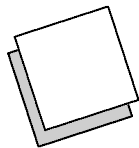


An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article



A model of fan identification: antecedents and sponsorship outcomes

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Abstract This study examines the impact of fan identification on four distinct sponsorship outcomes: sponsor recognition, attitude toward the sponsor, sponsor patronage, and satisfaction with the sponsor. In addition, consistent with the identification literature we investigate the antecedents of prestige, domain involvement, and fan associations for predicting fan identification among sports spectators. Utilizing structural equation modeling the findings support the premise that highly identified fans are more likely to exhibit the investigated sponsorship outcomes. In addition, we found that the investigated antecedents may aid in predicting fan identification. Our findings are discussed, managerial implications presented, and future research directions provided.

Modern sponsorship

Modern sponsorship has moved from primarily a philanthropic activity to mutually advantageous business arrangements between sponsors and the sponsored (Abratt *et al.*, 1987). The objectives being sought by sponsoring organizations are focusing more and more on exploitable commercial potential and bottom-line results (Cornwell, 1995; Hoek *et al.*, 1993; 1997; Irwin and Sutton, 1994; Marshall and Cook, 1992; Wilson, 1997), and less on altruism or a sense of social responsibility without expectation of return. With this recognition comes an increased significance on identifying attitudinal and tangible behavioral outcomes to sponsorship efforts (Hoek *et al.*, 1993). Despite the growth and recognized importance of sponsorship activities, academic research in this area has to date been limited (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Speed and Thompson, 2000).

Broadcast rights

Sport is a natural area for sponsorship as it can carry very strong images, has a mass international audience, and appeals to all classes (Abratt *et al.*, 1987; Ferrand and Pages, 1996). The importance of sports can be seen in the increasing amounts of money paid for broadcast rights to events such as the Olympics and the NCAA basketball tournament, as well as the growth in the number of sports-oriented radio talk shows and sports oriented television networks such as the 24-hour Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN). Not only will sports sponsorship continue to be a popular and growing form of marketing (Lucas, 1996), but:

... sport generates fanship that is more intense, more obtrusive, and more enduring than it is for other forms of entertaining social activities without direct participation in the spectated events (Zillmann and Paulus, 1993, p. 604).



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Four outcomes

Despite the increasing popularity of sport sponsorship for achieving promotional goals, the ultimate effect of sponsorship activities on important outcomes such as sponsor recognition, attitude towards and satisfaction with sponsors, and ultimately patronage is largely unknown. Indeed, in an international review of sponsorship research, Cornwell and Maignan (1998, p. 17) conclude: "research findings on sponsorship effects are ambiguous and often contradictory". Recent research has raised concerns over the efficacy of sponsorship investment. For example, the results of Graham's (1998) research calls into question consumers' long term recall of even title event sponsors (e.g. the Cadillac PGA Golf Tournament), while others have expressed concerns that sponsorship clutter (i.e. multiple sponsors being associated with a single event) lessens the effectiveness of the promotion (Pryor, 1999). While we share these concerns, we argue that positive sponsorship outcomes may be present for different types of consumers. Specifically, we present the results of a study examining the impact of team identification with a NCAA Division I football team on four distinct sponsorship outcomes:

- (1) sponsor recognition;
- (2) attitude toward the sponsor;
- (3) sponsor patronage; and
- (4) satisfaction with the sponsor.

Team identification

Team identification is defined as the spectators perceived connectedness to a team and the experience of the team's failings and achievements as one's own (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In this sense, it can be conceived as a more specific instance of organizational identification (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Consistent with suggestions in the identification literature (e.g. Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995; Fisher and Wakefield, 1998; Johan and Pham, 1999; Wann and Branscombe, 1993), we examine three antecedents (i.e. prestige, fan associations, and domain involvement) for predicting team identification among sports spectators. Perceived prestige of, and associations with a focal organization was previous examined in an art museum member context (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995). A study by Fisher and Wakefield (1998) found that domain involvement was consistently associated with identification. We incorporate all three constructs in a sports context and extend previous findings by examining sponsorship related consequences of team identification. Relying on social identity theory, we extend identification research by proposing that highly identified fans will exhibit significantly higher levels of sponsor recognition, patronage, and satisfaction and have more positive attitudes toward sponsoring firms than less identified fans. In the following section we review literature on social identity theory and team identification. The proposed antecedents to team identification and the sponsorship outcomes are explicated in developing our hypotheses. Results are then discussed, managerial implications presented, and future research directions provided.

Social identity theory and identification

Social categories

Social identity theory proposes that individuals classify themselves into various social categories in order to facilitate self-definition within their own social environment (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Social identification is the perceived oneness with, or connectedness to some human aggregate (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995; Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Identification allows for vicarious group participation (Katz and

Kahn, 1978; Turner, 1984) while the individual still “perceives the fate of the group(s) as her own” (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 21). The perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group is done partly to enhance self-esteem (Hogg and Turner, 1985; Tajfel, 1978). Self-esteem can be strengthened by emphasizing the positive aspects of the group to which one identifies (in-group) and minimizing negative information (Wann and Branscombe, 1995a). Further, emphasizing negative information, and downplaying the positive, among contrasting groups (out-groups) can similarly contribute to one’s self-esteem. Fisher and Wakefield (1998) suggest that a positive social identity can be maintained by evaluating the in-group to out-groups where the in-group compares favorably on some important performance dimension.

Variety of constructs

The extent to which an individual identifies with a group, such as a sports team, can vary greatly. Spectators low on involvement have a passive relationship with a sport or team and are likely attracted for the entertainment value, social interaction opportunities, or stress-relieving qualities. Fans highly involved with a team can be extremely loyal, holding a particular team as central to their identity where team success and failure is interpreted as personal success and failure. This loyalty is long-term, unwavering, and is supported by time and financial commitments (Pooley, 1978; Sutton *et al.*, 1997). The team identification literature, largely driven by the work of Daniel Wann and his colleagues, has found team identification to have an influence on a variety of constructs including:

- attributions of competition outcomes (Wann and Dolan, 1994);
- team knowledge and beliefs (Wann and Branscombe, 1995b);
- emotions (Wann and Branscombe, 1992; Wann *et al.*, 1994);
- self-esteem (Wann and Branscombe, 1990);
- perceptions of influence (Wann *et al.*, 1994); and
- belief in personal competence (Hirt *et al.*, 1992; Madrigal, 1995).

Sponsorship effectiveness

Unfortunately, despite the potential for team identification to provide insight into sponsorship effectiveness outcomes (e.g. sponsor recognition, satisfaction with and attitude towards sponsors, patronage of sponsors), these have not been examined. However, the more general identification literature suggests that as identification with a team increases in importance, fans will seek greater individual association with the team (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). In addition, greater identification results in an individuals’ willingness to engage in consumptive behaviors that support the group (Fisher and Wakefield, 1998). We propose that one way this may manifest itself is through the support of sponsoring organizations.

Hypotheses

Antecedents

Potential influences

In the proposed model we first examine the following potential influences on team identification: prestige, domain involvement, and number of associations.

Perceived prestige. Spectator sports can create a sense of community. By involving people jointly with a common purpose, sport provides a collective identity. There can also be a community pride that is created by linking a team to the community via history, symbols, shared goals, and the fan’s need to belong. The linking of a team to an affiliated community “is potentially

the most instrumental in building fan identification and, consequently, has the strongest long-term effects” (Sutton *et al.*, 1997, p. 19). Perceived as inseparable from the larger community, the team allows the fan a way to belong to the larger community. Thus, prestige as discussed here is community specific.

Supporting the teams of a university is one way of extending the self and communicating it to others. There is a greater opportunity to enhance self-esteem via identification if the university community is perceived as prestigious. The individual fan can receive the benefit of status derived from community prestige indirectly by identifying with a team. The perceived prestige and status of a sponsored event has also been shown to be associated with consumer intentions to attend to, and respond favorably toward sponsoring firms (Speed and Thompson, 2000).

Social identity

Social identity can be thought of as one’s “self-conception as a group member” (Abrams and Hogg, 1990, p. 2). As such, characteristics of the group, such as perceived prestige, should be salient in the strength of an individual’s identification with a particular group (cf. Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; March and Simon, 1958). Bhattacharya *et al.* (1995) found support for this phenomenon among museum members. Their study suggests that higher levels of perceived organizational prestige may predict identification with the museum. In a like manner, we hypothesize that team identification with a university football team will be stronger when the associated university is perceived to be prestigious:

H1. Perceived prestige of the university a team represents will be positively related to team identification with that team.

Domain involvement

Domain involvement. Some individuals may show interest in a particular sport genre, in addition to their interest with a specific team. Fisher and Wakefield (1998) find empirical support for their argument that the personal relevance of a particular object, situation, or action is an important dimension in the development of identification with a particular group. This personal relevance is labeled domain involvement, and refers to a particular field rather than a particular group or groups. Lasca *et al.* (1995) found individuals that rate highly on golf-involvement differ from individuals rating low on golf-involvement with regard to commitment to the game of golf.

Fisher and Wakefield (1998) put forth that domain involvement will be particularly influential for fans of less successful teams because it allows them to maintain a positive self-definition by associating the team (and thus their membership in the group) with the domain rather than the team’s “on-field” success. In this study, we predict that team identification will be stronger when the subject is more highly involved with the domain of the sport:

H2. Involvement with the sports domain will be positively related to team identification with a particular team in that domain.

Fan associations

Fan associations. The more contact a person has with an organization, the more likely that person is to define himself or herself as a member (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995; Dutton *et al.*, 1994). Previous studies have found that the length of time a person is actively involved with an organization is positively related to identification, albeit at a diminishing rate (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995; Hall and Schneider, 1972; Mael and Ashforth, 1992).

Focal organization

Identification is also likely to be associated with greater contact with a focal organization (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995; Dutton *et al.*, 1994; Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Support for this phenomenon is provided by Bhattacharya *et al.* (1995) who found that, among museum patrons, frequency of contact with the organization was significantly related to member identification. Social identity theory proposes that people will engage in activities to support those organizations that are congruent with their identities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). It is likely that when a person has been a member of a focal organization in a variety of roles, the perceived sense of oneness with the organization may be strengthened. Thus, behaviors that increase contact and role variety, such as purchasing season tickets or joining a university booster club, should be positively related to identification. We hypothesize that the number of associations an individual has with a focal organization should be positively related to identification. Associations in this study refer to the number of different forms of participation an individual has with a university and team:

H3. Number of fan associations with the university and team will be positively related to team identification with the team.

Cognitive reactions

Sponsorship outcomes

As discussed, level of identification with a sports team has previously been shown to be an important indicator of fans' affective, behavioral, and cognitive reactions to events relevant to their team (e.g. Branscombe and Wann, 1991, 1992, 1994; Wann and Branscombe, 1993, 1995a). The following hypotheses address the influence of team involvement on specific sponsorship outcomes, which represents an unexplored area in the marketing literature.

Sponsor recognition. "Anonymous sponsorship, even philanthropic, is rare" (Abratt *et al.*, 1987, p. 299). Stipp and Schiavone (1996), among others (e.g. Pope, 1998), suggest that consumers' proper identification of sponsors is a necessary condition for achieving corporate sponsorship objectives. This is apparent by the growing number of articles that suggest strategies for improving consumer identification of official sponsors (e.g. Meenaghan, 1994), and the concerns over tactics that may lead consumers to misidentify sponsors via ambush marketing (e.g. Meenaghan, 1994; Sandler and Shani, 1989; Stipp and Schiavone, 1996). Generally, exposure to sponsorship stimuli at sporting events (e.g. perimeter signage) has been found to achieve limited recognition of sponsors by spectators (d'Ydewalle *et al.*, 1987; Nebenzahl and Hornik, 1985; Pham, 1992). There would appear to be a need to better understand the factors that potentially affect the processing of sponsorship stimuli (Pham, 1992).

A fundamental part of social identity theory

Categorization of in-group and out-group members is a fundamental part of social identity theory, with highly identified individuals being more active in the observance of differences between group members (Abrams and Hogg, 1990). When firms are active in sponsoring a favored sports team, they may be considered an in-group member. We propose that the heightened sensitivity exhibited by highly identified fans to in-group and out-group membership will make them more likely to recognize sponsors (i.e. in-group member) as compared with fans identifying less with a given team.

Some support for this proposed effect of involvement on sponsor recognition is provided in a study by Lascau *et al.* (1995, p. 45). Subjects recruited at a professional golfing tournament were asked, among other things, to name the event sponsors they remembered. Spectators who were highly involved in

the sport of golf were found to be “more capable than low-involvement spectators of correctly identifying the event sponsors”. Although this earlier study examines the more general domain involvement, rather than team identification specifically, it provides initial empirical support for the following hypothesis:

H4. Team identification is positively related to the ability to correctly identify sponsors.

Consumer purchase behaviors

Attitude toward sponsors. Speed and Thompson (2000) report that positive attitudes toward a sponsor are positively associated with intentions to attend to, favorability towards, and willingness to consider a sponsor’s product. Thus, understanding a fan’s attitude toward a sponsor may play a role in understanding consumer purchase behaviors. In order to maintain self-esteem, highly identified individuals consistently evaluate in-group members more positively than out-group members (Wann and Branscombe, 1995a). For example, highly identified spectators of college basketball were found to see other supporters of the team as “special” and bonded together (Wann and Branscombe, 1993). An important, and as yet unanswered question, is whether the positive attitudes afforded in-group spectators translates to team sponsors.

Identified fan

Hoek *et al.* (1993) found that managers of sponsoring firms assumed that sponsorship improved consumers’ attitudes toward the company or its products. However, their assessment is limited to intuition and informal feedback. In some respects, a sponsor can be perceived as an ally of the identified fan by supporting something that he or she believes is important. This is consistent with McDonald’s (1991) belief that those who are interested in a particular event or sport may feel favorably disposed toward sponsoring companies. We propose that the favorable bias highly identified fans have toward other in-group members will extend to organizations supporting the favored team through sponsorship:

H5. Team identification is positively related to attitude toward sponsors.

Increased sales

Sponsor patronage. Increased sales are seen by many as an important outcome of corporate involvement in sponsorship (e.g. Turco, 1994; Wilson, 1997). However, at this time it would appear that many sponsors “are relying more on gut feeling than pure fact” (Wilson, 1997, p. 7) when it comes to determining the behavioral effects from sponsorship. Hoek *et al.* (1997, p. 30) assessed purchase probabilities of users and non-users of brands based on exposure to advertising or sponsorship stimuli related to World Cup Soccer. Their findings suggested that purchase probabilities for either group “were unaffected by exposure to either the advertising or the sponsorship stimulus material”. However, the study did not take into account potential subject differences based on identification levels with either the sport, or the teams featured in the stimulus materials.

To the extent that sponsoring brands are viewed as in-group members, patronizing these brands may serve to reinforce an individual’s own membership in the group:

A key aspect of identification is that individuals are motivated to establish and maintain their ties to the group through their behaviors (Fisher and Wakefield, 1998, p. 29).

Indeed, unlike Hoek *et al.* (1997), several studies have found a link between sponsorship and purchase intentions. For example, Crimmins and Horn (1996) reported that about 60 percent of the US adult population would

Consumption evaluation

purchase a company's product if they supported the Olympic Games. Research with NASCAR fans indicates that 48 percent would "almost always" purchase a sponsor's product rather than a closely priced competitive brand (Performance Research, 1994). Based on the potential for sponsors to be viewed as in-group members, we hypothesize that individuals who are highly identified with a team are more likely to engage in supportive patronage behaviors for sponsors, relative to those less identified:

H6. Team identification is positively related to patronage behaviors toward sponsors.

Satisfaction with sponsors. Satisfaction is a central concept in marketing. It is a post-consumption evaluation whereby consumers experience "a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment" (Oliver, 1997, p. 13). "Identification induces the individual to engage in, and derive satisfaction from, activities congruent with the identity" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 35). To the extent that these activities include the patronage of sponsors, in-group favoritism may influence the level of satisfaction highly identified fans have when interacting with sponsoring firms. Another possibility is that, due to their favored in-group status, negative service or product performance attributed to sponsors is discounted such that it remains consistent with prior held beliefs (i.e. a favorable attitude toward the sponsor's brands). That is, new information that is incongruent with existing knowledge is distorted so as not to upset the existing schema (Crocker *et al.*, 1984). This notion of individuals seeking out or modifying their perceptions to be consistent with their beliefs is well accepted (Sherif and Hovland, 1961). It is also in line with recent theorizing in the organizational identity literature where the ego defense of denial is proposed to be a tactic by which an organizational identity can be maintained by questioning the validity of divergent information (Brown and Starkey 2000). Thus, we propose:

H7. Team identification is positively related to satisfaction with a sponsor.

Research methodology

Data collection method

Field observation

Adult spectators at an afternoon university football game of a major NCAA Division I conference served as the sampling frame. Information provided by the university athletic department and verified by field observation suggested that different areas around the football stadium were likely to contain certain homogeneous groups. Surveys were distributed prior to the game in designated parking and tailgating areas surrounding the football stadium in order to obtain a more representative sample. The area(s) designated for the visiting team's fans were not surveyed.

Subjects. A total of 1,070 subjects were approached, 922 of whom agreed to participate in the study for a response rate of 86.2 percent. Of the surveys 41 were found to be incomplete or had obvious acquiescence bias and were discarded resulting in 881 usable questionnaires. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 76 years (mean = 32.7), with males making up 59.7 percent of the sample ($n = 526$). Subjects included current university students (26.4 percent), alumni (42.7 percent), and general spectators (30.9 percent). Alumni had graduated from the university from less than one, to 43 years previously ($M = 12.4$, $SD = 10.4$). Season ticket holders accounted for 32.5 percent of the respondents and had maintained their annual subscriptions from one to 35 years ($M = 7.90$, $SD = 7.05$). The spectator demographics of the sample were similar to those provided by the university's athletic department.

Seven-point Likert scale

Measurement

Team identification. Similar to Bhattacharya *et al.* (1995), we used Mael and Ashforth's (1992) six-item measure to gauge spectator identification with the football team. The scale was adapted to our context by simply adding the word "football" after the school name or replacing the word "school" with the words "football team" in Mael and Ashforth's original scale. A Likert-type seven-point response scale with anchors of "Strongly disagree" (1) and "Strongly agree" (7) was utilized.

Hypothesized antecedents. Perceived prestige of the university is defined as "the degree to which the institution is well regarded" (Mael and Ashforth, 1992, p. 111). A three-item, seven-point Likert-type scale with anchors of "Strongly disagree" (1) and "Strongly agree" (7) assessed perceived prestige of the university. The scale items utilized are a subset of a scale used by Mael and Ashforth (1992) specific to an educational organization. The same items have been successfully used in other contexts as well (cf. Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995; Mael, 1988).

Domain involvement is defined in this study as a deep personal bond with the sport of football. It is the love of the game, and not an affiliation to a particular team that distinguishes domain involvement from team identification. A three-item, seven-point Likert-type scale adapted from Fisher and Wakefield (1998) assessed domain involvement in this study.

Affiliation characteristics included a set of variables referring to the subject's association with the university and/or team. Specifically, respondents indicated if they were currently a student, alumni, employee of the university, football season ticket holder, or member of the university booster organization. The number of associations was summed, creating a range from zero to five, to create the fan association measure.

Respondent scores

Hypothesized consequences. Similar to previous sponsorship studies (e.g. Meir *et al.*, 1997; Turco, 1994), subjects were asked to identify known sponsors from a pre-determined list (i.e. recognition). To assess respondents recognition of official sponsors, subjects were provided a list of 12 companies and asked to "circle the names of all the companies you think ARE sponsors". One-half of the company names listed were actual sponsors chosen to represent a variety of sponsorship levels and industries (e.g. banking, fast food, telecommunications, and retail goods). The six "non-sponsors" were direct competitors of the actual sponsors. Company names on the list were randomly presented. A correct response was defined as circling an actual sponsor or NOT circling the name of a non-sponsor. Respondent scores ranged from three to 12 (mean = 7.57, SD = 1.58).

For assessing attitude toward sponsors we asked spectators to rate their overall impressions of firms that sponsor the football program. This was measured utilizing a seven-point semantic differential similar to Sengupta and Fitzsimons (2000). Specifically, subjects indicated if their "overall impression of firms that sponsor (university name) football" were:

- "Bad" (1) or "Good" (7);
- "Unfavorable" (1) or "Favorable" (7); and
- "Unsatisfactory" (1) or "Satisfactory" (7).

Patronage intentions were defined as the spectator's belief that he or she makes purchase decisions at least partly influenced by the brand or organizations sponsorship status. Patronage intentions were operationalized

Satisfaction construct

through a three-item, seven-point Likert-type scale. In particular, does the subject purposely look for sponsors, indicate a greater likelihood of purchasing from sponsors, and believe they are influenced by sponsors.

For the satisfaction construct, subjects were provided with a list of actual sponsors. The sponsor list was provided to subjects after recognition, patronage, and attitude were measured. From this list, subjects selected a sponsoring firm they had done business with and responded to the three satisfaction items with respect to that firm. Satisfaction with a specific sponsoring firm was defined as the customer's overall psychological state resulting from his or her past experiences with a particular business organization. A three-item, seven-point scale developed by Bitner and Hubbert (1994) was modified to measure satisfaction in this study. All multi-item measures are provided in Table I.

Measurement model**Results**

The data were tested in a two staged process (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). First, the measurement model was assessed via confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the reliability and unidimensionality of the scales used in the study. Once we were satisfied with the measurement model, a structural model was estimated using the SAS Institute's (1990) PROC CALIS causal modeling procedure. This allowed for an assessment of the overall model fit and the hypothesized relationships. We also tested for multicollinearity in our data by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF) associated with each independent variable (operationalized as summed scales for the VIF analysis). The VIF values do not exceed 10.0 (with the highest being 1.08), thus indicating that multicollinearity does not impact the dependent measures.

Multi-item indicator*Measurement model*

The entire measurement model was subjected to confirmatory factor analysis. We assessed each multi-item indicator as well as the manifest fan association and sponsor recognition variables simultaneously, which provides for a stronger test of convergent and discriminant validity than assessing each factor independently. The fit of the measurement model is encouraging. All of the standardized factor loadings exceed 0.68 and are significant ($p < 0.001$), providing evidence of the convergent validity of the indicators (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The chi-square statistic is 599 with 204 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.0001$). The non-normed fit index (NNFI) is 0.96 and the comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.97 (Bentler and Bonett, 1980; Bentler, 1990). The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) are 0.94 and 0.92, respectively. Composite reliabilities for each construct exceeded 0.85, with the highest being for attitude toward sponsors (0.94) and the lowest being for sports domain involvement (0.87) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Based on these results, we conclude that the measures are both unidimensional and reliable. Because the fan association and sponsorship recognition constructs are each operationalized as an index score, they were not included in the assessment of composite reliability or the variance extracted test for discriminant validity.

We tested for discriminant validity in two ways. First, following the recommendations of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), for all possible construct pairings we assessed whether the confidence interval formed by adding and subtracting two standard errors from the correlation between the two constructs included the number one. All of the construct pairings met this

Item	Standardized factor loading*
Team identification ^a ($\alpha=0.90$)	
1 When someone criticizes ____ football, it feels like a personal insult	0.821
2 I am very interested in what others think about ____ football	0.821
3 When I talk about the ____ football team, I usually say “we” rather than “they”	0.709
4 The ____ football team’s successes are my successes	0.789
5 When someone praises the ____ football team, it feels like a personal complement	0.846
6 If a story in the media criticized the ____ football team, I would feel embarrassed	0.687
Perceived prestige ^a ($\alpha=0.87$)	
1 People in my community think highly of ____ University	0.774
2 It is considered prestigious in my community to be an alumnus of ____	0.831
3 ____ has an outstanding reputation in my community	0.886
Domain involvement ^a ($\alpha=0.87$)	
1 Football is very important to me	0.799
2 I think about football all of the time	0.840
3 I watch football whenever I can	0.849
Attitude toward sponsors ^b ($\alpha=0.94$) (Rate your overall impression of firms that sponsor ____ football using each of these scales):	
1 Bad-good	0.925
2 Unfavorable-favorable	0.911
3 Unsatisfactory-satisfactory	0.922
Sponsor patronage ^c ($\alpha=0.91$)	
1 When you shop for products and services, how often do you purposely look for those sold by sponsors of ____ football?	0.859
2 All else being equal, are you more likely to purchase goods and services from ____ football sponsors rather than non-sponsors?	0.841
3 In general, how much does the fact that a firm is a sponsor of ____ football enter into your buying decision when you are shopping for products?	0.911
Satisfaction with sponsors ^d ($\alpha=0.93$)	
1 Based on all of your experiences, how satisfied are you with this organization’s services and/or products?	0.881
2 Compared to other, similar organizations that you have done business with, how would you rate your satisfaction with this organization	0.908
3 In general, I am satisfied with this organization	0.910

Notes:

^aEach item measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale with anchors: 1 = “Strongly disagree”, 7 = “Strongly agree”

^bA seven-point response scale provided between the adjective pairs

^cEach item measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale with the following anchors: item no. 1: 1 = “Never”, 7 = “Often”; item no. 2: 1 = “Very unlikely”, 7 = “Very likely”; item no. 3: 1 = Weak influence, 7 = “Strong influence”

^dEach item measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale with the following anchors: satisfaction items no. 1 and no. 2: 1 = “Very dissatisfied”, 7 = “Very satisfied”; satisfaction item no. 3: 1 = “Strongly disagree”, 7 = “Strongly agree”

*All factor loadings are significant at $p < 0.0001$

Table I. Battery of multi-item scales and confirmatory factor loadings

Hypothesized relationships

criteria (i.e. none included 1.0), providing evidence of discriminant validity. In a second assessment of discriminant validity, we followed the advice of Fornell and Larcker (1981) by assessing whether the variance extracted estimates associated with each possible construct pair are greater than the square of the correlation between the two constructs. Once again, evidence of discriminant validity is provided as all variance extracted estimates exceed the appropriate squared factor correlation. Overall, then, we concluded that the scales had adequate measurement properties, and we proceeded to test the hypothesized structural relationships.

Structural model estimation

To test the hypothesized relationships, a full structural model was estimated using each scale item as an indicator of its associated latent variable construct. Fan association and sponsorship recognition were modeled as manifest variables. Table II presents the correlations between the constructs. The causal paths between the latent variables were specified in accordance with Figure 1 and the model was tested using the maximum likelihood method of parameter estimation. We find strong support for drawing the conclusion that the model fits the data well. The chi-square statistic for the structural model is 809 with 222 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.0001$). The GFI is 0.92 and the AGFI is 0.90, while the CFI and NNFI are both 0.95. RMSEA estimate is equal to 0.0567. Table III provides a summary of the standardized estimates and t -values for the seven hypothesized paths. All seven of the hypothesized paths are supported ($p < 0.001$).

Construct	Mean	Std dev.	Correlation							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1 Perceived prestige	5.1	1.39								
2 Sports domain involvement	4.3	1.77	0.26							
3 Fan associations	1.3	0.96	0.12	0.17						
4 Fan identification	4.8	1.55	0.51	0.55	0.38					
5 Sponsorship recognition	7.6	1.58	0.03	0.01	0.19	0.12				
6 Attitude toward sponsors	5.6	1.19	0.32	0.22	0.15	0.42	0.08			
7 Sponsor patronage	4.1	1.79	0.28	0.54	0.27	0.59	0.08	0.38		
8 Satisfaction with sponsor	5.9	1.22	0.26	0.14	0.15	0.30	0.06	0.41	0.29	

Note: Correlation coefficients are estimates among the latent constructs in the model

Table II. Construct correlations, means, and standard deviations

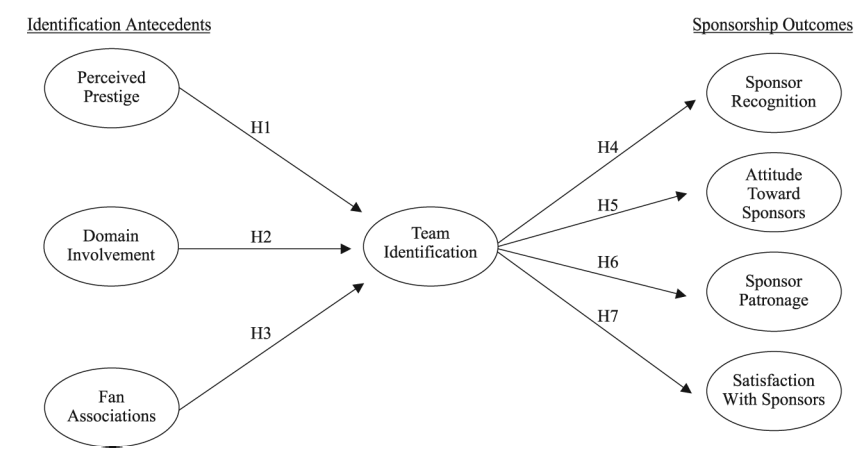


Figure 1. Team identification: antecedents and sponsorship outcomes

Constructs	Hypothesis	Standardized	
		path coefficient	t-value
Perceived prestige → Fan identification	H1	0.38	11.63
Sports domain involvement → Fan identification	H2	0.42	12.58
Fan associations → Fan identification	H3	0.26	9.11
Fan identification → Sponsorship recognition	H4	0.12	3.41
Fan identification → Attitude toward sponsors	H5	0.44	12.36
Fan identification → Sponsor patronage	H6	0.61	17.30
Fan identification → Satisfaction with sponsor	H7	0.33	8.95

Notes: $\chi^2_{(222)} = 809$, $p < 0.0001$; GFI=0.92; AGFI=0.90; CFI=0.95; NNFI=0.95, RMSEA=0.0567. All *t*-values are significant at $p < 0.001$

Table III. Summary of research hypotheses

Discussion

Results and managerial implications

The results of this study support the premise that highly identified fans are more likely to exhibit several positive outcomes related to sponsorship. Specifically, we find measures of sponsor recognition, attitude toward sponsors, sponsor patronage, and satisfaction with sponsors to all be higher for more highly identified fans. In addition, in a college football context, we find that team identification can be predicted by perceived prestige of the university, involvement with the domain of football, and associations with the team/school. Thus, we suggest that sponsorship is an effective promotional medium for companies, but that all consumers will not feel its influence equally. One contribution of this study is that it helps to explain why past research may have found inconsistent results regarding sponsorship effectiveness. In short, we find that it matters what type of fan you ask.

From a management perspective, our results suggest that greater gains in sponsorship effectiveness can be made by segmenting the sport spectator market according to level of team identification. Sponsoring firms may choose to focus on the highly identified fan due to their propensity for greater sponsor recognition and higher levels of patronage. Conceptual work (e.g. Sutton *et al.*, 1997) also suggests that highly identified fans may have greater price tolerance and be less sensitive to team performance (both positive qualities from an organization's perspective). The antecedents of our team identification model provide guidance for identifying members of this segment. Recognizing that fans differ in level of involvement can act as a starting point in the segmentation process. For example, the highly identified fans in this study were significantly more likely to be male alumni that belonged to the booster club. They also tended to be older (mean = 36 years) than those less identified with the team (mean = 29 years). Generalizability of these specific demographic identifiers beyond the context of this study is not warranted, however, the findings do suggest that sponsoring organizations can effectively target highly identified fans. For example, the introduction of relationship marketing programs such as special events for booster club members would be appropriate for the fans identified in this study. In other contexts, more in-depth examination of demographic and geographic factors, socio-cultural variables, and psychological characteristics should be used to develop a profile of the fans at different involvement levels. Developing fan profiles will help sponsors better tailor their efforts to reach these individuals.

Alternatively, sponsoring firms might direct their efforts toward spectators exhibiting low levels of team identification. An argument can be made that

Management perspective

Levels of team identification

highly identified fans will exhibit positive sponsorship outcomes (e.g. patronage, increased satisfaction, positive attitude toward sponsoring brands) without additional promotional expense from the firm. Therefore, the real opportunity may lie in creating awareness and increased patronage behaviors among those less identified with the sports team. These individuals should be targeted for supplemental promotional attention. For example, direct mail linking the event and the sponsoring brand can be sent to these consumers prior to the event. Of course, a substantial challenge exists in identifying these individuals. While fan association information could be used to distinguish highly identified fans, sports organizations are less likely to have identifying information for less identified fans, because, according to our results, they are less likely to be season ticket holders, alumni, booster club members, etc. Because of these drawbacks, a better approach may be to manipulate factors that will increase a fan's identification with a team or sport organization. Sutton *et al.* (1997) have suggested that increasing community involvement activities, creating opportunities for fan affiliation and participation with the team, making the team and its players accessible to the public, and reinforcing the team's tradition can serve to increase team identification.

Social identity theory

Social identity theory suggests that identifying with a group is done to a certain extent to augment self esteem (Hogg and Turner, 1985). Wann and Branscombe (1995a) note that by emphasizing positive aspects of the group to which one identifies, self-esteem can be strengthened. To increase fan identification via these positive associations the organization should engage in community relations programs backed by a media campaign to promote these activities. Various philanthropic efforts can be pursued such as non-profit charity work, drug education programs, youth involvement, or literacy programs. Efforts such as these "reflect positively on the team as well as its fans" (Sutton *et al.*, 1997, p. 20).

In order to take advantage of these positive associations, teams should create opportunities for fans to feel like they are affiliated with the team. For Greenbay Packer fans, the Packers offered stock that could be purchased so fans could become part owners in the franchise. Although this was largely a symbolic gesture as the stock is not redeemable, fans were made to feel that they were part of the team. Other ways of promoting team affiliation include fan clubs that utilize newsletters and/or e-mail, and contacting fans for their input regarding "their" team.

Accessibility to the team

Another important facet of generating fan involvement is by increasing the public's accessibility to the team. Events such as autograph and picture sessions, mid-night madness rallies, and youth sport clinics create this accessibility for fans. For example, several NFL teams conduct daylong NFL 101 camps where the public can interact with players and other team personnel as well as learn about the organization's history and traditions. This can "serve to increase the connection between the team, the community, and the fans" (Sutton *et al.*, 1997, p. 21).

As corporations seek greater justification for sponsorship effectiveness, event organizers will need to provide potential sponsors with evidence of how the sponsorship will substantially contribute in areas important to the company. The findings in this study should be useful for sports organizations seeking sponsors for their events. Our results provide evidence of sponsorship effectiveness among a segment of sport spectators. As such, this information can be used as a starting point for sports organizations to examine sponsorship effectiveness (as measured by our four sponsorship

outcomes) in relation to their own spectator base. That information (e.g. percentage of attendees that are highly identified with the team) could then be used to justify continued support from existing sponsors or in generating new sponsorships.

Limitations and future research

A potential limitation of the study is the focus of our domain involvement measure. In this study we take a very general view of domain involvement (i.e. football in general). However, within a particular sport there are often different levels of participation that may appeal to different audiences. For example, an individual could be highly involved with high school or college football, but have a relatively low level of domain involvement for professional football. Enhanced specificity of the domain involvement construct is an issue that future researchers may wish to consider further.

Measure-related limitation

Another measure-related limitation is the general nature of the satisfaction items. While the finding that team identification positively influences customer satisfaction with the firm is important, it lacks specificity that might aid marketing managers. A more robust satisfaction measure that examines a customer's satisfaction with different facets of the sponsoring firm would provide more diagnostic value.

This research utilized a survey methodology of fans at a real sporting event (i.e. NCAA football game), and relies heavily on social identity theory. The corporate sponsorship of a university sports organization acted as the empirical context for this study. However, the conceptual framework and hypotheses developed should be applicable to a gamut of corporate sponsorship contexts, not just those that are sports related (e.g. arts, festival, music, etc.). Thus, a possible extension of this research would be the replication of this study in some of these alternative sponsorship contexts. Additionally, other sporting related contexts (e.g. collegiate baseball and basketball, professional football, etc.) represent important replication opportunities. Potentially, additional antecedent variables may be relevant for predicting team identification in some of these alternative sponsorship contexts. While we use an established and respected fan identification scale, future researchers may wish to extend our findings by including alternative conceptualizations of team identification (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000).

Sponsorship effectiveness

The strong results of this study suggest that team identification is an important consideration in sponsorship effectiveness. Several team identification related topics may be particularly interesting for further academic study. First, it has been suggested that highly identified fans "value loyalty to the team in other fans" (Wann and Branscombe, 1992, p. 51). Therefore, highly identified fans are likely to hold negative attitudes toward so called "fair-weather" fans. It would be interesting to see if this relationship is present for event sponsors. That is, do highly identified fans think in terms of sponsorship loyalty? If so, then "fair-weather" sponsors might be perceived less favorably than sponsors who maintain their relationship with a particular team through good and bad seasons. An indication of this may be found in suggestions that a commitment of three to five years may be needed to develop trust with, and measure the effectiveness of, a sponsorship arrangement (Armstrong, 1988; Meenaghan, 1983).

Another area for future inquiry deals with the perceived prestige construct used in this study. While we report a positive relationship between perceived prestige and team identification, future research may wish to further refine

this finding by exploring the impact that specific “reputation” types may have on team identification. For example, in a collegiate sports context, one could explore the impact of a “party school” reputation versus an “outstanding scholastic” reputation on team identification. Further, what impact might a school that is perennially considered a basketball powerhouse have on team identification with that school’s other athletic teams?

Finally, image transfer from event to sponsoring brand is an important outcome of sponsorship and is now receiving increased research attention (Meenaghan, 1999). This may be an interesting variable to consider in relation to team identification. For example, might the transfer of event image attributes to sponsoring brands be more pronounced for highly identified fans?

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This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of this article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present

Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

Modern sponsorship has moved from being mainly philanthropic to being a business arrangement that benefits both sponsors and sponsored. Sponsoring organizations focus increasingly on the commercial potential and contribution to profits of their sponsorship activity. Research by Gwinner and Swanson among adult spectators at a US university football game reveals that sponsorship is an effective promotional medium for companies, but that consumers do not feel its influence equally.

Factors affecting how people identify with a sport team

The research shows that the prestige of a sport team affects the extent to which people identify with it. By involving people jointly with a common purpose, sport provides a collective identity. There can also be community pride that is created by linking a team to the community through history, shared symbols, shared goals and the fan's need to belong. People who support the team of a prestigious university may feel that the institution's prestige reflects on them. Some people show interest in a particular sport as well as in a specific team. People identify more strongly with a team when they are more highly involved in the sport that the team plays. In addition, the more contact people have with the organization, and the greater the length of time they have been involved with it, the more likely they are to identify with it. All of these factors affect the likely success of team sponsorship activities.

In-group and out-group members

Ardent fans who identify themselves closely with their team are "in-group" members, in contrast to more casual supporters who are "out-group" members. In-group people are more active in the observance of differences between in-group and out-group members. When a firm is active in sponsoring a favoured sport team, it may be considered an in-group member. Keen fans are more likely to recognize sponsors than are out-group members.

In order to maintain self-esteem, highly identified people consistently evaluate in-group members more positively than out-group members. This positive attitude also translates to team sponsors. To the extent that sponsoring brands are viewed as in-group members, patronizing these brands may serve to reinforce the individual's own membership of the in-group. Moreover, in-group favouritism influences the level of satisfaction highly identified fans have when doing business with sponsoring firms. Fans may even discount incidents of poor performance or service from a firm sponsoring "their" team.

Strategies for sponsors

Sponsoring firms may therefore choose to focus on the most ardent fans. These can be identified through demographic and geographic factors, socio-cultural variables and psychological characteristics. Alternatively, sponsoring firms may choose to direct their efforts towards more casual spectators, on the basis that the most ardent fans will already be well disposed towards the sponsor, without the need for additional promotional expense. For example, direct mail linking an event with the sponsoring brand can be sent to the more casual supporters before the event.

However, casual supporters are more difficult to identify than highly committed fans. Because of these drawbacks, a better approach may be to manipulate factors that will increase a fan's identification with a team or sport organization. Increasing community involvement activities, creating opportunities for fan affiliation and participation with the team, making the team and its players accessible to the public and reinforcing the team's tradition can serve to increase team identification.

Fans' sense of identification can be increased still further when sponsoring firms pursue charity work and publicize their efforts in this area. Teams can also create opportunities for fans to feel like they are affiliated with the team through, for example, fan clubs and stock-ownership schemes. Making the team more accessible to the public through, for example, autograph and picture sessions, can also help.

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