The Impact of Brand Cohesiveness and Sport Identification on Brand Fit in a Sponsorship Context

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This investigation analyzed the effects of sport identification and brand cohesiveness as predictors of brand fit in a unique sponsorship context by examining consumer responses to event sponsorships of the Dew Action Sports Tour. An additional focus of this research endeavor assessed the impact of brand fit on two important consumer behavioral outcomes: attitude toward sponsors and purchase intentions. Data were collected from 552 attendees at the Louisville, Kentucky stop of the Dew Action Sports Tour. The results of the study support our hypotheses that fit impacts attitude toward the sponsor which has a positive influence on consumer’s purchase intentions. The examination of influence that brand cohesiveness and sport identification have on fit perceptions extends our theoretical understanding of fit in a sponsorship context as up until now, research in this area has focused almost exclusively on outcomes of fit and not on those variables that might influence fit.

It has been suggested that sponsorship, “an investment, in cash or in-kind, in an activity, in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property” (Meenaghan, 1991, p. 36; see also Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Gardner & Shuman, 1988; Roy & Cornwell, 2004, pp. 186–187; Ukman, 1995, p. 1), is one of the most prominent forms of marketing promotion (McDaniel, 1999; Roy & Cornwell, 2004; Ukman, 1995). Harvey (2001, p. 59) states that sponsored events “generate more money than all media advertising combined.” According to the IEG Sponsorship Report (2006), sponsorship spending by companies in North America will increase from $10.2 billion in 2003 to $14.93 billion in 2007, whereas $37.7 billion is predicted to be spent worldwide.
Firms sponsor sporting events for several reasons. For example, sponsorship objectives often include increasing brand awareness (Cornwell, Roy, & Steinhard, 2001; Dean, 2002; Gwinner, 1997; Johar & Pham, 1999; Stipp, 1998), establishing a competitive presence globally (Ruth & Simonin, 2003), facilitating positive brand image and attitudes among consumers (Cornwell et al., 2001; Dean, 2002; Gwinner, 1997), boosting sales (Dean, 2002; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003), and targeting consumers through their lifestyles and interests (Bennett & Lachowetz, 2004; Crimmins & Horn, 1996; Roy & Cornwell, 2004; Schrieber, 1994). In essence, sponsorship is often chosen by firms as a communications tool to relay a message about brands, products, or services with prospects. Therefore, it is critically important to empirically test the effect sponsorship has on those who are exposed to the message.

Although there is an established line of research on sponsorship’s effect on brand awareness (Cornwell & Coote 2005; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2000, 2001; Pham & Johar, 2001; Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004), recently research has begun to address the gap regarding additional effects of sponsorship on consumers. For example, researchers have begun to more fully explore the effects of consumer attitude toward sponsorship (McDaniel 1999; Speed & Thompson, 2000; Stipp, 1998), event–sponsor fit (Dean, 2002; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; McDaniel 1999; Rifon et al., 2004; Rodgers, 2004; Szykman, Bloom, & Blazing, 2004), goodwill (Meenaghan, 1991, 2001), fan involvement (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Madrigal, 2001; Meenaghan, 2001; Schurr, Wittig, Ruble, & Ellen, 1988; Wann & Branscombe, 1993), image transfer (Gwinner, 1997; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999), and behavioral intentions like purchase intent, positive word-of-mouth, and actual purchase behavior because of sponsorship (Madrigal, 2001; McDaniel, 1999).

Despite the potential value of sponsorship as a promotional activity, scholars have suggested that (1) sponsorship has not received appropriate attention in the marketing literature (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Madrigal, 2001; McDaniel, 1999), (2) research efforts have been applied and devoid of theoretical grounding (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Madrigal, 2001; McDaniel, 1999; Ruth & Simonin, 2003), and (3) few have studied sponsorship’s influence on consumer behavior (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; McDaniel, 1999; Roy & Cornwell, 2004).

As mentioned, there are a variety of corporate motives for engaging in sponsorship. One motive is to alter public perception and enhance corporate image among viewers and attendees (Lough & Irwin, 2001). In examining these perceptual and image changes, we suggest that it is important to assess the sponsoring brand’s fit in the minds of consumers. Fit between a sponsoring brand and a sponsored event has been shown to have a significant influence on variables such as attitude toward the sponsor, and ultimately, purchase intentions (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Koo, Quaterman, & Flynn, 2006; McDonald, 1991; Pope, 1998; Roy & Cornwell, 2003).

As such, it is crucial to understand some of the variables that might influence one’s perception of brand fit in sponsorship. We seek to extend the extant literature on consumer responses to event sponsorships by examining variables influencing and being influenced by the brand fit construct. Specifically, this investigation analyzes the effects of sport identification and brand cohesiveness as predictors of brand fit in a unique sponsorship context. That is, the Dew Action Sports Tour is a special event series reliant and based upon on broadcast and event sponsorship...
revenue. Further, the consumer of these events is often described as critical of corporate involvement with the sports (Browne, 2005).

An additional focus of this research endeavor assesses the impact of brand fit on two important consumer behavioral outcomes: attitude toward sponsors and purchase intentions. Both practitioner and research implications will result from this study. Theoretical implications will include a more robust understanding of how fit perceptions are formed in a sponsorship and promotional context, although the practitioner will benefit by being able to use this information in making more sophisticated decisions with respect to evaluation and selection of events to the sponsor.

Hypothesis Development

Sponsoring Brand Fit

Research on mental processing of a sponsor’s association with a property indicates that individuals exhibit a bias toward those sponsoring brands that are related to the event (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Pham & Johar, 2001; Rifon et al., 2004; Roy & Cornwell, 2004; Speed & Thompson, 2000). That is, consumers are more likely to identify a brand as a sponsor of an event if there is some relationship between the product and the event (e.g., a tennis racquet brand sponsoring a tennis tournament) than if there is no relationship (e.g., a farm implement company sponsoring a tennis tournament) (Pham & Johar, 2001). Fit has been described as relevance, complementality, or compatibility in other sponsorship literature (Johar & Pham, 1999; Rifon et al., 2004). Gladden and Funk (2002) have identified 16 brand association dimensions that consumers connect with sport teams. It is possible that some associations consumers have with sponsors will mirror some of those dimensions (e.g., tradition, product delivery, importance, escape, etc.) they have with sport teams, thus creating greater perceptions of fit between the sponsor and the team (e.g., nostalgic memories of both Los Angeles Dodgers and Coke). Gwinner and Eaton (1999) suggest that fit can be conceptualized in terms of functional (the product is used in the event) or image dimensions (the image of the event and sponsoring brand are similar).

Scholars have suggested that the sponsorship process works much like a celebrity endorsement (Gwinner, 1997; Keller, 1993; McCracken, 1989; McDaniel, 1999) in that consumers link the attitudes they have toward a particular property and the sponsoring brand (Keller, 1993). This linkage can invoke positive images consumers hold of a respected event or sport to be transferred to the sponsoring brand (Cunningham & Taylor, 1995; Gwinner, 1997; Keller, 1993; McDaniel, 1999). Included in this positive transfer of images might be an increase in consumer assessment of a sponsor, including the quality of the sponsor’s products and the perceived categorical leadership of the brand (Becker-Olsen, 2003).

McDonald (1999) argues that a perceived match between sponsor and event influences consumers’ response to the sponsorship activation. Consumer attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral intentions are influenced by the level of perceived fit between event and sponsor (Becker-Olsen, 2003; Koo et al., 2006). Fit can determine the amount of thought that consumers give to the relationship between sponsor and the event (Becker-Olsen, 2003). Furthermore, if an individual perceives sponsor and
event to be highly related and they view the event in a positive manner, then it is much more likely that they will exhibit positive sentiment toward the sponsor of the event (Becker-Olsen, 2003; Becker-Olsen & Simmons, 2002; Harvey, 2001). Individuals who believe there is a fit between sponsor and event generally exhibit a greater ability to identify the correct sponsors of the event (Speed & Thompson, 2000).

We explore two constructs—brand cohesiveness and sport identification—that might influence the degree to which an event and sponsor are viewed as having a high level of fit. The brand cohesiveness construct is a brand level variable, whereas the sport identification construct is an individual difference level variable. Although many different constructs are likely to impact fit perceptions, we selected these two because they are prominent in the brand association and sponsorship literature and because they provide insight at both the individual and brand level.

### Brand Cohesiveness

Brand cohesiveness can be thought of as a measure of internal brand congruence. Keller (1993, p. 7) states that the “congruence among brand associations determines the ‘cohesiveness’ of the brand image—that is, the extent to which the brand image is characterized by associations or subsets of associations that share meaning”. Thus, brands that have developed nonambiguous meanings are more cohesive than those brands whose meanings are more diffused. A brand’s image will be more cohesive to the extent that it has maintained the same positioning over time, has used consistent images (e.g., logos, colors, endorsers, slogans, etc.) in its promotional efforts, and has cultivated associations with other entities (e.g., sponsorship activities) that share a similar theme.

A cohesive brand image results in stronger levels of brand related knowledge because ties to other pieces of information can be made more clearly. Following a network model of memory organization, memory researchers have suggested that concepts are represented by memory nodes that are tied to other concepts (nodes) by links. The links represent the type and strength of the tie (Anderson, 1983). Under this framework, individuals with elaborate brand knowledge structures have many nodes connected with strong ties at a greater level of depth and specificity. For example, in the context of branded products, those individuals with more elaborate brand knowledge structures have more detailed information available to them about the brand including the brand’s attributes, the different product lines offered, and even context specific usage information (Cowley & Mitchell, 2003). That is, the cohesive brand image is more strongly attached to a greater number of nodes than a weak and diffused (less cohesive) image would produce. This greater connectivity to other nodes increases the potential for a brand-event/sport fit to be perceived by expanding the associations connected to the brand. This increased brand knowledge makes it easier for the individual to see connections between the cohesive brand and other stimuli. Thus, in an event sponsorship context, higher levels of brand knowledge, brought about through brand cohesiveness, provide an individual the ability to see event-brand fit from many different perspectives, thus increasing the opportunities of finding a fit between the brand and the event.

For example, imagine two brands of plasma television sets: Brand A with a cohesive image and Brand B with a less cohesive image. Consumer knowledge
about Brand A (because of the more elaborate knowledge structure brought about through strong brand cohesiveness) might link associations of “cutting edge technology” with the brand, but these same associations might not be associated with Brand B (despite also being technologically advanced). Thus, when comparing the two plasma TV brands to an event also perceived as “cutting edge,” Brand A would be viewed as having a greater fit than Brand B.

Consistent with the information presented above, we propose that:

H1: High perceptions of brand cohesiveness result in higher perceptions of event-sponsor fit.

**Sport Identification**

Social identification is the perceived oneness with, or connectedness to some human aggregate (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Researchers have theorized that identifying with a group is done partly to enhance self-esteem by aligning oneself with groups that have positive qualities (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg & Turner, 1985; Tajfel 1978). Thus, one can strengthen one’s self esteem by emphasizing the positive aspects of the group to which one identifies (in-group), while minimizing any negative aspects associated with that group (Wann & Branscombe, 1995). Further, one can contribute to one’s self-esteem by emphasizing negative information, and downplaying the positive, among contrasting groups (out-groups). In comparing in-groups to out-groups, a positive social identity can be developed by evaluating the in-group to out-groups where the in-group compares favorably on important performance dimensions (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998).

Sport identification is a specific instance of social identification whereby the object to which one identifies is a particular sport. Although much of the sport-related identification literature has focused on teams, Funk and James (2001) emphasize in a model of different levels of psychological connection that an individual might identify with not only a team but also an individual athlete or the overall sport. Of interest in this article is the notion of sport identification. As individual (as opposed to team) sports continue to gain in popularity (e.g., skateboarding, motor-cross, snowboarding, etc.), it is likely that individuals interested in these activities will become more connected to the sport overall and less connected to specific individuals that come and go within the sport. Thus, it will be “I am into snowboarding,” not “I am a fan of Shaun White” (a 2006 Olympic gold medalist in snowboarding).

Scholars have theorized, and popular press articles have indicated agreement, that sport has become quite commercialized (e.g., Slack, 1998). In a State of the Association address, then NCAA President Cedric Dempsey states that “the level of cynicism over the commercialization of our most visible athletic programs has reached epidemic proportions” (Carter, 2001, p. 64). Chalip and McDaniel (2002) find that audience perceptions that an event was overcommercialized had a negative effect on subjects’ enjoyment of the event. Commercialization is viewed as a negative trait associated with sporting events (Lee, Sandler, & Shani, 1997). Highly commercialized sports might result in feelings of exploitation when there is a lack of connection (fit) between the event and the sponsor. In these cases, consumers would be more likely to infer a crass monetary incentive (e.g., the brand’s goal is
to sell more product) rather than a more noble altruistic incentive (e.g., the brand cares about the welfare of the sport) as the underlying motivation for the sponsorship arrangement (Meenaghan, 2001). Rifon et al. (2004), in support of this perspective, find that incongruence between the sponsor and the sponsored cause led to less altruistic motives being attributed to the sponsoring brand.

This results in a discrepancy for the highly identified fan: unfavorable commercialization perceptions paired with a sport that is an important part of their social identity. Traditional theories of cognitive consistency (e.g., Heider, 1958; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955) hold that, when individuals encounter information that is inconsistent with their previously held beliefs (e.g., a sport important to me engaging in practices I find distasteful), the inconsistent information will result in a negative psychological tension. To resolve this tension caused by the inconsistency, the individual might ignore some of the discrepant information, weight consistent information more heavily than inconsistent information, or even distort some information to bring the new information back in line with the prior held belief (Chi, Feltovich, & Glaser, 1981; McGuire, 1972).

In the context of sport sponsorship, to minimize the negative association by resolving the inconsistency, high sport identification fans might attempt to view the sporting event-sponsorship pairings as congruent (i.e., greater fit). That is, they might adjust their thinking to search for a logical event-sponsor connection more than low identified fans. To the extent they are successful in doing so, this lessens the perception of the sponsor commercializing the sport because there is a brand—event connection. In the team identification literature, adjusting one’s perception in this way is referred to as an in-group favoritism effect (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Hogg & Turner, 1985; Tajfel, 1978). Wann and Branscombe (1995, p. 561) find an in-group favoritism effect among highly identified fans and they assert that it is “exclusively the highly identified spectators who see other in-group fans through ‘rose colored glasses.’” They go on to add, “Persons low in identification do not exhibit the biases of those high in allegiance” (Wann & Branscombe, 1995, p. 561). Thus, in an attempt to maintain the desirability of the sporting event’s image and therefore enhance their own self-identity, highly identified fans might be more broadminded in examining the fit potential between sponsors and events.

As such, we propose that:

H2: Higher levels of identification with a sport will result in higher perceptions of event-sponsor fit.

From a practical standpoint, the usefulness of understanding the fit construct and what influences it is only important if it drives attitudes and purchase behavior. As such, we examine the role of fit in influencing attitudes and its indirect role on purchase intentions.

**Attitude Toward Sponsoring Brand**

Recent research finds that consumers take into account the presumed motivation of companies (e.g., to benefit the cause or to benefit the company) that sponsor causes and that the nature of the perceived motivation is a factor in how the sponsorship impacts their purchase choice (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000). Among all of the variables they assessed, Speed and Thompson (2000) found that perceived sincerity
of the sponsor had the highest correlation ($r = .40$) with their sponsor–event fit construct. Sincerity of the sponsor was operationalized in their study to represent a greater pro-social/philanthropic motivation. As such, high levels of perceived fit between the sponsor and event have been associated more with altruistic motives and less with exploitative motives. In a sponsorship context, Rifon et al. (2004) find that congruence (or fit) between the cause and the sponsor leads to more positive attitudes toward the sponsoring brand than when there is incongruence between sponsor and cause. Thus, altruistic motives, ascribed as a result of perceived event-sponsor fit, lead to more favorable attitudes toward the sponsoring brand.

More recently, Koo et al. (2006) found that individuals who perceive a high level of consistency between the event’s image and that of a sponsoring brand had a significantly higher attitude toward the sponsoring brand than those subjects perceiving a low level of image fit. As with many past studies on congruence effects, they use schemas as a theoretical explanation for the relationship between sporting events and the sponsoring brand by suggesting that when event and sponsor’s images are congruent then “the more likely the schemas held in memory will be stimulated, thereby allowing incorporation of ideas about sponsorship activity with the existing schema” (Koo et al., 2006, p. 82). That is, the similarity between the sponsor and the event serves to activate thinking about the event, which then becomes associated with the brand. Browne (2004) has suggested that sponsorship of action sports events has led to similar attitudes and also increased sales and revenue for brands that make the events and event series possible. In this context, fit is one indication that a brand has developed an authenticity within the minds of the consumer of the sports and events.

Consistent with the findings above, we propose that:

$H_3$: Higher perceptions of event-sponsor fit results in a more positive attitude toward the sponsoring brand.

### Purchase Intentions

Using a student sample, Koo et al. (2006) found brand attitude to be a significant predictor of sponsor purchase intentions. Speed and Thompson (2000) also find a significant relationship between one’s attitude toward a sponsor and their intentions to use the product in the future. Thus, evidence exists for brand attitude perceptions to impact purchase intentions in a sponsorship setting.

Accordingly we propose that:

$H_4$: A positive attitude toward the sponsoring brand results in higher purchase intentions.

The hypothesized relationships described in the preceding pages are illustrated in Figure 1.

### Methodology

#### Sample

Data were collected from 552 attendees at the Louisville, Kentucky stop of the Dew Action Sports Tour (DAST). The DAST event is sponsored by Mountain Dew with different locations also having a site sponsor. The Louisville stop’s site sponsor
was Panasonic. The event series, which is owned and broadcast by the National Broadcast Company (NBC), provides action sports athletes with an annual tour championship much like the PGA Tour and Nextel NASCAR series (Bennett & Lachowetz, 2004; Gladden & McDonald, 2005). The event site was located in downtown Louisville at the Kentucky Fair and Expo Center with Freedom Hall and Cardinal Stadium serving as venue hosts. The majority of those in attendance at the DAST Panasonic Open were White (91%), male (65%), members of Generation Y (44%)\(^1\), and between the ages 12 to 24. Generation Y has been defined as the current youth market between the age of 6 and 23 (or those born between 1977 and 1994).

**Data Collection and Operationalization of Constructs**

Dew Action Sports Tour events are designed to be all-day events. Fans arrive around noon, well in advance of scheduled competitions, and often stay throughout the day and leave after the evening concerts. They participate in a wide variety of experiential forms of sponsored entertainment on the event grounds across 3 to 4 days. Over the course of these days in June 2005, data were randomly collected between 12:00 noon and 8:00 p.m. at the Louisville, Kentucky event site. Survey completion took approximately 5 minutes and data were collected close to kiosks strategically placed near high traffic areas by 10 trained research assistants. Research assistants intercepted subjects, requesting participation in a survey assessing sponsorship of the tour. An incentive (e.g., chance to win a motorcycle) was distributed to those completing the survey. Nonresponse was minimal.

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**Figure 1**—Hypothesized model.

Numbers are standardized path coefficients. All paths are significant at <.001.
Several measures are modified from existing validated scales and in some cases the measures were developed for use in this study based upon related literature. All measures were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis to assess their psychometric properties and unidimensionality. The final scale items used in the analysis, standardized factor loadings, and reliability estimates are listed in Table 1.

**Brand Cohesiveness.** Based on Keller’s (1993) idea that brands perceived as cohesive have both a clear and definite image, we utilized a three-item semantic differential measure with two items centered on the idea of consistency (Not Concrete—Concrete, Ambiguous—Not Ambiguous) and one item tapping clarity of image (Not Vivid—Vivid) to measure brand cohesiveness.

### Table 1  Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Items</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Cohesiveness</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$; Composite Reliability $= .89$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I think of the Panasonic brand, I personally see it as:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not vivid — vivid</td>
<td>.814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not concrete—concrete</td>
<td>.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous—clear</td>
<td>.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sport Identification</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$; Composite Reliability $= .93$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For you personally, how accurately do the following describe action sports to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matters to me</td>
<td>.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant</td>
<td>.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuable</td>
<td>.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means a lot to me</td>
<td>.873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of concern to me</td>
<td>.776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Event-Sponsor Fit</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$; Composite Reliability $= .95$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a close fit between Panasonic and action sports or this tour</td>
<td>.883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panasonic and action sports have many similarities</td>
<td>.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It makes sense that Panasonic sponsors action sports</td>
<td>.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My image of action sports is consistent with my image of Panasonic</td>
<td>.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude Toward Sponsor</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$; Composite Reliability $= .89$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the Panasonic brand.</td>
<td>.898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panasonic is a very good brand.</td>
<td>.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a favorable disposition toward Panasonic.</td>
<td>.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purchase Intentions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$; Composite Reliability $= .78$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would buy Panasonic products.</td>
<td>.929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The next time I need to buy a product of this type, I would consider buying Panasonic.</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a*Measured on 7-point semantic differential scale (highest values for vivid, concrete, and clear)

*b*Measured on a 7-point scale (1 = not accurate, 7 = very accurate).

*c*Measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).
**Brand Cohesiveness and Sport Identification Impact**

**Sport Identification.** Identification measures often get at how meaningful and central the object of identification is to the individual (e.g., Mael & Ashforth 1992). Consistent with this, we measure sport identification with five items designed to illicit the importance of the sport to the individual’s life.

**Sponsor Fit.** Fit has been conceptualized on a variety of dimensions in the marketing literature. Consistent with Speed and Thompson (2000), however, we do not attempt to tease out the different dimensions of fit in our measure. Rather, we adopt a four-item measure that allows respondents to consider fit on their own terms without restricting the basis used to define fit.

**Attitude Toward the Sponsor.** This construct was measured with a three-item scale using the traditional attitudinal aspects of liking and favorable disposition on a 7-point agree−disagree scale (e.g., Bruner & Hensel, 1992).

**Purchase Intention.** The behavior intention measure used in this study consisted of two items specific to the site sponsor (e.g., Panasonic) as opposed to a more general “I will buy from sponsors” type of measure. This allows for a more a robust test of the paths from attitude to purchase intentions.

**Analysis and Results**

The data were tested in a two-staged process (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). First, the measurement model was estimated to confirm the reliability and unidimensionality of the scales used in the study. Next, the structural model was estimated using the SAS Institute’s (2000) PROC CALIS causal modeling procedure. This allowed for an assessment of the overall model fit and hypothesized relationships.

**Measurement Model**

The entire measurement model was subjected to confirmatory factor analysis. Although the overall chi-square statistic was significant ($\chi^2 = 182$, $df = 109$, $p < .0001$), this statistic has been found to be sensitive to sample size (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). As such, we relied upon the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and RMSEA to assess the adequacy of fit in the measurement model (Bentler, 1990; Bentler & Bonett, 1980). These indices suggest that the model represents an acceptable fit to the data (CFI = .98 , NNFI = .97, RMSEA = .05). All of the standardized factor loadings exceed .69 and are significant ($p < .001$), providing evidence of convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Composite reliabilities for each construct exceeded .70, with the highest being Event–Sponsor Fit (.95) and the lowest being for Purchase Intentions (.78) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Based on these results, we conclude that the measures are both unidimensional and reliable. We tested for discriminant validity, following the advice of Fornell and Larcker (1981), by assessing whether the variance extracted estimates associated with each possible construct pair are greater than the square of the correlation between the two constructs. Evidence of discriminant validity was provided as all variance extracted estimates exceeded the appropriate squared
factor correlation. Overall, we concluded that the scales had adequate measurement properties and we proceeded to test the hypothesized structural relationships.

**Structural Model Estimation**

To test the hypothesized relationships, a structural model was estimated and the model was tested using the maximum likelihood method of parameter estimation. Table 2 presents the correlations among the constructs. The final path model with standardized path coefficients and t-values is shown in Figure 1. The model has a $\chi^2$ value of 268, $df = 114$, and $p < .0001$. An examination of the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and RMSEA provide evidence of model fit: CFI (.96), NNFI (.95), RMSEA = .07) (Bentler, 1990; Bentler & Bonett, 1980).

As indicated in Figure 1, support was found for all hypothesized relationships.

**Discussion**

**Theoretical Implications**

Building from the notion advanced by Keller (1993) that brand knowledge is based on the associations one holds in memory for the brand, we examine the construct of fit between a brand and a sponsored sporting event. Specifically, we examine the influence that brand cohesiveness and sport identification have on fit perceptions. This extends our theoretical understanding of fit in a sponsorship context because, up until now, research in this area has focused almost exclusively on outcomes of fit and not on those variables that might influence fit.

Our findings support the theory that brand cohesiveness leads to greater brand knowledge which in turn results in a greater ability to see dimensions common to the event and the brand, which serves to increase fit. In terms of sports identification, we advance and find support for an argument based on high identification fans modifying their thinking about an event-brand pairing to more easily find fit to preserve positive self-identity. Both of these theoretical perspectives are important as they increase our understanding of how consumers view brands in a sport sponsorship context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 Correlations Among Constructs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Brand cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sport identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Event-sponsor fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Attitude toward sponsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Purchase intentions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Correlation coefficients are $\Phi$ estimates among the latent constructs in the model.*
Managerial Implications

Because sponsorship is an important marketing strategy and communication tool, the results of the current study have powerful implications for event managers and marketers.

These results support the hypotheses that fit impacts attitude toward the sponsor, which has a positive influence on consumer’s purchase intentions. Our findings amplify Koo et al.’s (2006) suggestion that those who perceive fit between an event’s image and the sponsoring brand exhibit a significantly better attitude toward the sponsoring brand than those who perceive less fit between the two properties. From a managerial perspective, this reveals that it might be more difficult to increase positive attitudes toward a sponsoring firm among individuals that fail to perceive fit between the brand and event.

As such, those involved with sport sponsorship selection should consider effective ways to communicate fit to those who attend the event, especially those members of the core fan base. Also, those responsible for business development with the event property may wish to consider sales strategies aimed at brands that have an obvious fit with the event (i.e., Mongoose Bikes and the Dew Tour). Otherwise, communications strategies need to be creative when the fit is not as obvious by pointing out bases of comparison where fit perceptions might be enhanced.

With regard to purchase intentions, it was found that perceived fit impacted purchase intentions through one’s attitude toward the sponsor. This finding is in agreement with past research suggesting that favorable attitudes toward a sponsor (Koo et al., 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000) positively influence the purchase intentions of consumers (Barone et al., 2000). Because purchase intentions are an important factor for the sponsoring firm to consider and research has suggested they can be indicative of actual sales, these findings imply that fit should be considered as an important criteria when companies make sponsorship selection decisions. Thus, understanding the variables affecting fit will be of intense interest to brand managers considering sponsorship purchases to promote their brands.

The results of this study provide evidence that fit is positively influenced by sport identification and brand cohesiveness, in this case among those attending an action sports event. Event properties seeking to increase the perceived fit (or match) between sponsoring firms and the event may choose to attend to both of these variables among those who consume the event. With regard to brand cohesiveness, we postulated and the data supports that a more elaborate knowledge structure among event attendees leads to stronger brand cohesiveness. Thus, firms that are consistent with their promotional and other communication strategies toward consumers could increase the perceived fit between the event and sponsoring firm.

Our findings also revealed that sport identification (those who identify with action sports) positively influences fit perceptions. Specifically, those who exhibit high identification with action sports were much more likely to perceive fit among sponsoring firms. Thus, marketing efforts should also consider these differences. This could be accomplished by developing separate marketing strategies for low and highly identified fans based on their profiles and preferences. If the goal is to increase perceived fit among event attendees, then event properties should consider how to approach and communicate with both high and low identified fans. For example, event properties could incorporate differing strategies aimed at reaching
and engaging low identified fans in an effort to increase fit perceptions while maintaining effective strategies that resonate with highly identified fans. Segmentation of the markets by level of identification seems to be a plausible alternative as well. Firms seeking an event to sponsor might also wish to consider these findings and base their sponsorship selection decisions on whether or not an event will be more likely to reach highly identified fans. On the opposite side of the coin, having a fan base of individuals highly identified with the sport is also a key selling point that properties soliciting sponsors for their event could point to when pitching their property to potential sponsors, as our results show that it impacts perceived event-sponsor fit and ultimately attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions.

Future Research

There are several areas that this research project touches on that would benefit from additional investigation. First, we believe that further research should be conducted to better understand other variables impacting fit. These might include additional personal variables such as experience with the event (Speed & Thompson, 2000). Even the type and methods of sponsor activation might influence the perception of fit by creating greater awareness of the sponsoring brand, as well as even suggesting or explaining to attendees how the brand fits with the sport or event. Our decision to focus on brand cohesiveness and sport identification enabled us to spotlight these two influences, but it admittedly left out the impact of other constructs. We further suggest future research should examine the dimensionality of fit. Certainly more robust multidimensional measures could be developed in an effort to better understand the fit construct within the context of sponsorship. Although we followed the lead of many studies that have treated fit as one-dimensional, there might be some interesting insights that could come from examining fit in different ways (e.g., symbolic fit, functional fit, etc.) (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Further, future research should explore the validity of the scales used in our research in other sponsorship contexts outside of action sports.

Limitations

Like all studies, there are limitations to this research project that need to be acknowledged and taken into account when interpreting the results of the study. First, we created new scales for the study. Although they were tested using confirmatory factor analysis to assess their psychometric properties and unidimensionality, this initial attempt will undoubtedly be refined in future studies. In addition, although we were limited in the number of items we could use because of restrictions of survey length placed upon us by the sponsoring organization, future studies should work to enlarge the number of items used to tap the various constructs of interest in order to more fully capture the phenomenon. Another limitation of this study is that our ultimate outcome variable, purchase intentions, is a self-reported intention to buy as opposed to actual purchase behavior. Although intention based data is commonly used in this literature, a more accurate picture would be through actual purchase data.

In summary, this study has provided a more thorough understanding of variables impacting the fit construct. These findings can enable event managers
and sponsoring firms to recognize the benefits of fit in sport sponsorship and to be able to make decisions that will enhance the perception of fit among targeted consumers.

**Notes**

1. For a more complete review of Generation Y please see Stevens, Lathrop, and Bradish (2005) or Bennett, Henson, and Zhang (2003).

**References**


Ukman, L. (1995). *The IEG’s complete guide to sponsorship: Everything you need to know about sports, arts, event, entertainment, and cause marketing*. Chicago: IEG.
