



American College Football Division I Team Attachment: A Model for Sponsorship Effectiveness

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine sponsorship effectiveness at the Division I level, including the relationship between fans and sponsors. To collect the necessary data, the 13-item questionnaire was disseminated at two college football games by volunteer sampling at three Division I universities in the United States. With a total of 407 respondents, LISREL 8.52 and SPSS 17.0 were used to analyze the data for descriptive statistics, CFA, and SEM. By utilizing SEM, the variables of team attachment, sponsor image, word of mouth, and purchase intentions fit the proposed model. Pragmatically, the significance of team attachment can be understated in its role as an initial construct to begin the sponsorship process. Considering the construct of sponsor image as a mediating variable, sponsor image played an important role to anticipate an increase in positive word of mouth or an increase in consumer purchase intentions.

Keywords: Sponsorship model, Sponsorship effectiveness, Football, Team attachment, Structural equation modeling

1. Introduction

Sponsorship is noted to be an integral part of the promotional and marketing mix (International Event Group [IEG], 2004; Kotler, 2000; O'Reilly et al., 2008). Ukman (2004) defined sponsorship as "a cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property (typically sports, arts, entertainment, or causes) in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property" (p. 154). Sponsorship spending has risen gradually over the past 27 years and worldwide sponsorship investments have now increased by 5.1% since 2010 to approximately \$48.6 billion in 2011 (IEG, 2012). Although the drop of 3.3% in 2010 was an improvement from the decrease of 7.8% in 2009, IEG (2011) indicated that promotional spending would plateau in 2011. Informed of these numbers, a significant focus of this research and for future sport sponsorship agreements will be the benefits that sponsors receive from investing financial support and providing products and service.

In 2009, college football sponsorship agreements were valued at an astounding \$572 million across the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) three divisions (IEG, 2009). Noting the revenues and business relationships at stake among universities, sponsors, and fans, research into team attachment, sponsor image, and how it relates to sponsorship effectiveness is critical to the success of future collegiate sport sponsorship agreements (Alexandris, Tsaousi, & James, 2007; Deane, Smith, & Adams, 2003; Cornwell & Coote, 2005).

1.1 The importance of sponsorship

Sponsorship is now reflected to be separate from advertising. Sponsorship is normally a two-way investment; methods of sending messages heavily depends on multimedia but also on word-of-mouth communication. The motivations of corporations consider sponsorship a sport marketing strategy that links a sport-healthy image and a technique of management and operation. It is essential for both sponsors and sport properties to take note of each other because the relationship is intended to be beneficial for both parties. Former studies have also covered consumer perspectives of sponsorship and have found: consumers view sponsorship advertising as an attempt to persuade their attitudes and emotions to consume products and services and, sponsorship advertising only benefits corporations, sport benefits the broader public (Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Crompton, 2004; Meenaghan, 2005; O'Reilly et al., 2008).

A critical issue in sponsorship research is evaluating whether sponsorship activity produces the desired outcomes. Sponsorship outcomes are significant factors that help estimate sponsorship effectiveness and are criteria measured by corporations. Copeland, Frisby, and McCarville (1996) indicated that sponsorship is built on two principles: (a) resources are exchanged by two or more parties and (b) each party must be content that the resources exchanged are equal in value. According to the concepts in exchange theory (Copeland et al., 1996) corporations invest in sporting events to achieve desired objectives or outcomes. Furthermore, if corporations realize that their sponsorship benefits and effectiveness support their expenditures, then they will continue spending on sport sponsorship (Stotlar, 2004).

1.2 The need to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness

Evaluation methods regarding sponsorship benefits and effectiveness are critical tools, as they relate to sponsorship activity. Corporations may seek a variety of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes that may include but not be limited to: image enhancement, brand recognition, community involvement, sampling opportunities, brand loyalty, increased awareness, and increased sales and /or market share (Christensen, 2006; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; O'Reilly & Madill, 2012 ; Stotlar, 2004). Despite these desired outcomes, Crompton (2004) indicated that 40% of the 200 companies he researched did not spend money to investigate the effectiveness of their major sponsorship investments. Although some studies exist that investigate the influence of attitudinal and behavioral constructs on sponsorship outcomes, empirical research on sponsorship evaluation is still not comprehensive (Christensen, 2006; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003 ; O'Reilly & Madill, 2009). Notably, the aforementioned studies neglected to investigate a comprehensive consumer behavior model beginning at fans' team attachment and concluding with sponsorship effectiveness.

Moreover, there are not adequate studies to point out which antecedent constructs most influence consumer behavior. The construct of sport attachment is considered to be an important variable in previous research; however, in previous studies the variable was tested either in isolation or in relation to other constructs (Alexandris et al. 2007; Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Thus, the current study investigated sport attachment as an antecedent construct and attitudinal and behavioral factors as outcomes of consumer behavior. This study developed and conducted the sport consumer behavior model in the context of American Division I college football teams. Finally, the current study offers a theoretical framework of consumers' attitudes and behaviors for practical application and to guide future studies.

1.3 Review of Literature

The review of literature is divided into two portions. First, analysis of the consumer decision-making purchase model was conducted. What follows is an examination of the sponsorship effectiveness model including its antecedents, outcomes and support for the current analysis. Finally, an argument regarding research that addresses how and when sponsorship works is presented.

1.3.1 The Consumer Decision-Making Purchase Model

The current study connected a general four-stage consumer decision-making process, which is also called the AIDA model, with three sponsorship outcomes. The AIDA model is one of the most enduring and extensively applied in the marketing and advertising fields (Crompton, 2004). The four processes are awareness, interest, desire, and action. For instance, a consumer becomes conscious of a product, develops an interest in it, desire grows, and finally takes the action to purchase it.

Crompton (2004) attempted to implement this concept in the sponsorship field. According to Crompton, the AIDA model demonstrated that particular marketing strategies can influentially determine consumers' purchase attitudes and behaviors. Thus, it was suggested that consumers' awareness of the sponsor's image, consumers' interest in word of mouth, and consumers' purchase intentions be empirically tested in an integrated model in a sport sponsorship setting (Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Crompton, 2004; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). The current study found that these four stages were linked with three sponsorship outcome categories: consumers' awareness of the sponsor's image, consumers' interest in word of mouth, and consumers' purchase intentions (sales opportunities). The three stages in the consumer decision-making process are discussed in the sponsorship field below.

Awareness is the first stage in the consumer decision-making model; however, consumers' awareness is limited compared to the total information to which they were exposed. O'Reilly et al. (2008) explained, "A consumer who attends an event or watches it on television is exposed to the brand or company name of a sponsor or an advertiser" (p. 396). Prior studies found that consumers' awareness usually relied on a person's recall of a sponsor's name being associated with an event. Although consumers use selective perception and retention means, their awareness and retention are only a small part of the information to which they are exposed. Awareness occurs when consumers of the target market have to interpret the message and then absorb it. However, there is a substantial probability that this will not occur because individuals are exposed to exorbitantly more communications than they can possibly accept and/or interpret (Crompton, 2004). Meenaghan (2001) argued that the consciousness of event audiences was intruded upon by event sponsors and advertisers.

Consumer interest encourages goal-direct purchase actions between consumers and sponsors. The power of consumer interest between consumers' awareness and purchase intentions has been the focus of previous studies (Crompton, 2004; Lyberger & McCarthy, 2002; O'Reilly et al., 2008; Séguin et al., 2005). Consumers are willing to pay more attention to objects they are interested in; therefore, consumers seek to strengthen their existing feelings and beliefs of products, and

neglect the rest. For instance, if the Super Bowl's recognition, logo, banner, reputation, competition, or other features are not appealing, or if the Super Bowl advertising seems to possess no attractive lure, consumers are unlikely to open their senses for them to take notice of it. The sponsors' message will not be received and consumers will ignore them with ease.

Purchase intentions are the last stage of the consumer decision-making model and are considered to be an extremely important variable in the sponsorship literature. Several studies confirmed that purchase intentions are the key factor affecting a sponsors' decision to continue or discontinue sponsoring events (Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Crompton, 2004; O'Reilly et al., 2008; Stotlar, 2004). In their study of Super Bowl sponsorship, O'Reilly et al. (2008) demonstrated that although the average scores of each purchase intention measurement item was lower than the midpoint, the overall trend from 1998 to 2006 displayed that consumers' purchase willingness had increased. Specifically, the consumers' willingness to spend more money and buy sponsors' products were shown to increase with time.

As previously discussed, Crompton (2004) suggested that the consumer decision-making purchase model consists of a series of stages. The three stages in this procedure are led by the awareness stage, followed by the interaction with the consumer interest stage, and the final stage of purchase decision. In general, these stages are sometimes referred to in the marketing field as the product adoption process. These stages show that the decision to buy a product is usually the final step of a process that started long before an actual purchase occurred. Therefore, sponsorship of a sporting event will only increase sales if it is successful in motivating potential customers, arouses consumer awareness, and generally appeals to consumers.

1.3.2 The Sponsorship Effectiveness Model

Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) selected applicable variables, analyzed each path between them, and constructed an overall sponsorship model. Later, they used the fans of a professional Greek basketball team to propose and measure a model in which fans' team attachment was the determinant of three sponsorship outcomes: sponsor image, purchase intentions, and word of mouth.

Findings from the study demonstrated that fans' support toward teams can transfer to sponsors and improve overall sponsorship effectiveness. Although the constructed structural model fit the data, there were several flaws that needed to be addressed from their study. First, only one item was used to measure the endogenous variable (word of mouth) and just two items for the exogenous variable (involvement-attraction). Historically, scores on a measure possess more reliability and validity if each variable is comprised of three items or more (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). As such, the lack of items used to measure involvement-attraction and multicollinearity concerns relating to the aforementioned and involvement-centrality, is why each was removed from the model in the present study

The next flaw from the previous study was that the authors added a relationship between purchase intentions and word of mouth to improve the fit of the model without literature support. Further complicating matters, the relationship between the variables was ambiguous and thus, could not be confirmed by previous studies (Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001; Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003).

1.3.2.1 Team Attachment

Gwinner and Swanson (2003) suggested that team attachment functions as the exogenous variable (an antecedent construct) that inspires goal-directed consumer behavior in the sponsorship model. The researchers also indicated that fans' sport attachment could be passed on to the supporting sponsor. This scenario reveals that fans do care who the sponsors are and who the sponsors support. From a sport property perspective, the very large fees currently sought for sponsorship rights will only be maintained and increased if good value to sponsors is provided. Thus, the relationship between the sponsors, the sport properties, and the fans becomes very sensitive and important for maintaining suitable sponsorship relationships (Kwon & Armstrong, 2004; Quester & Thompson, 2001).

Team attachment represents an individual's psychological engagement with a sports team (Funk, 2008; Kwon & Armstrong, 2004). The reason why team attachment is critical is because it is based on a stable psychological connection and is not affected by where a team plays (locale) or team performance (Kwon & Armstrong, 2004). Cornwell and Coote (2005) pointed out that consumers' identification connect a positive relationship with their intentions to purchase sponsors' products.

Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) found that team attachment significantly influences an individual's image of team associated sponsors, and their subsequent word of mouth and purchase intentions. The result of Tsiotsou and Alexandris's (2009) study exhibited that team attachment had the strongest positive total influence on purchase intentions, followed by a sponsor's image. The direct influence of team attachment on purchase intentions was stronger than the indirect effect of team attachment on purchase intentions, with a sponsor's image being the stronger direct influence on purchase intentions. Last, the effect was not significant between team attachment and word of mouth. To the contrary, sponsor image significantly affected word of mouth.

Nevertheless, as with all studies, there were flaws within Tsiotsou and Alexandris' (2009) work that need to be addressed. Thus, in an effort to improve upon their study by addressing the insufficient number of items that were used to measure each construct and a lack of literature to support these constructs, the purpose of the current study was to modify their scale to examine how college football team attachment contributes to sponsorship effectiveness by studying three American college football teams in the Division I level.

1.3.2.2 Sponsor Image

According to exchange theory (Copeland et al., 1996), sponsorship activity is an interaction where sponsors and properties exchange cash or value-in-kind with each other (Chavanat, Martinet, & Ferrand, 2009; Copeland et al., 1996; Crompton, 2004; Stotlar, 2004). Various scholars have analyzed the effect of sponsorship on consumers' cognitive attitudes, emotional transformations, and behaviors (Koo, Quaterman, & Flynn, 2006; Madrigal, 2000, 2001). Sponsorship outcomes include attitudinal and behavioral constructs. Both attitudinal and behavioral constructs have been considered as important indicators to measure sponsorship effectiveness. (Crompton, 2004; Koo et al., 2006; Meenaghan, 2005). Attitudinal constructs such as a sponsor's image, sponsor recognition, media exposure; and behavioral constructs like purchase intentions, market share, and word of mouth.

Sponsor image is a major sponsorship outcome (Crompton, 2004; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009). Sponsors or enterprises intent on maximizing the benefits of sponsorship by attempting to be perceived as positive sponsors whose relationship with the activity results in benefits to the event, sport, or team (Deane et al., 2003). Thus, sponsor image, sponsor favorability, and goodwill transfer are three important consumer attitudes and objectives of sponsorship (Meenaghan, 2005). Moreover, a sponsor's image has an effect function on other constructs and is viewed as a mediator in the sponsorship effectiveness model (Crompton, 2004). In Koo et al.'s study (2006), they considered whether perceived sponsor image fit with consumers' cognitive and affective responses and the effects of these responses on purchase intentions. The results demonstrated that the effects of consumers' cognitive and affective responses were significantly linked to purchase intentions.

1.3.2.3 Consumer Purchase

Consumer purchase intentions are an important sponsorship benefit that most sponsors are inherently interested in learning more about. Spears and Singh (2004) defined purchase intentions as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (p. 56). Chavanat, et al. (2009) conducted an interesting study regarding the relationship between four variables and purchase intentions. The variables of interest were: a sponsor's image (Adidas), an event (2006 FIFA Soccer World Cup Germany), a team (French National Soccer Team), the captain of the team (Zinedine Zidane). The authors indicated that consumers were willing to buy Adidas' products because of the fact that Adidas was one of FIFA's sponsors. In other words, a sponsor's image directly had an impact on fans' intention to purchase a sponsor's products. Moreover, the results revealed that sponsors' and sponsor properties' brands' cognitive and affective dimensions consist of a set of sponsorship activated nodes which generate interaction among them.

In Tsiotsou and Alexandris's (2009) context, the result displayed that 49% of the variance in consumers' purchase intentions were explained by the variance on the other endogenous variables (team attachment and sponsor image), indicating that highly attached fans are more likely to develop a positive image towards a sponsor and express willingness to buy their products. Therefore, these relationships display that sponsorship effectiveness should be evaluated using a sponsor's image and a consumer's cognitive team attachment and affective responses.

1.3.2.4 Word of Mouth

Word of mouth can be defined as an "interpersonal communication concerning marketing of a product that denigrates and praises the object of the communication" (Laczniak et al., 2001, p. 58). Swanson et al. (2003) revealed that because information received in a face-to-face behavior is more understandable and accessible, word of mouth can powerfully impact consumer purchase intentions. Maxham (2001) asserted that word of mouth provides critical information regarding businesses to consumers that usually helps consumers make a decision regarding whether or not to buy products and services. As such, word of mouth is recognized as an influential marketing tool and thereby has a powerful influence on the consumer purchasing process, yet its effect on sponsorship outcomes has not been sufficiently examined (Laczniak et al., 2001; Swanson et al., 2003; O'Reilly & Madill, 2009).

Even fewer studies have considered word of mouth as an outcome variable in the sponsorship field (Maxham, 2001). A notable study in particular was conducted by Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009), who found that a sponsor's image should be viewed as a mediating variable affecting word of mouth and purchase intentions. Nevertheless, and serving as a detractor to their study, Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) added a path from purchase intentions to word of mouth without literature support. Although their model fit the data, it violated the rationale of SEM that a model should rely on previous studies and existing theory to hypothesize relationships between observed variables and latent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Hence, the relationship and interaction between word of mouth and purchase intention is still unclear and needs to be tested in the sponsorship field. Thus, in the current study sponsor image was used a mediating variable to help explain sponsorship procedures.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between fans and sponsors. The current study modified the antecedent and outcome of sponsorship scale (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009) in accordance with previous studies (Alexandris et al., 2007; O'Reilly et al., 2008). Based on the exchange theory (Copeland et al., 1996), the consumer decision-making process model (Crompton, 2004), and Tsiotsou and Alexandris' study, the current study attempted to comprehensively understand the sponsorship effectiveness model. Traditionally, it is understood that if consumers perceive that sponsors positively influence sport properties, consumers are therefore willing to buy the products and share sponsors' information with friends and relatives. On the other hand, besides investing money and/or providing

value-in-kind to sport properties, sponsors hope to achieve desired business outcomes (e.g., increase positive image, increase fans' purchase intentions, and word of mouth). Above all, this study combined fans' attitudes and behaviors to test the sport consumer behavior model and gain an improved understanding of sponsorship effectiveness.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

- H1 Team attachment is positively related to sponsor image.
- H2 Team attachment is positively related to word of mouth.
- H3 Team attachment is positively related to purchase intentions.
- H4 Sponsor image is positively related to word of mouth.
- H5 Sponsor image is positively related to purchase intentions.
- H6 Word of mouth is positively related to purchase intentions.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

Four hundred and eighty surveys were distributed utilizing random sampling at three American college football Division I games (a single university). The three games were selected based on the following criteria: an early season game, a mid-season game, and a game later in the season. Completed surveys totaled 407 and were analyzed. Next, the reliability and validity of the sponsorship effectiveness scale was conducted followed by CFA. Anyone under the age of 18 years was not allowed to partake in the survey.

The demographic results of this study are presented in Table 1. The majority of respondents were male (56%) and single (74.4%). For 56.6% of respondents, high school was their highest level of education attained, followed by a bachelor's degree (24.6%). In terms of age, 73.9% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 30, with only 2.9% of the sample between the ages of 31 and 40. Single ticket holders accounted for 77.8% of the respondents, season ticket holders accounted for 21.7%.

Table 1. Demographics (n=407)

Gender	Age		Education		Marital Status		
Males	56%	18-30	73.9%	High School	54.6%	Single	74.4%
Females	44%	31-40	2.9%	Bachelor	24.6%	Widowed	1.4%
		41-50	10.6%	Graduate	11.1%	Divorced	0.5%
		>51	12.6%	Other	9.7%	Separated	2.4%
						Married	19.3%
					Partner	1.9%	

2.2 Procedures

After consent was received from the three sport marketing directors of athletics, we collected data one hour before until the end of the two games. We invited five instructors, all graduate students in the Sport Administration Program at an university in America, who were informed about the purpose and the details of the survey, to help distribute surveys. The product categories of the sponsors included the motor, soft drink, alcoholic beverage, and local restaurant industries.

Before each game, a sign and two tables were set up in front of the main entrance and at the student entrance to recruit potential participants. Directly before the participants completed the survey, they read the consent form and were explicitly told how to complete the questionnaire, that their answers would not be shown to other people, and that it is an anonymous survey without correct or incorrect answers. This was done in an effort to minimize socially desirable responding. Participants also had to read a list of sponsors and had to choose one brand regarding questions in the survey. The current study accounted for the consumer confusion factor; where a sponsor was self-determined by the subject.

2.3 Instruments

The measurement model of the study, including the endogenous and the exogenous variables, is presented in Table 2. The five constructs were measured as follows.

Table 2. Measurement Model of Sponsorship and Confirmatory Factor Results

Exogenous variables	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings
Team attachment ($\alpha=.89$, $M= 3.49$)			
1. I feel like I am a member of my college's football team.	2.84	1.77	.86*
2. My college's football team is an important part of my life.	3.38	1.79	.95*
3. I want others to know I am a fan of my college's football team.	4.11	1.81	.81*
4. I believe that I work for the good of my college's football team.	3.64	1.76	.82*
Endogenous variables			
Sponsor image ($\alpha=.91$, $M= 4.05$)			
5. I have a positive attitude toward my college's football sponsor and its products due to their sponsorship of my college's football team.	4.33	1.68	.79*
6. The sponsorship improves my perceptions about my college's football team sponsor and their products.	3.95	1.57	.94*
7. Due to the sponsorship of my college's football team, I like their products more.	3.88	1.56	.94*
Purchase intentions ($\alpha=.96$, $M= 3.89$)			
8. I consider buying the sponsor's products in the future.	3.91	1.72	.98*
9. I will try to buy the sponsor's products in the future.	3.88	1.65	.98*
10. I will buy the sponsor's products in the future.	3.89	1.62	.85*
Word of mouth ($\alpha=.94$, $M= 4.12$)			
11. I will recommend the sponsor's products to friends and relatives.	3.92	1.64	.94*
12. I will encourage friends and relatives to buy the sponsor's products.	3.98	1.67	.99*
13. I will say positive things about the sponsor's products.	4.46	1.58	.94*

Note: *Significant at the .05 level. $\chi^2=115.06$ ($p < .001$) with 59 degrees of freedom, $SRMR=.06$, $RMSEA=.08$, $CFI=.92$, $NNFI=.90$

The survey consisted of 13 items: team attachment (four items), sponsor image (three items), word of mouth (three items), and purchase intentions (three items). All of the scales were slightly modified to align with the purpose and scope of the current study. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure all items, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Utilizing the constructs from Alexandris et al.'s (2007), Tsiotsou and Alexandris' (2009), and O'Reilly et al.'s (2008) study, all items were adapted to fit the context of the American college football games. In addition, to adequately measure the constructs where Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) used less than three items, two items were added to word of mouth to bring their respective totals to three items each (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

2.4 Data Analysis

The following statistical techniques were conducted to answer the research questions in the current study: analysis of descriptive assessments, CFA, internal consistency reliability analysis, and SEM. In order to validate important assumptions relative to the data, an analysis of descriptive statistics was conducted on all variables prior to use in any other statistical techniques with SPSS 17.0. Descriptive statistics such as measures of distributional characteristics and frequencies allowed for better comprehension of the data, recognition of characteristics within variables, and identification of outliers or non-normal data (Huck, 2004). In addition, descriptive statistics helped identify the need for data transformation and any errors that may have occurred in data conversion.

In examining the reliability of the sponsorship effectiveness scale, Cronbach's alpha was utilized. Cronbach's α reliability estimates were calculated to ascertain the internal consistency reliability of the scales (Devellis, 1991). The α reliability estimates for each construct exceeded the minimum recommended level of .70 (Devellis, 1991).

Later, CFA was performed to examine the factorial structure of team attachment, sponsor image, purchase intentions, and word of mouth. The 13 items used to measure the four latent constructs were subjected to CFA using LISREL 8.52. A standardized factor loading above .40 is believed to be a reasonable fit (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989). The model tested was evaluated using the comparative fit index (CFI), the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR), and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA). In particular, a NNFI and a CFI value above .90, a RMSEA value of .08 and below, and a SRMR value of .06 and below are all suggestive of a reasonable fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Byrne, 1998).

3. Results

3.1 Initial Analysis

Multicollinearity was tested in the data by examining the Pearson correlations associated between each pair of items. If an intercorrelation was larger than .85, it was considered problematic (Kline, 1998). None of the correlation coefficients in this study exceeded .85.

Cronbach's α was used to examine the internal consistency of the latent variables team attachment, sponsor image, purchase intentions, and word of mouth. All values ranged from .89 to .96, above the recommended .70 cut-off point.

3.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The final measurement model of this study, including the exogenous and the endogenous variables, are presented in Table 3. The standardized factor loading of each item ranged from .81 to .99, which are all above the recommended .40 cut-off point. Although the χ^2 goodness of fit index was statistically significant ($\chi^2 (59, N = 407) = 115.06, p < .001$), the specified measurement model was determined to fit the data sufficiently ($SRMR = .06, RMSEA = 0.08, CFI = .92, NNFI = .90$).

Table 3. Summary of causal effects in the sponsorship effectiveness model

Determinant	Outcome	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total
Team Attachment	Sponsor Image ($R^2 = .42$)	.65*		.65*
	Word of Mouth ($R^2 = .69$)	.21*	.44*	.65*
	Purchase Intentions ($R^2 = .85$)	-.04	.65*	.60*
Sponsor Image	Word of Mouth	.67*		.67*
	Purchase Intentions	.50*	.34*	.84*
Word of Mouth	Purchase Intentions	.50*		.50*

Note. *Effects significant at the .05 level.

The factor loadings were also analyzed to test for convergent and discriminant validity, while path coefficients from latent constructs to the corresponding indicators were statistically significant. This means the scale possesses convergent validity. The loadings of the observed variables ranged from .81 to .99, and all were positive and significant at the .05 level (the lowest t-value = 3.18), showing that the observed variables were explained by the latent variables.

To test discriminant validity, correlations among the latent constructs were examined to see whether the values were significantly less than one. None of the standardized confidence intervals of the Φ values (\pm two standards errors) included the value of one, offering evidence of discriminant validity. Consequently, the conditions for convergent and discriminant validity were satisfied providing that the constructs were measured reliably and can be discriminated.

3.3 The Sponsorship Effectiveness Model

The hypothesized model of sponsorship effectiveness was examined with conducting the maximum likelihood estimation. After used SEM analysis, the χ^2 goodness of fit index was statistically significant ($\chi^2 (59, N = 407) = 115.58, p < .001$) and the ratio of $\chi^2/df = 1.96$, displaying that the model fit the data well. Model indices of RMSEA, CFI, NNFI, and SRMR also demonstrated that the hypothesized sponsorship effectiveness model fitted the data reasonably well: RMSEA = .08, CFI = .93, NNFI = .90, SRMR = .06. The low mean score of the first question might be because respondents may have felt as if they do not literally feel as if they are a member of the football team; as in a player or coach per se.

3.4 Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

With one exception, all of the hypothesized paths were positive and significant. Team attachment had no significant direct effect on purchase intentions. Team attachment had the strongest standardized direct effect on sponsor image (.65) and the strongest standardized indirect effect on purchase intentions (.65). Sponsor image had the strongest standardized direct effect on word of mouth (.67), followed by purchase intentions (.50). Word of mouth had the strongest standardized direct effect on purchase intentions (.50).

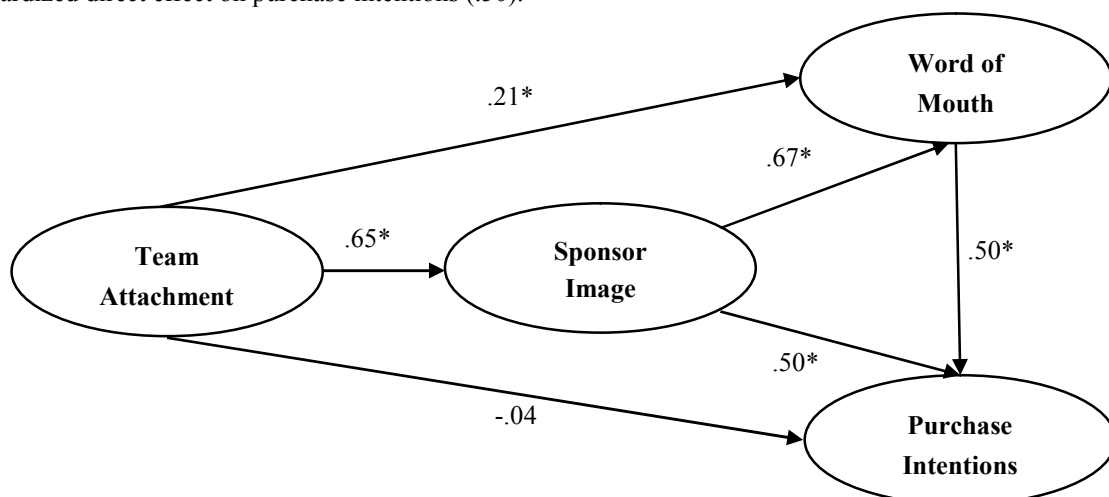


Figure 1. The sponsorship effectiveness model. * significant at the .05 level.

From the viewpoint of the explained variance of the endogenous variables, team attachment explained 42% of the variance in sponsor image. Team attachment and sponsor image explained 69% of variance in word of mouth. Team attachment, sponsor image, and word of mouth explained 85% of the variance in purchase intentions. Table 3 presents a summary of causal effects in the sponsorship effectiveness model. Figure 1 displays the model and each path coefficient.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Sponsorship Effectiveness Model Scale

In the present study, responses to the sponsorship effectiveness scale possessed reliability and validity when the scale was applied to fans attending football games. The present study attempted to comprehensively understand consumers' behavior stemming from fans' team attachment in the college football games toward purchase intentions of the sponsors' products.

4.2 The Sponsorship Effectiveness Model Analysis

In the current study, there was one exogenous variable (team attachment) and three endogenous variables (sponsor image, word of mouth, and purchase intentions). The proposed model started with the direct effects of team attachment on sponsor image. Sponsor image was directly related to word of mouth and purchase intentions. Finally, word of mouth was directly related to purchase intentions.

All the explained variances in the current study were higher than in the previous study conducted by Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009). Hence, it was recognized that the current sponsorship effectiveness model was more effective in explaining college sport consumer behavior.

4.3 Effect Analysis

According to the results, team attachment can positively affect a sponsor image (H1) and word of mouth (H2), but not purchase intentions (H3). Only if team attachment is combined with a sponsor's good quality image, will fans be willing to purchase the sponsor's products and services.

As Gwinner and Swanson (2003) suggested, team attachment functions as an antecedent variable that encourages goal-directed consumer behavior to share a sponsor's information and purchase their products. This is especially the case with collegiate sport fans' team attachment, since after students graduated from colleges, some of them still have steady psychological engagements with their alma maters (Funk, 2008; Kwon & Armstrong, 2004). Furthermore, fans' team attachment could be passed on to the sponsor who supported the sport (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). In short, collegiate sport fans do care who the sponsors are and whether the sponsors truly support their favorite sport or not.

Hence, it was determined that sponsors should not implement a one-way process of communication with its target market, which exclusive use of team attachment engagement implies. Rather, sponsors should implement a two-way procedure of communication that depends on the intended recipients being interested sufficiently to interpret and absorb the communication. This two-way form of communication promotes consumer awareness and allows for movement onto the next stage--the consumer interest stage (D'Alesandro, 2001).

In the current study, hypothesis 4 (sponsor image is positively related to word of mouth) and hypothesis 5 (sponsor image is positively related to purchase intentions) were supported. Those results correlated with the AIDA model, which stated that consumers' awareness of sponsors' image can increase their interest (Crompton, 2004). Sponsor image was also found to be a critical mediator in the current model. According to the results, fans with high team attachment intend to purchase sponsors' products. In addition, if fans with high team attachment perceived goodwill in the sponsor's image, then they will be willing to pay more for a sponsor's products as well as have a discussion with other friends and family members regarding the sponsor. In other words, not only do sponsors aim to exploit the profits of sponsorship, but they also strive to be perceived as affirmative sponsors (Alexandris et al., 2007; Crompton, 2004).

American collegiate sporting events are very unique. In these situations, as long as the sponsors possess affirmative images, commercialization may not reduce fans' response toward sponsors. Even though the direct effect from a sponsor's image to purchase intentions (.50) was lower than the direct effect to word of mouth (.67), the total effect from sponsor image through word of mouth to purchase intentions was still very influential (.84). In the case of Division I collegiate football events, it is essential for sport marketers to generate an attractive buzz to drive fans discussion regarding their contribution to the game.

In the present study hypothesis 6 (word of mouth is positively related to purchase intentions) was affirmed. This result is the same as the AIDA model, which declared that sport fans' interest will enhance their purchase intentions (Crompton, 2004). Since word of mouth is less biased and providers distribute the information without commercial purpose, word of mouth is sometimes viewed as more trustworthy (Alexandris et al., 2007; Lacznik et al., 2001; Maxham, 2001). Although Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) found that purchase intentions influenced word of mouth, the total effect from team attachment and sponsor image was lower than in the current study. In Tsiotsou and Alexandris' (2009) study, the total effects from team attachment and sponsor image were .55 and .47, the explained variance of purchase intentions was .49. In the current study the total effects from team attachment and sponsor image were .60 and .84, the explained variance of purchase intentions was .85. It has been confirmed that the path from word of mouth to purchase intentions is more reasonable.

5. Conclusions

In regards to the consumer decision-making model, some studies have pointed out that purchase intentions are affected by various factors, with other studies confirming that purchase intentions are the key factor affecting a sponsor's decision to continue sponsoring events (Cronewll & Coote, 2005; Crompton, 2004; O'Reilly et al., 2008; Stotlar, 2004). Pragmatically speaking, sponsor image and word of mouth directly affect purchase intentions. Team attachment, a sponsor's image, and word of mouth indirectly influenced purchase intentions in the current study. In exchange theory (Copeland et al., 1996), the higher purchase intentions are, the more willing sponsors will be to invest money in sport

teams or sporting events (Crompton, 2004; O'Reilly et al., 2008; Stotlar, 2004). Therefore, fans' team attachment, a high quality sponsor image, and word of mouth will increase fans' purchase intentions, which then also meet sponsors' desires and will lead to more money being invested in sport teams or sporting events.

5.1 Recommendations for Future Research/Limitations

Because of insufficient items and the multicollinearity problem of involvement-centrality and involvement attraction from Tsiotsou and Alexandris' (2009) study, the current study did not take these two constructs into account. More specifically, multicollinearity creates problems that generate inaccurate results and an insufficient number of items comprising a construct may cause low reliability and validity (Kline, 1998; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Consequently, to avoid low reliability and validity of the measurement and inaccurate results, involvement-centrality and involvement attraction were deleted and not analyzed in the current study. In future studies, researchers can add more items to involvement-centrality and involvement attraction if they elect to do so.

The sampling method was slightly modified because of the initial low response rate. In the beginning stage, the sampling method was designed to post the survey link on the researcher's Facebook page, the official NFL website chat board, the NFL Facebook page, and the chat boards of the two competing teams. However, the NFL website chat board would not allow any survey links on it so the response rate was undesirable. Thus, the current study still used voluntary sampling but added one more survey protocol with respondent solicitation--emailing. In total, there were 111.3 million Super Bowl XLVI viewers to sample from; however, an undetermined number of viewers only watched parts of Super Bowl XLVI. Before employing CFA and SEM, the present study used a standardized skewness and kurtosis index to test for normality. It was subsequently determined that no extremely non-normal indicators were found. In the future, researchers could attempt to collect data by random sampling to enhance the generalizability of the results and use incentives to increase response rate.

Previous studies verified that time had a strong effect on purchase intentions (Crompton, 2004; Nielsen Company, 2010; O'Reilly et al., 2008). However, because of time and financial limitations, the current study did not compare different periods of time on purchase inattentions. In future studies, the sponsorship effectiveness scale can be applied to study fan behavior during additional time frames surrounding a given sporting event (e.g., one week before the game, the week of the game, and one week after the game). By doing so, clarity will ensue relating to how fans' involvement with sporting events influences their view of the sponsor's image, word of mouth, and purchase intentions.

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