

Perceptions of Employees on Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon Sponsorship

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Abstract: *The aim of the study was to find out the perceptions Standard Chartered Bank Kenya (SCBK) employees had on The Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon (SCNM) sponsored by their employer. The study specifically investigated; employees' views as stakeholders, employees' support of the SCNM, whether the sponsorship improves SCBK image and lastly, employees' views on criticism SCNM received. The sample comprised of 120 participants based in Nairobi where the marathon is annually held. A self administered questionnaire was used in data collection. The results indicated slightly over half of the respondents (52.7%) considered themselves as key SCNM stakeholders, majority supported SCNM sponsorship, the sponsorship improves the image of their employer and majority of the participants felt uncomfortable when SCNM was criticised. The study concluded that despite nearly half of SCBK employees felt they were not a key audience of SCNM and majority of employees being uncomfortable with SCNM being criticised they highly regarded and supported the sponsorship. This study recommends strategic involvement of employees in corporate sponsorship agreements since internal publics can either be positively or negatively influenced as a result of employer sponsored event, personality or facility.*

Key words: *perceptions, Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon, sponsorship*

I. Introduction

Over the years, there has been exponential growth in the use of sponsorship as an important communication strategy employed by organisations to reach its publics. Sponsorship is widely used by organisations as a marketing communication tool especially in the developed economies. However, companies, mostly multinationals in the developing world, are increasingly adopting use of sponsorship to reach their consumers. According to the International Event Group (IEG) a leading sponsorship consultancy and research firm project globally, companies are expected to spend approximately 57.5 billion dollars in 2015 compared to 44 billion dollars spent in 2009 (IEG, 2015). This represents a steady increment of about 5.2 % per annum on the amount of money companies invest in sponsorship over a six year period. It is not clear how much companies operating in Africa spend on sponsorship. IEG approximates less than 5% of total sponsorship funds are invested in all other countries excluding North America, Europe, Asia pacific, Central and South America. In Kenya, where this study was done, there are no official reports on sponsorship spending by firms. However annual financial and media reports do indicate that individual companies are progressively investing in corporate sponsorships.

Sponsorship has been defined differently depending with the researcher's bias in terms of philanthropy, marketing and communication. The widely quoted definition of sponsorship is Meenaghan's (1998) which defines sponsorship as an investment, in cash, in an activity, a person or an event, in return for access to an exploitable commercial potential associated with the sponsored activity, person or event by the investor in order to raise its profile, improve its image and possibly to increase sales. Based on Meenaghan definition sponsorship is characterised by a number of elements which include sponsor funds, sponsored activity, event or property and sponsor's objective. Sponsorship done by institutions or formal organisations is referred to as corporate sponsorship which was the focus of this study. Corporate sponsorship as communication tools is meant to improve the image of an organisation among its stakeholders rather than a specific product or range of products an organisation deals in. Javalgi et al. (1994) argue that unlike sponsorship in marketing, corporate sponsorship as a communication tool should be viewed in terms of exposure obtained for the benefit of a company rather than its products.

Sponsorship in itself is not an entirely new occurrence. On the contrary, organisations have been offering funds or assistance in kind in order to gain commercially or be seen as giving back to the society (churches, Libraries, community centres) they do business in (Tripodi, 2001). In fact, early sponsorship engagements were restricted to immediate localities in which organisations operated in. The phenomenal growth of corporate sponsorship from 1980's can be attributed to the ability of sponsored events or properties to reach millions of an organisation's publics especially through mass media and other digital technologies that allow for expansive reach. According to (Beliga, 2012; Zepf, 2008) the rapid growth of sponsorship came about as a result of

measures that rendered traditional advertisement methods less effective such as; stringent laws on alcohol and cigarettes advertising, high cost of traditional marketing space, mass media clutter and changing views of target audience on classical media. These reasons can explain why firms are increasingly engaging in sponsorship activities as it has been conceptualised and employed to achieve organisational objectives.

Sponsorship should ideally achieve basic goal of corporate communication such as attract public attention, win belief, achieve understanding, increase sales and earn goodwill from an organisation's multiple publics. Corporate sponsorship, it is argued, affects all stakeholders of an organisation either positively or negatively, yet researches conducted on corporate sponsorship have largely concentrated on its influences on the external publics (Hall, 2008; Manyala, Kowour & Mtange, 2015). While it is without doubt that external publics are a critical audience to sponsors, internal audience are also an equally important organisational public because they affect and are affected by the communicated image of an organisation. Cornellisen (2008) emphasises that employees comprise a key stakeholder group within a corporation and should be strategically engaged in organisational activities. It has also been noted that large corporations find it a challenge to clearly distinguish between external and internal publics. Hickham, Lawrence, and Ward (2005) are of the view that in most cases it is difficult to distinctively classify audiences as either strictly internal or external, more so when it comes to employees who could be consumers of products and services the sponsoring organisation provides.

Studies on influence of corporate sponsorship on internal audience are increasingly acknowledging the need for corporations to implement and communicate an employee focused corporate sponsorship strategy which in turn can have numerous positive outcomes such as increase in employees' organisational commitment, identity and identification, task and job engagement (Hall, 2008; Zepf, 2008). Commonly mentioned factors that may influence employee response to corporate sponsorship include event-sponsor fit, team/fan affinity and perceived prestige of sponsorship (Hickman et al., 2005). Additionally, it is imperative for companies to effectively use corporate sponsored events to convey their desired organisational image. An effective and efficient communication strategy of a firm's sponsored event increases the ability of having lasting positive influence on its staff and assisting in mitigating negative images of a sponsored event or property that have the potential of causing dissatisfaction among employees.

Corporate sponsorship perceived as supportive to employees has the potential to foster the feeling of mutual care between employees and their organisation (Hickman et al., 2005) which then leads to increased organisational commitment and identification (Zepf, 2008). In their study of effects of corporate sponsorship on employees of the sponsor Khan and Stanton (2010) confirm that employee general beliefs and attitudes towards sponsorship will have a strong influence on their specific attitude towards their employer's sponsorship activity. Therefore when corporate sponsorship is used strategically to communicate to employees of an organisation, it can build a bridge between personal values and organisation's values and increase an individual's person-organisation perceptions. In a nutshell sponsorship messages should be developed to target employees' attitude positively towards the sponsored event or property.

Sport sponsorship is the most popular sponsorship due to its ability to attract extensive media coverage (Pichot, Tribou & O'Reilly, 2008). Beliga (2012) agrees that although sports are the usual choice when it comes to sponsorship, companies commit to other areas like arts, culture, charity and humanitarian domains, or even to sponsoring television programs. Over 70 percent of total sponsorship concern sporting activities (IEG, 2015). Sport sponsorship is popular compared to other kinds of sponsorship predominately because sport events appeal to large audiences and easily attract mass media coverage. The popularity of sports sponsorship stems from the fact that (Ifeanyichukwu & Gbenegbara, 2009) it leads to massive publicity; building the corporate image; public relations and contact with organisational publics; entertainment and trade relations, marketing and promotion.

Nairobi Marathon has been in existence since 2003 when Standard Chartered Bank Kenya Limited partnered with the City Council of Nairobi to organize it. The bank has sponsored this annual event since its inception and has been the title sponsor all through. The inaugural race had 6,000 participants compared to approximately 23,000 in 2014. Through this sponsorship the bank has acquired the naming rights of the marathon thus it is commonly referred to as the Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon. SCBK invests in excess of 1 million dollars annually in cash and in kind in each of the editions which can be considered as a large sum of money to invest on a sponsorship deal for a single event in a developing country such as Kenya. The Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon 2014 runners guide states the main objective of the sponsorship as: "To demonstrate the bank's commitment to the communities it does business with and affirms its brand promise – Here for good" (Standard Chartered, 2014). Other goals include bringing together runners, supporters, staff, corporate and the community. The marathon also seeks to raise funds for the bank's corporate social responsibility initiative seeing it as believing aimed at eradicating avoidable blindness in children under the age of nine years.

The researcher was motivated by the fact that corporate sponsorship has over time become a major communication tool used by firms. Sponsorship is increasingly being used to reach out to internal publics

especially in the developed world notably developing countries are also rapidly embracing the practice. . SCNM has been sponsored by SCBK for 13 straight years making it one of the longest corporate sponsorship agreements in Kenya. Hence SCBK employees have opinions on it and have been influenced in one way or another by the messages conveyed to them through this sponsorship. The researcher also established SCBK has not formally and comprehensively conducted studies to ascertain its employees' views on SCNM. It is for this reason that this study sought to provide reference material for future researchers on employees and sponsorship in Africa.

Research Questions

Four research questions were posed and answered in this study. The questions were:

1. As an employee of Standard Chartered Bank I am considered an important stakeholder of Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon sponsorship?
2. I support Standard Chartered Bank's sponsorship of Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon?
3. The Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon improves my employer's image?
4. I feel uncomfortable when someone criticises Standard chartered Nairobi Marathon?

II. Method

The research design used for this study was a descriptive survey design that used the quantitative method of data collection. The main purpose of the survey design is to describe the state of affairs as it exists at present and the results of a descriptive survey research are often used to describe peoples' opinions and preferences. It was appropriate for this study because the focus of the study was an already existing phenomenon; that is, the study meant to assess the perception of SCBK employees on SCNM sponsorship.

Population and Sample

The research population for this study was internal publics of Standard Chartered Bank Kenya based in Nairobi. The research population consisted of all cadres of employees. The bank has a total of 1,600 employees of whom 1,100 are based in Nairobi and were the target population for this study. This study involved 120 SCB employees based in Nairobi out of the 1,100 research population of this study, which represents 10.9 percent. The 120 employees were picked through simple random sampling to give the research population an equal and independent chance of being selected as a member of the sample.

Instrument

A self administered questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to collect data from the sample. Pre-testing of questionnaires for this study was done at the bank's Treasury Square branch in Mombasa to ensure that items in data collection instruments were clearly stated and had the same meaning to all respondents. The study employed the five-point Likert scale which was preferred as it captured the respondents' opinions and presents a good measure of their perceptions on SCNM sponsorship. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed out of which 93 were filled and returned. This represents 77.5% response rate.

III. Results

The first research question posed to the respondents in this study stated: As an employee of Standard Chartered Bank I am considered an important stakeholder of Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon sponsorship? The responses of the participants to this question and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Responses on importance of employees' as a stakeholder of Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon sponsorship

Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Strongly Agree	29	31.2	31.2
Agree	20	21.5	52.7
Neutral	28	30.1	82.8
Disagree	12	12.9	95.7
Strongly Disagree	4	4.3	100.0
Total	93	100.0	

Slightly over half (52.7%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they were critical stakeholders to SCB sponsorship of SCNM. Whereas those who either disagreed or strongly disagreed constituted 17.2%, those who remained neutral were 30.1% of the respondents. This finding shows that a considerable number nearly half (47.3%) of the respondents felt that they were not important stakeholders of

SCNM sponsorship. Hence, it can be concluded that a significant number of employees at SCB feel that they are not critical stakeholders of SCNM sponsorship.

The second research question participants were asked to respond to was: I support Standard Chartered Bank's sponsorship of Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon? Standard Chartered Bank has sponsored SCNM since its inception in 2003 making it a fairly long sponsorship relationship. Hence, it was important to establish whether the bank's employees supported the sponsorship. Table 2 presents a summary of the respondents' view on SCB employees' support of SCNM.

Table 2: I support Standard Chartered bank's sponsorship of Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon

Responses		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Strongly Agree	52	55.9	55.9
	Agree	25	26.9	82.8
	Neutral	12	12.9	95.7
	Disagree	4	4.3	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	

The findings point out that 82.8% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they supported the bank's sponsorship of the marathon. Among the respondents, a small number (4.3%) did not support the idea of the bank supporting the marathon. Those who were neutral constituted 12.9%. It can be construed that a majority of the respondents were of the opinion that SCNM is a worthy sponsorship engagement.

The third research question posed to the participants was: Does the Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon improve my employer's (Standard Chartered Bank) image? Table 3 presents findings on whether Standard Chartered Nairobi marathon improved Standard Chartered bank's image.

Table 3: The Standard Chartered Nairobi marathon improves Standard Chartered bank's image

Responses		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Strongly Agree	52	55.9	55.9
	Agree	23	24.7	80.6
	Neutral	8	8.6	89.2
	Disagree	7	7.5	96.8
	Strongly Disagree	3	3.2	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	

The responses show that 55.9% and 24.7% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the marathon improved the image of the bank. Those who disagreed with this statement were 10.7% while those who were neutral were 8.6%. It may be concluded that SCNM sponsorship generally improved the image of SCB as a large number (80.6%) of the respondents were affirmative.

The fourth research question posed to the respondents in this study stated; I feel uncomfortable when someone criticises Standard chartered Nairobi Marathon? Table 4 presents a summary of Standard Chartered employees' responses on how they felt when SCNM was criticised.

Table 4: I feel uncomfortable when someone criticizes my employer and Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon

Responses		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Strongly Agree	38	40.9	40.9
	Agree	26	28.0	68.8
	Neutral	17	18.3	87.1
	Disagree	7	7.5	94.6
	Strongly Disagree	5	5.4	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	

The responses show that 68.8% agreed that they felt uncomfortable when either the SCNM was criticized. Those who did not feel uncomfortable were 12.9% while those who were neutral were 18.3%. From

this finding it is clear that a majority of employees were influenced by other stakeholders' negative criticism of SCNM.

IV. Discussion

This study has revealed that SCBK employees generally had a positive view of corporate sponsorship. Majority of the respondents agreed that SCNM improved the image of SCBK and they support SCNM sponsorship. Corporate sponsors hope to ultimately engender themselves in the mind of their target audience through a transfer of values between the sponsored event's image and identity to that of the company. This notion supports (Meenaghan 1991; Pichot, Tribou & O'Reilly, 2008) assertion that employees' view of sponsored events can be positive when an employee believes that the sponsorship is beneficial. Employees, just like other organisational publics, are critical of the benefits their organisation accrues from corporate sponsorship. It could be for this reason that SCBK also invests in SCNM as it is the bank's major corporate social responsibility program. The marathon helps raise funds for eye surgeries to eradicate avoidable blindness among children under the age of nine years in addition to offering a platform to harness Kenyan's athletics talent and provide an opportunity for the public to keep fit, interact and enjoy themselves at the same time. In light of this finding, Zepf (2008) noted that corporate sponsorship provides an effective way of omitting media clutter since sponsorship appeals to its target audience in a direct and entertaining way.

The choice of sponsorship can also determine employees' perception of both the sponsored event and their employer. Ifeanyichukwu and Gbenegbara (2009) note that sports sponsorship is popular as a communication tool as it leads to massive publicity; building the corporate image; public relations and contact with organisational publics. Therefore, the SCNM sponsorship probably gained positive support from a majority of SCBK employees as a communication tool owing to it being a sporting event.

This study also established that a small majority (52.7%) of SCBK internal publics viewed themselves as important stakeholders of the SCNM while nearly half of the employees deemed themselves as non key publics of the bank's corporate sponsorship. It is significant to note that 30.1% of the respondents were neutral. Therefore, a sizeable internal audience of SCBK felt that they were a neglected stakeholder group. It could be as a result of not being targeted directly by the SCNM sponsorship messages and probably not being adequately offered opportunities to get involved in the sponsorship activities. This finding is consistent with (Hall, 2008; Khan & Stanton, 2010) opinion that even though employees constitute a key stakeholder group they have been overlooked in marketing communication activities such as sponsorships.

It is worth noting that the over 50% of the respondents who perceived themselves as an important public of SCNM could mean that SCBK did put in some effort to capture the needs of this segment in its SCNM sponsorship. Grimes and Meenaghan (1998) recommend that organisations embrace corporate sponsorship as a strategic communication tool to endear themselves to their workforce more or less as sponsorship is used to influence external publics' perception of organisations in terms of enhancing corporate image, attitude and behaviour, brand loyalty and organisational identity. The study revealed that SCBK employees were increasingly being incorporated as key stakeholder which is a departure from the past where they were largely overlooked (Hall, 2008).

Employees' views of a corporate sponsorship can be largely positive especially when they understand why their employer invests usually large sums of money in sponsorship. The ability of SCNM sponsorship to favourably influence employees' view of their employer is attested to that while only 52.7% of respondents deemed themselves as important stakeholders, over 80% of the respondents believed that corporate sponsorship helped improve the image of the bank hence their support of SNMN. Favourable view of an organisation's sponsored event or property is greatly hinged on the perceived benefits the society among other publics will accrue from the sponsorship which in turn will tend to lower the target audience defence and allow for goodwill effect (Hickman et al., 2005; Zepf, 2008).

Employees are critical of other publics' views of their organisation's activities. Majority of the participants in this study noted that they were uncomfortable when SCNM was criticised. Therefore employees' perceptions, attitudes and even organisational identity can be negatively influenced especially where its corporate sponsorship attracts negative feedback from organisational publics. Ideally corporate sponsorship should communicate the enduring and central characteristics of an organisation which if attacked could lead to lowering of employees' self esteem (Hall, 2008). In essence, corporate sponsorship needs to be well planned and implemented to minimise on the amount of negative criticisms by organisational publics whether internal or external.

V. Conclusion

Corporate sponsorship is a field eliciting lots of interests among marketing communication scholars and practitioners. It is clear that sponsorship is an important communication tool which influences employees'

of an organisation. Employees of any sponsoring organisation are bound to hold divergent views and attitudes towards properties, personalities and events sponsored by their employer. Generally, this study established that: a majority of SCBK employees held a positive view of and supported SNMN sponsorship; there is need for employees to be actively involved and communicated to on corporate sponsorship since a significant number felt they were not a key stakeholder of SCBK sponsorship; and lastly, the employees are negatively affected by criticism of their employer sponsored program.

This was an exploratory study because few studies on perception of corporate sponsorship particularly on internal publics have been undertaken in developing world and specifically in Kenya. Hence, this study recommends organisations planning to or already engaging in sponsorship need to regard employees as key audiences. Employees need to be strategically targeted by corporate sponsorship and incorporated in planning, implementing and evaluation of employer sponsored engagements. Further research can be conducted to evaluate effectiveness of corporate sponsorship as an internal communication tool and it would be of interest find out perceptions of communication practitioners on corporate sponsorship influence on employees in Africa.

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