appropriate for the event's attributes. Exposing event attendees to sponsoring businesses is essential for the effect and purpose of sponsorship activities. Sponsored event organizers should establish an effective marketing strategy to reach a broader audience and garner more media attention. Furthermore, they should constantly provide value for their sponsors and adjust their sponsorship packages accordingly. This will facilitate the awareness and attention of both the event and its sponsoring brands by the target public, which can in turn increase the value received from the sponsors.

5.3. Limitation and future research

There are some limitations. The first in the research is that the authors investigated the impact of event sponsorship on brand loyalty in just one sponsorship program, namely PepsiCo's sponsorship of Rap Viet 2021. These results can be extrapolated to comparable programs exclusively. Findings on the impact of event sponsorship in multiple areas, for other sponsor brands, event

types and sponsors should be further studied in future. Secondly, both the perceived event image and the perceived sponsoring brand image are intrinsically prone to change; the perceived event and sponsoring brand images could be different before and after the event. An experimental design might be used to investigate image transfer effects by assessing image and attitude changes prior to and after the event.

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