The objective of this research was to test the application of an alternative hierarchy of effects model (affect, cognition, and conation) in the context of sponsorship. Activity involvement and team attachment (affect) were proposed to influence sponsor image and attitudes toward sponsorship (cognition), which in turn were proposed to influence consumer behavioral intentions (conation). Fans of a professional basketball team in Greece (N = 384) participated in the study. The results provided support for the alternative hierarchy of effects model and its application in the context of sponsorship. Team attachment (affect) was shown to have both a direct and indirect relationship with behavioral intentions (conation), through its influence on sponsor image and attitudes toward sponsorship (cognition). Furthermore, the attraction dimension of involvement was shown to influence team attachment. The theoretical and managerial implications of these results are discussed.

Investments in sponsorship activity have increased steadily over the last two decades, with increases occurring around the world. Global sponsorship expenditures reached $44 billion in 2009; the figure is notable because expenditures increased 2.1% from 2008, even during difficult economic times (“Sponsorship Spending to Rise,” 2009). In Europe, it was estimated that $12.2 billion were invested in sponsorship contracts in 2009 (“Sponsorship Spending to Rise,” 2009). The increased expenditures relate to the effectiveness of sponsorship as a marketing communication tool (Crompton, 2004; Dolphin, 2003; Seguin, Teed, & O’Reilly, 2005). Research has shown that sponsorship can be a more effective communication strategy than traditional advertising (Carrillat, Lafferty, & Harris, 2005; Harvey, Gray, & Despain, 2006) due to the phenomenon of “goodwill” (Meenaghan, 2001), a higher level of involvement among the target audience (Christensen, 2006), and the operation of different consumer cognitive processes compared with advertising alone (Harvey, Gray, & Despain, 2006).

While marketing practitioners rely mainly on indicators related to product sales to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness (Carrillat et al., 2005), research findings have shown the importance of attitude when examining sponsorship outcomes. A variety of attitudinal and behavioral indicators including media exposure, stock prices, recognition and recall rates, sponsor image, purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth communications have been examined as sponsorship outcomes (Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006; Tsiotou & Lalountas, 2005; Crompton, 2004; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Harvey, 2001; Meenaghan, 2001; Pope & Voges, 1999; Cornwell & Maugham, 1998). Despite the increasing number of studies measuring the above outcomes in different sport settings (e.g., Alexandris, Tsousi, & James, 2007; Christensen, 2006; Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006), use of variables to assess sponsorship effectiveness is still at an early stage. A prominent gap in our understanding of sponsorship effectiveness is a lack of established theoretical frameworks explaining consumer decision-making that include variables such as sponsor image, purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth communication (Christensen, 2006; Poon & Prendergast, 2006).

Few studies of sponsorship activity have adopted a sound theoretical framework to explain how sponsorship works. At the same time, the conceptual work of Meenaghan (2001) and Poon and Prendergast (2006) which provides some ideas on how sponsorship works has yet to be empirically tested. Social identity theory constitutes the most recently used conceptual framework (Madrigal, 2001; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) in testing the effects of sponsorship. In the current study, the alternative three stage hierarchy of effects model (affect, cognition, conation), as discussed by Barry and Howard (1990) in the context of advertising research, was tested. We propose that team attachment (affective stage) influence a consumer’s perception of sponsor image and attitudes toward sponsorship (cognitive stage), which in
their turn influence behavioral intentions (conation stage). In this line, sponsorship effectiveness was assessed in the current study by the development of positive sport consumer behavioral intentions (conation stage). These relationships are discussed below.

Background to the Study

Antecedents and Outcomes of Sponsorship

A variety of attitudinal factors have been proposed as antecedents of sponsorship outcomes. Team attachment (or team identification), fan involvement, activity involvement, product familiarity, and attitude toward sponsorship are variables proposed to influence sponsorship effectiveness (Carrillat et al., 2006; Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Crompton, 2004; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Harvey, 2001; Koo, Quarterman, & Flynn, 2006; Meenaghan, 2001; Pope & Voges, 1999). The importance of the above constructs varies according to the context of a particular study. Event attachment, for example, has been shown to be an important factor in event sponsorship (Alexandris et al., 2007; Poon & Prendergast, 2006; Speed & Thomson, 2000); attitude toward sponsorship was shown to be an important factor in Olympic sponsorship (Lee, Sandler, & Shani, 1997); team attachment has been shown to be a major factor in studies conducted in collegiate and professional sports (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2001).

Gwinner and Swanson (2003), who proposed and tested a theoretical model of sponsorship evaluation in the context of collegiate sports, provided empirical evidence that sponsorship antecedents (domain involvement, perceived prestige, fan associations) influence an individual’s identification with or attachment to a sports team, which in turn influences sponsorship outcomes (sponsor recognition, attitude toward sponsor, sponsor patronage, satisfaction with sponsor). However, Gwinner and Swanson did not take into account the idea that there may be a hierarchy of effects process influencing sponsorship effectiveness, as theoretically proposed by Poon and Prendergast (2006), who argued that the traditional hierarchy of effects model (cognition, affect and conation) can be applied in the context of sponsorship. Sponsorship awareness and perceived quality of the sponsor’s brand represent the cognitive stage, liking of the sponsor’s brand represents the affective stage, and purchase intentions represent the conation stage.

While this sequence is feasible for consumer behavior in general, in the context of sport sponsorship it fails to consider the psychological connection that individuals develop with sports teams and the role such a connection has in guiding sport consumer behavior (Funk & James, 2006). Evidence from previous research has shown that with hedonic products affect plays an important role in sport consumer behavior (Funk & James, 2006); sport consumers develop psychological associations with their favorite teams and use the team as a means to express their self-concept and self-identity (Funk & James, 2001; 2006). It seems unrealistic to accept that sport consumption by highly identified fans is guided primarily by cognitive evaluation related to the quality of the sponsors’ brands. It is also difficult to accept that consumers develop positive attitudes toward a sponsor because of the perceived quality of their products. The cognition-affect-conation proposition does not fit with the “transfer of goodwill” phenomenon (Meenaghan, 2001) associated with sponsorship. It has been proposed that sport consumers develop favorable attitudes toward a sponsor because of their appreciation for the benefits a property receives from partnering with a sponsor (McDonald, 1991; Meenaghan, 2001).

In the current study, we propose to apply an alternative hierarchy of effects model to sport sponsorship. After completing a detailed review of the literature on the hierarchy of effects model, Barry and Howard (1990) concluded that while there has been a wide agreement on the importance of the three stages, there has been disagreement on the sequence of the three stages. As a result, alternative hierarchy of effects models have been proposed: 1. cognition-affect-conation (original); 2. cognition-conation-affect; 3. affect-conation-cognition; 4. conation-affect-cognition; 5. conation-cognition-affect; 6. affect-cognition-conation. We argue the affect-cognition-conation model is most applicable in the context of sport consumer behavior. Barry and Howard (1990) noted that consumer preferences do not always require a cognitive basis; they might be primarily affective based. They also proposed that if an individual later feels a need to justify a preferred choice, an affect-conation-cognition sequence could arise. Results from previous research have illustrated the important role feelings and emotions play in sport consumer behavior (Funk & James, 2006; Funk & Pastore, 2000).

We propose that a consumer’s attachment with a sports team represents the affective stage of the model. Sport team attachment has been defined as a consumer’s psychological connection to a sport team (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Funk, Haugtvedt, & Howard, 2000), which is developed based on fans’ feelings and emotions. We further propose that a sport team attachment is driven by an individual’s involvement with a particular sports team. In this line, involvement is considered as an antecedent of team attachment. It has been proposed that in the case of sport and leisure, involvement has a psychological element (Funk & James, 2001; 2006) related to an individual’s affective attitude toward the object in question (i.e., a favorite sports team). This psychological element includes the ability of a product (a sports team) to provide pleasure (the attraction dimension of involvement) and position the product in a central role in an individual’s life (the centrality dimension of involvement). Sponsor (brand) image and attitudes toward sponsorship, on the other hand, represent the second stage (cognition) of the model. It has been proposed that sport consumers develop a good image about a sponsor,
because of their appreciation for the benefits that their team receives from partnering with a sponsor (McDonald, 1991; Meenaghan, 2001). On the other hand, sport consumer attitudes toward sponsorship are developed based on their evaluation about sponsorship as being a “subtle and indirect” (Meenaghan, 2001, p.101) marketing activity, which does not promote commercialization. This process is referred to as the “transfer of goodwill” (Meenaghan, 2001; Pope & Voges, 1999; Rajaretanam, 1994). The two processes described above are more cognitive than affective. Finally, the behavioral intentions construct represents the conation stage, as has been proposed in the hierarchy of effects model (Barry and Howard, 1990). The proposed model for this study is presented in Figure 1.

**Hypotheses**

**Sponsor (Brand) Image**

Consumers form an image of a brand based on the associations they remember with respect to that brand. Keller (2003) proposed three dimensions of brand associations: attributes, benefits and attitudes. In our study we measure the third dimension of sponsor image, attitudes. Shiffman and Kanuk (2007) defined an attitude as “a learned predisposition to behave in a consistently favorable or unfavorable way with respect to a given object” (p. 200). It has been proposed that a positive attitude towards a sponsor develops when a consumer positively evaluates the benefits of sponsorship for a team (Meenaghan, 2001). Meengham (2001) argued that consumers’ positive evaluations are made at a generic level (benefit to the society), category level (e.g., sport, art, etc.), and/or an individual activity level (e.g., basketball team). In the case of sports club fans, evaluations occur primarily at the individual level (benefits for the team). As Meenaghan (2001) discussed, a sponsor should try to be perceived as “a good” sponsor, whose relationship with the activity results in benefits to the event, activity, or team, if the goodwill effects are to be maximized. The positive influence of sponsorship on the image of the brand (sponsor) is well documented (Pope & Voges, 1999). Harvey et al. (2006) reported that sponsorship changes consumers’ responses toward a specific sponsor and fosters a positive attitude about the sponsor, which then leads to increased consumer willingness to buy the sponsor’s products. The same authors argued that “where sponsorship works, the perception of the sponsor changes in the direction of, ‘those are pretty good folks, I ought to try to give them a fair chance’” (p. 406). We therefore hypothesize that:

H1: Sponsor (brand) image is positively related to consumer behavioral intentions.

**Attitudes Toward Sponsorship**

It is well documented that sponsorship is viewed as a different activity than advertising in the eyes of consumers (Bennett, 1999; Harvey, 2001; Harvey, et al., 2006; Meenaghan, 2001). As Meenaghan (2001) argued, consumers usually appreciate the benefits of sponsorship for the activities in which the individuals are involved (McDonald, 1991), and develop positive attitudes toward sponsorship (McDonald, 1991; Madrigal, 2001). Sponsorship is seen as “subtle and indirect, involving a disguised intent to persuade resulting in a lowering of consumer defense mechanisms” (Meenaghan, 2001, p.101). On the other hand, advertising is seen as “being selfish and in the interest of the advertiser, thus involving no benefit to the society” (Meenaghan, 2001, p.101). This leads to

![Figure 1 — Proposed and final model of sponsorship effectiveness. * Indicates significant paths at the .05 level](image-url)
increased activation of consumers’ defense mechanisms. However, the increased amount of sponsor-initiated commercial activity in relation to major sponsorship programs (e.g., mega events and sponsors of large sport clubs) can produce negative attitudes toward sponsors (Lee et al., 1997; Veltri, Luehman-Jaynes, & Kuzma, 2001). When sponsorship is viewed as increasingly commercialized, there is a danger that the “goodwill phenomenon” may be damaged (Lee, 1999; Meenaghan, 2001). Lee discussed the Olympic Games as an example of this potential problem. With the Olympic Games, sponsorship might be perceived as a factor increasing commercialization and professionalism, while contributing to the loss of the amateurism of the games. Empirical verification of the role of beliefs on the development of positive consumer behavioral intentions in the context of sponsorship has been provided by Alexandris et al. (2007) in a study of spectators at an all-star basketball game in Greece. Consequently, it was hypothesized that a consumer’s attitude about sponsorship would influence behavioral intentions:

H2: Attitudes toward sponsorship are positively related to consumer behavioral intentions.

Team Attachment

A consumer’s psychological connection to a sports team has been written about using various titles including team identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1993), attraction (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989), association, (Gladden et al., 1998), attachment (Funk, Haugtvedt, & Howard, 2000), involvement (Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997), importance (Funk & Pastore, 2000), and psychological connection to a team (James & Ross, 2002). Whatever the label that is used, the psychological connection with a sports team represents a type of social identification; the strength of such a connection may range from weak to strong. For individuals with a weak or low level of connection following a sports team is “a peripheral component of their self-concept” (Wann et al., 2001, p. 4). Those with a strong or high level of team identification have a very strong connection to a team, and often give up their personal identity to become “members” of the team. Individuals do not literally become players on their chosen team; they do, however, create attachments and perceptions of involvement reflecting the nature of this social psychological bond. For the purposes of this study, the phrase team attachment is used to refer to the psychological connection to a sports team.

Researchers have found that psychological attachment to a team does influence sport spectator consumption (e.g., Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Individuals with a high level of team attachment reported attending more home games compared with those with a low level of attachment (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). In the same study, those with a high level of attachment reported a greater likelihood or intention to attend away games (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Beyond attending games and intentions to attend, those with a high level of team attachment reported they would spend more money to get regular season, playoff, and championship tickets compared with those with low level of team attachment (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Those with a high level of team attachment also reported a willingness to spend longer amounts of time waiting in line for tickets than people characterized by a lower level of team attachment. Based on the preceding, it was hypothesized that team attachment would positively influence consumers’ behavioral intentions.

H3: Team attachment is positively related to consumers’ behavioral intentions.

Team attachment has also been shown to be a key variable in the sponsorship process (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2001; Meenaghan, 2001; Pope & Voges, 1999). Madrigal (2001) explained this relationship based on social identity theory: “…people tend to have favorable attitudes toward issues that are congruent with salient aspects of their owned identities deemed to be positive and also support the institutions that embody those identities” (p. 150). Applying this proposition in the sponsorship process means that attachment to a team will be positively related to attitudes toward the sponsor as a result of a transfer of affect. Social identity theory was also used by Gwinner and Swanson (2003), who proposed that the development of team attachment is influenced by team prestige, fan association and domain involvement (sponsorship antecedents). The same authors argued that fans characterized by a high level of attachment will have more positive attitudes toward the sponsor, higher levels of sponsor recognition, patronage and satisfaction. As previously noted, Gwinner and Swanson (2003) did not propose a hierarchy of sponsorship outcomes (awareness, image, purchase intentions). We propose that team attachment influences first the development of positive attitudes toward the sponsor (sponsor image). We therefore hypothesize that:

H4: Team attachment is positively related to sponsor image.

While the relationship between attitudes toward sponsorship and consumers’ behavioral intentions is documented in the literature, the link between team attachment and attitude toward sponsorship has not been empirically established. We argue that fans with a stronger level of attachment will have higher knowledge of the benefits of sponsorship for their team (Madrigal, 2001), which will lead to positive attitudes toward sponsorship. We based this argument on Madrigal’s (2001) discussion on the role of beliefs in the development of positive attitudes toward sponsorship. Based on attitude theory, Madrigal (2001) argued that fans develop positive or negative beliefs about the benefits of sponsorship for the team: “…one person may believe that sponsorship reduces a team’s operating expenses and will, therefore, lead to lower ticket prices. This belief associates an attitude object (i.e., sponsorship) with a favorable evaluation” (p. 149). On the other hand: “…another person
might be more skeptical about sponsorship and believe that companies engage in sponsorship simply as a means for generating more revenue” (p. 149). Subsequently fans which have favorable beliefs about the benefits of sponsorship will have more positive attitudes toward the sponsorship. We therefore argue that fans with a stronger level of attachment will have a greater awareness of the benefits of sponsorship (e.g., reducing team’s operating expenses, reducing ticket prices), and subsequently will have more positive attitudes toward sponsorship:

H5. Team attachment is positively related to attitudes toward sponsorship.

Activity Involvement

Involvement is regarded as a primary determinant of consumer behavior and has been defined as ‘a person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests’ (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). The construct has also been defined as the amount of time and effort a buyer invests in the search, evaluation and decision processes of consumer behavior (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2004).

In sport and leisure settings the construct of activity involvement has been shown to be an important determinant of leisure behavior (Kyle et al., 2004). It represents an individual’s interest in a specific sport activity, and has been defined as “an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreation activity or associated product” (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997, p. 246). Research has provided evidence that involvement is a multidimensional construct (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; McIntytre & Pigram, 1992). Attraction and centrality are two dimensions of involvement that have consistently been examined in previous studies, and are applicable to the context of the current study. According to Kyle et al. (2004), attraction refers to the perceived importance that an activity holds for an individual and the interest, pleasure and enjoyment derived from the activity. Centrality refers to the position that an activity has in an individual’s lifestyle (Kyle et al., 2004). These dimensions have also been applied in sponsorship event research and have been shown to influence sponsorship outcomes (Alexandris et al., 2007).

A similar term (domain involvement) was used by Gwinner and Swanson (2003). They argued that some spectators might show interest in a particular sport, in addition to their interest with a specific team. This proposition was based on the research conducted by Lascu, Giese, Toolan, et al. (1995), who studied domain involvement among golfers. They reported that individuals who were highly involved with golf were more likely to develop sponsorship awareness than those who had a low level of involvement with golf. Gwinner and Swanson (2003) provided evidence that involvement with the sports domain influences team attachment. We therefore propose that:

H6: Involvement- centrality is positively related to team attachment.

H7: Involvement- attraction is positively related to team attachment.

The hypotheses discussed above are graphically presented in Figure 1.

Rival Model

Following Gwinner and Swanson’s (2003) propositions, we also tested a rival model (Figure 2), in which team attachment is a direct determinant of behavioral intentions, sponsor image, and attitude toward sponsorship. This model does not consider the hierarchy of sponsorship effects, and allows us to test whether team attachment has an independent influence, and thus has transformational
impact on sponsorship outcomes. The rival model was proposed to test for the robustness of the proposed model because as it has been argued that the strongest test of a proposed model is to identify and test competing models that represent truly different hypothetical structural relationships (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006).

**Research Method**

**Sampling and Procedures**

Questionnaires were collected from spectators attending a professional basketball game in Greece. The participants were classified in three groups: fun club members, season ticket holders and single game ticket holders. Based on the average proportion of the three groups comprising the total number of spectators, the following number of questionnaires were distributed: 250 among fun club members, 110 among season ticket holders, and 101 among single game ticket holders (N = 490). The questionnaires were distributed in the arena before the start of a game. A team of six researchers distributed and then collected the questionnaires. It should be noted that each of the three groups has a separate seating area within the arena. From the questionnaires distributed, 384 were returned for a response rate of 78.3%.

**Research Instrument**

**Attraction and Centrality**

Researchers have suggested the attraction and centrality constructs are important components of involvement (e.g., McIntyre & Pigram, 1992; Kyle et al., 2004). McIntyre and Pigram’s (1992) scales were used to measure attraction and centrality. Both scales included three items measured on five-point Likert scales anchored by Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (5); see Table 1.

**Team Attachment.** Eight items proposed and tested by James and Ross (2002) were used to measure team attachment. Four items measure the degree to which an individual has a felt commitment to the team and four additional items assess the extent to which an individual has internalized the team within his/her self-concept. Participants responded to the items using a five-point Likert scale anchored by Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (5).

**Attitude Toward Sponsorship.** Three items modified from the scales used by Madrigal (2001) and Lee et al. (1997) were included to measure attitude toward sponsorship. The items were rated using five-point Likert scales anchored by Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (5). The team sponsor and its products, due to team sponsorship” and “The sponsorship improves my perceptions about the team sponsor and its products” (see Table 1). The items were rated using five-point Likert scales anchored by Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (5). The team had one “major” sponsor, whose name was printed on the front side of the team’s jersey. The “major” sponsor, a dairy producer (milk, yogurt and ice cream), is a well-known national brand best characterized as a middle size Greek company.

**Behavioral Intentions (Purchase Intentions and Word-of-Mouth Communication).** To measure purchase intentions, respondents were asked to report how likely it was that they would “Consider buying products from the sponsor,” and “Will certainly buy products from the sponsor.” While positive intentions do not always translate to actual behavior, the use of similar items is a common practice to measure consumer behavioral intentions (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Madrigal, 2001). Measurement of intentions is the closest step to actual consumption behavior. To measure word-of-mouth communication, respondents were asked how likely it was that they would “Recommend sponsor’s products to others.” Five point Likert scales anchored by Very unlikely (1) to Very likely (5) were used for both purchase intentions and word-of-mouth assessment.

**Results**

**Participants Characteristics**

Respondents ranged in age from 16 to 62 years (M = 30.9), with males making up 92% of the sample. The majority of the subjects were single (66%). Subjects included high school graduates (40%), university students (17%), baccalaureate degree holders (36%), masters degree holders (5%), and graduates of continuing education centers (2%). Fan club members comprised 57% of the respondent set, season ticket holders 16%, and single ticket holders 27%.

**Initial Analyses**

After the data were collected, a preliminary analysis was conducted to assess the univariate and multivariate normality of the measured variables. The purpose here was to identify outliers and to test for multicollinearity. PRELIS was used to examine skewness and kurtosis results, and to test univariate and multivariate normality (Hoyle, 1995). The χ² test results indicated that the assumption of multivariate normality was not violated. Moreover, the test for univariate normality showed the 18 observed indicators were normally distributed.

To avoid multicollinearity problems, items with intercorrelations larger than .80 were dropped from the measurement model. As a result, Involvement-Attraction was measured with 2 items instead of 3, the number of Team Attachment items was reduced from 8 to 4, and Attitude Toward Sponsorship and Behavioral Intentions...
Table 1  Measurement Model of Sponsorship Effectiveness and Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exogenous Variables</th>
<th>Loading</th>
<th>AVE**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INVOLVEMENT-ATTRACTION (α=0.62, CR = 0.77)**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching basketball games is important to me (INVA1)</td>
<td>0.85*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching basketball games is one of the most enjoyable activities (INVA2)</td>
<td>0.73*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVOLVEMENT-CENTRALITY (α = .84, CR = 0.86)**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball is an important part of my life (INVC1)</td>
<td>0.88*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my friends are in some way connected with basketball (INVC2)</td>
<td>0.80*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To me, there is no other sport like basketball (INVC3)</td>
<td>0.78*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Endogenous Variables</th>
<th>Loading</th>
<th>AVE**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATTITUDE TOWARDS SPONSORSHIP (α = .72, CR = 0.74)**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsorships offer valuable financial support (ATSP01)</td>
<td>0.78*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsorship is necessary for basketball teams to survive (ATSP02)</td>
<td>0.75*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsorships improve the image of basketball teams (ATSP03)</td>
<td>0.57*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEAM ATTACHMENT (α = .85, CR = 0.86)**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I am a member of the basketball team (TAT1)</td>
<td>0.72*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team is important part of my life (TAT2)</td>
<td>0.77*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want others to know I am a fan of the team (TAT3)</td>
<td>0.81*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I work for the good of the team (TAT4)</td>
<td>0.82*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPONSOR IMAGE (α = .92, CR = 0.92)**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a positive attitude toward the sponsor and its products due to the team sponsorship (IMA1)</td>
<td>0.90*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sponsorship improves my perceptions about the team sponsor and its products (IMA2)</td>
<td>0.83*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due the particular sponsorship, I like more the products of the sponsor (IAM2)</td>
<td>0.94*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS (α =0.81, CR = 0.81)**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend sponsor’s products to others (BI1)</td>
<td>0.93*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider buying sponsor’s products in the future (BI2)</td>
<td>0.71*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will buy sponsor’s products in the future (BI3)</td>
<td>0.63*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi square = 329.5 (p = 0.01) with 117 degrees of freedom, RMSEA = 0.07, GFI = 0.91, NFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.94
* significant at the 0.05 level
** CR = Composite Reliabilities, α = Cronbach alpha, AVE = Average Variance Extracted
were measured using 3 items each instead of 4. Table 1 presents the final measurement model for the exogenous and the endogenous variables of the study.

Multicollinearity was tested by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF) associated with each independent variable. The VIF values did not exceed 10.0 (with the highest being 5.5) indicating that multicollinearity did not constitute a limitation of the study.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The 18 items used to measure the six latent constructs were subjected to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using LISREL 8.52. CFA was employed to test the proposed theoretical framework and to verify unidimensionality and convergent validity. The specified measurement model was found to fit the data adequately, although the chi-square goodness of fit index was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 329$ with 117 degrees of freedom $p = .00$). However, the values for the additional fit indices met or exceeded the critical values for good model fit (NFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.07, GFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.94). The chi-square test demonstrates that the model is not a perfect fit, but the additional fit indices provide evidence of adequate fit that warrants further analysis.

Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach $\alpha$ and composite reliability (CR). The Cronbach $\alpha$ for the latent variables, Involvement-Centrality, Attitude Toward Sponsorship, Team Attachment, Sponsor Image and Behavioral intentions ranged from 0.72 to 0.92, all above the recommended 0.70 cut-off point. One exception occurred for Involvement-Attraction, where the correlation between the two items that measured the construct was 0.62. Both composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated using the procedures recommended by Fornell and Lacker (1981). As shown on Table 1, all the composite reliabilities for the six multi-item scales ranged from .74 to .92, indicating acceptable levels of reliability for the constructs. Moreover, the AVEs ranged between .50 and .79, meeting or exceeding the recommended .50 level and above (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

The measurement model was tested for evidence of convergent and discriminant validity using the factor loadings and the $\Phi$ matrix. Convergent validity is indicated when path coefficients from latent constructs to the corresponding indicators are statistically significant. The loadings of the observed variables ranged from 0.57 to 0.94, and all were positive and significant at the 0.05 level (the lowest $t$ value = 14.5). The item loadings indicate that the observed variables were explained by the latent variables. Significant $t$ values are part of the evidence of convergent validity.

Two tests of discriminant validity were performed. First, we checked whether the correlations among the latent constructs were significantly less than one. None of the confidence intervals of the $\Phi$ values ($\pm$ two standards errors) included the value of one, providing evidence of discriminant validity. The $\Phi$ matrix (correlations between the constructs, corrected for attenuation) is provided in Table 2. We also compared the AVE score for each construct against the shared variance with the other latent constructs. The AVE scores were larger than the shared variance with the other latent constructs, providing further evidence of discriminant validity.

The Structural Model

The structural model was tested using the statistical package LISREL 8.52. The proposed model (see Figure 1) fit the data well, with a chi square value of 358.7 and 124 degrees of freedom. The additional fit indices met or exceeded the recommended thresholds (GFI = 0.91, CFI = .94, RMSEA = 0.07). The hypotheses, with the exception of H6, were confirmed. Involvement-Attraction had a significant, positive direct effect on Team Attachment ($\gamma = .61, p < .05$). Team Attachment had a significant, positive effect on Attitude toward Sponsorship ($\beta = .56, p < .05$), on Sponsor Image ($\beta = .44, p < .05$), and on Behavioral Intentions ($\beta = .21, p < .05$). Sponsor Image and Attitude toward Sponsorship each had a significant, positive effect on Behavioral Intentions ($\beta = .52, p < .05$ and $\beta = .29, p < .05$ respectively). In contrast to the proposed hypothesis (H6), Involvement-Centrality presented a significant, negative effect on Team Attachment ($\gamma = .27, p < .05$).

The total, direct, and indirect effects on the endogenous variables of the proposed model were all

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>$\Phi$-Matrix of Latent Constructs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INVAT</td>
<td>INVCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVAT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVCE</td>
<td>0.65*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTSPO</td>
<td>0.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEAMAT</td>
<td>0.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPOIM</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEINT</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INVAT = Involvement-Attraction, INVCE = Involvement-Centrality, ATTSPO = Attitude Toward Sponsorship, TEAMAT = Team Attachment, SPOIM = Sponsor Image, BEINT = Behavioral Intentions

* Significant at .05 level (All correlations are significantly less than 1.0)
significant and are presented in Table 3. All constructs used in the model presented significant, positive direct and/or indirect effects on Behavioral Intentions with the exception of Involvement-Centrality (see Table 3). Several of the total effects were very strong. Specifically, Team Attachment exhibited the strongest positive total effect on Behavioral Intentions (.60) followed by Sponsor Image (.52), Involvement-Attraction (.37) and Attitude toward Sponsorship (.29). However, the indirect effect of Team Attachment (.39) on Sponsor Image is stronger than its direct effect (.21). Sponsor Image was the strongest direct determinant of Behavioral Intentions (.52). Involvement-Centrality had a significant, negative indirect effect (-.16) on Behavioral intentions. The strongest determinant of Sponsor Image was Team Attachment with a direct effect of .44, followed by the indirect effect of Involvement-Attraction (.27) and the negative indirect effect of Involvement-Centrality (-.12). Involvement-Attraction had the strongest effect (.61), whereas Involvement-Centrality exhibited a negative effect (-.27). Team Attachment had the strongest total effect (.56) on Attitude toward Sponsorship followed by Involvement-Attraction (.34) and the negative effect of Involvement-Centrality (-.15).

With respect to the explained variance on the endogenous variables Team Attachment, Sponsor Image and Attitude toward Sponsorship explained 64% of the variance in Behavioral Intentions. Involvement-Attraction and Involvement-Centrality explained 23% of the variance on Team Attachment, Team Attachment explained 20% of the variance on Sponsor Image, and 32% of Attitude Toward Sponsorship.

Comparing the Equality of the Factor Structures

To test for the invariance of the measurement model across the three fan groups (Season ticket holders (n1 = 217), Fan club members (n2 = 62) and Single ticket holders (n3 = 105)), the procedure recommended by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Determinant</th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavioral Intentions</strong> (R² = .64)</td>
<td>Team Attachment</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>.60+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sponsor Image</td>
<td>.52*</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.52+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitude Toward Sponsorship</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.29+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement-Centrality</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.16+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement-Attraction</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.37+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sponsor Image</strong> (R² = .20)</td>
<td>Team Attachment</td>
<td>.44*</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.44+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement-Centrality</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.12+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement-Attraction</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.27+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team Attachment</strong> (R² = .23)</td>
<td>Involvement-Centrality</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
<td>-.27+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement-Attraction</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.61+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude Toward Sponsorship</strong> (R² = .32)</td>
<td>Team Attachment</td>
<td>.56*</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.56+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement-Centrality</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-.15+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement-Attraction</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.34+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates significant effects at .05 level
+ Total effect may be incomplete due to unanalyzed components

Table 3  Direct, Indirect and Total Effects on the Endogenous Variables
Joreskog and Sorbom (1993) was employed. The notion for measurement equivalence is that the measurement models are invariant across samples. This assumption refers to the invariance of factor loadings, factor correlations, and error variances and is accepted if the change in chi-square is nonsignificant (Byrne, 1995). To validate the measurement model across the three fan groups, invariance testing on factor loadings, factor correlations and error variances were computed (see Table 4). The measurement model (Model A) with the increased constraints fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 1402.6$ on 462 degrees of freedom, $\chi^2$/d.f. = 3, $p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.07). When comparing this model with measurement model B, which is without the constraint of factor loadings invariance, there is a significant chi-square difference at the .05 level and a nonsignificant change at the .01 level suggesting no differences in the factor loadings between the three data sets. Moreover, when the error variances are set free (Model C), the chi square difference between the Models B and C is significant, indicating differences in the error variances of the measurement model in the three groups. Finally, when the error variances are set free (Model C), the chi square difference between the Models A and C is not significant indicating that no differences exist in the factor loadings and the correlations of the measurement model in the three groups. The differences found in the error variances across three groups might be attributed to the large differences in their sample size. Thus, it seems efficient to use the parameters of the overall measurement model and no separate parameters need to be developed for each sample in the study.

**Testing the Mediation Effects of Team Attachment**

An additional analysis was conducted to test whether Team Attachment mediates the relationship between Involvement and Sponsorship Effectiveness (see Table 5). First, a model examining only the indirect effects of Involvement (via Team Attachment) on Sponsorship Effectiveness was tested. The analysis resulted in a chi square of 358.7 and 124 degrees of freedom. A second model was tested where both direct and indirect effects of Involvement on sponsorship effectiveness were accounted for. This model had a chi square value of 497.62 and 122 degrees of freedom. The chi square difference between the two models was statistically significant indicating that Team Attachment acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between Involvement and Sponsorship Effectiveness.

**Assessing the Rival Model**

The rival model (see Figure 2) presented a worse fit to the data with a chi square value of 669 and 127 degrees of freedom. The other fit indices were below the 0.90 threshold (AGFI = .79, CFI = .85), and the RMSEA (0.11) value exceeded acceptable limits. Moreover, when parsimony fit indices (PGFI and PNFI) were compared, the hypothesized model was found to be especially robust. The PGFI produced a value of 0.63 for the rival model, compared with a PGFI = 0.66 for the proposed model. The competing model’s PNFI (0.688) value was lower than the hypothesized model’s PNFI (0.74) value. The lower values of the competing model indicate a preference for the hypothesized model (Hair et al., 2006). The proposed model presented a better fit compared with the rival model.

**Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to test a hierarchy of effects model to assess the effects of team attachment, sponsor image, and attitude toward sponsorship on intentions to consume a sponsor’s products. First of all, the results indicated that the attraction dimension of involvement influences team attachment. Furthermore, the results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Model A</th>
<th>Model B</th>
<th>Model A-B</th>
<th>Model C</th>
<th>Model A-C</th>
<th>Model B-C</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$\chi^2$/d.f.</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1402.6</td>
<td>1459.5</td>
<td>56.9***</td>
<td>1372.7</td>
<td>29.9 (ns)</td>
<td>86.8*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>462</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td></td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model A-B</td>
<td>56.9***</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model A: Factor loadings, correlations and error variance invariant
Model B: Factor correlations and error variance invariant
Model C: Factor correlations invariant
* Indicates significant difference in the $\chi^2$ (p<.05)
** Indicates significant difference in the $\chi^2$ at the .05 level but not significant at the .01 level
ns: Indicates no significant difference in the $\chi^2$
provided support that the alternative hierarchy of effects model (affect, cognition and conation) can be applied in the context of sponsorship. Team attachment (affect) was shown to have both a direct and indirect relationship with behavioral intentions (conation) through its influence on sponsor image and attitudes toward sponsorship (cognition). Team attachment was shown to be a partial mediator of the relationship between involvement and behavioral intentions. These relationships are discussed below.

Activity Involvement and Team Attachment

As previously discussed, involvement is a primary determinant of consumer behavior (Lamb et al., 2004). In the current study we tested the influence of activity involvement on the development of team attachment, based on the findings reported in previous studies (e.g., Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009; Alexandris et al., 2007; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003; Lascu et al., 1995). The results of the current study provided support for the hypothesis that the attraction dimension of activity involvement does influence team attachment. A significant, direct link between the attraction dimension and team attachment was revealed, supporting Hypothesis 7. As previously discussed, attraction refers to the perceived importance that an activity holds for an individual and the interest, pleasure and enjoyment derived from the activity (Kyle et al., 2004). Individuals who perceive basketball as an interesting and pleasurable activity to watch are more likely to be characterized by a high level of attachment. The results, however, also indicated a negative relationship between the centrality dimension and team attachment, which means that Hypothesis 6 was rejected. This type of negative relationship was also reported by Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009), who interpreted it based on the nature of the sample. They argued that some fans (e.g., single ticket holders) might be highly involved with the activity itself and not attached to the specific team. This is an issue that merits further investigation.

The Determinants of Behavioral Intentions

As previously noted, we hypothesized that team attachment, which represents the affective stage of the hierarchy of effects model, would have both a direct and indirect influence on consumer behavioral intentions. Furthermore, we proposed the indirect effects would be through an influence on sponsor image and attitude toward sponsorship. The results confirmed this proposition. Team attachment was shown to have both a direct link with consumer behavioral intentions, providing support for Hypothesis 3, and an indirect link through its influence on sponsor image and attitude toward sponsorship. The direct influence of team attachment on consumer behavioral intentions is in line with the results reported by Wann and Branscombe (1993), who found that level of identification (attachment) did influence behavioral intentions and specific behaviors.

The results also indicated a direct relationship between team attachment and sponsor image, providing support for Hypothesis 4. There was also a direct relationship between team attachment and attitude toward sponsorship, providing support for Hypothesis 5. These results lead to the inference that consumers with a stronger attachment to their team are more likely to develop a positive image of a sponsor and a positive attitude toward sponsorship. The results confirm the findings from previous studies (e.g., Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2001; Meenaghan, 2001; Pope & Vöges, 1999), which have also reported a positive relationship between team attachment and sponsor image.

Sponsor Image and Attitude Toward Sponsorship

The results indicated that sponsor image had a strong direct effect on behavioral intentions, providing support for Hypothesis 1. This finding emphasizes the important role of sponsor image in sponsorship evaluation research,

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**Table 5 Testing the Mediating Effects of Team Attachment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Sponsorship Effectiveness</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>$\Delta\chi^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta$d.f.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Effects of Team Attachment</td>
<td>- Involvement (centrality)</td>
<td>Sponsor Image</td>
<td>358.7</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>138.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Involvement (attraction)</td>
<td>Attitudes Toward Sponsorship</td>
<td>497.6</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct and Indirect Effects of Team Attachment</td>
<td>- Involvement (centrality)</td>
<td>Sponsor Image</td>
<td>358.7</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>138.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Involvement (attraction)</td>
<td>Attitudes Toward Sponsorship</td>
<td>497.6</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant difference at the .001 level.
an idea which has been discussed by Meenaghan (2001) and Pope and Voges (1999). The results are consistent with the findings of Harvey et al. (2006), who reported that wherever sponsorship works, it produces a positive change in consumers’ perceptions about sponsorship, which can lead to favorable consumer behavioral intentions. These positive consumer perceptions about a sponsor and its products are developed in part on the basis of fans’ positive evaluation of the connection between the sponsor and the favorite team (Pope & Voges, 1999; Rajaretanam, 1994). This is known as the “transfer of goodwill” (Meenaghan, 2001).

Considering the results of the current study, it reasonable to consider that the “transfer of goodwill” in sponsorship functions through a twofold mechanism. The first mechanism refers to the indirect effects of affection through formed attitudes on conation. Consumers that are highly involved and consequently attached to a favorite team are likely aware of the benefits to their team resulting from sponsorship activity. The attached consumers are expected to form positive attitudes toward a specific sponsor of the team, and also sponsorship activity in general. The positive attitudes are expected to lead to positive behavioral intentions, which may manifest as positive word of mouth communications, and ultimately consumption of a sponsor’s product(s).

The second mechanism includes a direct effect of affection on conation. Team attachment alone can lead to positive behavioral intentions without any intervening factors. The magnitude of this relationship and consequently the impact of the direct effect, however, are smaller than the impact of the indirect effect. The two mechanisms may potentially be used to leverage a sponsorship and transform it into an efficient and effective marketing tool.

The results also indicated that the attitude toward sponsorship variable had a direct effect on the development of positive consumer behavioral intentions, providing support for Hypothesis 2. This finding supports the premise that sponsorship is an effective communication strategy because it is “subtle and indirect” (Meenaghan, 2001, p.101), and does not activate consumer defense mechanisms, in contrast to advertising which is perceived as “selfish” (Meenaghan, 2001, p.101). As previously discussed, the attitude toward sponsorship variable has been tested primarily in studies measuring sponsorship effectiveness in events and amateur leagues (e.g., Olympic Games, college athletics, etc.), where consumers’ negative perceptions regarding commercialization of such events has been shown to damage the phenomenon of “goodwill” (Alexandris et al., 2007). Considering the collective results of the current and previous research are mixed, additional research is merited to seek greater clarity regarding the impact of Attitude toward sponsorship.

In sum, the alternative hierarchy of effects model proposed and tested in the current study was shown to be useful for better understanding principal aspects of the sponsorship evaluation process. We supported the hierarchical effects by indicating that activity involvement and team attachment (affection stage) influences behavioral intentions, directly and indirectly, through its influences on sponsor image and attitude toward sponsorship.

Managerial Implications

The results have some clear managerial implications. First, marketers should target the attraction dimension of involvement by making basketball an attractive product. Strategies could be developed to improve consumers’ experiences before and during games. Pregame activities, such as exhibitions, shows, and parties are important elements of the basketball “experience” in the United States; however, such strategies have not been widely used in European basketball games (including Greece), where the actual game and its outcome (winning or losing) determines, to a large degree, the spectators’ experience. This issue might also be related to the different profile of spectators among US (families) and Greece (young and single individuals) professional basketball consumers. While empirical sponsorship research related to the role of team success on sponsorship effectiveness is limited, it is widely recognized by marketers that the winning record of a team is related to the spectators’ experience and sponsorship outcomes. Research, for example, conducted in the U.S. by Funk and James (2001) led to the conclusion that team success is an important variable impacting intention to buy team merchandise. The physical environment (stadium / arena) also plays an important role in the development of the involvement (attraction) dimension.

Marketers should also effectively communicate and promote the benefits of sponsorship for the team. Such information is essential if positive attitudes toward a sponsor are to be developed. Consumers have to regard the sponsor as a team partner that contributes to the achievement of the team’s objectives (financial and competitive). In this line, promotional strategies should be delivered in an on-going basis. Visa provides a good example of this point. As an Olympic sponsor Visa works in off years to remind consumers of its association with the Olympic Games by including the Olympic rings in various promotional pieces (http://www.adweek.com). There may not be a mention of the association, but the connection is subtly communicated. During years in which the Games are played, Visa utilizes promotional materials which explicitly announce the company’s sponsorship of the Games, and which point out the company’s contribution to making the games happen. Visa has done an excellent job promoting it’s sponsorship of the Olympic Games to increase consumer use of its financial services.

Marketers in professional sport leagues should also make efforts to avoid linking sponsorship with commercialization. It is possible that an inverted-U relationship between sponsorship promotion and sponsorship effectiveness exists in some cases. Too much promotion of the sponsor might lead consumers to link sponsorship with commercialization. Marketers should incorporate
sponsorship within corporate social responsibility policies, and include “social” objectives within sponsorship programs. It has become more common for companies to include sponsorship under their corporate social responsibility policies. Examples of social objectives could be the support of developmental leagues and youth sports, the promotion of basketball in schools and society, the organization of education seminars for healthy lifestyles, and the support of charitable events organized by the team and/or the league.

It has been proposed that team attachment is a relatively stable characteristic (Wann et al., 2001); subsequently, it can be used as a segmentation criterion. Consumers can be segmented according to their attachment level. Consider the results of the current study, consumers with a strong psychological connection are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward a sponsor. Subsequently, marketers should collect and use marketing research data to profile consumers of prospective sponsored teams to determine if a sponsorship program is related to positive attitudes toward a sponsor. Sponsorship of NASCAR teams provides a good example of how an organization may leverage sponsorship activity to reach consumers. The United States Army was interested in new ways to reach potential recruits. A review of the NASCAR fan demographics indicated that a higher percentage of young men attended NASCAR events (Gan, 2007). The U.S. Army first sponsored events at selected races as a means to connect directly with consumers. The Army’s investment grew to partial sponsorship of a racing team, which has led to a positive increase in annual recruitment numbers (Pate, 2008).

Finally, marketers should make efforts to increase attachment with the team. Increasing consumer involvement in team activities could achieve stronger levels of attachment. This can be achieved by persuading fans to participate in events organized by the marketing department of the team, such as pregame activities and competitions, developing interactive web-sites, and face books, distributing printed material (e.g., team magazine and newsletters), and communicating with the team’s players and the management of the team. Several of these strategies have been proposed (e.g., Sutton et al., 1997), and seem to be good ways to increase team attachment levels.

Limitations / Future Research

Recommendations

The sample size, the use of consumers of only one team and one sport are the main limitations of the study. Any attempts to generalize the findings should me made with caution.

Further verification of the model with more teams and/or different sports and leagues is required in order for us to be more confident in generalizing the findings. While sponsorship is a widely applied communication strategy internationally, the majority of sponsorship evaluation studies come from North America. Cross-cultural research could further help our understanding of the sponsorship evaluation process, since it seems that constructs that have been developed and applied in North American research are not always applicable in the European setting, without being adjusted (e.g., fan involvement, fan identity etc.). American collegiate sports and American professional leagues, for example, differ in many aspects from the European and national sport leagues. Adjusting these constructs and their measurement scales to the European sport market is necessary to build their validity and include them in sponsorship models.

The results of the study provided evidence that in the case of a hedonic product (sport), involvement acts as an antecedent of team attachment and sponsorship outcomes, supporting our alternative model (affect, cognition, and conation). Future studies, however, could further investigate the sequence of the three stages, based on different levels of fan involvement. It has been proposed in the general consumer behavior literature that that the level of involvement (high or low) might determine the sequence of the three stages (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Zaichkowsky, 1985). The level of fan involvement might be related to the sport activity in question (e.g., basketball, football, volleyball etc), but also the brand of the specific sport team and cultural aspects of the fans.

While the model tested in the current study was shown to be promising in understanding the sponsorship evaluation process, the inclusion of more variables as sponsorship antecedents and outcomes could further improve our understanding of consumers’ decision making processes.

Examples of antecedent variables include product relevance (Poon & Prendergast, 2006), knowledge about the sponsor (Roy & Cornwell, 2004), and familiarity with the sponsor (Carrillat et al., 2005), while examples of outcome variables include brand awareness (Harvey, 2001; Koo et al., 2006) and sponsor satisfaction (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). The notion of product relevance may also be thought of as the nature of a sponsorship or the fit between a sponsor and a sport property.

While the fit between the sponsor product and the image of the sport was not empirically tested in the presented study, it could be argued that, the current study’s “major” sponsor’s products (dairy) can be considered relevant with sports. Many dairy products (e.g., milk, yogurt, cheese, etc.) are associated with healthy and active lifestyles, and are an important part of an athlete’s diet (Fogelholm, 2003). It has been a very common strategy for dairy companies, internationally, to sponsor sporting events and teams. For example, two Greek dairy product companies were joint sponsors of the 2004 Olympic Games. Furthermore, the Yili Group, a leading dairy enterprise in China, was a sponsor of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The Yili Group also signed a sponsorship contract with the New York Yankees (Sports Business News, 2007). Another dairy company, Saputo, signed a $3 million partnership contract with the Organizing Committee of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Saputo was the Official Supplier of packaged...

Future research, however, should empirically investigate to what extent the nature of a sponsorship, or sponsor-property fit, may impact sponsor image and attitude toward sponsorship. For example, it makes sense for a tire manufacturer to sponsor auto racing. What about laundry soap or a candy bar? Does the nature of the sponsorship make sense to consumers and as a result impact sponsor image and attitude toward the sponsorship? Are the latter examples viewed merely as sponsors seeking commercial advantage and subsequently they experience less or no goodwill transfer? Future research should consider these possibilities.

Another point to consider with future research is our understanding of the development of team attachment, which was shown to be a key variable in the sponsorship process. While the one dimension of activity involvement (attraction) was shown to have a strong effect on team attachment, a relatively low proportion of the variance on team attachment was predicted by involvement. This shows the need for a further understanding of the development of team attachment. Funk and James (2006) proposed a revised version of the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) which includes a comprehensive means of exploring the structural processes and multilevel outcomes associated with an individual’s psychological connection to a sports team. The PCM is a tool for assessing how an individual forms a psychological connection with a sports team that may result in allegiance (or loyalty). The model may be used to determine what other sociological and psychological constructs beyond involvement may account for the variance in team attachment.

Another variable that should be considered due to the nature of sport is team success. Sport is defined in one sense by the element of competition and the fact that in any competition there is a winner and a loser. As noted by Funk and James (2001), some individuals may attend games or even buy team merchandise because a team is winning or successful. Following a winning team is one way to fit in with friends and peers. Team success as a factor is troublesome for marketing personnel because it is a factor which cannot be controlled. At the same time, it is worth examining the extent to which team success may influence team attachment. This is particularly important if we had a large enough sample to study consumers with low, moderate, and high team attachment. It would be very informative to learn whether team success is an important variable for the respective groups. Arguably team success would be most important to those with a low level of attachment, suggesting they are more interested in the band-wagon effect than forming an attachment based on other, personal elements. A counter example is the success of the team and sponsorship effectiveness for the Chicago Cubs. The “loveable losers” have historically maintained a strong level of attached fans and have a strong group of sponsors. It would be informative though, to actually gauge the importance of team success to team attachment.

A final issue that merits future research is the role of the attitude toward sponsorship variable. In the current study it was made clear that a positive attitude toward sponsorship lead to positive behavioral intentions. However, it has been reported (Alexandris et al., 1997) that consumers might form a negative attitude toward sponsorship if the sponsorship program creates perceptions that an event or organization has been commercialized. This implies an inverted-U relationship between sponsorship promotion and effectiveness. There might be a point after which, the positive effect of sponsorship might wear off, due to over promotion of a sponsor (e.g., too much branding of sport facilities). This is an issue that needs further investigation.

Taken together, the results from the current study provide initial empirical evidence supporting the alternative hierarchy of effects model. More specifically, the initial evidence suggests the model may be used to advance our understanding of sponsorship effectiveness, particularly the role of attitude. As noted, there are numerous opportunities for future research to advance both our knowledge and our ability to improve sponsorship effectiveness.

References


