During recent Olympic Games, Olympic sponsors have activated “onsite” sponsorship plans to engage consumers and enhance their brand presence. Olympic sponsors have presented their products/services and provided various types of entertainments at the brand pavilion in the Olympic park (e.g., 2008 Beijing Games and 2012 London Games) or at Olympic fan sites (2010 Vancouver Games). In this way, sponsors have tried to link their brand images with the image of the Olympic Games. Sponsorship researchers have suggested that an event’s image can be linked and transferred to a brand through sponsorship activities (Gwinner, 1997; Gwinner and Bennett, 2008). Gwinner (1997) has suggested a model of image creation and image transfer in sponsorship by identifying several factors that moderate the relationship between event image and sponsoring brand image. McDonald (1991) has argued that a perceived match between sponsor and event influences consumers’ response to the sponsorship activity. Consumer attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral intentions are influenced by the level of perceived fit between the event and the sponsor (Becker-Olsen, 2003). In line with these brand-event image fit studies, researchers have tried to identify two dimensions of sponsor-event fit: image and functionality. Image-based similarity is defined as the association between the core values of the sponsor and the sponsored event; function-based similarity is associated with consumers’ beliefs about sponsors helping the event be successful with their products or services (Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004). Lee and Cho (2009), however, have argued that not many sporting event sponsorship studies have examined the manner in which consumers perceive a brand-event fit and how they react to sponsorships from either a conceptual or a theoretical perspective of sports marketing. Sponsorship researchers who investigate sponsor-event fit, moreover, often use measures that allow respondents to consider fit on their own terms by asking questions such as “There is a close fit between this sponsor and the event” and “This sponsor and the event have many similarities” (e.g., Gwinner & Bennett, 2008). The use of pre-specified scale items measures the similarities between the two entities but fails to measure what the similarities are about. Thus, this study aims to better understand the top-of-mind thoughts sport consumers have when they think about “sponsor-event fit.” The lack of research becomes even more evident when one examines onsite sponsorship activation, which has the potential to generate favorable changes in the audience’s attitude toward sponsors (Lardinoit & Quester, 2001). Only a few studies have investigated the effect of “onsite” sponsorship on consumers’ attitudes toward the sponsor (e.g. Choi, 2008; Lardinoit & Quester, 2001), which may differ from other types of sponsorship communications, given direct experience with sponsor activation programs. The purpose of this study, then, was to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the dominant “Olympic sponsor-games fit” themes among Olympic onsite spectators? (2) How do different themes of “sponsor-event fit” influence a spectator’s evaluation of desired sponsorship outcomes (e.g., intention to purchase sponsor’s product/service, word of mouth)?

Method

We used an onsite self-administered survey to collect data from spectators of the 2012 London Olympic Games during four days of the event at the Olympic Park in Stratford, London, England. Since the purpose of the study was to examine spectators’ perception of sponsor-event fit after having experienced onsite sponsorship activation, the recruiting of respondents was designed to target those who had visited at least one sponsor site in the Olympic park. We intercepted two hundred and sixty spectators near the major sponsor sites and asked them if they visited the site according to the study’s requirement. A total of 210 spectators participated in the study on four days of the London Games. The survey consisted of an open-ended question that asked spectators to provide three things that came to mind when they thought of “fit” between the sponsor and the Olympics. The measurement paradigm of Echtner and Ritchie (1993) was adapted to measure the perception of fit between the sponsor and the Olympic Games qualitatively to allow top-of-mind thoughts. There were 282 words/phrases generated, which were then classified into seven themes (outlined in results). Two coders examined the data holistically and identified themes,
solving disagreements through discussion. Purchase intention on a sponsor’s product/service (“Because of what I have experienced today, I am more likely to consider sponsor’s product/service for my next purchase”) and word of mouth (“I will definitely talk about my sponsor site experience with my friends”) were also measured using a seven-point Likert scale.

Results
The average age of the respondents was 36.54 years old (SD = 9.59), and 56.5% of respondents were male. The majority (71.9%) had either a university or advanced degree, and 47.3% had a monthly household income of more than $30,000. The following seven themes were revealed as criteria that spectators considered when they thought of the fit between the sponsor and the London Games: company size/global reputation (n = 18), overall appropriateness (n = 34), emotional image fit (n = 81), functional image fit (n = 35), direct support for the Games (n = 51), contribution to the sport/young athletes (n = 30), commercialization (n = 33). Descriptive statistics of purchase intention (PI) and word of mouth (WOM) among themes show that company size/global reputation created the highest figure for both PI and WOM (Mean_PI = 4.60, Mean_WOM = 6.20), which suggests that a sponsor’s brand reputation is the most important aspect of promoting actual behavior. Spectator groups who mentioned direct support for the Games (Mean_PI = 4.19, Mean_WOM = 4.48) emotional image fit (Mean_PI = 4.26, Mean_WOM = 4.71) also showed a higher mean than other themes.

Discussion
This study found that the components of the fit are primarily emotional, cognitive in the sense of sponsors being direct supporters of the event. Adjectives representing emotional fit, such as fun, entertaining, exciting, and joyful were frequently mentioned, showing the importance of pleasure in the onsite sponsorship activities. Sponsors’ direct support for the Games was also frequently mentioned (e.g., “The sponsor provides drink to the athletes” and “Sponsor brands improve spectator experience at the game by providing technology support”). These descriptions suggest the integral role of onsite sponsorship activation in the onsite spectator experience. More detailed discussion and several directions for future study will be provided in the presentation.