NCAA CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP: DOES IT IMPACT CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND PURCHASES? THE CASE OF AT&T SPONSORSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effectiveness of corporate sponsorship in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sanctioned sporting events and attempts to examine consumer attitudes and purchase intentions towards companies such as AT&T that sponsor NCAA sporting events. This paper addresses four key concepts: consumer awareness of sponsorship; the perceived fit between sponsorship and the sponsoring company; consumer attitudes towards the sponsoring brand; and consumer purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand. Research results indicate that approximately 44.9 percent of respondents are aware of AT&T sponsoring NCAA sanctioned sporting events. In addition, research indicates that consumer attitudes towards the sponsoring brand have a strong direct relationship with purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand. Furthermore, results indicate that sponsoring brand equity has a positive effect on attitudes toward the sponsoring brand; and corporate sponsorship helps sponsoring firms increase brand equity; and sponsored organization recognition has a favorable impact on consumer purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand.

Keywords: Sport Sponsorship, Consumer Attitudes, Purchase Intention, Sports Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship is a cash and/or in-kind fee rewarded to a property which may be a sports, arts, entertainment, or non-profit event in return for access to the commercial potential associated with that property (Meenaghan, 1991). Although sponsorship enables a corporation to communicate with their customers and deliver increased awareness, brand building and propensity to purchase, unlike other advertising media, sponsorship cannot communicate specific product attributes.

Corporate sponsorship has become an essential marketing tool in the highly congested marketing communication world and is now considered one of the most important tools for a corporation's marketing communication strategy. In fact, research indicates that sponsorship can be a highly cost-effective means of marketing communication (Benett, 1999; Marshall & Cook, 1992; Meenaghan, 1991; Thwaites, 1995).

Sponsorship enables a corporation to achieve numerous goals including increasing brand awareness (Cornwell, Roy, & Steinhard, 2001; Dean, 2002); enhancing brand recall and loyalty, and developing a positive attitude toward the sponsor (Cornwell, et al., 2001); developing a positive affect towards the company and their products and services; assessing consumer purchase intentions and; boosting sales (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003); and developing a halo of goodwill (IEG, 2011); (Meenaghan, 2001; Rifon, Choi, Trímble, & Li, 2004; Speed & Thompson, 2000). As Levin, Joiner, and Cameron (2001) and Neijen, Smit, and Moorman (2009) indicated a corporation can benefit from sponsorship by associating its brand with a specific event. Furthermore by sponsoring corporate events such as sporting events, causes, the arts, festivals and annual events, etc., firms can create a positive image of commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) with their customers, which has a positive influential effect on its customers (Chomvilailuk & Butcher, 2010). Finally, sports sponsorship enables a firm to link the aspiration and passion of its customers to specific sporting events (Arun, 2004; Kim, 2010).

Transparency and accountability are two of the greatest obstacles sponsors face in the field of sponsorship. As corporations increase their investment in sponsorship, they will be subject to more stakeholder financial scrutiny and review in order to accurately determine the effectiveness of sponsorship activities (Meenaghan, 2013).

Though sponsorship has several benefits it requires a large investment, firms cannot always be sure that their sponsorship programs are effective. Previous studies indicate that consumers are often confused or have misperceptions about official sponsors (Meenaghan, 1996). Thus official sponsors may face a marketing challenge whereby they have to ensure that their customers recognize them as the sponsor and develop a favorable attitude towards their brands (Pitt, Parent, Berthon, & Steyn, 2010; Schmitz, 2005). Interestingly, the effect of sponsorship on consumer company identification and brand attitude were found to be greater in firms that ranked high in corporate social responsibility reputation than in firms that ranked low in corporate social responsibility reputation (Lii & Lee, 2012).

Corporate sponsorship is a very lucrative business. Total global sponsorship expenditures, made by event organizers were $55.1 billion in 2013, up from $46.3 billion in 2010. In fact, industry projections estimate 2014 sponsorship expenditures to be $55.3 billion dollars (IEG, 2014). According to IEG's 29th annual year-end industry review and forecast, in North America, the total dollars spent on corporate sponsorship has grown from $17.2 billion (2010) to $20.6 billion (2014 projected). Although corporate sponsorship dollars have increased annually from 2010 to 2014, the growth rate of sponsorship dollars has actually declined from 5.5% (2010) to 4.3% (2014 projected), (IEG, 2014). Similar to North America, the growth rate globally has declined from a 5.1% increase in 2010 to 4.1% (2014 projected), (IEG, 2014). Globally in 2013, 70% of these sponsorship dollars were spent on sporting events, 10% on entertainment, 9% on causes, 4% the arts, 4% festivals and annual events, and 3% associations and memberships. In North America, the numbers were somewhat similar: 69% for sporting events, 10% for entertainment, 9% for causes, 4.5% for arts, 4.2 % for festivals, and 2.8% for associations (IEG, 2014). The annual growth rate of sponsorship versus other advertising tools has seen a slight decline from 5.5% (2011) to 4.3% (2014 projected). Globally, this number has also declined from 5.1% in 2011 to 4.1% (2014 projected) (IEG, 2014).

As discussed previously, corporate sponsorship is still experiencing a steady growth rate; however corporate sponsors have begun to utilize other marketing alternatives such as: digital media, social media, and mobile applications. Sports sponsorship remains the largest sponsorship category for corporations although its dominance has declined in recent years as corporations invest advertising dollars in other non-traditional media venues such as social media and mobile applications (Meenaghan, 2013).

The aim of this study is to develop a theoretical model that helps better explain consumer behavior within the context of existing sponsorship marketing literature. This study examines the role of sponsorship on purchase intention towards the sponsoring brand, awareness of the sponsorship and factors effecting consumer attitudes toward the sponsoring brands. This study's emphasis is intended to provide sponsors and marketers with a point of departure for understanding specific consumer characteristics and purchase intention towards the event sponsor and its brands. A conceptual model was developed to explain three key items: (1) awareness and sponsored organization recognition (2) the relationship between sponsored organization recognition, perceived fit, sponsoring brand equity and attitudes toward sponsoring brand (3) the importance of sponsorship factors effecting purchase intention. As such, understanding sponsorship's role and function for consumer purchase intentions of the product and/or service is the main focus of this paper.

This paper is comprised of seven sections. The first section presents an introduction and review of the essence of sponsorship, the use of sponsorship events, and the present trends of sponsorship. Section two examines NCAA event sponsorship. Section three focuses on the literature review of sponsorship. Section four contains the research model and explains the hypothesis formed, based on the literature review. Section five contains the methodology questionnaire design, measurement of variables and data collection. Section six presents the data analysis and research results. Finally, section seven discusses the conclusions, limitations and future research recommendations.

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (NCAA) EVENT SPONSORSHIP

The NCAA Corporate Champions and Corporate Partners program supports all 89 NCAA championships. Corporate partners are granted a wide variety of benefits for participating in this partnership, including exclusivity around the use of NCAA logos, designations and championship tickets. Through the NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner programs, sponsoring companies provide a direct, positive impact on the academic and developmental opportunities afforded to over 400,000 student-athletes each year.

The NCAA Corporate Champion and Corporate Partner Programs were first introduced in 1984 and are dedicated to excellence and committed to developing marketing and promotional activities surrounding NCAA Championships. Some of America's top corporations participate in the program and emphasize the role of athletics and academics in our society by supporting NCAA youth programs, student-athlete awards, and scholarship initiatives. In 2002-03 the program was restructured to consist of two specific tiers of marketing and promotional rights – Corporate Champions and Corporate Partners. Presently official NCAA Corporate Champions

are comprised of AT&T, Capital One, and Coca Cola. Official NCAA Corporate Partners include: Allstate, Buffalo Wild Wings, Buick, Burger King, Enterprise, Infiniti, Kindle Fire, LG, Loews, Nabisco, Northwestern Mutual, Reese, Unilever and UPS.

AT&T is the NCAA's longest standing sports corporate sponsorship partner. AT&T sponsors NCAA sporting events for both men's and women's events such as basketball, golf, and football. AT&T is one of ten corporate sponsors that are considered top tier NCAA sponsors. Since 2001 AT&T has maintained its sponsorship relationship with the NCAA. AT&T was selected for this study because it is the longest standing NCAA sponsor, and because it is also one of the largest in terms of dollar expenditures (Smith 2011). In 2012 AT&T paid between 175 and 180 million dollars on US sports sponsorship. Although not officially published, it is estimated that AT&T pays the NCAA millions of dollars per year in event sponsorship dollars (Jacobson, 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considerable research has already been done in the field of sponsorship. Dardis (2009) emphasized the importance of a goodness of "fit" message and repeated message exposure to the customer for the sponsored event. Cornwall and Coote (2005) utilized social identity theory to assess consumer identification with a sponsored event, and purchase intention with non-profit groups. Grohs and Reisinger (2005) researched the importance of sponsorship image, goodness of "fit," and sponsor reputation. Similarly, Hamlin and Wilson (2004) researched cause related marketing, and the degree of "fit" between sponsoring corporations, and their brand identity in customer relationship management campaigns. Rifon, et al., (2001) identified sponsor motives such as altruism and reputation management to determine message congruence and consumer influence.

Madrigal (2000) researched consumer identification of sponsor and found that identification with a particular team affects sponsor influence and consumer purchase intentions. Harris (2000) examined consumer purchase intentions towards sponsored brands by reviewing alliances between sports fans and sports teams. Speed and Thompson (2000) utilized a classical conditioning model to understand consumer attitudes and perceptions of sponsor-property fit. Johar and Pham (1999) researched sponsor reputation and brand-event fit, noting that more popular sponsors in the marketplace are often misidentified as being an event sponsor. Gwinner and Eaton (1999) assessed how a sporting event activity can enhance a brands image via sponsorship. They concluded that if an event could be made more prominent, the resulting image transfer that the sponsor was trying to achieve would be more successful. Cornwall, Humphreys, Maguire, Weeks, and Tellegen (2003) examined the level of sponsor recall, concluding that consumer recall is stronger for sponsors with good "fit," rather than sponsors with lesser "fit." Olson and Thjømøe (2003) researched sponsorship involvement with brand information, finding that consumers who had additional brand information tended to have stronger attitudinal changes towards sponsors. Finally, Becker-Olsen and Simmons, (2002) examined attitudes towards the sponsor and the effects of good "fit" on firm equity, noting positive congruence or goodness of "fit" tends to influence consumer attitudes as much as one year later (Woodside & Summers, 2012).

Sponsored Organization Recognition

Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983) show that the importance of attitude toward the event creates a favorable customer response. Burke and Edell (1989) demonstrate that positive feelings about an ad positively affect a consumer's opinion of the advertised brand, and conversely, negative feelings negatively impact a consumer's affinity towards a brand. d'Astous and Bitz (1995) determined that consumers who considered an event to be attractive also considered the event would have a stronger impact on the sponsoring organizations' image. Crimmins and Horn (1996) suggested that corporations can benefit from consumers that have a strong affinity for an event (Speed & Thompson, 2000). Grohs, Wagner, and Vsetecka (2004) researched consumer identification with a specific activity via their engagement with a sponsored event. Cornwell and Coote (2005); Daneshvary and Schwer (2002); Meenaghan (2001); and Harris (2000) show a significant link between the sponsored event and the sponsoring brand.

Sponsoring Brand Equity

Consumers may form a strong sense of attachment with the sponsoring firm when consumers become emotionally attached to the sponsoring firm's product (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2007). In addition, these associations may then be reflected in consumer awareness of the brand, and create a greater preference for the brand and lead to additional consumer purchases of the brand (Tripodi & Sutherland, 2000; Woodside & Summers, 2012). In addition, firms try to create an association between the brand and the event (Levin, et al., 2001; Meenaghan, 2001; Neijen, et al., 2009) in order to create brand preference and brand purchase (Morales, 2005).

When a brand is associated with a specific event, the event can be associated with a group of brand associations and the event may also become indirectly related with the brand (Keller, 1993). Sponsorship also makes it possible to categorize a market by target audience interests and thus improves the linkage of the brand to a high profile event or group (Crimmins & Horn, 1996, Kim, 2010). In the case of the grocery industry, most consumer purchase decisions are made at the point-of-purchase (Harris, 2000), and thus effective promotional strategies are vital because on-package promotions help influence consumer decision making (Johar & Pham, 1999). However, literature also suggests as brand loyalty increases, competitive action declines (Johar & Pham, 1999).

Perceived Fit between the Sponsored Event and the Sponsor

Meenaghan (1991, 1996), Pitt, et al. (2010), and Schmitz (2005) remind us that quite often consumers who are exposed to a sponsor's message do not recall, identify, or recognize the sponsors and develop a favorable attitude toward the brands. Thus, it is imperative that the sponsoring firm create an effective message through the sponsorship event and make sure that there is a good fit between the sponsored event and the event sponsor. When there is a close fit between the event sponsor and the sponsors of the event, consumers tend to improve their attitude towards the sponsor positively and also have higher purchase intentions (Becker-Olsen, 2003; McCarthy & Erwin, 1998; Roy & Cornwell, 2003; Speed & Thompson, 2000).

When there is a perceived "fit" between the sponsoring firm and the brand, improved results in sales and profits can be observed. Speed and Thompson (2000) indicate that the level of "fit" is positively related to a consumer's willingness to consider the sponsoring firm's product. Individual activities or events are found to be possessed of particular personality attributes in the public mind and much sponsorship activity is directed towards garnering a 'rub-off' effect to the company or its products through associating with a particular sponsorship event or activity" (Meenaghan, 1983).

Koo, Quarterman, and Flynn (2006) used schema theory to determine whether similar information about a sponsor's products results in more positive consumer behavior towards sponsoring firms. Shani and Sandler (1996) researched the depth and width interest of sponsored events and also categorized these events as: global (Olympics); international (Tour De France); national (NCAA Final Four); regional (Big East Conference); and local (high school football).

Attitudes towards the sponsored event to its brand are more favorable when the event property and sponsoring corporation are known to the consumer in either image or functionality (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Research suggests that there is a fit between consumer perceptions of sponsoring event and sponsoring firm (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Meenaghan, 2001; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Specifically, when customers positively perceive a sponsor-event fit, consumer attitudes towards the event are improved (Cornwell et al., 2003; McDaniel, 1999). Additionally, sponsor-event fit tends to influence consumer memory and recall of the event sponsor (McDaniel, 1999). Crimmins and Horn (1996); Otker and Hayes (1987); Stipp and Schiavone (1996) emphasize the importance of congruence or good "fit" between and sponsor and the sponsored property or event.

Awareness of Sponsorship

For many companies participating in sponsorship activities, the primary goal is to enhance brand awareness (Yong, Kyoungtae, Cathryn, & Tae Hee, 2008). Recent academic research has concentrated on various factors which affect respondent associations of sponsored events in order to better explain sponsorship effects. More specifically examined memory and sponsorship to understand sponsorship effects (Meenaghan, 2013). Guner and Harcar (2012) addressed consumer awareness and brand sponsorship for corporations sponsoring athletic stadiums. Approximately 70% of respondents were aware of local corporations that sponsored local teams in the greater Pittsburgh area.

Consumers may form a strong sense of attachment with the sponsoring firm when consumers become emotionally attached to the sponsoring firm's product (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Sirgy et al., 2007). In addition, these associations may then be reflected in consumer awareness of the brand, and create a greater preference for the brand and lead to additional consumer purchases of the brand (Tripodi & Sutherland, 2000).

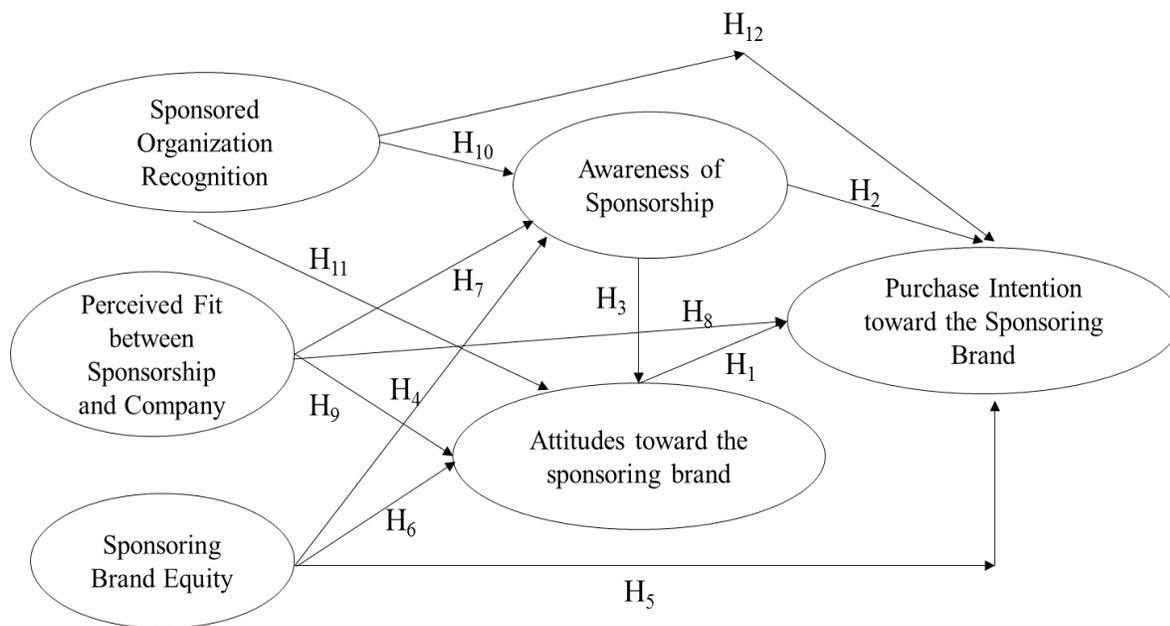## Attitude and Purchase Intentions toward Sponsoring Brand

Javalgi, Traylor, Gross and Lampman (1994) and Stipp and Schiavone (1996) determined that sponsors with a more favorable image tend to have more positive response to their sponsorship activities than sponsors with a less favorable image identified those respondents pro-

social perceptions of the sponsor tend to favorably impact the sponsor' image (Speed & Thompson, 2000; Stipp & Schiavone, 1996). Guner et al., 2012 found that consumer recognition of and preference for sponsoring brand is affected by the level of involvement with the event as well as the respondents' demographic characteristics.

RESEARCH MODEL and HYPOTHESIS

The conceptual model, operational definitions, and measurement items were developed based on theoretical foundations adopted from the literature review.

Figure 1: Sponsorship Initial Conceptual Model

The evidence gathered from the above literature review, permits us to suggest the following hypotheses:

H1: Attitudes toward the sponsoring brand has a strong direct relationship with purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand.

H2: Awareness of sponsorship has a positive effect on purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand.

H3: Awareness of sponsorship has a positive effect on attitudes toward the sponsoring brand.

H4: Sponsoring brand equity has a positive effect on awareness of sponsorship.

H5: Sponsoring brand equity has a positive effect on purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand.

H6: Sponsoring brand equity has a positive effect on attitudes toward the sponsoring brand.

H7: Perceived fit between sponsorship and company has a positive effect awareness of sponsorship.

H8: Perceived fit between sponsorship and company has a positive effect on purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand.

H9: Perceived fit between sponsorship and company has a positive effect on attitudes toward the sponsoring brand.

H10: Sponsored organization recognition has a positive effect on awareness of sponsorship.

H11: Sponsored organization recognition has a positive effect on attitudes toward the sponsoring brand.

H12: Sponsored organization recognition has a positive effect on purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand.

These hypotheses gave us the foundation for completing our analysis and developing our sponsorship model.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire Design and Measurement of Variables

A questionnaire was developed to collect data based on the relevant literature. The questionnaire consisted of four categories and was pretested for content validity, face validity, and precision of the questions and instructions prior to being administered. The questionnaire was comprised of seven sections. The first section measured sponsored organization recognition, in the second section, the respondents were asked to express their perception about sponsoring brand equity, the third section of the questionnaire was designed to measure matching of sponsorship and company, the fourth section measured the attitude toward sponsor, the fifth section of the questionnaire was designed to gauge whether consumers were aware of the sponsorship, the sixth part was developed to determine purchase intention of the sponsor company product/services and the last section was comprised of questions regarding the respondent's demographic background.

Table 1 shows the operational definitions of the research variables. For each variable, a multiple-item scale was developed where each item was measured based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1—"Strongly Disagree" to 5—"Strongly Agree." Seven items were used to

measure sponsored organization recognition and brand equity, four items were used to measure fit between sponsorship and company, three items were used to compute attitude toward sponsorship and purchase intention whereas awareness with the event sponsors were assessed by only two items.

Data Collection

Data for the study were collected as part of a larger study through self-administered questionnaires from randomly selected adults (18 years or older) who reside in the Beaver, Alleghany,

Table 1. The Operational Definitions of the Research Variables

Research Variable	Operational Definition	Previous Research Scale
Sponsored Organization Recognition (SOR)	1. NCAA Basketball is extremely important in my daily life 2. I usually attend NCAA basketball games 3. I frequently watch NCAA games on TV 4. I am strong supporter of NCAA basketball	Guner, Harcar, and Altintas, 2014; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Woodside and Summers, 2012.
Sponsoring Brand Equity (SBE)	1. AT&T brand is reliable 2. AT&T provides good value for money 3. I would recommend AT&T to others 4. AT&T is different from competing brands 5. I like AT&T 6. I have a favorable opinion of AT&T 7. I am loyal to AT&T	Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Dahl, Manchanda and Argo, 2001; Guner and Harcar 2012; Sen,Gurhan-Canli and Morwitz 2001; Woodside and Summers, 2012.
Perceived Fit Between Sponsorship and Company (PF)	1. The overall fit between AT&T and NCAA is clear 2. The overall fit between AT&T name and NCAA is logical 3. The overall fit between AT&T and NCAA is readily apparent 4. It makes sense to me that AT&T sponsors NCAA	Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka, 2004; Speed and Thomson 2000; Guner and Harcar 2014; Woodside and Summers, 2012.

Attitude toward Sponsoring Brand (ASB)	1. AT&T sponsorship makes me more favorable toward the sponsor. 2. AT&T sponsorship would improve my perception of the sponsor. 3. AT&T sponsorship would make me like the sponsor more. 4. Sponsorship of AT&T to NCAA positively influenced how I felt about AT&T 5. It is good that AT&T sponsor NCAA	Speed and Thomson, 2000.
Awareness of Sponsorship (AS)	1. I was aware of AT&T's sponsorship to NCAA earlier. 2. I am pretty sure AT&T's sponsors to NCAA.	Woodside and Summers, 2012.
Purchase Intention (PI)	1. I am most likely to purchase the products/services from AT&T 2. I would consider buying the product/service from AT&T if I need a product of this kind 3. AT&T sponsorship encourages me to use AT&T's products/services a lot. 4. It's possible for me to buy the product /service from AT&T	Benett, 1999, Cornwell and Coote, 2005; Guner and Harcar 2012; Woodside and Summers, 2012.

Butler and Washington counties in Pennsylvania. These counties are located within an hour drive from the University Pittsburgh. The University of Pittsburgh basketball team is a well-known basketball team in NCAA. A total of 300 questionnaires were hand-delivered to the residents of these counties during the NCAA basketball season 2013. Completed surveys were later collected. After a four-week data collection process, 278 usable ones were retrieved for data analysis. Sample geographic profiles are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Geographic Profile of Respondents

County	Frequency	Percent
Beaver	109	39.2
Allegheny	90	32.4
Butler	47	16.9
Washington	22	7.9
Other	10	3.6
Total	278	100.0

DATA ANALYSIS and RESEARCH RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were executed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, version 21. A Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was used to examine the proposed model. SEM technique permitted assessment of association between variables in the model which contained more than one dependent variable as in our hypothesized model (Figure 1). SEM was performed using the statistical software AMOS version 21. Model modification was concluded when the model was considered to be the most appropriate fit with the data.

Several indices were used to assess the fit of the model. First the maximum likelihood chi-square statistic, chi-square/degree of freedom ratio is used to evaluate the fit between the hypothesized statistical model and the actual data set. The Chi-square values between 1.0 and 2.0 indicate good fit, values between 2.0 and 3.0 indicate satisfactory fit, and values less than 1.0 indicate over fit. Secondly the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) used to measure absolute fit of the model. Conventional interpretation for these fit indices (AGFI and GFI) is that values of .95 or greater indicate excellent correspondence between the hypothetical model and the actual data, and values between .85 and .90 indicate reasonable model fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The third index is the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) which is used to assess incremental fit. Values close to 0 indicate poor fit, values between 0.90 and 0.95 indicate satisfactory fit, values greater than 0.95 indicate good fit and CFI = 1 indicates a perfect fit. The fourth index used was the Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). This index is a measure of how well the model approximates the data by determining the lack of fit of the model to the sample covariance matrix, expressed the discrepancy per degree of freedom which indicated absolute fit of the model. A RMSEA value of less than .05 is required to claim good fit, values around .08 indicate fair fit, and values approaching .10 indicate poor fit (Marsh, Balla, & MacDonald, 1988). Lastly the normed fit index (NFI) and the Tucker-Lewis non-normed fit index (TLI) were used to measure the correspondence between the hypothetical model and the actual data, and values between .85 and .90 indicate a reasonable model fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The reliability of the construct of the model was calculated using the formula proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The construct reliability was accomplished when the results of several indices conclude that the model fitted with the data. Convergent validity was achieved when the estimated standardized factor loadings in the model were significantly different from zero (Holmes-Smith, Coote, & Cunningham, 2006).

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

A total of 134 females and 144 males completed the survey. Respondents were fairly educated; post university graduates comprised 6.1% of the respondents, 32.7% had a college degree, while 32.7 % had some college or technical school education, 28.5% graduated from high school or less. Approximately 20 % of the respondents were 25 years old or younger, 14.4 % were between the ages of 25 and 34, 36.7 % were between the ages of 35-44, 21.2% were between the age of 45-59 and the rest were older than 60 (7.6%). With regard to occupation, homemakers accounted for 7.6% percent; full time positions 29.1%, part time workers 25.2%,

self-employed 10.8%, students 11.9% and retired 15.5%. Of the respondents, 17.6% had annual household incomes less than $30,000, 22.3% between $30-45K, 22.7% $46-60K, 18% $61-75K, 9.4% $76-100K, 5.8% $101-150K and about 4.3% came from households with annual incomes $151,000 or over. Thirteen percent of respondents were single person families, 22.7% were from two person families, 29.9 % were from three person families, 21.6% four person families, 9.0% five person families, and 3.6 % were from six or more person families.

Table 3. Sample Respondents Demographic Profile

Characteristics	Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Education (n=278)		
Less than high school	16	5.8
High school	63	22.7
Technical school	51	18.3
Some college	40	14.4
College graduate	91	32.7
Graduate school	17	6.1
Gender (n=278)		
Male	144	51.8
Female	134	48.2
Age Group (n=278)		
Less than 25	56	20.1
25-34	40	14.4
35-44	102	36.7
45-59	59	21.2
60+	21	7.6
Income (n=278)		
Less than $30K	49	17.6
$30-$45K	62	22.3
$46-$60K	63	22.7
$61-$75K	50	18.0
$76-$100K	26	9.4
$100-$150K	16	5.8
More than $150K	12	4.3
Occupation (n=278)		
Homemaker	21	7.6
Student	33	11.9
Part-time employed	70	25.2
Full-time employed	81	29.1
Self-employed	30	10.8
Retired	43	15.5
Household size (n=278)		
Single person	37	13.3
2 people	63	22.7
3 people	83	29.9
4 people	60	21.6
5 people	25	9.0
6 and more people	10	3.6

Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Sponsorship Model

Table 4 itemizes the criterion cut-off used to evaluate the goodness of fit relative to the observed data. The final structural model of NCAA sponsorship in relation with AT&T found acceptable the data fit well to the model (X^2 58.657, n = 278, X2/df = 2.79, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)=0.846, Adjusted Goodness of Fit (AGFI) = 0.873, The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.927, Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.056, Normed Fit Index (NFI) =0.873 and Tucker-Lewis coefficient TLI=0.932). As a result of this evidence we can conclude that goodness of fit statistics for sponsorship model passed the test of all above mentioned criteria.

Table 4. Goodness of Fit Statistics for Sponsorship Model

Model/Construct	X^2/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA	NFI	TLI
Recommended Value	<=3.00	>=0.85	>=0.85	>=0.90	<=0.08	0.85-0.95	0.85-0.95
Sponsorship Model	2.79	0.846	0.873	0.927	0.056	0.873	0.932

As indicated in Table 4, the measurement model demonstrated a fairly good fit with the data collected. Consequently, we can evaluate the sponsorship properties of the measurement model in terms of reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity. Therefore, the analysis supported the convergent and discriminant validity of the measures.

Reliability and Internal Validity Tests

In this study, the internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for the 25-itemscale was 0.865. To test the appropriateness of factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was conducted. The KMO was 0.867, which is very near to the perfect level, 0.92. Bartlett's test of sphericity reveals significance at a level of 0.000 (Chi-square = 58.657).

The variance-extracted estimates (VES) range from 46 % for awareness of sponsorship to 85% for attitudes toward sponsoring brand. The estimates of awareness of sponsorship do not exceed the 50 % rule of thumb suggesting insufficient, however acceptable convergence (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Also note that all variance-extracted estimates are greater than the corresponding inter-construct squared correlation estimates in Table 5 (second column). Consequently, this data analysis does not indicate any problems with discriminant validity. Furthermore, examination of standardized residuals and modification indices did not show the addition of other paths that would meaningfully expand the fit of the sponsorship model.

Table 5. Reliability, Variance Extracted Estimates and Discriminant
Validity of the Sponsorship Model.

	Variance Extracted Estimates (VES)	SOR	SBE	PF	ASB	AS	PI
SOR	0.54	1					
SBE	0.63	0.02	1				
PF	0.56	0.01	0.15	1			
ASB	0.85	0.02	0.18	0.29	1		
AS	0.46	0.05	0.12	0.10	0.18	1	
PI	0.69	0.00	0.29	0.18	0.27	0.1	1

The construct reliability (CR) was projected to evaluate internal consistency of the measurement model. The result supports reliability and validity of constructs. We examined the reliability of each of the composite constructs by using Cronbach's alpha. These are represented in last column of Table 6. Cronbach's alpha analysis allowed the identification of six factors that were tested for reliability and validity by means of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Construct reliability values were all acceptable, close to 0.7 or above, indicating high internal consistency of the latent constructs.

Factors Affecting Sponsorship Model Exploratory Factor Analysis

Using the `factor analysis' module in SPSS, the "factors affecting sponsorship" were analyzed. The principal components' method for initial factor extraction with the criterion Eigenvalue greater than 1 and Varimax method of rotation was practiced. Sample size is an element that can affect the adequacy of the factor models. It has been suggested (Hayes, 1992) that the sample size should equal at least 10 times the number of variables; for large numbers of variables the proportion is decreased to five. In similar studies, samples of size approximately 200 were chosen (Parasuraman, Zeithhaml & Berry, 1988) while in this study a sample size of 278 was used. All the items were first factor analyzed. Rotated factor loadings were examined assuming different numbers of factors for extraction. Excluding three items from Sponsoring Brand Equity construct "*I like AT&T*", "*I have a favorable opinion of AT&T*" and "*I am loyal to AT&T*" all the sponsorship responses could be combined into the analysis. Table 6 depicts the rotated factor loadings for the items based on six-factor extraction without these three statements. The summation of the percentage variances is 55.28 that represent the percentage of variances of all 25 statements expounded by the six factors.

Factor loadings for each item ranged from .632 to .948. The final research constructs and corresponding measurement items are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis

Model Constructs	Factor Loadings	R²	% of Variances	Cronbach Alpha
Sponsored Organization Recognition (SOR)			15.35	.834
1. NCAA Basketball is extremely important in my daily life	.925	.85		
2. I usually attend NCAA basketball games	.946	.87		
3. I frequently watch NCAA games on TV	.789	.57		
4. I am strong supporter of NCAA basketball	.707	.52		
Sponsoring Brand Equity (SBE)				
1. AT&T brand is reliable	.668	.45		
2. I would recommend AT&T to others	.869	.74		
3. I am loyal to AT&T	.891	.79		
4. AT&T is different from competing brands	.731	.510		
Perceived Fit Between Sponsorship and Company (PF)			8.16	
1. The overall fit between AT&T and NCAA is clear	.775	.62		
2. The overall fit between AT&T name and NCAA is logical	.738	.54		
3. The overall fit between AT&T and NCAA is readily apparent	.759	.58		
4. It makes sense to me that AT&T sponsors NCAA	.729	.52		
Attitude toward Sponsoring Brand (ASB)			19.76	,867
1. AT&T sponsorship makes me more favorable toward the AT&T Corporation.	.714	.52		
2. AT&T sponsorship would improve my perception of the sponsor.	.831	.68		
3. AT&T sponsorship would make me like the sponsor more.	.902	.84		
4. Sponsorship of AT&T to NCAA positively influenced how I felt about AT&T	.838	.69		
5. It is good that AT&T sponsor NCAA	.872	..75		
Awareness of Sponsorship (AS)			4.56	.645
1. I was aware of AT&T's sponsorship to NCAA earlier.	.747	.55		
2. I am pretty sure AT&T's sponsors to NCAA.	.692	.49		
3. I read and watch news about AT&T's sponsorship to NCAA on media.	.632	.41		

4. I know other corporate sponsors for NCAA.	.681	.46		
Purchase Intention (PI)			7.45	.743
1. I am most likely to purchase the products/services from AT&T	.842	.70		
2. I would consider buying the product/service from AT&T if I need a product of this kind	.835	.69		
3. AT&T sponsorship encourages me to use AT&T's products/services a lot.	.948	.81		
4. It's possible for me to buy the product /service from AT&T	.724	.63		

**Sponsorship Conceptual Model SEM Results**

Figure 2 displays the path diagram with the resulting entirely standardized structural parameter estimates comprised on the paths. The estimation of the structural model shows that all but two hypotheses were supported (Table 7). The exceptions are awareness of sponsorship and perceived fit between sponsorship and company on the purchase intention of sponsoring brand (H2; $\gamma = 0.02$, t = 0.39, p > 0.05 and H8; $\gamma = 0.06$, t = 1.12, p > 0.05.

It is worthy to remark that awareness of sponsorship does not have a direct effect on purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand. But, this variable has a positive indirect effect on purchase intention through attitudes toward the sponsoring brand, (H3; $\gamma = 0.22$, t = 4.02, p < 0.01). As expected, sponsoring brand equity and attitudes toward sponsoring brand have strong positive effects on purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand (H5; $\gamma = 0.33$, t = 6.22, p < 0.01, H1; $\gamma = 0.32$, t = 5.23, p < 0.01). The effects of sponsoring brand equity have a relatively strong direct relationship with awareness of sponsorship and attitude towards sponsoring brand (H4; $\gamma = 0.26$, t = 4.17, p < 0.01, H6; $\gamma = 0.21$, t = 4.13, p < 0.01).

Perceived fit between sponsorship and company has a positive effect on attitudes towards sponsoring brand toward the sponsoring brand (H9; $\gamma = 0.29$, t = 5.04, p < 0.01). Additionally sponsored organization recognition on purchase intention toward sponsoring brand has a significant positive effect (H12; $\gamma = 0.31$, t = 5.85, p < 0.01). Sponsored organization recognition contributes positively to both awareness of sponsorship and attitudes toward the sponsoring brand (H10; $\gamma = 0.17$, t = 2.99, p < 0.01, H11; $\gamma = 0.13$, t = 2.22, p < 0.05). Perceived fit between sponsorship and company has a marginal impact on awareness of sponsorship (H7; $\gamma = 0.13$, t = 2.02, p < 0.05).

Overall, provided that ten of the twelve estimates are consistent with the hypotheses, the study results maintain the theoretical model, with a caveat of the two paths that are not supported.

Figure 2. Sponsorship Conceptual Model SEM Results
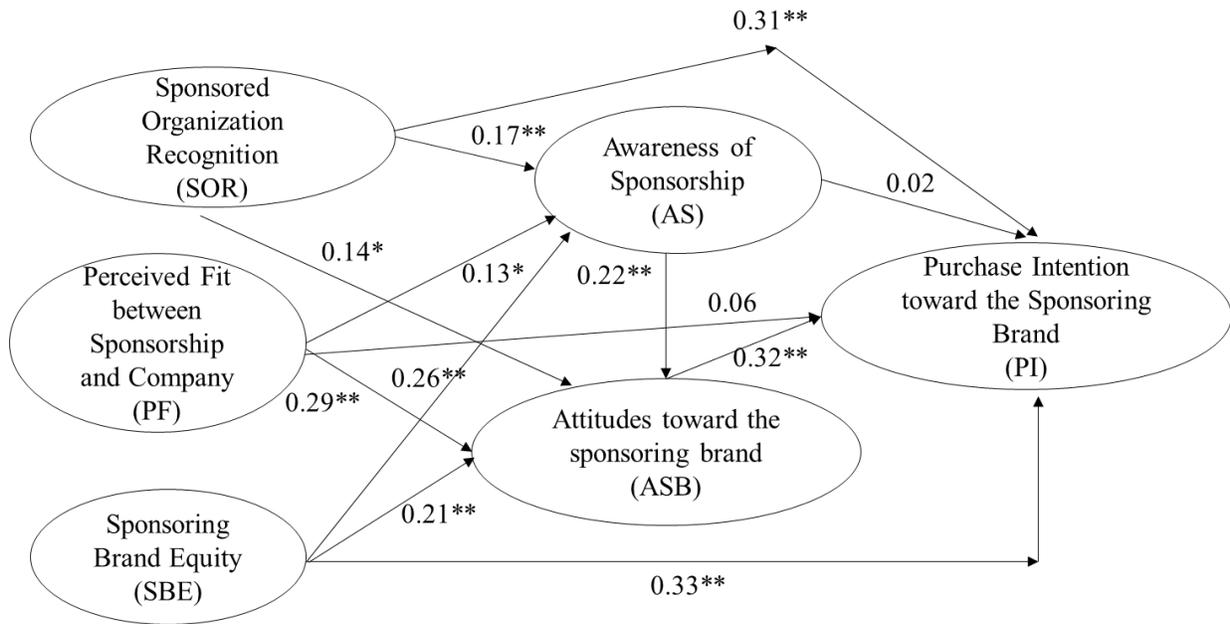
*Significant at p=.05   **Significant at p=0.01

Table 7. Results of Estimation Structural Model

Hypotheses	Path to	Path From	Coefficient	t-value
H_1	ASB	PI	0.32	5.23
H_2	AS	PI	0.02	0.39
H_3	AS	ASB	0.22	4.01
H_4	SBE	AS	0.26	4.17
H_5	SBE	PI	0.33	6.22
H_6	SBE	ASB	0.21	4.13
H_7	PF	AS	0.13	2.12
H_8	PF	PI	0.06	1.12
H_9	PF	ASB	0.29	5.04
H_{10}	SOR	AS	0.17	2.99
H_{11}	SOR	ASB	0.14	2.23
H_{12}	SOR	PI	0.31	5.85

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examined consumer awareness and the brand preference, attitudes and perceived fit of a corporation that sponsors NCAA sanctioned sporting events. The results suggest that attitudes towards the sponsoring brand have a positive effect on consumer purchase intentions and attitudes towards the sponsoring brand. In addition, sponsoring brand equity has a positive effect on the awareness of sponsorship, consumer purchase intentions, and attitudes

towards the sponsoring brands. Also, the perceived fit between sponsorship and the sponsoring firm have a positive effect on awareness of sponsorship, and attitudes towards the sponsoring brands. Finally, recognition of the sponsoring organization has a positive effect on awareness of sponsorship, attitudes towards the sponsoring brand, and consumer purchase intention toward the sponsoring brand. The results of this study indicate that it is evident that consumers have a high tendency to develop more positive attitudes towards the firm or brand sponsoring the NCAA sporting event. Therefore, firms should consider sponsoring events in order to increase consumer awareness, purchase intentions, and brand equity.

Confirmatory factor analysis for the sponsorship model confirmed all the relationships in the model with two exceptions. Reliability and internal validity of the data has been tested, it can be concluded that this model is in fact a good fit for the suggested model. Cronbach's alpha reliability test also supports convergent and discriminant statistical validity measurements of the model.

It can be concluded that awareness of corporate sponsorship does not have a direct effect on consumer purchase intentions, but rather an indirect effect on consumer purchase intentions through attitudes towards the sponsorship brand. Overall, this model confirms the initial research hypothesis that consumer attitudes towards the sponsoring brand have a strong direct relationship with consumer purchase intentions of the sponsoring brand.

This research confirms previous research (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003, Harris, 2000; Meenaghan, 2001; Sirgy et al., 2007) that when consumers are emotionally attached to a sponsor and identify with its sponsored event, it leads to a strong consumer sense of attachment with the sponsors' brands. In addition, our findings confirms previous research which indicates that positive attitudes towards a sponsor are related to favorable consumer purchase intentions of sponsoring firms products (Gwinner, 1997; Guner et al., 2014; Pope & Voges, 1999; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Also, our findings support previous research that suggests it is important for sponsors to reinforce the relationship between the sponsoring event and its brand or sponsored properties (Fullerton, 2007, Harcar & Guner, 2012). In addition, it is important to emphasize the key role that congruence or good "fit" plays in consumer related perceptions of sponsor attitudes (Woodside & Summers, 2012).

Some of the limitations for this study are that it was only conducted in a limited geographic area (Western Pennsylvania) and it only examines one already well known large corporation. In future research it may be necessary to test the model for more than one corporation and compare the results of different sponsoring companies. More specifically future research should focus on other aspects such as international sporting events, lesser known firms, weaker known brands (Kim, 2010) and brand recall and home country national pride (Smith & Kim, 2006).

Also more research is needed to assess a firm's return on investment for sponsorship activates, as well as to better understand the actual impact of event sponsorship on sales, customer loyalty and preference, as well as brand equity development. In addition, this paper does not address whether factors such as gender, education, age, and income affect consumer

preferences towards sponsorship. More specifically, do demographic profiles of consumers and an event impact brand equity (Lii & Lee, 2012).

In addition, this event sponsorship model from an international perspective (Singh, 1995) might be tested for other countries engaged in sports event sponsorship. Likewise, this sponsorship model can be examined for specific international events such as Formula 1, the World Cup, the Olympic Games, Tennis Grand Slam and Golf's Grand Slam which are traditionally sponsored by multinational corporations.

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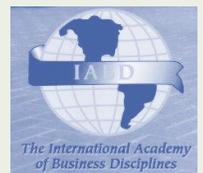Shani, D., & Sandler, D. (1996). Climbing the sport event pyramid. *Sports Marketing*, *30*(18), 6.

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