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A model bridging team brand experience and sponsorship brand experience

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Abstract

Purpose: Previous research has focused on the antecedents of fan loyalty or the link between fans and the team on sponsorship reactions, but no comprehensive framework has been developed to combine these perspectives. The purpose of this study is to present an integrated framework of how team brand experience during the season impacts sponsorship brand experience.

Research methods: To create our conceptual model a comprehensive search of peer-reviewed articles was conducted in electronic databases and journal reference lists. We identified constructs from prior research aimed at understanding sponsorship effectiveness. These constructs not only included aspects of the sponsorship brand experience, but aspects within the team brand experience that form the link between consumers' responses derived from team-related stimuli and the responses evoked by sponsor-related stimuli.

Results and findings: This conceptual framework yields a set of 11 propositions regarding fans' interactions with both team and sponsorship brands highlighting how to strengthen the bond between fans, teams, and sponsors. It provides a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon and identifies opportunities to increase fan support and the appeal of professional teams to potential sponsors.

Implications: This study extends previous research by providing a unique conceptual framework that highlights the importance of understanding how fans view both the team brand and the sponsor brand. Several suggestions for future studies and strategies to increase the benefits for both teams and sponsors can be drawn from this framework.

Keywords: Sport; Fans; Team Brand Experience; Sponsorship Brand Experience.

Article classification: Conceptual paper

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Introduction

The International Events Group (IEG, 2016) projected \$60.2 billion of investments in global sponsorship in 2016, with approximately 70% being directed towards sport properties. While sponsors focus on properties that can deliver the best return on investment, sport sponsorships also contribute to generate substantial revenue for teams and leagues. For example, in the United States, the National Basketball Association generated \$799 million in sponsorship in the 2015-2016 season (IEG, 2015), while the British football team Manchester United has recently signed a seven-year deal with a car manufacturer worth \$559 million (Forbes, 2016). However, while sponsorship monies continue to increase for most teams and leagues, it is requisite for sport entities to show sponsors that it is a valuable investment. One way of doing that is to show that the sport entity has highly loyal fans willing to support the sponsors and purchase their products (Kaynak *et al.*, 2008). Sponsors invest in sports in hopes that the goodwill fans feel toward the team will be transferred to their brand via team-sponsor association (Madrigal, 2001). Extant studies suggest that fans' link to the team plays a vital role on sponsorship awareness (Wakefield and Bennett, 2010), attitude towards sponsors (Deitz *et al.*, 2012), purchase intentions, and ultimately increased sales (Crompton, 2004).

Knowing that fans are loyal is not sufficient though. Marketers need to know what aspects of fan experiences can influence individuals' loyalty and support of sponsors. In this sense, studies have focused on fan experiences at the stadium to understand how to strengthen their linkages towards the teams. Brand associations (Bauer *et al.*, 2008) and satisfaction with team games have been suggested to be vital predictors of fans' loyalty (Bodet and Bernarche-Assollant, 2011). While previous studies have focused separately on the antecedents of fan loyalty (Bauer *et al.*, 2008) or the link between the fans and the team on sponsorship reactions (Biscaia *et al.*, 2013a), to date no comprehensive framework has been developed combining

these perspectives to provide a global understanding of the importance of the team brand experience to the sponsorship brand experience. This is an important aspect to provide sport managers with a tool or road map on how to increase the effectiveness of sponsorship deals. As such, the purpose of this study is to present an integrated conceptual framework to aid in explaining how team brand experience can impact sponsorship brand experience. In doing so, this study reviews extant literature on sport fans, team brands, and sponsorship of sports to build a conceptual framework with a set of propositions aiming to guide future empirical studies and support managerial actions for increasing the benefits for both teams and sponsors.

Conceptual Framework

The success of a sport sponsorship deal depends to a large extent upon fans' linkages with the team and how they react to the sponsoring brands. Given that prior studies have either focused on fans' linkages with teams or with the sponsors, the development of a conceptual framework explaining fans' experiences with both the team and associated sponsors is therefore timely and warranted. Bridging team brand experience and sponsorship brand experience in a single model provides sport managers with a tool highlighting critical variables and linkages that should be nurtured to increase team attractiveness for sponsors, while also allowing sponsoring brands to better understand factors impacting positive return on their investment.

The proposed framework draws on a thorough review of the literature related to sport fans, team brands, and sponsorship of sports that was conducted in electronic databases such as EBSCO, JSTOR, and ProQuest. The searches included the analysis of article titles by considering terms related to sport fans' reactions to sport events properties (e.g., emotions, service quality, satisfaction, loyalty), team branding (e.g., brand associations or image, brand

experience, brand loyalty) and sport sponsorship effectiveness (e.g., awareness, goodwill, attitudes toward sponsor, purchase intentions). Other sources for identifying studies included manual cross-referencing of bibliographies cited in these articles (Teixeira *et al.*, 2015). More than 500 peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings and book chapters were identified in a first round of search. In the sake of parsimony, and considering the publication sources (e.g., impact factor), 86 were selected to develop this framework. There were no restrictions with respect to the format and age of the studies, as studies varied from 1978 to 2016.

Figure 1 depicts the proposed framework for understanding the linkages between team brand experience and sponsorship brand experience. In the team brand experience section we elaborate on how past team-related behaviour, team brand associations, and satisfaction influence attitudinal brand loyalty. Additionally, we explain how allegiance toward the team brand impacts fans' reactions to sponsors. In turn, the sponsorship brand experience section is focused on how past team-related behaviour impacts sponsorship awareness, which in turn makes it feasible for fans to assess the image fit between a sponsor and a sport team, the exclusivity/ubiquity of the sponsorship, and their impact on the perceived goodwill toward the sponsor. The interaction between these aspects of sponsorship and attitudinal brand loyalty impacts the attitude toward the sponsor, which in turn influences intention to purchase the sponsor's products and its actual purchase, moderated by constraints.

[Insert Figure 1 around here]

Team Brand Experience

The American Marketing Association (AMA, 2016) defines a brand as the “name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.” Thus, a brand may have many components, and for the purposes of

this paper, one of those components is the team itself. In addition, Brakus *et al.* (2009, p. 53) refer to brand experience as “subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments”. Accordingly, we define team brand experience as consumers’ internal and behavioural responses derived from team-related stimuli. For example, relative to FC Barcelona (Spain), team brand experience would include any interaction with the team (e.g., game experience), feelings and beliefs (e.g., sense of belonging and attractiveness of the stadium) associated with the team, and subsequent evaluations of these interactions. In sum, it includes all of the aspects that are depicted on the Team Brand Experience side (left side) of Figure 1.

Past Behaviour. Specific to sport, past behaviour can run the gamut from season ticket purchase, frequency of game attendance during a season or over time, participation in other team-related activities, regularity of following the team through media, engagement in team’s content on social media, and the number of years as a fan and/or club member (Shapiro *et al.*, 2013). However, not all past behaviour necessarily has the same relevance to all people. Some may be unable to attend due to geographical location, but may consume the product through media. Others may attend for business purposes, but suggesting that this represents behavioural “loyalty” may not be accurate. Furthermore, people may purchase team merchandise for others, which may not represent the purchasers’ affinity for the team. Generally though, as behaviours across categories increase, it is assumed that there is an affinity for, or positive attachment to, the team.

Understanding the role of fans’ actual team-related-behaviours on sponsorship reactions is pivotal to reinforcing the linkages between team and sponsor over time. Cornwell *et al.* (2005) suggest that as people are repeatedly exposed to a stimulus, they become aware of it

and will have an affective response. This can occur even when “impoverished-communication stimuli, such as simple brand logos, which are minimal by nature and cannot carry the wealth or quality of information that more complex communications can,” are used in “sponsorship-linked marketing situations” (Cornwell *et al.*, p. 23). Professional sport teams represent important sponsorship vehicles used by firms to communicate with actual and prospective consumers, and thus, fans who attend live games at the stadium are frequently exposed to team sponsors (Biscaia *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the emotional context experienced by fans when attending team matches has been suggested to influence how attentive they are to the overall sports environment including sponsors (Santomier, 2008). For example, Maxwell and Lough (2009) noted that the number of home games attended increases the ability to identify the sponsors, while Biscaia *et al.* (2013a) reported that sponsorship awareness was positively influenced by fans’ behavioural loyalty. Thus, we propose that:

P1: A fan’s past behaviour relative to the team will impact sponsorship awareness.

Past consumption behaviour relative to the team can also be an important driver for the development of team brand associations (Ross *et al.*, 2008). Kapferer (2004) noted that the power of a brand is the actual product or service, combined with all sources of cumulative brand experience, while Berry (2002) mentioned that the experience with the service provider is a primary influencer for customer perceptions. Acknowledging the experiential nature of spectator sports, Ross (2006) developed a conceptual framework in which fans’ prior experiences with the team assumed a pivotal role in the development of brand associations. The rationale for this assumption is based on the fact that sport fans are often emotionally involved when attending their team games (Biscaia *et al.*, 2012), and thus, past behaviours represent a critical aspect to understanding fans’ perceptions towards the team brand. Consistent with this idea, Yoshida *et al.* (2015) noted that attendance frequency was

significantly related to the way baseball fans perceive their team's brand. Romaniuk and Nenez-Thiel (2013) further noted that a consumer's purchase frequency was related to his/her brand associations. Furthermore, Trail *et al.* (2016) noted that past attendance was directly linked to the way fans feel towards their teams, while Shapiro *et al.* (2013) found that past behaviours were significantly related to future loyalty manifestations towards the team. Overall, these results indicate support for our proposed model in that it is probable that past behaviours affect brand associations and subsequent responses towards the team, which we will endeavour to establish below. Thus, based on the above discussion, we propose that:

P2: A fan's past behaviour will impact team brand associations, which in turn is an important aspect leading to an increase in attitudinal loyalty.

Brand Associations

Brand associations are the thoughts associated with a particular product or service (Aaker, 1991). Following service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), all exchanges between organizations and society are based on service with goods representing service-delivery vehicles. Thus, for the purposes of the current study we define the whole experience as a service. Two dimensions of the sport service are the core and peripheral service offerings (Byon *et al.*, 2013). In spectator sport, the core dimension is the competition itself and the experience of attending the contest, while the peripheral dimension includes all the non-game experiences such as the brand benefits and other points of attachment (Lee *et al.*, 2009) not directly linked to the match day. Both perspectives contribute to the generation of brand associations. In the sport domain, researchers have proposed various types of associations (Ross *et al.*, 2008; Gladden and Funk, 2002), yet there is no universally accepted view of how these associations can be categorized. In the proposed model, two broad categories of associations are identified: attendance associations and non-attendance associations.

Attendance Associations. Attendance associations refer to the thoughts that are linked to the match day, formed through actual attendance interactions, and can include a variety of dimensions that may be derived from game-day attendance. The evaluation of team and player performance is a critical aspect of game-day attendance, and represents a strong mental association towards teams (Ross *et al.*, 2008). Other traditional service quality dimensions such as interactions with frontline employees, social interaction with other attendees, and pre- and post-game entertainment could all impact the associations held by consumers (Gladden and Funk, 2002). The emotions experienced from attending an event, as well as some sensory aspects linked to the visual appeal and the atmosphere inside the stadium, would also contribute to the overall perception of the brand (Couvlaere and Richelieu, 2005), and potentially create strong, unique associations influencing consumers' satisfaction with the team (Biscaia *et al.*, 2012). As noted by Andreassen and Lindestad (1998), a positive perception of the brand tends to create a halo effect on customers' overall satisfaction judgments, and Biscaia *et al.* (2013b) noted that team brand associations in general were positively related with overall satisfaction. Furthermore, Brakus *et al.* (2009) noted that brand experience affects consumer satisfaction. On the basis of previous literature, we propose that:

P3a: Attendance associations will impact overall satisfaction.

Non-Attendance Associations. Non-attendance associations refer to all other thoughts that are formed by interactions independent of actual game attendance. These associations may include a wide spectrum of benefits related to supporting a team (e.g., social acceptance), motives for consumption (e.g., escape), and intangible attributes (e.g., logo). Research has shown the importance of star players, the head coach, and management as potential brand associations linked to a sport organization (Gladden and Funk, 2002). Other intangible non-

attendance associations such as logo and the colours of the team brand are often some of the strongest brand associations (Ross *et al.*, 2008), while the tradition surrounding the team has also been suggested as a strong basis of brand association development (Gladden and Funk, 2002). Recent studies have also highlighted that the identification with a fan community is vital in the development of a team's brand (Yoshida *et al.*, 2015). Team brand associations play a role in satisfaction with the service (Biscaia *et al.*, 2013b) and there is general consensus that a myriad of dimensions contribute to satisfaction. That is, consumer perceptions regarding different service features tend to represent a source of overall satisfaction (Oliver, 1993). Thus, we propose that:

P3b: Non-attendance associations will impact overall satisfaction.

Overall Satisfaction. Consumer satisfaction refers to a pleasurable fulfilment response towards a good, service, benefit or reward (Oliver, 1993). Consistently, consumer satisfaction has been described as a summary of cognitive and affective reactions regarding service encounters (Martin *et al.*, 2008). Consumer satisfaction is experiential and depends on a consumer's subjective perceptions of service performance rather than the organization's objective standards of quality (Greenwell *et al.*, 2002). Complementarily, satisfaction can be examined from a global perspective or from a transaction-specific perspective (Jones and Suh, 2000). Transaction-specific satisfaction refers to the evaluation of a particular service encounter or a specific product, and is deemed appropriate when the focus is to understand variability associated with service delivery (Bodet and Bernarche-Assollant, 2011) or a specific product. In turn, global satisfaction refers to the cumulative evaluation of all service encounters over the time or all aspects of the product, and has been suggested to be more relevant for understanding consumer loyalty (Jones and Suh, 2000). Overall attendance satisfaction in sport settings often refers to the fans' experience resulting from attendance

during the season (Biscaia *et al.*, 2012), but we are defining overall satisfaction more broadly as the satisfaction with both attendance and non-attendance associations.

Considering Oliver's (1993) satisfaction theory, it seems reasonable to assume that as an individual is more satisfied with all of the multitudinous brand associations (both attendance and non-attendance) represented by satisfaction, he/she will increase in attitudinal loyalty to the brand. In the sport and leisure context, there is an extensive body of literature highlighting that satisfied fans are more likely to remain loyal to their teams (Van Leeweun *et al.*, 2002; McDonald and Shaw, 2005). For example, Kwak *et al.* (2012) found that satisfaction influenced (hedonic) attitude toward the brand in FIFA soccer video games. Similarly, Lee *et al.* (2007) found that satisfaction influenced attitudinal loyalty, while Trail *et al.* (2005) found that satisfaction impacted fans' loyalty through increased positive intentions towards the team. In sum, this information provides support for our next proposition:

P4: Overall satisfaction will impact fans' attitudinal brand loyalty.

Attitudinal Brand Loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty in general has been defined as a deep desire to maintain a relationship with a product or brand (Kaynak *et al.*, 2008) and as Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) noted, it is a preference and commitment to a brand or product. Oliver (1999, p. 35) calls affective loyalty a "liking or attitude toward the brand" that consists of both cognition and affect. Within sport, attitudinal loyalty can be described as a fan's commitment and positive attitudinal preference toward a team (Kaynak *et al.*, 2008). Attitudinal elements are important to discriminate between spurious and true loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994), and to understand how to maintain a fan base in increasingly competitive environments. Oliver (1999) suggests that attitudinal loyalty toward the brand often translates into an intention to buy the brand in the future. It means that an individual with a strong attitude toward the team tends to engage in purchase behaviours in multiple occasions over time (Kaynak *et al.*, 2008).

For example, a fan's attitudinal loyalty towards FC Barcelona may lead him/her to join paid-member clubs, attend games, buy merchandise, consume media about the team or wear the team jersey. As such, the examination of attitudinal loyalty is a key aspect of the team brand experience and will aid sport managers in better understanding current and historical consumption behaviours of fans.

In addition, based on the premise that goodwill toward the team can be transferred to the sponsors' brands or products via team-sponsor association (Madrigal, 2001), numerous studies have suggested that a fan's attitudinal link with the team brand contributes to enhance attitude towards the sponsor (Meenaghan, 2001). For example, Dees *et al.* (2010) found that attitude toward the team was correlated with attitude toward the sponsor, while Parker and Fink (2010) noted that highly identified fans were more favourable toward the sponsor than lowly identified fans. Also, Biscaia *et al.* (2013a) found that attitudinal loyalty (toward the team) predicted attitude toward the sponsor in two different samples. Drawing on previous literature, it is proposed in the current framework that:

P5: Attitudinal team brand loyalty will impact attitude toward the sponsoring brand.

Sponsorship Brand Experience

Sponsorship of sports is a dominant component of marketing investments, and it is now common to see corporations' logos in facilities, league websites, and other sport-related places (Chadwick and Thwaites, 2004; Walliser, 2003). According to Cornwell (1995, p. 15), sponsorship-linked marketing can be defined as "the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the purpose of building and communicating an association to a sponsorship". It means that a sponsorship involves an exchange between a sponsor and a sponsee for mutual benefits (Cornwell, 2008; Lamont *et al.*, 2011). While the sport entity

earns the monetary support and/or other in-kind fees, the sponsor obtains the tangible and intangible benefits of being associated with the team (Yang *et al.*, 2008).

It has been suggested that the more a fan is attached to a team, the greater the propensity the fan has to purchase the sponsor's products (Crimmins and Horn, 1996). However, the relationship between team loyalty and purchase behaviour of the sponsor's product tends to be more complex, and seems to be the culmination of a process that may have started with other stages before the actual purchase (Crompton, 2004). Based on previous literature, the current framework proposes that past team brand experience impacts the sponsorship brand experience at several points in time (Figure 1). In the current study, we use Brakus *et al.*'s (2009) definition of sponsorship brand experience as consumers' internal and behavioural responses evoked by sponsor brand-related stimuli that are part of a sponsor brand's logo, communications, promotional activities, and hospitality environments. We describe each aspect of the sponsorship-brand experience and relationships that will impact the actual purchase of the sponsor's product.

Sponsorship Awareness. Keller (1993) refers to brand awareness as the consumer's ability to identify the brand under different conditions, consisting of brand recall and recognition performance. Brand recall is the consumer's ability to remember the brand name without any mention of product category or other brands, while brand recognition is the ability to remember past exposure to a brand when given a list of brands as a cue (Aaker, 1991). In this sense, sponsorship awareness in professional sports can be defined as fans' familiarity with the team sponsors, being expressed through correct recall and recognition.

Yang *et al.* (2008) noted that seeing a sponsor's name associated with a team or event on a regular basis reinforces the product-sport relationship in consumers' mind, while Wakefield and Bennett (2010) suggested that consumers with more knowledge about the sport properties

tend to process more sponsorship information. As noted earlier, prior studies have noted that sponsorship awareness is typically higher for fans who exhibit consistent attendance behaviours towards the team or event (Biscaia *et al.*, 2013a). Notwithstanding, it is important to consider that within cluttered environments (such as sport leagues) in which fans are regularly exposed to multiple sponsors, the ability to identify a brand as a sponsor may be subject to distortion (McAlister *et al.*, 2012). It means that aspects such as fans' familiarity with the sponsor brand and its products (Campbell and Keller, 2003), market prominence of the sponsor (Pham and Johar, 2011) or leverage activities (Nickell *et al.*, 2011) may play a moderator role in the relationship between past team-related behaviour and sponsorship awareness.

Madrigal (2001) suggested that awareness is the initial stage of a continuum of fans' responses that can lead to their purchase intentions and actual purchase. Similarly, Biscaia *et al.* (2013a) noted that sponsorship awareness plays an indirect role on purchase intentions (of the sponsor's product) via increased positive attitudes toward the sponsor. Thus, drawing on the aforementioned research, in the current framework, sponsorship awareness is a requisite precursor to perceived image fit and ubiquity of the sponsor, as well as attitude towards the sponsor. That is, awareness of the sponsorship must exist before an individual can evaluate the fit of the team with the sponsor and the ubiquity of the sponsor, as well as before developing an attitude toward the sponsor. However, awareness of the sponsorship is either present or absent; there is not necessarily a 'degree' of awareness. Thus, no linear relationship can be proposed between awareness and subsequent outcome variables. It must exist, but 'more' awareness does not create a greater positive attitude toward the sponsor.

Sponsor-Team Fit. The idea of fit (also called match, relatedness, or similarity) between a sponsor and an event or team has been widely studied in sponsorship research (Cornwell *et*

al., 2005; Olson, 2010). Viewed broadly, fit is defined as a strategic match between sponsoring firms and sponsored events/objects in business, mission, target audience, geographic location, image, and/or values (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006; Zdravkovic *et al.*, 2010). To date, researchers have conceptualized fit from the consumer's perspective (Speed and Thompson, 2000). For example, Mazodier and Merunka (2012, p. 808) define sponsor-event fit as "the perception by spectators or participants determines the degree to which sponsors and the event match, belong to the same world, or seem likely to engage in joint business or communication efforts".

Perceptions of fit can emanate from numerous characteristics (Pappu and Cornwell, 2014) and consequently, there is not one type of brand relationship but a portfolio of brand relationships between the consumer and the brand for which the associations are held (Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013). The fit between a sponsor and a sport property has often been operationalized based on the research by Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) where fit can be derived from the mission, products, markets, technologies, attributes, brand concepts, or any other key association (Bridges *et al.*, 2000). Given that consumers can have a large collection of unique brand perceptions derived from numerous origins (including beyond the team itself), the proposed model acknowledges the importance of the team but does not include a direct link from brand associations to sponsor-team fit.

Regardless of conceptualization, a significant body of previous research has shown that the fit between a sponsor and a sport property has a positive effect on consumer attitudes toward the sponsor (Gwinner and Bennett, 2008; Kim *et al.*, 2015) and intention to use the sponsor's product (Speed and Thompson, 2000). However, Olson (2010) found that perceived goodwill exists as an intervening variable in the relationship between sponsor-object fit and consumer attitudes toward the sponsorship. In addition, Kim *et al.* (2011) demonstrated that perceived goodwill fully mediates the relationship between consumers' relational associations with a

sport team and their attitudes toward the sponsor. The underlying rationale is provided by Rifon *et al.* (2004) who suggested that there will be a greater presence of altruistic sponsor motives under high sponsor-object fit conditions because sponsor-object fit minimizes consumers' scepticism about sponsors' motives and facilitates the acceptance of the sponsorship. This is particularly important in the context of sport, given that sponsors expect to become members of a tight network of fans once the relationship is established (Kim *et al.*, 2015; Parker and Fink, 2010). Thus, we propose that:

P6: A fan's perception of sponsor-team fit will impact perceived goodwill.

Exclusivity/Ubiquity of the Sponsor. Due to the success of sponsorship as a brand building tool, the use of a single sponsorship (exclusivity) is becoming rare (Chien *et al.*, 2011). For example, the Real Madrid's soccer team had 13 corporate sponsors during the 2013/2014 season (Real Madrid, 2014). Today, corporate sponsors often engage in numerous sponsorship deals simultaneously (ubiquity), and sponsored properties tend to have a portfolio of several sponsoring firms. For example, Emirates has a portfolio of football sponsorships that includes agreements with FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation, as well as some European clubs such as the Arsenal FC (England) and Real Madrid (Spain) among others (Emirates, 2014). These figures suggest that sport consumers are often exposed to several sponsors simultaneously inside the stadium, and their responses to those brands may be ambivalent (Roy and Cornwell, 2004).

Chien *et al.* (2011) suggested that although a brand may have reasons to develop a diverse portfolio of sponsorships (ubiquity), pursuing this objective may expose the brand to risks that may weaken sport consumers' perception of the brand. For example, Davies *et al.* (2006) noted that sponsorship that is effective in associating with a particular team may alienate opposition fans against the sponsor. Similarly, Deitz *et al.* (2012) suggested that exclusivity is

a valuable component of an effective sponsorship because sponsors with multiple sponsorship deals may be perceived as being opportunistic, leading fans to develop a poor perception of the sponsor as compared to those who only sponsor their favourite team (Rifon *et al.*, 2004). Also, Speed and Thompson (2000) note that firms with multiple sponsorship deals tend to be perceived as less committed, and thus have lower credibility among fans. In fact, those authors observed that perceived ubiquity of the sponsors led to negative consumer reactions, which could include lowered perceptions of goodwill toward the sponsor and negative attitudes toward the sponsor. Drawing on this research, we propose that:

P7: A fan's perception of exclusivity or ubiquity of the sponsor will have a positive or negative impact (respectively) on perceived goodwill.

Perceived Goodwill. Perceived goodwill is defined as consumers' perceptions of the degree to which sponsors are sincere and motivated by philanthropy in their sponsorship (Speed and Thompson, 2000). Previous researchers (e.g., Kim *et al.*, 2011; Olson, 2010) have suggested that a consumer's perception of sponsor goodwill will lead to an increased positive attitude toward the sponsor. The rationale being that consumers will be more likely to have a favourable perception of a sponsor's prosocial motives and show a positive attitude toward the sponsor when consumers perceive the sponsor and event fit well (Rifon *et al.*, 2004). However, even though previous research suggests a direct relationship from perceived goodwill to attitude toward the sponsor, because we propose that attitudinal brand loyalty will also impact attitude toward the sponsor (Figure 1), we argue that perceived goodwill will interact with attitudinal brand loyalty to influence the attitude toward a sponsor. That is, a positive attitude toward the sponsor will result not just from the perceived goodwill, but also from the attitudinal brand loyalty. Thus, we propose that:

P8: A sponsor's goodwill interacts with attitudinal loyalty toward a sport team to influence attitude toward the sponsor. In addition, perceived goodwill mediates the relationship between sponsor event/team fit and exclusivity to this interaction.

Attitude toward the Sponsor. An attitude can be formed through direct experiences with an entity or exposure to knowledge and messages (Albarracin *et al.*, 2005), and it is commonly defined as a "psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). In the sport sponsorship domain, Madrigal (2001) noted that a psychological tendency represents a type of bias that predisposes the consumer to evaluate the sponsor either in a positive or negative direction. Therefore, an attitude towards a sponsor represents the consumer's overall evaluation of the brand sponsoring the team or event (Keller, 2003).

It is often suggested that the development of a positive attitude towards the sponsor is vital for increasing sponsorship effectiveness (e.g., Alexandris *et al.*, 2012; Gwinner and Bennett, 2008) because when attitudes are formed they can have a strong impact on consumer behaviour (Dees *et al.*, 2008; Meenaghan, 2001). Consumers tend to develop positive attitudes towards the sponsor when they feel the sponsorship is valuable for the property (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). For example, if a fan believes that sponsorship reduces the team's operating expenses, resulting in lower ticket prices, this belief may lead him/her to create a positive attitude towards the sponsor (Madrigal, 2001). In fact, Biscaia *et al.* (2013a) conducted a study with two different sponsors of a professional team and noted the attitude towards the sponsor was the strongest predictor of purchase intentions for both sponsors. Also, Meenaghan (2001) presented a model for understanding sponsorship effects highlighting that a positive attitude towards the sponsor is vital to guide fans' actual purchase behaviours of the sponsors' products. Drawing on these studies, we propose that:

P9: Attitude towards the sponsor will impact the intention to purchase sponsor's products and subsequent actual purchase behaviours.

Intentions to Purchase Sponsor Products. As noted by Crompton (2004), the intent-to-purchase is perhaps the most useful indicator of the impact of sponsorship on future sales. While purchase intention is not the same as an actual purchase behaviour, consumers' intentions are critical in guiding their behaviours (Ajzen, 1991, Cheng *et al.*, 2012). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) represents the foundation for this proposition and suggests that a behavioural intention is indicative on how much a person is willing to attempt a particular behaviour. Similarly, Norman *et al.* (2005) suggested that individuals with strong behavioural intentions are likely to be motivated to perform a behaviour, and to expend greater effort to achieve their goals.

In sport sponsorship, Dees *et al.* (2008) suggested that a purchase intention represents an indicator of a fan's motivation to purchase the sponsor's products and Madrigal (2001) argued that actual purchase behaviour can be predicted with accuracy through an individual's intentions. This assumption is also highlighted by Crompton (2004) in his framework for assessing sport sponsorship effectiveness. Based on the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), behavioural intentions represent the link between a person's attitude toward an object and their resulting behaviour. Thus, we propose that:

P10: Intentions to purchase sponsor's products will impact actual purchase behaviour of these products.

Constraints to Sponsorship Consumption. Even though a purchase intention is often considered a key driver of actual purchase behaviour (Cheng *et al.*, 2012; Dees *et al.*, 2008), barriers, obstacles, or constraints to actual purchasing of the sponsor's product may exist.

Oliver (1999) suggested that obstacles can occur at different stages of the relationship with brands, and researchers in sport and leisure contexts have typically labelled these obstacles using the term ‘constraints’ (e.g., Kim and Trail, 2010). Constraints may impact a variety of relationships depicted in Figure 1, however we focus on the impact that constraints may have on the relationship between purchase intentions and actual purchase of sponsor products.

Building on the work of researchers from the business, economic, and leisure literature (e.g., Crompton *et al.*, 2005), Kim and Trail (2010, p. 191) defined constraints within sport as “factors that impede or inhibit an individual from attending a sport event”. However, in terms of consuming a brand, that definition is too limiting, and thus, for the purposes of the current study, we define a constraint as any factor that impedes or inhibits an individual from consuming any aspect of a brand. In addition, constraints can be both internal (i.e., internal psychological cognitions that deter behaviour) and external (i.e., social or environmental aspects that prevent or decrease the likelihood to perform the behaviour) to the individual (Kim and Trail, 2010). Internal constraints could include aspects such as lack of knowledge about where to purchase the sponsor’s product, perceived lack of interest from invested others in purchasing the product, or lack of need of the sponsor’s product. External constraints could include, for example cost of sponsor’s product or lack of availability of sponsor’s product.

As noted by Baron and Kenney (1986), moderators might exist when expected relationships are unexpectedly less than anticipated, which implies that there might be moderators between intentions to purchase a product and its actual purchase. For example, although the individual may intend on purchasing the sponsors product, some intervening factor may prevent the actual purchase (e.g., product not available, high cost, lack of need for that particular product, preference for an alternative product, lack of popularity of product). Unfortunately, little research has tested constraints as moderators and the few studies on this topic have found a modest moderating effect on a variety of relationships (e.g., Adkins and

Naumann, 2001). In addition, as far as we could ascertain, no research in the sport sponsorship field has investigated constraints as moderators. However, there is considerable research indicating that constraints do impact either behaviour or behavioural intentions in the leisure and sport area (e.g., Jun and Kyle, 2011; Kim and Trail, 2010). Based on the aforementioned research and theory, we propose the following:

P11: Constraints will moderate the relationship between the intention to purchase sponsor's products and the actual purchase of these products.

Actual Purchase of Sponsor Products. From the sponsor's perspective, the impact that a sponsorship has on sales is the most desirable measure to understand sponsorship effectiveness (Crompton, 2004). There are a number of benefits that companies pursue when engaging in a sponsorship deal (see Biscaia *et al.*, 2013a), but the ultimate aim is to orient consumers to purchase sponsors' products (Barros and Silvestre, 2006). Santomier (2008) argued that sponsoring brands use the emotional impact of sport to connect with the consumers. This suggests that in the absence of tangible differences between products and potential constraints, sponsorship may contribute to gain those consumers who have an emotional bond with the event or team (Deitz *et al.*, 2012). Thus, actual purchase behaviour represents the final indicator of the current framework, since it is commonly accepted as the ultimate goal for assessing the return on the investment made by companies engaged in sponsorship deals (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Crompton, 2004).

Conclusions and Implications

By focusing simultaneously on both the team brand experience and the sponsorship brand experience, this study offers a conceptual framework for understanding how to increase fans' loyalty towards their teams and strengthen the link with sponsors that summarizes and

extends previous research on these topics. A conceptual framework presents a simplified view of a complex reality and may act as a road map to guide empirical inquiry (Lamont *et al.*, 2011). The key contribution of this study is the creation of a framework supported by theory and research that can be used by both sport teams and actual or potential sponsors to understand how to increase the effectiveness of the sponsorship deal. The implications of this study are that using this framework can aid sport organizations to show sponsors which aspects increase awareness and interest in sponsor products, and ultimately increase sales, both in the short and long term.

To date, there is a dearth of research focusing simultaneously on fans' experiences with the team and associated sponsors. This framework is unique in that it highlights the importance of understanding how fans view both the team brand and the sponsor brand, and provides a set of propositions that collectively allows a comprehensive understanding of how to increase the bond between fans, teams, and sponsors. Our proposed framework places an emphasis on fans' past team-related behaviours, highlighting that professional sport teams should place attention on delivering memorable services to generate favourable mental associations that lead to satisfactory evaluations of the team brand among consumers and subsequent increased loyalty. An important aspect is that, rather than using service quality as a specific type of brand association (Ross, 2006) and/or to build upon categorizations originally designed for different industries (i.e. attributes, benefits and attitudes; Keller, 1993), the current framework builds on the sport context and proposes attendance associations (e.g., team performance) and non-attendance associations (e.g., logo) as two broad categories of team brand associations.

The central component of this framework is the fan's experience with the team brand, including past behaviours, brand associations, satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty. This team brand experience plays a key role at enhancing a consumer's experience with the sponsorship brand, and is reflected through a continuum of reactions that often starts with sponsorship

awareness and ultimately to increases in actual purchases of the sponsor's products. Consumer loyalty towards the team brand is the cornerstone for major sources of revenue, given that the number of fans and their spending impacts sales and the interest of media and sponsors (Bee and Havitz, 2010). Thus, to generate benefits for both parties, professional sport teams and sponsors should create dynamic relationships by working together to increase attendance, provide good service delivery, and demonstrate the value of the sponsorship to the fans. To facilitate these endeavours, sponsors and sport organisations need to create linkages between team fans and sponsor products (e.g., exclusive products for spectators), work together to attract fans to sponsored events (Biscaia *et al.*, 2014), and encourage use of game tickets as vouchers for obtaining discounts on sponsor products. Complementary events to the match itself such as pre-game or half-time contests, social events before or after the game, could also be designed in partnership by sponsor and sponsee to demonstrate their commitment to fans. In addition, sport teams should reinforce the sponsors' legitimacy and importance to their success both on and off the field, in all marketing communications. Nevertheless, it is important to be cognizant of constraints that may have a potential negative impact on a fan's actual behaviours toward the sponsors or even the team. For example, a fan may demonstrate high levels of attitudinal loyalty towards the team but may not be able to attend games due professional commitments or financial issues. Therefore, in addition to creating quality consumption experiences, sport clubs and sponsors should invest resources to identify constraints of potential consumers and develop strategies to reduce these barriers. Furthermore, sponsorship objectives are frequently related to creating a climate conducive to the development of sales in the future rather than to stimulate immediate sales (Crompton, 2004). As mentioned in earlier sections, it is important to highlight that sponsorship effectiveness cannot be uniquely attributed to the sponsored team and its fans. For example, prominent brands (e.g., Coca-Cola and Nike) are more likely to be identified as an event or

team sponsor than less prominent brands (e.g., Dr. Pepper and Converse) because they are more accessible in memory and perceived as more plausible sponsors due to resource availability (Pham and Johar, 2001). Thus, sponsors should invest greatly in leveraging activities to succeed in differentiating themselves from competitors (Cornwell *et al.*, 2001; Weeks *et al.*, 2008). As noted by Crimmins and Horn (1996), without an investment in leveraging the sponsorship, solely association won't be sufficient to attain marketing goals. Thus, strategies such as public relations activities, internet tie-ins, direct marketing, hospitality, product sampling or exclusive offers at the stadium may prove to be important for reinforcing the sponsor's link with the sport property and increasing fans' familiarity with their products or services, thus promoting a competitive edge.

It is also important to note that, even though this framework proposes indirect relationships between variables, some direct relationships may also exist that are not depicted in the model, and sport managers should be aware of such relationships. For example, brand associations may also be directly linked to team brand loyalty (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Ross, 2006). Also, fans' reactions to the sponsors may be influenced by other aspects not directly related to the team such as media communications, market prominence of the sponsor (Wakefield *et al.*, 2007) or sponsorship leveraging (McAlister *et al.*, 2012), while team brand associations may be affected by the sponsor brand and vice-versa (Bauer *et al.*, 2008). However, due to the complex nature of the relationships between fans, teams, and sponsors, and in the interest of parsimony, we focused on the relationships that had the most prior research support for explaining fans' responses to both team brand and sponsorship brand. In addition, including all paths (direct and indirect, and moderating) suggested in the literature would create a model with too much complexity, which would be empirically unverifiable. Thus, this proposed framework brings together important variables in a single model with the aim of understanding how to create a stronger link between fans, teams and sponsors. The

framework highlights the role of understanding how fans view both the team brand and the sponsor brand, and identifies opportunities for sport managers to influence fan support and make professional teams more appealing to potential sponsors. In sum, the proposed model represents a first attempt to explain the complex relationships between fans, teams, and sponsors, and highlights a number of factors that should be managed and monitored by teams and sponsors in order to potentiate a win-win situation.

Research Directions

With the current framework as a basis, some research directions can be offered. The most important suggestion for future research would be to empirically examine the proposed relationships. As noted by Wood *et al.* (2008), the interaction between two latent variables may influence the predictive effect of each of these variables. Even though the current framework is based on solid theoretical foundations, an empirical examination with the proposed variables in a single model may prove to be an essential step to further refine this framework and increase our understanding of how to improve the links among fans, teams, and sponsors. Empirical testing could be conducted through a two-stage longitudinal study (first, team brand experience; second, sponsorship brand experience) in order to contribute to a more parsimonious model explaining fans' interactions with both team and sponsor brands. Alternatively, utilizing strict criteria of participant selection by only including those who exhibit past behaviours towards their teams and correctly identify the sponsor(s) would eliminate the need to measure some constructs on both sides of the model (i.e., team brand experience and sponsorship brand experience), and thus lead to enhance the feasibility of the model. Future research could also empirically examine these relationships in different countries, as previous studies suggest that brand perceptions tend to vary across cultural settings (Biscaia *et al.*, 2013b). Furthermore, it is important to note that not all sports and

leagues have the same attractiveness for sponsors (e.g., youth and mainstream sports). The development of cross-national studies may contribute to understanding the generalizability of the model to different sports and cultures.

Examining the proposed relationships during different points of the season or comparing the model using fans from “star teams” and “underdogs” would be a fruitful research line as well. Chadwick and Thwaites (2004) suggest that sponsors hope to equate the on-field success with the sponsorship success. Thus, the team performance in the competitions may represent an important variable for future research to further understand fans’ reactions to team and sponsor brands. Finally, it is important to highlight that future research should focus on actual sponsors of the teams rather than generic sponsors, given that professional teams rely on multiple sponsorship sources, and previous studies have shown that fans tend to have different reactions to each of the sponsors of the team (Biscaia *et al.*, 2013a). In sum, we believe that this framework emphasises the need for a simultaneous approach of fans’ experiences with both the team brand and sponsor brand, and provides a comprehensive starting point for future empirical studies. We hope that in turn, those empirical examinations of this model will provide greater practical benefits for sport organizations and their sponsors.

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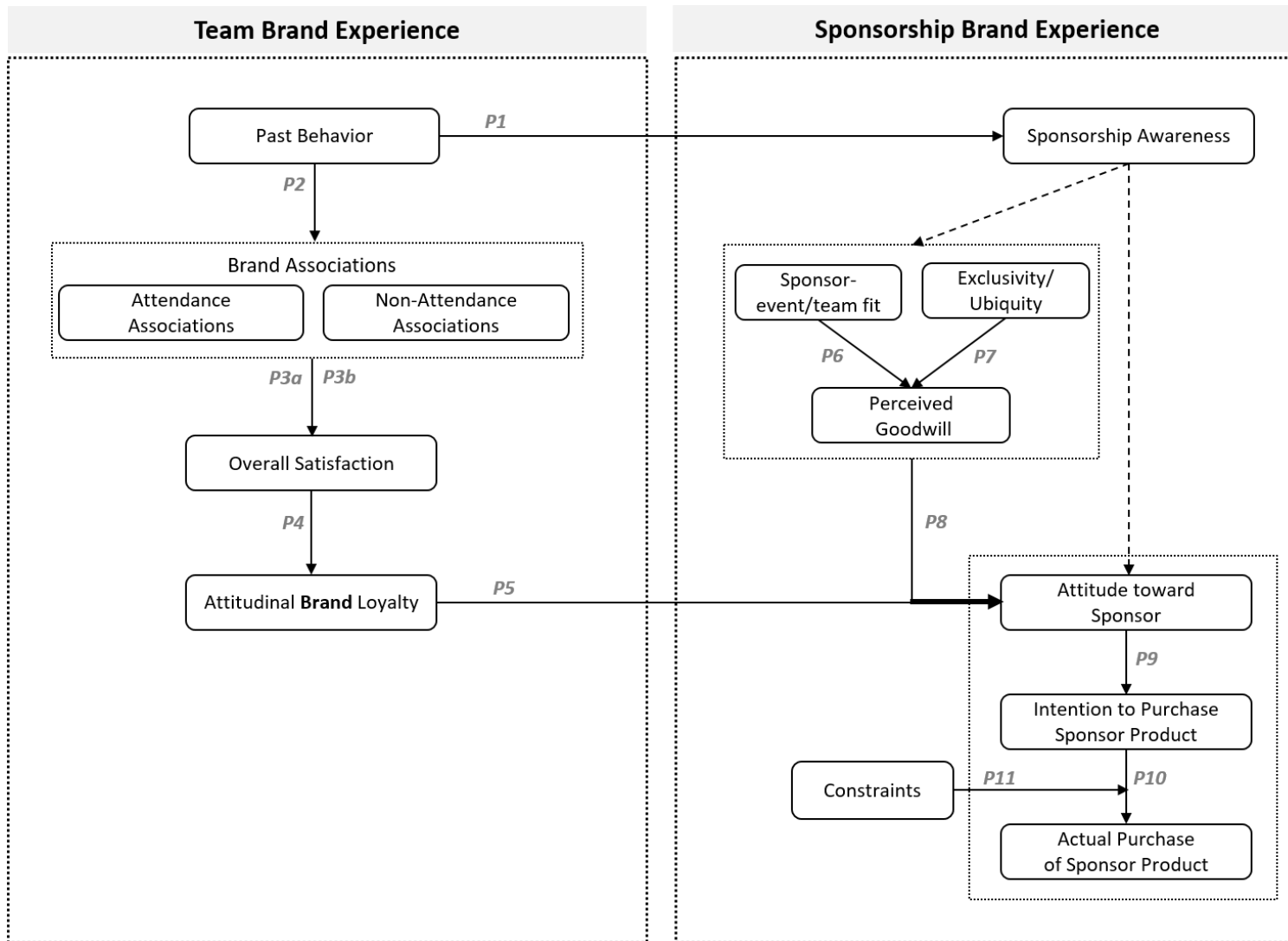


Figure 1. Model for understanding the link between team brand experience and sponsorship brand experience.