The idea of marketing a product or service to the public is a function so central to a business that it requires careful nurturing and a considerable amount of personal attention. Accordingly, businesses who wish to convey the salient aspects of their offerings may do so in a creative but sometimes costly manner. As a more cost effective alternative, outsourcing has become an extremely popular modern business development. Once thought of as an alternative for only large multinational corporations (Sharpe, 1997), outsourcing has now evolved into a viable business solution for any organization serious about improving its overall quality (Burden et al., 2006). While many corporate activities such as Information Technology (IT) and Human Resource Management (HRM) have traditionally been performed “in-house,” advocacy for outsourcing the bulk of these efforts is steadily increasing (Klass et al., 2001) and more and more they are becoming a global business trend (Leverett et al., 2004). Advocates of outsourcing argue that the practice can reduce costs, increase service quality by producing greater economies of scale, increase incentives and accountability for service providers, and increase access to experts in specialized areas (cf. Greaver, 1999; Laug, et al., 2005; Mowery, et al., 1996). Despite these suggested benefits, others claim that hiring an outside agency to do the “right-brain” (McGovern & Quelch, 2005, p. 1) work of internal employees may lead to disharmony, distrust, and diminished employee commitment levels (cf. Bhagwati et al., 2004; Kessler et al., 1999). A firm’s management therefore, must be cognizant of these potential tradeoffs when entertaining the idea of outsourcing.

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which outsourcing in the intercollegiate marketing context impacted the marketing director-rights holder relationship. Using a mixed-methods research design, the researchers sought to examine the issues, antecedents, and empirical consequences associated with outsourcing among rights holders and intercollegiate sport-marketing directors. To first explore the aforementioned relationships, the researchers conducted semi-structured focus group interviews with marketing directors housed within one Division I-A intercollegiate conference (n=16). Adopting a “grounded, a posteriori, inductive, context-sensitive scheme” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 32) and utilizing the method of constant comparison whereby the data were coded and analyzed simultaneously to understand of emergent concepts and their relationships (Glaser, 1965), the data revealed that the marketing directors perceived outsourcing as crucial and were generally satisfied with their current rights holder (i.e., outsourcing partner). Despite these positive feelings, the directors also expressed some frustration and felt that there existed an “us against them” dichotomy which impeded departmental progress. Overwhelmingly, the respondents felt that the primary solution to their frustrations was to improve the level, frequency, and direction of the existing communication: a finding previously absent from the literature.

Based on the qualitative results we derived two hypotheses for further inquiry. We first hypothesized that overall communication satisfaction would positively influence continuance, affective and normative commitment levels. We also hypothesized that satisfaction with supervisory communication, media quality, and personal feedback would positively influence continuance, affective and normative commitment levels. The Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) was constructed to examine the effects of employee satisfaction with communication processes on organizational commitment. Three dimensions of CSQ (Supervisory Communication a=.93, Personal Feedback a=.84, Media Quality a=.76) assessed communication satisfaction levels. The Meyer and Allen (1991) three component commitment instrument assessed employee commitment levels (Continuance a=.73, Normative and Affective a=.76).

Data were collected via an online survey distribution system using the National Association of Collegiate Marketing Administrators (NACMA) list-serve. After the removal of respondents who’s college/university did not outsource, individuals who were employed by an outside agency, and lower level employees (e.g., student assistants, interns, etc.) who may only have limited contact with the outsourcing agency, 188 [male: 131 (69%); female: 57 (31%)] complete questionnaires were utilized in the analyses. Multivariate multiple regression was used to predict the relationship between communication satisfaction and organizational commitment. First, the composite communication satisfaction variable revealed significant main effects on the three outcomes for the multivariate model [R-Square=.35; adj.R-Square=.33; F=11.384; p<.05].

The analysis revealed significant main effects for communication satisfaction on both normative and affective commitment measures, while continuance commitment was not significantly influenced. It is notable that the effect sizes for the overall model were quite large (R-Square=.18 affective; R-Square=.21 normative) indicating that a communication satisfaction was an important predictor of two types of commitment. The second analysis (where the individual factors were regressed) showed that
the three communication satisfaction factors were important positive predictors of two commitment outcomes. Examination of the coefficients revealed the statistically significant effects on the three outcome measures: supervisory communication (norm = .34, p < .01; aff = .35, p < .01), media quality (norm = .29, p < .01; aff = .36, p < .01), and personal feedback (norm = .20, p < .05; aff = .30, p < .01). Examination of the R-Square values indicated that supervisory communication also accounted for a great deal of the variance for both normative (R-Square = .18) and affective (R-Square = .14) outcomes.

Results were consistent with the hypothesized expectation that communication satisfaction is an appropriate predictor of employee commitment. Three aspects of communication were significantly correlated with organizational commitment, and did display a unique relationship with two aspects of the commitment construct. Thus, within the sport marketing arena, employees value the communicative efforts of their outside agencies. This finding indicates that organizations such as this need to explore ways to input communication channels into their, oftentimes, complex organizational structures, as doing so could lead to a higher degree of commitment amongst internal employees. This study adds to the research by examining how intercollegiate marketing employees perceive and react to an outsourcing partnership. Building on additional work in this area, the research focused on several aspects of the communication-commitment framework not previously examined. First, the authors suggest that managing the “right commitment” is essential for marketing departments when working with an outsourcing agency. Second, the authors call attention to the importance of certain contextual factors (e.g., shared knowledge, mutual dependency, and organizational linkage) that may serve to improve the outsourcing partnership.