

The effectiveness of sponsoring women's collegiate sport

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**Presentation (25-minute)
Abstract 40**

Women's sports have become increasingly popular in recent years and as women continue to increase their incomes they have garnered the attention of sport marketers. Previous research has demonstrated that women can be a powerful target market for sponsors, due to their input into the decision making process for the purchase of sponsor's products (Shaw & Amis, 2001). For example, a male fan may attend a National Football League (NFL) game with his wife and during the course of the game they notice a sponsor's message. Researchers have found that the wife or female member of the couple typically provides more input into the purchase of the sponsor's products than their male counterpart. This suggests that marketing sponsor's products to female fans at men's sports events may be more efficient than primarily focusing on male fans (Ross, Walsh, & Maxwell, 2007).

Sponsorship has received a great deal of attention in recent years due to the increasing cost of sponsoring events and consequently the corporate need for accountability regarding their sponsorship investments (Roy & Cornwell, 2004). Since sponsorship was initially considered a dimension of advertising, researchers have typically relied on traditional measures of advertising effectiveness to assess the relative value of sponsorships. These measures evaluate consumer awareness of sponsorships and include consumer recall and recognition (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). As sponsorship has evolved, researchers have noted the unique brand building benefits of sponsorship and the inefficiency of sponsorship awareness as a powerful predictor of positive consumer behavior related to sponsorship and thus sponsorship effectiveness (Dean, 1999; Madrigal, 2000; Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000).

Sponsorship continues to grow as a unique form of marketing communication and so does the need for research in this area. For example, the International Events Group (IEG) 2006 estimated North American sponsorship expenditures at \$14 billion. This figure represented almost a five billion dollar increase from 2001. Concurrently with the growth of sponsorship, sponsorship research has continued to grow and has shifted recently. Researchers have illustrated the need for further studies examining the effects of sponsorship stimuli on consumer purchase intentions, widely considered a better measure of sponsorship effectiveness than the previously used measures of sponsorship awareness (Madrigal, 2000; Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000; Cornwell & Coote, 2005).

Female attendance at most major sports events has increased significantly in recent years and female fans typically attend women's sports events with a higher frequency than men's sports events. For instance, in 2006 70% of Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) fans were female as opposed to 37% of National Basketball Association (NBA) fans (Maxwell, 2006). Simultaneously with the dramatic increase in female attendance at women's sports events, sponsorship of these events has also increased significantly. For example, according to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2006) sponsorship of women's collegiate soccer has increased by 1,041% since 1981. Overall, sponsorship of women's sport has increased substantially in recent years, but very few corporations fully exploited their sponsorships (Lough & Irwin, 2001).

Sponsors of women's sports events have typically viewed their sponsorships as philanthropic and thus failed to measure the effectiveness of their investments. Consequently, research examining sponsorship effectiveness at women's sporting events is scarce and the literature that exists has only minimally addressed the purchase intent of fans at these events (Lough & Irwin, 2001; Shaw & Amis, 2001; Ross, Walsh, & Maxwell, 2007). Future research needs to further investigate the effectiveness of sport sponsorships at various women's sports events and sponsors should consider these events as viable alternatives to sponsoring expensive men's sports events such as the NFL Super Bowl (Shaw & Amis, 2001).

Therefore the purpose of this study will be to investigate the effectiveness of sponsoring women's collegiate sport by measuring consumer purchase intentions. A secondary purpose will be to compare the effectiveness of sponsorships at both non-revenue and revenue women's collegiate sports events.

The data will be collected during the month of November 2007 from fans attending two distinct division I-A women's sporting events at large Midwestern universities. The first sample will represent the revenue generating group and include fans attending a women's hockey game at a perennial national powerhouse that contends for an NCAA championship every year and sells out most of their games. The second sample will include fans from a moderately successful women's division I-A volleyball team that has a limited following. Data will be collected by surveying fans prior to games utilizing previously validated measures of sponsorship-linked purchase intention (Cornwell and Coote, 2005) and fan identification (Greenwell, Fink, and Pastore, 2002),

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which may moderate the relationship between sponsorship and purchase intent in a non-profit setting such as women's collegiate sport (Cornwell & Coote, 2005).

The data will be analyzed utilizing SPSS 14.0 and results will provide several important implications for sport marketers and researchers. First of all, results from this study will potentially illustrate the unique nature of women's collegiate sport as a promotional vehicle for sponsors. Secondly, study results will be disseminated to marketing staff members at both universities providing them with important information about the effectiveness of the sponsorships at their events. If the results demonstrate that sponsorships of specific events are highly successful, the athletic marketers may use the information from this study to increase the renewal rate of previous sponsors and potentially increase sponsorship sales. If the results reveal the sponsorships at these events are largely unsuccessful, marketers may adjust their sponsorship practices in order to maximize the effectiveness of these investments. For example, marketing employees may improve the value of their sponsorship inventory by striving to integrate sponsors into the promotional activities at the aforementioned sports events, a practice which has improved sponsor's ability to deliver their message effectively in a variety of settings (Meenaghan, 1991; Meenaghan, 2001). Finally, this study will extend the research by representing one of the first attempts to examine the effects of sponsorship stimuli on consumer purchase intentions at two distinct women's sports events.