

A proposed conceptual framework of the effect of sport domain involvement and team attachment on the effectiveness of sport sponsorship

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Keywords

Sponsorship, domain involvement, team attachment, sponsorship awareness, sponsor's corporate image and purchase intention.

Abstract

Corporate engagement in sport sponsorships, and companies' expenditures assigned to these sponsorships have boosted. Corporations seek new means to gain more reach, to leverage their image and to increase their purchase intentions. Literature regarding the assessment of the effectiveness of the sponsorship has been limited. Furthermore, few studies have tackled all main the expected outcomes of the sponsorship and the relationships among these factors. Moreover, literature investigating the effect of sport involvement and team attachment on these various factors has been limited. Literature in the sports marketing domain is relatively limited in Egypt. Few Egyptian studies have attempted to tackle the nature and relationships in the field of sponsorships. Furthermore, few studies have examined the effectiveness of sport sponsorship in Egypt. This working paper attempts to extend the sports and sponsorship knowledge through examining the previous literature and concluding a model. This model represents the effect of domain involvement on team attachment, the direct and indirect effect of both domain involvement and team attachment on factors pertaining to the effectiveness of sport sponsorship, sponsorship awareness, corporate image and purchase intention, and the relationship among these factors.

1. Introduction

Sponsorship plays an important role as a marketing tool that companies increasingly rely on as a viable contemporary alternative to traditional advertising. They believe that event sponsorships, especially sports, generate better yields compared to other marketing communication tools (Lee and Cho, 2012). In the last few years, there has been fierce competition between large organizations to sponsor the Egyptian sports teams. Managers of these companies believe that gains provided by sponsoring these teams would actually exceed their huge expenditures. This necessitates the measurement of the effectiveness of these investments and the assessment of whether these sponsorships, in fact, yield the desired outcomes. Furthermore, it is critical to examine some of the event-related factors that can affect the effectiveness of the sponsorship; and therefore, should be considered when making the decision regarding which team to sponsor.

On the other hand, the governmental financial support provided to Egyptian sports entities and teams has been declining over the past few years; therefore, managers of these entities are under continuous pressure of finding other sources of funds (Alafandi and Séguin, 2008). This notion has raised the importance of sponsorship as a major source of finance (Eshghi, Kazemi, Aghazadeh and Hedayatnia, 2013). Sport teams need to raise their opportunities to be sponsored. Thus, they should target specific consumers and to establish their own unique identities (Renard and Sitz, 2011). These unique identities need to match the identities of their consumers to establish strong bonds with them (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, and Nyffenegger, 2011).

Few studies have tackled companies' decisions regarding which event to sponsor, how to best benefit from the sponsorship and what are the expected outcomes of the sponsorship (Speed and Thompson, 2000). Sponsor awareness, sponsor's corporate image and intentions of future purchases

are the main variables of sponsorship effectiveness. The dependence on only one factor in evaluating the effectiveness of the sponsorship may be insufficient because of the complex nature of the process by which consumers develop their perceptions regarding the sponsorship (Ko et al., 2008). Furthermore, exposure shouldn't be the only criterion used to select and evaluate sponsorships. Other factors as well should be highly considered (Speed and Thomson, 2000). Domain involvement and team attachment have shown significant direct and indirect effects on sponsorship effectiveness (Alexandris, Tsiotsou and James, 2012). Nevertheless, studies that have examined the magnitude of the impact of these two affect constructs are limited in number.

Accordingly, this study attempts to extend the sports marketing and sponsorship knowledge through further investigation of the effect of both domain involvement and team attachment on factors pertaining to the effectiveness of sport sponsorship and the relationships among these factors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sponsorship

Recently, many studies have been examining sponsorship as a contemporary publicity tool. Some of these studies have been conducted in the eastern world, yet the majority of them have been applied in the western communities (Dekhil, 2010). The stream of research has diversified regarding what to examine concerning sponsorships. Some researchers have been oriented towards studying the business to business relationship between the sponsor and the sponsored entity such as Renard and Sitz (2011) and Urriolagoitia and Planellas (2007).

On the other hand, many sponsorship studies have been oriented towards examining the effects of sponsorship on consumers' responses. For instance, some have examined its effects on the sponsors' brand equity, consumers' willingness to pay premium prices, and purchase intentions towards the sponsor's products (e.g., Holtermann, 2007). Others have examined its effect on sponsors' brand loyalty (for instance: Sirgey, Lee, Johar, and Tidwell, 2008). Although, some studies have examined variables reflecting the main desired outcomes of sponsorship (sponsor awareness, sponsor image and purchase intentions) and how the many properties of the sponsored event can transfer from the event to the sponsor leading to these outcomes. Most of these studies have investigated only one variable. For instance, recall and recognition (dimensions of sponsor awareness) have been examined by Biscaia, Correia, Ross and Rosado (2014). Factors impacting sponsor awareness have been examined by Grohs and Steffen (2005).

Others have examined the relationship between some of the pillars of the sponsorship effectiveness. For instance, Javalgi, Traylor, Gross and Lampman (1994) have conducted an exploratory research to examine the relationship between sponsorship awareness and corporate image of the sponsor. Nevertheless, the relationships among all the main pillars of sponsorship effectiveness (sponsor awareness, sponsor's corporate image and intentions of future purchases) have been addressed in few studies (e.g., Ibrahim, 2014 and Ko, Kim, Claussen and Kim, 2008).

Some studies have aimed to investigate factors affecting the outcomes of the sponsorships. Some of these studies have aimed to examine the sponsor related factors affecting sponsorship effectiveness such as sponsorship advertising (Holtermann, 2007), attitude toward the sponsor (e.g., Speed and Thompson, 2000; Kim, Ko and James, 2011; and Demirel and Erdogmus, 2014) and perceived ubiquity (the engagement in multiple sponsorship) (Speed and Thompson, 2000). The effect of the sponsors' product perceived quality has also been examined (Kwak and Kang, 2009).

Other studies have examined some event related factors such as the type of the event sponsored (Javalgi et al., 1994) and the nature of sponsorships and its origin (sponsoring already existing event vs. creating an event) (d'Astous and Bitz, 1995). Moreover, other studies have examined the effect of the perceived congruence between the sponsor and the event sponsored on various element of the sponsorship outcomes (Demirel and Erdogmus, 2014; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006; and Speed and Thomson, 2000). Moreover, the effect of self- congruence with the sponsored event or team has also been tackled (Kwak and Kang, 2009 and Sirgey et al., 2008).

Despite the importance of consumers' involvement in the sponsored event as a key factor influencing the effectiveness of the sponsorship, few studies have investigated this variable's relationships with factors of the sponsorship effectiveness. Furthermore, most of these studies have not examined the direct and indirect relationships between involvement and factors pertaining to the sponsorship effectiveness. For instance, Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka (2004) have investigated the event involvement as one of the antecedents of sponsor awareness.

Recently, some marketing academics and practitioners have been recognizing the importance of the brand attachment construct as an important indicator of many consumer behaviors (e.g., Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005 and Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich and Iacobucci, 2010). However, the incorporation of this concept in the sponsorship studies has been limited.

In Egypt, few studies have tackled sport marketing (Alafandi and Séguin, 2008) and more specifically sports sponsorships. For instance, Alafandi (2013) has investigated the relationship between the sponsor and the sponsored property in Egypt; where this relationship, in most cases, is mediated by marketing companies. Some of the antecedents of team identification and some of its consequences (sponsor recognition and purchase intentions) have been investigated by El Sahn, Eman, and Tantawi (2012).

The conceptual framework of the current study comprises of five main variables domain involvement, team attachment, sponsor awareness, corporate image of the sponsor, and intentions to purchase the sponsor's products.

2.2. Domain Involvement

Involvement can be defined as "a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests" (Zaichkowsky, 1985). In sports, fan involvement can be defined as "the degree to which fans personally identify with a particular sport, competition or athlete, or the level of personal affiliation and engagement they possess in regard to the sport property" (Smith, 2008). In this study, the focus will be on sport domain involvement. Domain involvement (for instance, for the sport of football) can be defined as "a deep personal bond with the sports of football" (Gwinner and Swanson, 2003).

In general, fan involvement (with a sport, team or athlete) is an important concept in sport sponsorship where in many cases consumers' responses towards the sponsorship are motivated by their involvement. The more fans are involved, the more favorable they perceive the sponsor. Moreover, more involved consumers tend to have preference of the sponsor's brand. They may also switch to the sponsor's brand (Smith, 2008).

Some studies have examined the relationship between domain involvement and team attachment, sponsor awareness, sponsor corporate image and purchase intentions towards the sponsor's product (e.g., Tsiotsou and Alexandris, 2009; Alexandris, Tsiotsou and James, 2012; Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka, 2004; and Ibrahim, 2014).

2.2.1. Domain Involvement and Team Attachment

A great contribution has been made by Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) who have examined the effect of domain involvement on team attachment. These authors have measured the effect of the two dimensions of sport involvement (attractiveness and centrality) rather than the aggregate effect. Surveying fans of a basketball team in Greece; involvement attractiveness was found to have a positive direct impact on the team attachment. Therefore, a fan gets more attached to a team in a particular sport that he/she finds to be interesting, fun, enjoyable and pleasurable. This result was again confirmed by Alexandris, Tsiotsou and James (2012).

Although involvement centrality was proposed to have a positive direct impact on fans' attachment to teams. This relationship was rejected. Despite the significant impact that involvement centrality had on team attachment, this impact was negative (Tsiotsou and Alexandris, 2009 and Alexandris, Tsiotsou and James, 2012). Although both dimensions had opposite effects; the impact of

involvement attractiveness was greater than the impact of involvement centrality. Thus, the aggregate direct impact of domain involvement on team attachment was found to be positive.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the aggregate effect of domain involvement can be expected to be positive. Therefore, the first proposition is:

P1: Domain involvement has a positive effect on team attachment.

2.2.2. Domain Involvement and Sponsor Awareness

When the relationship between fans' domain involvement in sports and the awareness of the sponsors of the 2002 Korea/Japan FIFA World Cup was examined; it has been found that domain involvement has a positive impact on sponsor awareness (Ko et al., 2008). This result has also supported in the context of the Egyptian football premier league. Sponsorship awareness of the Egyptian fans was directly and positively influenced by sport domain involvement (Ibrahim, 2014).

On the other hand, according to Grohs and Steffen (2005), sponsor awareness is affected by event involvement rather than sport involvement. The study conducted by Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka (2004) applied on seven brands representing sponsors of the Alpine Ski World Championships 2001 in Austria illustrated that fan involvement with the event showed different effect on the no recall and the unaided recall. Therefore, these researchers have suggested that the proposed relationship between involvement and sponsor awareness was partially supported.

Further investigation of the relationship between sponsorship awareness and sport domain involvement is needed. Therefore, the current study proposes the following proposition:

P2: Domain involvement has a direct and positive effect on sponsor awareness.

2.2.3. Domain Involvement and Sponsor's Corporate Image

Fan involvement with a sport plays an important role as a predictor of how fans perceive the image of the sponsors of the event (Ko et al., 2008 and Ibrahim, 2014). Although Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka (2004) have not examined the direct relationship between event involvement and post sponsor image. Event involvement indirectly impacted post sponsor image where sponsor awareness mediated the relationship (in this study the relationship between involvement and awareness was partially supported). The role that team attachment plays as a mediator between sport involvement and sponsor's image has been examined by Alexandris, Tsiotsou, and James (2012). The indirect path was accepted.

Based on the previous argument, the following proposition is introduced:

P3: Domain involvement has a direct and positive effect on corporate image of the sponsor

2.2.4. Domain Involvement and Intentions to Purchase

According to Smith (2008), fans who are more involved (in a sport, team or an athlete) tend to express more purchase intentions towards the sponsor's products. The direct impact of fan involvement in sports on fans intentions to purchase the sponsor's products has been examined in a limited number of studies. Most of the studies have examined the indirect relationship between consumers' involvement in a certain event and the purchase intentions toward the sponsor's products. In the study conducted by Lacey and Close (2013), it has been concluded that activeness in the event domain positively affects the perceived sponsor fit which in turn leads to more committed consumers eventually causing an increase in the purchase intentions towards the sponsor's products. In the study conducted by Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009), involvement (as an aggregate construct) had positive indirect impact on purchase intentions through team attachment acting as a mediator.

One of the few studies that have examined the direct effect of domain involvement on purchase intentions is that conducted by Ko, et al. (2008). In this study, the researchers have successfully supported the existence of a positive direct relationship between the degree of fans involvement in the sport of football and their intentions to purchase the products of the sponsors of the event. Nevertheless, when the relationship was examined in Egypt; results have shown that there is no

correlation between domain involvement and purchase intentions. This result contradicts with the previous literature and the author of the study has related this contradicting result to the decline in the purchasing power of the respondents (Ibrahim, 2014).

In order to gain more understanding of the relationship between domain involvement and intentions to purchase the sponsor's products, the following proposition is introduced:

P4: Fans' domain involvement has a direct and positive effect on their intentions to purchase the products of teams' sponsors.

2.3. Team Attachment

Brand attachment is "the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self. This bond is exemplified by a rich and accessible memory network (or mental representation) that involves thoughts and feelings about the brand and the brand's relationship to the self" (Park et al., 2010). Sport team attachment can be defined as "sport consumer's psychological connection to a sport team" (Alexandris and Tsiotsou, 2012). Consumers who have stronger bonds with a brand are motivated to utilize their personal resources to be able to sustain their connection with that brand (Park et al., 2010). Moreover, customers who are more attached to a brand are more likely to be satisfied with that brand (Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005 and Thomson, 2006). Furthermore, attached consumers often exhibit more willingness to pay premium prices. Brand attachment also predicts consumers' loyalty to a brand (Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005). Consumers who are more attached to a brand are more likely to have more trusting and committed relationships with that brand (Thomson, 2006).

In the sponsorship context, few studies have examined the antecedents of team attachment. For instance, Rahmawati (2014) has proposed that team trust, team self expression and team involvement can be used as predictors of team attachment. However, results of this study did not support these relationships.

Some studies have investigated the relationship between team attachment and sponsor awareness, sponsor's corporate image, and purchase intentions (e.g., Kim and Kim, 2009; Alexandris, Tsiotsou and James, 2012; Eshghi et al., 2013; and Gwinner and Swanson, 2003

2.3.1. Team attachment and Sponsor Awareness

One of the few studies that have examined the direct effect of team attachment on sponsor awareness has been conducted by Eshghi et al. (2013). This study aimed to investigate the effect of team attachment on the effectiveness of football teams sponsorships in Iran. Although they have proposed a positive relationship between team attachment and sponsor awareness; this relationship was not supported.

On the other hand, the few studies that have examined the relationship between team identification and sponsor awareness have suggested the opposite. Korean football fans who were strongly identified with their teams; showed greater ability to correctly identify the sponsor of these teams (Kim and Kim, 2009). Furthermore, the relationship between team identification and sponsor recognition (one dimension of brand awareness) was found to be positive (Gwinner and Swanson, 2003 and El Sahn, Eman, and Tantawi, 2012).

The contradictory relationship between team attachment and sponsor awareness needs further investigation. Thus, this research proposes the following proposition:

P5: Team attachment has a positive effect on sponsor awareness

2.3.2. Team Attachment and Sponsor's Corporate Image

The relationship between fans' attachment to a basketball team and their perception regarding the image of the sponsor of that team has been examined by Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009). Results of this study have indicated that the stronger the attachment of fans to their team, the more favorable they perceive the image of that team's sponsors. The same result was concluded in Iran (Eshghi et al., 2013). Moreover, the hierarchal levels of effects in the sponsorship have been investigated by Alexandris, Tsiotsou and James (2012). Results have supported their proposition that the affect level

(involvement and attachment) influences the cognitive level of effect (sponsor image and attitude toward the sponsorship).

From the previous discussion, the following proposition is suggested:

P6: Team attachment has a direct and positive effect on perceived sponsor's corporate image

2.3.3. Team Attachment and Purchase Intentions

In conventional marketing settings, consumers' intentions to perform behaviors that relates to their utilization of their resources such as money, time and reputation can be predicted by the degree of their brand attachment. Consumers who are more attached to a brand are derived to use their personal resources for the sake of sustaining their relationship with this brand (Park et al., 2010). The direct positive relationship between team attachment and intentions to purchase the sponsor's products has been demonstrated by Eshghi et al. (2013) and Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009). When football teams suffer from financial problem, especially those privately owned; fans who are more attached to their teams tend to perceive the financial problem they suffer from and seem to respond to the sponsor's support through the increase in their purchases (Eshghi et al., 2013).

Alexandris, Tsiotsou and James (2012) have also confirmed the direct and indirect effects of team attachment on behavioral intentions (represented by both purchase intentions and word of mouth) whereas the mediation role has been played by both corporate sponsor image of the sponsor and attitude towards the sponsorship. On the other hand, indirect relationship between team attachment and purchase intentions towards the sponsor's products has been proposed by some scholars. Team attachment positively affects perceived sincerity which in turn positively enhances consumers' attitude towards the sponsorships. Eventually, intentions to purchase the sponsor's products are positively affected by the favorable attitudes towards the sponsorship (Demirel and Erdogmus, 2014).

The above discussion leads to our next proposition:

P7: Team attachment has a direct and positive effect on intentions to purchase the sponsor's products.

2.4. Sponsor Awareness

Brand name awareness relates to "the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind and the ease with which it does so". Brand awareness is critical in consumers decision making (Keller, 1993). Sponsor awareness is a cognitive objective of the sport sponsorship.

Exposure has a positive effect on sponsor awareness (Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka, 2004; Grohs and Steffen, 2005 and Dekhil and Desbordes, 2013). Measuring the effect of attendance frequency on sponsor recognition; Boyle (2001) has concluded that attendance frequency impacts sponsor awareness through recognition. In comparison with some demographics (age, gender, income and education), attendance level has the greatest effect. Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka (2004) have found that sponsorship awareness is positively affected by the perceived fit between the event and the sponsor. This result has been supported by the study conducted by Grohs and Steffen (2005). According to Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka (2004), brand prominence effect on sponsor awareness was not significant for all the sponsors under the study. On the contrary, according to Grohs and Steffen (2005) sponsor prominence has a positive impact on the sponsor recall. Additionally, Boyle (2001) has noted that how established a sponsor's brand positively affects its level of recognition.

Some studies have examined the relationship between sponsor awareness and sponsor image and purchase intentions (e.g., Javalgi et al., 1994; Ko et al., 2008; and Ibrahim, 2014)

2.4.1. Sponsorship Awareness and Sponsor's Corporate Image

Brand awareness affects the development and strength of the brand associations in the brand image; therefore, it can impact consumers' decisions. Brand image cannot be formed without

establishing the brand node in the memory of the consumer. The ease with which different kind of information can be linked to the brand in consumers' memory depends on the node establishment and the nature of that brand node (Keller, 1993).

Based on the results of an experimentation conducted by Javalgi et al. (1994), corporate image of a company engaged in a sponsorship activity is more favorable than that of another company that doesn't sponsor any activity. This result is supported by a number of studies that have reached the same conclusion (e.g., Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka, 2004; Ko et al., 2008; and Kim and Kim, 2009).

On the other hand, Ibrahim (2014) has tested the relationship between the sponsorship awareness and corporate sponsor image in Egypt and has found that Egyptian football fans that were aware of the sponsor of their team showed no improvement in their perception of the corporate image of the sponsor. Moreover, mixed results have been obtained from a telephone survey technique conducted by Javalgi et al. (1994) and applied on five companies representing different industries; nevertheless, this relationship was supported for only one of the five companies. Furthermore, results have indicated that not all the dimensions of the corporate image of an individual sponsor were promoted by the sponsorship. These mixed results could be explained by the notion that the knowledge and perceptions of the sponsorship event are incorporated with the firms' overall knowledge and perceptions in the minds of customers. Some sponsors suffered from negative publicity prior to the study.

In general, it could be concluded that corporate sponsor image can be positively affected by the corporate sponsorship; nevertheless, such effect is not automatic (Javalgi et al., 1994). That been said, the following proposition is proposed:

P8: Consumers' awareness of the sponsors has a positive effect on corporate image of the sponsor

2.4.2. Sponsor Awareness and Intentions to Purchase

According to Boyle (2001), nearly 81% of the respondents expressed their intentions to use the product of the sponsor rather than other brands given the same price and quality. None of the respondents expressed their willingness to select the non-sponsor brands. On the other hand, 19% of the respondents were indifferent. Moreover, the positive relationship between equity and intentions to purchase (Holtermann, 2007) suggests that a direct relationship between sponsor awareness and purchase intention may exist. Nevertheless, Ko et al. (2008) and Ibrahim (2014) have found that the relationship was not significant. However, the indirect path between sponsor awareness and future purchase intentions mediated by corporate image of the sponsor was supported (Ko et al., 2008). Further investigation of the nature of the relationship (direct vs. indirect relationship) between sponsorship awareness and purchase intentions is needed.

Therefore, the current study suggests the following proposition:

P9: Sponsorship awareness has a direct and positive effect on intentions to purchase the sponsor's products.

2.5. Corporate Image of the Sponsor

Corporate brand image can be defined as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. Brand associations are the other informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers" (Keller, 1993).

Some academics have tried to identify the antecedents of post sponsorship image. For instance, Grohs, Wagner, and Vsetecks (2004) have reached a conclusion that post-event sponsor image is affected by pre-event sponsor image, sponsor awareness and event image. These researchers have also introduced the proposition that perceived fit indirectly influences the post-event image and that the relationship is mediated by brand awareness. Nevertheless, research conducted by d'Astous, and Bitz (1995) strongly supported the notion that the relationship between the two variables is non-linear. Some scholars have studied the effect of the event itself on the corporate image of the sponsor. For instance, d'Astous, and Bitz (1995) have examined the effect of the nature of the sponsorship on the

perceived corporate image of the sponsor. Results indicated that consumers hold more positive image of the sponsor when the sponsorship is philanthropic in nature than when it is commercial in nature. The study conducted by Javalgi et al. (1994) supported the notion that different types of events sponsored showed little variance in their impact on the corporate image of the sponsor.

Some studies have examined the relationship between sponsor image and purchase intentions (e.g., Tsiotsou and Alexandris, 2009 and Alexandris, Tsiotsou, and James, 2012)

2.5.1. Corporate Image of the Sponsor and Purchase Intentions

The direct positive effect of sponsor's corporate image on purchase intentions towards the sponsor's products has been examined in different contexts. This relationship has been investigated by Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) and it has been applied on the fans of a professional basketball team in Greece. The relationship was significant. Moreover, the positive corporate image held by football fans towards the sponsors has increased the future intentions to purchase the sponsor's products (Ko et al., 2008 and Ibrahim, 2014). These results were supported by the research conducted by Alexandris, Tsiotsou, and James (2012). Through these authors' study, it has been concluded that basketball fans that form positive images regarding the sponsor in their mind are more likely to express future behavioral intentions (word of mouth and intentions to purchase).

The previous discussion leads to the suggestion of the final proposition:

P10: Sponsor's corporate image has a positive effect on intentions to purchase the sponsor's products.

2.6. Purchase Intentions

Marketing academics usually find it difficult to measure sales generated directly from the sponsorship activity in an accurate way. They often solve this problem through assessing whether consumers plan to buy the sponsor's products. In this case intentions to purchase the products is a "proxy for actual sales, in that they represent a substitute, or a stand-in measure. They can also be considered a proxy for actual behavior that is for actually buying and consuming a product". Needless to say, these intentions can, in fact, turn to be different from the actual future behavior (Smith, 2008). Most of the studies in sponsorship have used purchase intentions towards the sponsor's product as the only measure or one of the measures of the sponsorship effectiveness (e.g., Kim, Ko and James, 2011; Demirel and Erodomus, 2014; and Lacey and Close, 2013). Purchase intentions towards the sponsor's products were found to have a positive impact on the word of mouth (Tsiotsou and Alexandris, 2009).

3. Conceptual Framework

Relationships proposed in this study between domain involvement, team attachment, sponsorship awareness, sponsor's corporate image and intentions to purchase the sponsor's products can be represented in the following framework (Figure 1):

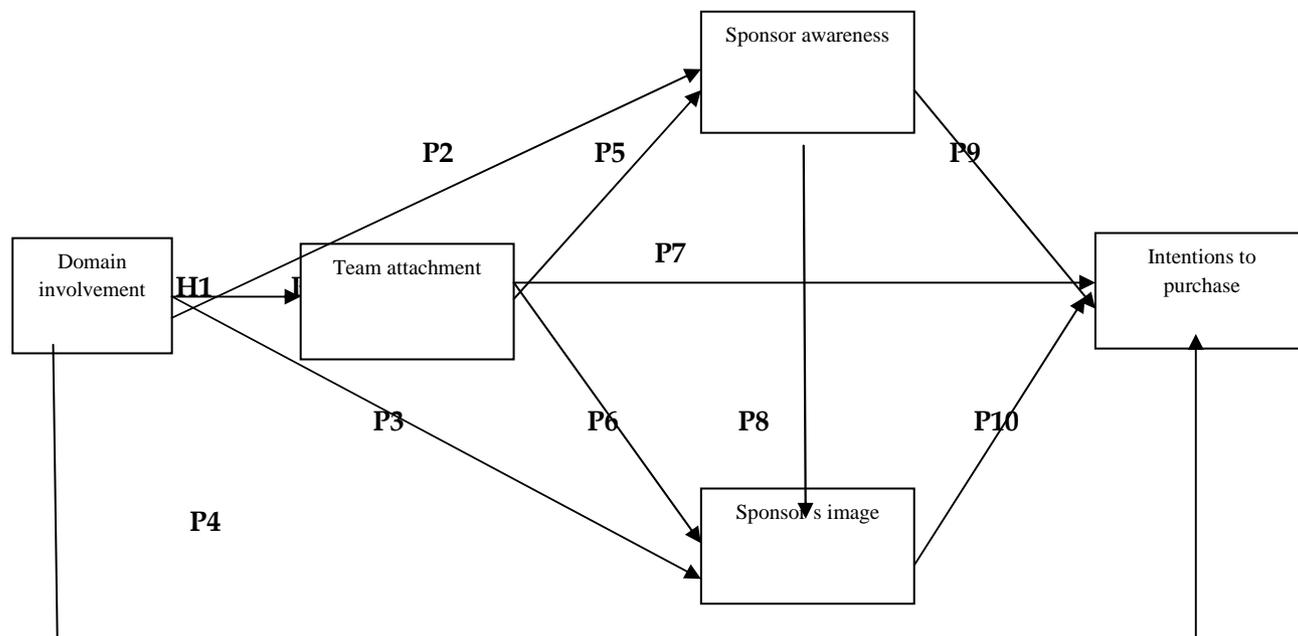


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Investments in sports sponsorships are increasingly growing. These investments need to be assessed regarding whether they accomplish their desired goals. The main targeted objectives of any sponsor pertain to promoting brand awareness, enhancing brand image and boosting purchase intentions. Moreover, exposure is not the only factor that managers should consider when taking the decision regarding alternative sponsorship opportunities (Speed and Thompson, 2000). Managers should consider factors that are related to the event such as consumers' involvement in the event or the sport and the degree of attachment to a particular property.

The primary objective of the current study is to introduce a conceptual framework that investigates the direct and indirect effects of domain involvement and team attachment on the main sponsorship outcomes and the relationships among these outcomes. Domain involvement has an aggregate positive effect on team attachment (Tsiotsou and Alexandris, 2009 and Alexandris, Tsiotsou and James, 2012). The more fans find a particular sport interesting, the more they are attached to a specific team. Moreover, domain involvement positively correlates with sponsor's corporate image (Ko et al., 2008 and Ibrahim, 2014). On the other hand, literature regarding the effect of domain involvement on sponsor awareness and purchase intentions was contradicting and needs further investigation (e.g. Ko et al., 2008; Ibrahim, 2014; Grohs and Steffen, 2005; and Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka, 2004). Although the effect of team attachment on sponsor awareness was not supported (Eshghi et al., 2013); studies that have investigated the effect of team identification on sponsor awareness confirmed the relationship (Kim and Kim, 2009; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003; and El Sahn, Eman, and Tantawi, 2012). More attached fans have more positive image of the sponsor (Tsiotsou and Alexandris, 2009 and Eshghi et al., 2013) and have more purchase intentions (Eshghi et al., 2013). Some researchers have suggested a positive relationship between sponsor awareness and sponsor's corporate image (e.g., Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka, 2004; Ko et al., 2008; and Kim and Kim, 2009). However, Javalgi et al. (1994) have found that results were mixed. Despite of the positive relationship between sponsor awareness and purchase intentions concluded by Boyle (2001); the relationship was not supported by Ko et al. (2008). According to Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) and Ko et al. (2008), sponsor's corporate image has a positive impact on purchase intentions. The conceptual framework developed examines these relationships.

5. Research Implications

This research highlights the importance of sponsorship as a contemporary communication tool and the sports domain as a major platform to market companies' products. Few studies have examined factors pertaining to the effectiveness of sports sponsorship. Moreover, the relationships among these factors were contradicting through the stream of studies. This study aims to provide some understanding of the nature of these variables and the relationships among them; thus, providing marketers with clear understanding of factors comprising the measurement of the effectiveness of their sponsorship investments. Studies examining the impact of consumers' involvement in a sport on their attachment to a specific team and the direct impact of involvement on the pillars of sponsorship effectiveness are limited. A limited number of studies have incorporated the attachment concept in marketing in general and more specifically in sponsorship. This research aims to further investigate the effects of domain involvement and team attachment on the three key outcomes of the sports sponsorship. The current study aims to draw the attention of the managers of sport entities towards the importance of building strong emotional connections with their fans, thus; maximizing their chances of being sponsored.

6. Areas for Future Research

Future research should take into consideration the effect of sport domain involvement and team attachment on the main pillars of sponsorship effectiveness. The proposed conceptual framework did not examine the role that some of the sponsor related factors plays in determining the sponsorship effectiveness such as attitude toward the sponsor (e.g., Speed and Thompson, 2000; Kim, Ko and James, 2011; and Demirel and Erdogmus, 2014), perceived ubiquity (Speed and Thompson, 2000), and sponsorship advertising (Holtermann, 2007). Investigating the effect of one or more of these variables provides opportunities for future research. Furthermore, other event related factors were not tackled in the current study. Future researchers can investigate the impact of the perceived fit between the sponsor and the event sponsored (Demirel and Erdogmus, 2014; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006; and Speed and Thomson, 2000) and self congruence with the sponsored event or team (Kwak and Kang, 2009 and Sirgey et al., 2008) on factors pertaining to the sponsorship effectiveness. Although the current study proposes relationships in the context of sport sponsorship; most of these relationships can be applied in other forms of sponsorships.

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