No More "Good" Intentions: Purchase Behaviors in Sponsorship

Noni Zaharia, University of Northern Colorado
David Stotlar (Advisor), University of Northern Colorado
Dianna Gray (Advisor), University of Northern Colorado
Rui Biscaia (Advisor), Universidade Europeia, Lisboa: CIPER, Universidade de Lisboa

Student Research Competition Finalist
Abstract 2015-092

Despite the increasing number of studies measuring sponsorship outcomes in different sport settings, a major gap exists in the understanding of how past purchase and actual purchase behaviors function in relation to other sponsorship outcomes. Moreover, although intent to purchase is commonly used in the academic sponsorship literature as a final outcome of sponsorship effectiveness, a more accurate picture would be derived through analyzing actual purchase data (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008; Mazodier & Merunka, 2012). That is, even though intentions to purchase are commonly associated with actual behaviors, an intention does not necessarily translate into actual purchase behavior (Yoshida, Heere, & Gordon, in press). Therefore, this study’s purpose was to develop a conceptual model for sport sponsorship outcomes (i.e., sponsorship awareness, sponsorship fit, attitude toward the sponsor, purchase intentions, past purchases, and actual purchases), controlling for the number of days between collecting data regarding purchase intentions and actual purchases. This research initiative was addressed by analyzing soccer fans from the U.S. in the area of sport sponsorship through a jersey sponsorship.

Recent studies have stressed that sponsorship awareness is an important aspect of consumers’ attitudes towards sponsors and their subsequent purchase intentions (Schlesinger & Güngerish, 2011). In addition, the more relevant the brand is to consumers, the more likely they are to purchase that brand (Dees, Bennett, & Ferreira, 2010) as consumer intentions are dependent upon the level of perceived fit between the event and the sponsor (Koo, Quarterman, & Flynn, 2006). Furthermore, favorable attitudes toward sponsors are expected to point to consumption of a sponsor’s products (Speed & Thompson, 2000). Also, consumers must have an intention to purchase a product or service before the action takes place; therefore, purchase intentions are commonly suggested as an antecedent to actual purchase behaviors (cf. Dees et al., 2010). Moreover, previous studies have demonstrated the impact of past behavior on both intention and behavior (Smith et al., 2008). However, the true long-term impact of a sponsorship on sales is difficult to evaluate and, thus, often questioned (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross, & Maroco, 2013; Gwinner & Bennett, 2008). The hypotheses specified in the proposed model are:

H1: Sponsorship awareness will have a direct positive effect on the attitude toward the sponsor.
H2: Sponsorship awareness will have a direct positive effect on purchase intentions.
H3: Sponsorship fit will have a direct positive effect on the attitude toward the sponsor.
H4: Sponsorship fit will have a direct positive effect on purchase intentions.
H5: Attitude toward the sponsor will have a direct positive effect on purchase intentions.
H6: Attitude toward the sponsor will have a direct positive effect on actual purchases.
H7: Purchase intentions will have a direct positive effect on actual purchases.
H8: Past purchase behaviors will have a direct positive effect on purchase intentions.
H9: Past purchase behaviors will have a direct positive effect on actual purchases.

To test these hypotheses, a web-based survey was utilized where participants rated the effectiveness of Chelsea Football Club’s (CFC) jersey sponsorship. The research plan was to administer an initial survey to examine sponsorship awareness, sponsorship fit, attitude toward the sponsor, purchase intentions, and past purchases. The researcher then undertook a follow-up survey at a later date using the sample from the first survey to collect data regarding actual purchases of CFC’s jersey sponsor’s products between the initial survey and the follow-up survey. The CFC fans’ email addresses linked the initial survey with the follow-up survey. The initial survey remained active for 22 weeks and 219 usable surveys were obtained. The follow-up survey was directly sent to the e-mail addresses of those 219 valid respondents from the first survey in order to collect actual purchase behavior data. The follow-up
questionnaire resulted in 120 completed surveys; thus, data from 120 respondents was used in the final analysis.

To assess the measurement model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. In accordance with the aim of this study, the results of the measurement model \( \chi^2(69) = 116.846, p < .001, \chi^2/df=1.693, TLI = .94, CFI = .96, GFI = .89, RMSEA = .076 \) showed an acceptable fit to the data. Next, the researcher utilized structural equation modeling (SEM; Byrne, 2010) to test the hypothesized relationships. The overall assessment of the structural model indicated an acceptable fit to the data \( \chi^2(10) = 11.804, p = .298, \chi^2/df=1.180, TLI = .98, CFI = .99, GFI = .97, RMSEA = .039 \). Sponsorship awareness showed a negative effect, and was not significant on attitude toward the sponsor \( \beta = -.13, p = .062 \) and on purchase intentions \( \beta = -.01, p = .857 \). Thus, H1 and H2 were not supported. Moreover, sponsorship fit had a significant, positive effect on attitude toward the sponsor \( \beta = .63, p < .001 \) and on purchase intentions \( \beta = .18, p = .034 \), which did support H3 and H4. Attitude toward the sponsor had a strong positive effect and was significant on its relationship with purchase intentions \( \beta = .55, p < .001 \), so H5 was confirmed. Also, attitude toward the sponsor had a positive effect but was not significant in its relationship with actual purchases \( \beta = .14, p = .239 \), thus H6 was not confirmed. The purchase intentions variable showed a positive effect but was not significant in its relationship with actual purchases \( \beta = .09, p = .478 \), when controlling for the number of days between collecting purchase intentions and actual purchases in the model, and as such H7 was also not confirmed. The association between past purchases and purchase intentions was significant and showed a positive effect \( \beta = .17, p = .009 \), while the association between past purchases and actual purchases had a positive effect but was not significant \( \beta = .15, p = .104 \), when controlling for the number of days between collecting purchase intentions and actual purchases in the model, which supported H8 but not H9.

The results from this study indicate that the impact of sponsorship variables such as awareness, fit, attitude toward the sponsor, purchase intentions, and past purchases on actual purchases can be doubtful. The findings also suggest that using purchase intentions as an endpoint for sponsorship effectiveness is debatable, as intention will not necessarily lead to actual behavior. Despite previous research findings that would infer a greater willingness toward purchase, the attitude toward the sponsor variable was not a significant predictor of actual purchases for the jersey sponsor’s products in this study. Therefore, it seems that there is no consistency of attitudes and behavior in this study, which is contrary to the attitude-behavior framework developed by Fazio, Powell, and Herr (1983). The Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985) suggest that a link is present between purchase intentions and behavior. However, this study’s results recognized that the purchase intentions variable is not a predictor of actual purchases for the jersey sponsor’s products, in line with Yoshida and colleagues’ (in press) research on intentions and actual sport attendance behaviors. Moreover, past purchases of the jersey sponsor’s products did predict purchase intentions, in accord with what has been found in previous sport research (Shapiro, Ridinger, & Trail, 2013), but past purchases of the jersey sponsor’s products did not predict actual behavior, not in line with general academic literature (Smith et al., 2008). Other theoretical and managerial implications of the results will be discussed.