The Development of the Sports Sponsorship Perception Scale (SSPS) in the Minor League Setting

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The worldwide sponsorship market has exceeded US$60 billion since 2016 (Statista, 2018). Sponsorship is more effective than traditional marketing communications (e.g., advertising) in building brand equity through its association with an event (Keller, 2003). Sponsorship is based on the belief that any association with a sports team or sporting event will improve brand recognition of a company (Levin, Beasley, & Gamble, 2004) and strong brands provide their parent companies with many strategic advantages because of customer loyalty (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). The average price of a sports sponsorship is over $100,000 (Lefton, 2010), so it is important for sponsors to understand the fan base (e.g., their attitudes towards, and awareness of, the current sponsors). Numerous studies have been conducted to assess fans’ perception of sponsorship in sports. However, the majority of these studies were conducted at the professional/intercollegiate level, such as Major League Baseball, NASCAR, professional golf and soccer, or intercollegiate basketball and football. On the contrary, sports sponsorship in minor league sports is understudied in spite of the fact that the attendance in MiLB (e.g., 41 million people in 2012) was higher than both the NBA and NFL combined. The purpose of this study was to develop the Sports Sponsorship Perception Scale (SSPS) to examine fans’ attitude towards the sponsors of the MiLB team.

The Scale was developed through an extensive review of literature and site observations of sport facilities. Face and content validities of the Scale were evaluated by three university professors and the executives of the MiLB team. As a result, the SSPS included 33 items and the respond format was based on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire (the SSPS and demographic variables) was distributed at three home games. Initially, a total of 355 individuals agreed to participate in the study. However, only 299 of them were returned (82.2%). The Dimension Reduction procedure of IBM SPSS was used to identify the factor structure of the scale. The criteria for retaining the factors were based on the eigenvalue >1 (Guttman, 1954) while comparing to the scree test (Cattell, 1966). Based on the alpha extraction (Kaiser & Caffrey, 1965) with promax rotation (Hendrickson & White, 1964), seven factors were identified. However, seven items were removed since they were either loaded on two factors or had factor loading less than .45. Next, the same common factor analysis procedure was utilized to examine the 26-item Scale. Without confining the number of factors, four factors were identified: Sponsorship (n=5), Brand Loyalty (n=4), Perception (n=12), and Receptiveness (n=5), with alpha reliability equaled to .81, .81, .91, .85, respectively. This suggested that all items under each factor were reliable in estimating their respective construct (Cronbach, 1951). Overall, the SSPS is a reliable instrument that can be used to evaluate the perceptions of MiLB fans on team sponsors. Nevertheless, the SSPS was developed in the Northwestern region of the United States with one MiLB team, further investigations (e.g., validation with confirmatory factor analysis on another sample) with teams in other regions are necessary to warrant its psychometric properties.