

**Impact of sport sponsorship experience at the Super Bowl on purchase intension**

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Abstract 277**

Sport sponsorship has been considered as one of the primary revenue sources for sport organizations (Laugh, 2000). As the sport industry has grown, sport sponsorship has become a multi-billion dollar industry. It is now a significant part of the corporate communication mix and is viewed as a highly cost-effective method of marketing (Grohs, Wagner, & Wsetecka, 2004). Sponsorships are used to achieve a wide range of marketing objectives including establishing community relations, enforcing the company image, increasing brand awareness, and enhancing corporate responsibility. The value of commercial sponsorship of sports reached \$26.2 billion in 2003, an increase of 7.4% from \$24.4 billion in 2002 (Sport Business Associates, 2004). However, there has not been a great deal of research undertaken to explore the impact of sport sponsorship on consumer behavior despite the increased use of sport sponsorship to reach various market segments. Measuring the effectiveness of sport sponsorship is challenging. For many organizations, it is unclear to evaluate the effectiveness of their sponsorship activities. Assessing the effectiveness of sport sponsorship based on the level of media coverage may not appropriate because it does not provide information about purchase intention or attitude change (Rodgers, 2004). Theoretically, there have been three important aspects of sponsorship objectives such as brand awareness, sale, attitude toward sponsors, and image enhancement utilized in studying the effectiveness of sponsorship. These sponsorship objectives have been considered as essential predictor to measure sponsorship effectiveness (Sneath, Finney, & Close, 2005) because they allow sport marketers to identify the pattern of sport consumer behavior in term of attitude change toward sponsors. The primary challenge for sport marketers continues to be the difficulty of separating the effects of the sponsorship from the effects of other promotional activities. However, consumers' cognitive and affective reactions have meaningful implications in terms of assessing the effectiveness of sport sponsorship.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the effects of sport sponsorship at the 2007 Super Bowl using attitudes toward the sponsors and its product, brand awareness, event-sponsor image fit, and the likelihood of considering the sponsor's products for a future purchase. A second goal is to investigate potential differences in purchase intention with respect to the level of event involvement.

The study purposively selected eight corporate sponsors appeared at the Super Bowl Official Website. The selected sponsors were categorized into two groups based on the characteristics of sponsors' products; food and technology. A total of 303 (female 150, male 151) usable surveys were completed by college students two weeks after the 2007 Super Bowl game. A survey instrument consisting of 12 questions to measure awareness, attitudes, and behaviors was administrated to the participants. The questionnaire consists of several parts. The first part asked participants to identify brand image, awareness, and event involvement. The participants were also asked to indicate event-sponsor image fit with the list of the selected sponsors. Questions designed to determined participants' attitudes toward the sponsors and their products were formulated and information was gathered concerning product perceptions and preferences. There are four factors (brand awareness, event-image fit, event involvement, and website visiting) formulated in the regression model to predict consumers' purchase intention in the sponsors' products. The decision on every statistical test was made at the significant level of .05.

Of total participants, 80 percent has watched the 2007 Super Bowl game and 33 percent visited the Super Bowl Official website. The most common age range of the participants was 19 to 29 (79%) years old. Most participants (86%) selected TV as a medium that they used to obtain the information about the Super Bowl. The descriptive statistics revealed that the participants who have visited the Super Bowl website showed higher purchase intension ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) than the group ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) that have not. For the effect of watching the Super Bowl on the purchase intension, the group that watched the game had also higher purchase intension ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) than the group that did not ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ). However, the difference between two groups was very slight. Multiple Chi-square tests were performed to difference in brand awareness for all eight sponsors depending on whether a participant has visited the website or not and watched the 2007 Super Bowl or not. Pepsi was only brand showing significant difference of brand awareness depending on whether a participant has visited the website or not while BudWeiser was only brand that showed significant difference in brand awareness depending on whether a participant watched the game or not. A series of Two-way ANOVA was performed to examine the difference in the purchase intention for all eight sponsors by visiting the website and watching the game. Watching the game showed a statistically significant impact on the purchase of only two brands, Snickers and Bud ( $F = 6.296$ ,  $F = 4.660$ , respectively), but was not significant on other brand purchase. Additionally, high degree of involvement in the 2007 Super Bowl had a higher correlation with watching the game than visiting the website. A series of Multiple-Regression analyses was conducted to identify the relationship between such factors like event image fit and brand awareness and Super Bowl fans' overall purchase intention in sponsors' products for each industry. To investigate the relationship in terms of industry, each sponsor's brand was categorized into the same industry and

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then multiple regression analyses were employed on purchase intention about each industry. For the technology industry, 10% of purchase intention was explained by two factors; brand awareness ( $t = 3.04, p < .01$ ) and event image fit ( $t = 2.52, p < .05$ ). However, event-involvement was the only factor ( $t = 2.23, p < .05$ ) statistically significant on the level of purchase intention in the food industry.

According to the findings from the study, website visiting and experiencing a sport event did not influence consumers' behavior in purchase intention. Watching the game had more impact on brand purchase intention and reflected their involvement in the game. However, visitors of the website had a better link between the game and sponsor than those who did not visit the website. The results of the study also indicated that the level of event interest or commitment can be an appropriate factor for sponsoring firms to assess their sponsorship effort. There was an interesting pattern in that with different categories of sponsors, each category has the different factor (s). The level of purchase intention and influential factor can be determined by the characteristics of a sponsor's product. Implication from this finding includes the fact that a link between the event and the sponsor allows sponsoring firms to increase perceived event-sponsor fit. Overall, it seems to be important and necessary for a viable sponsorship to define a target well in terms of brand awareness, image fit and event involvement. These goals are related to the consumers' behavioral intention more directly than are the media exposure goals that are often used in practice.