

Predicting Intention to Patronize Vancouver 2010 Olympic Sponsors: An Extended Theory of Planned Behavior Approach

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Measures of purchase intention have long been regarded as an important indicator of sponsorship effectiveness (Howard & Crompton, 1995; O'Reilly, Lyberger, McCarthy, Séguin, & Nadeau, 2008; Madrigal, 2000; Meenaghan, 2001). Although several researchers have attempted to model sponsorship effectiveness in terms of intention to purchase, there has been a lack of consistency with respect to the predictors involved (Ko, Kim, Claussen, & Kim, 2008). To address this concern, several researchers have called for the use of empirically validated explanatory theories of behavior when explaining the actions of sport consumers (Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003; Madrigal; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Thus, the present study applied the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) to understand the motivational factors associated with peoples' intention to patronize sponsors of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games.

The TPB was employed because of its strong empirical record in predicting behaviors in a variety of domains (Armitage & Conner, 2001). As it relates to sport consumption, the TPB has been used to explain sport event attendance (Cunningham & Kwon, 2003) and active event sport tourism (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2009). To date however, few (if any) studies have employed the use of the TPB to predict intention to patronize sport event sponsors. Central to the TPB, is the notion that a person's behavioral intention represents the most important predictor of eventual action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). According to the theory, behavioral intentions are determined by individuals' attitude toward performing the behavior (i.e., their overall evaluation of the behavior); the subjective norms they associate with the behavior (i.e., beliefs about whether most people approve or disapprove of the behavior); and perceived behavioral control (i.e., the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior).

It was expected that attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control could explain significant proportions of variance in people's intention to purchase products or services from companies because they were sponsors of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games. As well, the constructs of descriptive norms (i.e., people's perceptions about the degree to which other people were going to patronize sponsors) and past behavior (i.e., the extent to which people believed they purchased products or services from sponsors of previous Olympic Winter Games) were examined in terms of their ability to explain significant proportions of variance in respondents' intention above and beyond TPB constructs. These two constructs were chosen for their capacity to add predictive value to the TPB in several behavioral contexts (Conner & Armitage, 1998; Ravis & Sheeran, 2003). Moreover, measures of past behavior and descriptive norms have rarely been employed in the sponsorship literature.

A sample of 405 students attending undergraduate classes in Canada completed a questionnaire prior to the start of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics. The questionnaire assessed each TPB construct (excluding actual behavior), as well as past behavior and descriptive norms using standardized Likert-type scaling procedures suggested by Ajzen (2006). To measure intention, for example, respondents rated the statement, "I intend to purchase products or services from companies because they sponsor the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games." from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A two-step, hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis tested the degree to which TPB constructs predicted intention; and whether descriptive norm and past behavior could explain variance in intention over and above TPB predictors. Results of step one of a hierarchical regression analysis revealed that the three TPB constructs accounted for 40.5% of the variance in respondents' intention ($F = 90.52, p < .001$). Attitude toward the behavior ($Beta = .314, p < .001$) and subjective norms ($Beta = .392, p < .001$) were significant positive predictors of respondents' intention to purchase products or services from companies because they were sponsors of the event. Perceived behavioral control did not emerge as a significant predictor of intention in either step of the analysis.

Step two of the hierarchical regression analysis involved the simultaneous addition of descriptive norms and past

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behaviour to the existing TPB model. The addition of these constructs meant that an additional 21% of the variance in sponsorship patronage intention was explained ($\Delta R^2 = .210, p < .001$). In total, 61.5% of the variance in respondents' sponsorship patronage intention scores were explained by the five variables in the model ($F = 127.02, p < .001$). Descriptive norms ($Beta = .431, p < .001$), past behaviour ($Beta = .242, p < .001$), attitude toward the behaviour ($Beta = .197, p < .001$), and subjective norms ($Beta = .124, p < .01$) were significant positive predictors of intention within the model. Therefore, when considering the additive influence of descriptive norms and past behavior, intention to patronize Olympic sponsors was positively associated with: (a) a belief that important others would perform the behaviour; (b) a belief that in past years, the individual had chosen to patronize sponsors of previous Olympic Winter Games; (c) a more favourable evaluation of performing the behaviour (i.e., that patronizing event sponsors was beneficial, important, good, valuable, and enjoyable); and (d) a perception that important others (i.e., friends and family) would approve of performing the behavior.

The results of the current study demonstrate the efficacy of using an extended TPB model to predict intention to patronize event sponsors and have implications for the design of sponsorship communication efforts. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Madrigal, 2000), positive evaluations of the behavior (i.e., attitude toward the behavior) and perceived approval from friends and family (i.e., subjective norms) were strongly associated with intentions to perform the action. Descriptive norms enhanced the predictive utility of the TPB. Therefore, decisions to purchase sponsors' products or services may stem from a mentality of 'if everyone is doing it, it must be the sensible thing to do' (Sheeran & Orbell, 1999). This mentality might be particularly salient in the context of Olympic sponsorship. For instance, purchasing sponsors' products that display national Olympic emblems may signal to important others compliance to an informal social norm (e.g., that I have pride my country and my country's Olympic athletes). Past behavior also added predictive value over and above TPB constructs. This finding may be explained via the activation efforts of Olympic sponsors. Many companies leverage the influence of their sponsorship investment by producing commemorative merchandise celebrating a particular nation and/or nation's Olympic athletes (Papadimitriou & Apostolopoulou, 2009). Consequently, consumers may wish to collect a certain year's (or event's) version of a particular product (e.g., an article of clothing, a commemorative coin, a glass, etc.) or an "Olympic edition" of a product's packaging. Indeed, such activation strategies may encourage habitual purchase behaviour of a sponsor's product or service offering.