Sponsorship of Case Study Competitions and Impact on Brand Equity-An Exploratory Study in the UAE Higher Education Sector

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ABSTRACT
This exploratory article aims to evaluate the effectiveness of case study competitions in promoting the brand equity of sponsors and organizers. The article compares the managerial objectives with the responses of participating students who are the targeted audience of the marketing communications of the sponsors and examines the alignment between managerial objectives and the perceptions of participants. The quantitative data using surveys is collected from sponsors and organizers, and participants in the competition. The data is analysed using frequency tables, descriptive statistics, F-tests for equality of variances and T-tests for equality of means. The findings suggest that managers attach high importance to brand awareness (cognitive aspect), brand images and attitude (affective aspect) and less importance to brand loyalty (behavioural aspect) to enhance brand equity through sponsoring academic competitions. However, participants’ responses indicate that the brand awareness aspect is not effectively realized as compared to other brand equity dimensions.

KEYWORDS
Academic Events Sponsorship, Brand Equity, Case Study Competitions, Marketing in Higher Education, UAE Higher Education Sector

1. INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector in the UAE and the GCC has witness rapid growth in last 20 years (Ashour & Fatima, 2016). According to a report on the GCC Education Sector the compounded annual growth rate of the tertiary and higher education sector of the UAE was 9.1% in 2015 (Alpen Capital, 2016). The UAE government’s focus to encourage higher education in the country has resulted in establishment of many public, semi-public, and private colleges and universities. The higher education institutes (HEIs) in the UAE attempt to attract both local and overseas students, and aim to produce globally employable graduates possessing the right mix of knowledge and skills. Along with the continuous emphasis on improving the teaching and learning in the UAE’s higher education sector, the universities and colleges are also working to build their institutional brands to attract good students.
amidst rising competition in the sector. Therefore, an important focus of the educational marketing in the higher education sector in the UAE is to build and establish the institutional brands. The HEIs offer students a richer academic experience to develop their academic and transferrable skills. In line with the global practice to provide students experiential learning the HEIs and Professional Bodies (PB) in the UAE have incorporated the case study method in their teaching and learning frameworks. Case study analysis positively influences students’ attitudes, interest, motivation (Jalgaonkar, Sarkate & Tripathi, 2012) enhance self-confidence and encourages active learning (Cameron, Trudel, Titah, & Léger, 2012).

As UAE becomes an education hub (Shaban, 2016), the universities and colleges strive to build their brands by increasing brand awareness, enhancing brand image, building superior quality perceptions and subsequently attracting more students. One way to pursue such objectives is by organizing case study competitions for students. In the recent years, the use of case method has extended beyond the realms of classrooms to competitive environments in the form of case study competitions. The expected outcomes of organizing academic competitions and events have resulted in the increased popularity of case study competitions. (Refer to Table 8 in the Appendix for a list of selected regional and global case study competitions). Analysing case studies in a competitive environment encourages participants’ learning and engagement through real-life problems, inquiry, group work, assimilation of facts, critical thinking, reflection, discussion and presentation. However, beyond the learning aspect, students find these competitive events attractive and meaningful as they bring the academia and industry together. Case study competitions provide a platform where students can realize concrete integration of theory and practice, which is a key indicator of quality in higher education. Case study competitions use industry experts for mentoring, judging and providing simulation exercises and activities. Within the UAE there is a rising trend of forming partnerships and collaborations between the academia, public sector and the private sector to organize case study competitions. The HEIs and PBs consider such events as tools to promote excellence amongst participants and prepare them to face real-life challenges in the work environment effectively. Besides promoting distinction in participants, the HEIs, PBs, and the partnering sponsors from the corporate sector may consider these competitions as a tool to support their corporate and marketing objectives.

The study considers ‘sponsors’ as those parties which contribute significantly towards organizing and executing such events or partnering with the main sponsors as co-sponsors. The sponsors role could vary from being the main organizer to making contributions including providing cash and in-kind prizes, infrastructure support (rooms, auditoriums or other on-premises facilities), training and mentorship, and judging. The research has studied the impact of sponsoring case study competitions on the brand equity of sponsors in the UAE. Brand equity is examined by comparing the sponsorship objectives (pursued by sponsors) and the degree of sponsorship outcomes achieved (based on the responses of participants). With respect to the participants, the study only focuses on those undergraduate students who have already participated in such events. The objectives of the study are multi-faceted. First, the study will attempt to draw conclusions about the brand equity related objectives such as brand awareness (cognitive), brand Image and attitude (affective) and brand loyalty (behavioural) of the sponsors for sponsoring such events. Second, the responses of the participants towards the sponsors and the event will be examined. Lastly, the study will compare the results derived from the responses of the sponsors and participants to examine the impact on the brand equity of the sponsor. Given the lack of literature specific to case study competitions, the study will draw implications for the organizers and sponsors based on the literature available on events sponsoring as well as Cause Related Marketing CRM.
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