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Unlocking the Black Box of Sponsorship in Participant-Based Sport

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Unlocking the Black Box of Sponsorship in Participant-Based Sport.

Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this research is to develop a more precise evaluation of sport sponsorship efficiency in participant-based sport, by investigating the specific aspects of participants' attitude and behavior towards sponsors. In more detail, this research develops a comprehensive sponsorship model in the participant sport context, integrating the following constructs: Sport Involvement, Sincerity, Social Media Use, Beliefs about sponsorship, Satisfaction with Event, Sponsor's Image, Awareness of Sponsors, Attitude toward Sponsors, Purchase and Word of Mouth intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative method was utilized and 1,056 questionnaires were effectively collected and analyzed via SPSS and AMOS. Using structural equation modelling, this research tested a conceptual framework analyzing the role of different factors for sponsorship efficiency in a participant sport context.

Findings - The present research proposes a model of 10 variables which on the whole permits a complete comprehension of how to expand the linkages among antecedents and outcomes of sport sponsorship in participant-based sports. The proposed factors assume a critical role in upgrading sponsorship effectiveness, which is reflected through a continuum of responses that regularly begins with sponsorship awareness and, ultimately, leads to increments in participants' purchase and word of mouth intentions regarding sponsors' products.

Research limitations/implications - Various implications for future studies as well as strategies to boost the advantages for sponsoring firms in participant-based sports, can be drawn from the suggested model.

Originality/value - Up to the present time, there is a scarcity of research exploring the effectiveness of sponsorship in participant-based sports. The majority of sponsorship studies measure the impact of sponsorship on spectators, neglecting the role of participants as potential vehicles in the sport sponsorship setting. This study, the first to explore the role of sport participants in sport sponsorship literature, provides a comprehensive framework, which can guide future studies and enhance sponsorship efficiency in a participant sport context.

Keywords: Sport Sponsorship, Participant-based sport, Martial Arts

1. Introduction

The ability of organizations to influence consumers becomes increasingly important (Marin, Ruiz De Maya and Rubio, 2018). Organizations need to consider more compelling procedures of advertisement, for example, events sponsoring. Sponsorship is a strategy of non-traditional or below-the-line communication that has created a lot of consideration among scholars (Meenaghan, 2013) and can be characterized as “a money or in-kind fee paid to a property [a property rights holder] regularly in games, arts, entertainment, or causes) as a trade-off admittance to the exploitable business capability of that property” (Walliser, 2003).

Sponsorship-based marketing, while useful in building awareness and improving brand image, holds more prominent potential than traditional advertising methods since it correlates with an individual’s passion (Meenaghan, 2013). Sponsoring takes various forms relying upon the sponsored “object” (Cornwell, 2019). Examples include (1) stadiums/equipment/things, namely the Allianz Arena Stadium in Munich, (2) activities/events/programming, for example, the Paris Marathon, with sponsors, such as, Schneider Electrics, (3) groups/individuals, for example, footballer’s Cristiano Ronaldo sponsoring by Nike, and (4) organizations/leagues, for example, the Euroleague Basketball Championship sponsoring by Turkish Airlines.

Regardless of the Covid-19 health emergency and the subsequent mass retractions or delays of sports events worldwide, overall sport sponsorship spending in 2020 was \$28.92 billion, while it is estimated to reach \$89 billion before the end of 2024 (Gough, 2020). Nonetheless, these numbers do not recount the entire story on the significance of sponsoring in the present marketing and communications scene. It is not the supreme spending on sponsorship that is so significant yet rather how support has been instrumental in changing how brands connect with audiences. One characteristic among numerous others of contemporary sport is its capacity to motivate people passionately and engage them emotionally, which has made sport a valuable tool for consumer-driven marketing. In sport sponsorship, the sponsoring brand

associates with the sport property and can convey messages to consumers in a less commercial way. Organizations invest resources in sport sponsorship expecting that the positive attitude that fans have toward their preferred sport entity (e.g., team) will be transferred to their brand through sponsor-sponsee relationship (Madrigal, 2001).

Target audiences from the sponsor's viewpoint include current and expected customers, workforce and communities. From the sport property point of view, fans, supporters, and participants could be objective target audiences. Nonetheless, most sponsorship research has been oriented toward understanding sport viewers as consumers of sponsoring brands. Sport participants, for example, are under-researched and the capability of sponsorship to impact such "internal" audiences is simply starting to be acknowledged (Cornwell, 2019).

The present work recommends that a more profound connection among brands and their audiences can be achieved in sponsorship when advertising-driven correspondence is not the sole goal. Regardless, sponsorship research which remains a field dominated by marketing and research that investigates internal audiences is restricted in amount (Khan and Stanton, 2010). Some experimental commitments have zeroed in on the internal audiences of organizations occupied with sponsorships (Edwards, 2016), yet so far barely any empirical study has explored internal audiences (such as sport participants) as potential vehicles in the sport sponsorship setting. One expected field for sport sponsorship that seems to be developing overall is the section of participant-driven sport, which may speak to a bigger portion of the sport business than viewer-driven sports (Kim et al., 2010).

One renowned participant-based sport is Taekwondo, the Korean martial art that has been an Olympic event since the year 1988. The practice of Taekwondo has spread worldwide and is right now a popular sport reaching about 70 million practitioners in 204 nations, while the number of children who join Taekwondo training is increasing each year, with 380,000 applying for the Taekwondo belt test on a yearly basis (Lee and Johnson, 2020). Taekwondo competitions

have likewise expanded in number and size as of late. These events draw in contenders and fans from around the globe and have local and worldwide sponsorships. Associations and organizations that make products associated with Taekwondo practice and competition (for instance, the Taekwondo industry) are similarly keen on supporting Taekwondo events. Multinational companies, for example, Adidas, which makes Taekwondo uniforms and attire, frequently support Taekwondo competitions and events that draw a huge number of contenders (Lee and Johnson, 2020).

The enhanced development of participants and Taekwondo events has attracted corporate sponsors. Organizations see opportunities for lifestyle marketing, and regular participants in grassroots and specialty sport events are more passionate about the promotion of their sport than the average sport consumer (Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006). provide interesting opportunities for corporate social responsibility initiatives, given that associations that run participant sports are frequently not-for-profits as well as depend on corporate funding to provide projects and opportunities to general society (Kim et al., 2010). Hence, albeit grassroots and niche sport events do not get the same mainstream (media) exposure as major spectator-based sports, they actually provide an alluring vehicle to sponsors to draw in explicit objective target sectors. Notwithstanding the development of participant-driven sport sponsorship, there is as yet a general deficiency of analyzing sponsorship in participant sport settings. A large part of the present sponsorship research is led through the viewpoint of sport fans and spectators (Herrmann et al., 2016); nonetheless, as Eddy and Cork (2019) noted, there is a demand to comprehend sport participants' reaction to sponsors as well.

Various contrasts exist between the variables that anticipate why individuals take an interest in sport as participants versus as viewers (Lera-Lopez and Rapun-Garate, 2011). In accordance with the developing need to explore the effectiveness of sponsorship using a theoretical framework and because of the above inadequacies, the aim of the current research is

to create a model of consumer-buyer attitude relating to the sponsorship of participant-driven sport. To be more explicit, the purpose of this study was to introduce an integrated conceptual model for sport sponsorship assessment in the participant sport setting, by analyzing the effect of sponsorship on participants' attitudes and intentions toward sponsors. The suggested model draws on a comprehensive review of the literature related to sport participants, athletes, team brands, and sponsorship of sports.

While past examinations have focused separately on the antecedents affecting sponsorship awareness or the connection between sponsorship and purchase purposes (Biscaia et al., 2017), to date, no thorough system has been created linking these points of view to the participant sport setting, to provide a thorough comprehension of the elements impacting sponsorship's effectiveness.

The proposed model is comprised of ten (10) variables that, when taken as a whole, offer a thorough knowledge of how to strengthen the relationships between the antecedents and outcomes of sport sponsorship in participant-based sports. The essential components of this concept include individuals' awareness and attitudes toward official sponsors, as well as their influence on the purchase and word-of-mouth intents of participants with regard to sponsoring businesses. The main components of this model include participants' awareness of and attitudes toward official sponsors, as well as their effect on participants' purchase and word of mouth intentions regarding sponsoring firms. This research also explored the role of significant antecedents, for example, participants' involvement with sport, their beliefs about sponsorship, their satisfaction from the sport event, sponsoring firms' degree of sincerity, the frequency of visiting the sport event's site and social media accounts and the sponsoring companies' image. The previously mentioned antecedents play a key role in upgrading sponsorship effectiveness, which is reflected through a continuum of responses that regularly begins with sponsorship

awareness and ultimately leads to increments in participants' purchase and word of mouth intentions for sponsors' products.

2. Theoretical Background

Sponsorship is the endorsement of a specific event to help corporate goals by improving corporate image, expanding attention to brands, or straightforwardly stimulating sales of products and services, that can be personal or joint; the occasion can be a one-time affair or a continuing series of activities (Kang et al., 2019). The impact of sports is expanding through different channels and media because of the expansion of the sports population and the advancement of the media. Sports sponsorship is an advertising medium for consumers who are exposed to a flood of data and sports sponsorship is more centered around the target group than traditional cluttered advertising media, empowering effective communication in the communication cycle, and intensifying the perception of the message.

Sports sponsorship is an exchange between a sponsor and sport sponsee/sponsored sport association, event, athlete etc. (Koronios et al., 2020b). Sponsors are linked to sport events that receive economic, material, and human assistance from sponsors. Sport sponsorship is the most widespread sponsorship type, regularly receiving 70% of the complete yearly overall sponsorship expenditure (IEG, 2017). Corporate marketing, communications, public relations, and/or promotional purposes have been referred to as main sport sponsorship aims (Greenhalgh and Greenwell, 2013). Overarching corporate goals are met by using the sport sponsorship relationship as a vehicle. Increase public awareness, enhance corporate image and alter public perception, build business/trade goodwill, enhance employee relations/motivation and increase sales/market share are just a few of the sponsorship objectives that were identified by the majority of sport sponsorship research.

This happens because via sponsorship, companies can feel a sense of intimacy and homogeneity and can create a new corporate image. Furthermore, the firm's brand value can be

boosted through established corporate image and brand awareness, proficient access to target groups, supported positive ties with customers and expanded customers reliability to expand deals. Past examinations express that another reason behind the fast development of sports sponsorships as marketing instruments is that sports sponsorships are generally compelling, while traditional marketing techniques are less powerful (Kang et al., 2019). As sports sponsorships emerge as new marketing vehicles, there is a growing scientific interest in sports and academia research.

Up until today, sport sponsorship research has commonly been engaged with the emotive and attitudinal results of spectators. Constructs generally distinguished as (attitudinal) indicators of sponsor results (the most well-known of which being buying goals) are sponsorship awareness (Hickman, 2015), sponsor image and engagement (Alexandris and Tsotsou, 2012), and sponsor generosity (Dees et al., 2008). These kinds of variables, especially awareness (Eagleman and Krohn, 2012), have also started to show up in investigations of sport participants. It is essential to take note of the fact that there is some proof to propose that, in all probability, there are differences between how participants and spectators process sponsorship.

According to Andreani et al. (2014) and Madrigal (2001), regardless of the environment, the theoretical frameworks used to investigate the attitudinal impacts of sponsorship are largely modifications of the theory of reasoned action, which was first suggested by Ajzen and Fishbein in the 1980s. The theory of reasoned action (often referred to as the belief-attitude-intention chain), states that an individual's personal beliefs about an item or entity impact their attitudes toward that item or entity, which in turn influences their future intentions toward that item or entity. In addition to the cognition-affect-conation chain (or possible combinations of any of the above), other hierarchy of effects models, have been used to explain the effects of sponsorships on consumers (Alexandris and Tsotsou, 2012), but these adaptations are typically grounded in the theory of reasoned action. The present study, proposes a research framework, based on two

focal components: (a) the antecedents of sport sponsorship awareness (for example, participants' degree of involvement with sport, their beliefs about sponsorship, the sponsor's image, participants' satisfaction with the sport event, participants' frequency of social media and website usage, sponsors' anticipated degree of sincerity, which as a result impact the intermediate factor (i.e. attitude toward sponsors), which thus impact the (b) desired results for the sponsor (i.e. purchase and word of mouth intentions regarding their products/services). A review of the specific constructs included in the model follows below.

Sport Involvement

Involvement theory exhibits that an individual's association with an object of interest is a determinant of how the individual's assumptions are shaped, and the object is assessed. Views and assumptions for objects of interest can be influenced by the level of inclusion with the object (Kim and Kaplanidou, 2019). As indicated by Zaichkowsky (1985), engagement is "an individual's apparent importance of the object dependent on intrinsic requirements, qualities, and interest" (p. 342). The degree of engagement is revealed by personal identification towards the object of interest. Moreover, the degree of engagement influences a series of attitudinal choices and can act as a significant mediator that clarifies the connections between the factors inside the attitudinal choices of people (Kim and Kaplanidou, 2019). Involvement can be alluded to as the level of responsibility with respect to an object, action, or experience, perceived individual significance, and degree of psychological association (Funk and James, 2001). Along these lines, a martial art like Taekwondo can be the object of inclusion in sport participant context and can be utilized as an antecedent to awareness of as well as attitude toward sponsors.

Sport involvement can be viewed as the evaluation of how much sport activity is at the focal point of an individual's life, involving watching and taking part in different sport occasions. Thusly, sport engagement can influence the intrinsic assumption development and assessment cycle of the occasion's results (for example, financial, social, environmental) among participants

with various degrees of engagement. Concurrently, other past explorations have concentrated on the role of inclusion as a mediator in relation to indicators and result factors. Notwithstanding, a couple of studies have investigated the impacts of participants' sport association on their behaviors and buying purposes (Dees et al., 2008).

Sponsors' Sincerity

In spite of the expanded acknowledgment of sponsorship, there is still worry about purchaser skepticism toward sponsorship and the apparent sincerity of the sponsor (Tyler et al., 2019). Sport members may respond adversely in perceiving that a sponsor is excessively motivated by commercial contemplations (for instance, anti-social intentions) rather than the pro-social motives of supporting the sport itself (Speed and Thompson, 2000). Speed and Thompson (2000) emphasized the role of perceived sincerity – described as pro-social parts of the sponsorship contrasted with commercial inspirations – in upgrading sponsor interest, positivity, and utilization of the sponsor's item. People who see a sponsor as genuine appear to like the sponsorship, especially when those people are exceptionally included or related to the sponsored occasion (Gwinner and Swanson, 2003).

Sponsors of one's preferred sport event may be criticized less severely and perceived as motivated more by pro-social purposes. As such, emotionally connected sport participants could see the sponsorship support of a sport event as an earnest acknowledgment of the significance of the sport. Sponsoring informing that stresses pro-social contention components may advance this impression of sponsor sincerity. The purpose of an influence heuristic is for individuals to utilize their emotions to advise their resulting decisions. Taking into account that a sport participant holds a positive feeling (for example, bliss, joy) about the occasion, it should promote good decisions of correlated data, for instance, a related sponsorship. Whilst truthfulness has been discovered to be a significant indicator of more elevated level sponsorship impacts (Olson, 2018), no past examination has endeavored to incorporate this factor into a comprehensive

sponsorship structure, as an important precursor of sport sponsorship adequacy in the participant sport setting.

Beliefs about Sponsorship

Participants' impression of a signal will be fundamental in accomplishing the ideal sponsorship impacts. Keeping in view the grounded connection among beliefs and attitudes (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), an individual's views about sponsorship may influence their behavior towards the sponsoring organization. To be more explicit, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) suggest that the development of views, behavior, and conduct ought to be particular. This multidimensional structure views belief as a predecessor and attitude as an outcome of mentality, shaping a cognition-fondness-conation relationship. Individuals may have various purposes behind the development of a similar behavior towards a specific object. An individual can imagine how business sponsorship can be valuable in the advancement of sport. For this situation, the individual's viewpoint could shape their demeanor (likely to be favorable) towards sports sponsorship. On the other hand, in the event that someone else believes that sponsorship uses are a waste, at that point the behavior towards sponsorship could be negative (Koronios et al., 2020).

For instance, a Taekwondo athlete may shape a negative attitude towards a sponsor since it makes Taekwondo more commercialized. Another participant may likewise have a similar negative attitude towards the sponsor due to the sponsor logo interruptions throughout in the competition because of an absence of fit between the sport and the sponsor. Belief can therefore explain attitude. Deeply embedded general beliefs and attitudes apply more noteworthy impact (than low-embedded behaviors) on explicit assessments of circumstances (Prislin and Ouellette, 1996). Accordingly, participants' overall viewpoints and behaviors towards an activity can prompt positive behaviors towards an association's inclusion with a particular action. Likewise,

a participant's overall viewpoints and behavior towards sponsorship and the impact on their behavior towards sponsors requires examination.

Sponsor Image

A brand speaks to a “repository of implications filled by a blend of marketers’ aims, consumers’ interpretations, and various sociocultural networks’ affiliations” (Parmentier, 2011, p. 219). Information processing theories structure the reasons for branding research. For instance, Keller’s (2005) fundamental work of customer-driven brand value model depended on the cooperative organization memory model, which introduce that consumers’ different dynamic generally relies upon their insight into the brand and the views they connect with the brand. One attitudinal factor which can be utilized as it related to other precursor variables in order to yield more significant discoveries, is sponsor image (Crompton, 2004; Kim et al., 2015). Sponsor image is characterized as a good demeanor toward the sponsor and its products (Meenaghan, 2013). In this research, sponsor image is being operationalized as a proportion of positive conclusions about the sponsoring brand, for example, liking or connection (Alexandris and Tsiotsou, 2012; Bennett et al., 2006; Dees et al., 2008).

The measure of information previously held by consumers about the sponsor will influence how a sponsoring organization will initially be comprehended and therefore stored in memory by consumers. Participating in sponsorship can have a particularly incredible beneficial outcome on the sponsor’s image if customers accept that the sponsorship is profiting the sport association. This cycle, regularly alluded to as image transfer (Gwinner and Swanson, 2003), happens when the image of the sport property is moved to the sponsor (Koo et al., 2006). Impression of brand image has been found to emphatically affect both behavior toward brand and purchase purposes of a sponsor’s items. In this way, the sponsor’s image assumes a significant part in participants’ assessments of sponsorships, as anticipated image can impact purchase choices (Alexandris and Tsiotsou, 2012). To be more precise, studies on the mental

processing by purchasers of a sponsor's relationship with a property shows that individuals are bound to accurately recognize sponsoring brands that have an unmistakable image and are natural to them. People distinguish brands with unmistakable images more regularly than less-image conspicuous sponsors of sporting events on the grounds that these brands are all the more intellectually open in the minds of consumers, and they can all the more productively learn about the brand's sponsorship activities (Koronios et al., 2016).

Social Media & Website Use

For quite a long time, contemporary sponsorship has not been connected distinctly with the presentation of the sponsor's logos. Nowadays it resembles 360-degree communication, covering various marketing and communication activities, for example, creating brand image and brand awareness, reliability, corporate social obligation, product and service advancement, deals support or caring about relationships with stakeholders. As of late, there has been significant expansion in the quantity of communication and limited time activities, which has permitted sponsors to contact their stakeholders and more significantly, their supporters in a considerably more successful way. While conventional media remains the essential value driver for sponsors, when all media platforms are taken into consideration, social media accounts for 5-20% of absolute value created for sponsors (Hurst and Plastiras, 2020). For instance, according to Nielsen-Sports' information, one soccer match between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid in December of 2016 created US\$42.5 million in media worth for sponsors, of which social media contributed 12% or around US\$5.1 million (Hurst and Plastiras, 2020).

Since it has reclassified buyer-brand association, social media is viewed as a significant customer activation vehicle by organizations across the globe. Social media has as of late become a powerful device that can be used by marketers for tapping shared interests of their customers and stimulating commitment in order to bring about positive attitudinal and social results, particularly in the sponsorship area (Koronios et al., 2020). This is on the grounds that

social media is populous with sports supporters, and acts as an extraordinary source of conversations identified with sport and sport-wise issues, which occasionally spill over to discussions about related brands (Cleland, 2014). Although there is academic focus on consumer commitment on online platforms, there are insufficient investigations on the utilization of social media by sport members, and on how social media can act as an instrument for accomplishing sponsorship targets (Abeza et al., 2015). This examination looked to analyze the connection between sponsor awareness, behaviors, and buying purposes dependent on the sport participant's recurrence of visiting a sporting event's social media, a determinant not previously analyzed in participant-driven sport sponsorship research.

Satisfaction from event

Satisfaction begins from the psychological condition and anticipated worth of individuals toward the events and objects that they cooperate with during the engagement cycle. Fulfillment has become the essential pointer for corporate marketing and sales and has gained a noticeable situation at the core of marketing hypothesis and practice over recent years (Kim et al., 2015).

The generic framework of consumer satisfaction has been broadly brought into the sport marketing field. There are numerous parts of sport viewer fulfillment that sport associations ought to consider, including how to fulfill viewers and the results of viewer fulfillment. Notwithstanding, past examinations on sponsorship chiefly centered around viewers; then again, there is scant experimental proof with respect to the participants' fulfillment from the occasion and its impact on sponsorship.

Sport participants' general satisfaction with the sport event includes their own success for competition, the presence of headlines, the lead trainer, the team management, the arena or field where the games are taking place, and explicit kinds of communication with the team. Powerful management of the range and variety of the components of the sports item will be incorporated into the participants' general fulfillment with the occasion (Tsuji et al., 2007).

Generally, fulfillment is conceptualized by sport participants' overall or aggregate fulfillment with their total experience of the support to the sport event. The sport participants' general fulfillment with the occasion can be theoretically proposed as a precursor of awareness and behavior toward the occasion's sponsors. To be more explicit, a participant's general satisfaction from an event will prompt the advancement of trust between the participant and the sponsor and this ultimately prompts the improvement of a long-term responsibility between the two (Tsuji et al., 2007).

Awareness of Sponsors

Sponsorship is viewed as a productive instrument for expanding client awareness of a brand (Speed and Thompson, 2000). Brand awareness gives consumers suggestions or signs that promptly help them to remember certain brands, which is significant in light of the fact that this includes reviewing explicit brand names and product data from a client's long-term memory (Keller, 2005). As information on a brand expands, the apparent useful and enthusiastic risks of selecting the brand decline. In other words, brand awareness influences cognitive and emotional states, and such states decide the strength of the consumer-brand relation (Koo et al., 2006).

Sponsorship awareness has been characterized as a cognitive capacity through which simple openness to stimuli (for example, sponsor enactment) can create an affiliation structure among brand and event (Hickman, 2015). Regularly, awareness is estimated by testing purchasers' capacity to review sponsoring organizations (independent) or perceive sponsors of the occasion (aided) from a list of organizations (Bennett et al., 2006). Even more explicitly, brand review is the consumers' capacity to recall the brand name with no notice of product category or different brands, while brand acknowledgment is the capacity to recollect past openness to a brand when given top notch brands as a prompt (Biscaia et al., 2017). In this sense, sponsorship awareness in professional sports can be characterized as supporters' knowledge of the team sponsors, being communicated through the proper review and acknowledgment.

Madrigal (2001) proposed that awareness is the underlying phase of a continuum of people's reactions that can prompt their purchase and word of mouth intentions. Previous exploration for the most part shows that attention to the sponsorship is a significant determinant to more elevated-level attitudinal and conduct reactions to sponsorship, however it ought to be referenced that outcomes are to some degree mixed (Bennett et al., 2006; Eagleman and Krohn, 2012).

Attitude towards sponsor

An attitude is a positive or negative assessment of an item (for example, individuals, occasions, activities, and ideas), going from very negative to incredibly positive (Koronios et al., 2020b). Such assessments are constructed by the emotional and cognitive decisions of the object (Bagozzi and Bumkrant, 1985). The affective determinant of a behavior incorporates a good or negative emotional reaction to the item and the cognitive factor of a behavior includes convictions about the attributes of the item. As a general rule, affective and cognitive assessments of an item structure is the evaluator's general good or negative behavior towards the item. Appropriately, audience behaviors towards a sponsor could be characterized as the general positive or negative behavior towards the organization that is shaped by the audience's affective (for example, emotional reactions to the sponsor) or cognitive (for example, viewpoints about the organization's attributes) assessments of the sponsoring companies.

The improvement of a great behavior toward a sponsor is an urgent component of sponsorship adequacy (Alexandris and Tsotsou, 2012) on the grounds that ideal perspectives toward sponsors are required to prompt positive social goals. Companies participating in sponsorship activities are hoping to see sport consumers experiencing similar good emotions when seeing a sponsorship brand as to those experienced toward their team, and also hope that sport consumers will in general have beneficial behaviors toward the sponsor on the off chance that they accept that the sponsorship is essential to the sport (Madrigal, 2001; Cornwell et al., 2006). Accordingly, sponsorship activity can alter participants' reactions to a particular

association, resulting in the improvement of beneficial behaviors toward the sponsor, which would, in turn, prompt expanded purchaser eagerness to purchase the sponsor's items.

Purchase Intentions

Purchase intention has been viewed as one of the most famous determinants of both advertising and sponsorship viability (Crompton, 2004). There have been different examinations endeavoring to disclose consumers' aims to carry on in specific manners in advertising or sponsorship, for example, buying purposes (Biscaia et al., 2017; Dees et al., 2008) and beneficial word-of-mouth purposes (Alexandris and Tsotsou, 2012). As behavior is a component of people's convictions about a product (for example, sponsored organization) and social expectations are emphatically affected by behavior, if participants evidence beneficial behaviors toward the sponsorship organizations, they will show much stronger buying purposes concerning their products. Buying purposes can be characterized as an individual's conscious plan in making an effort to buy a brand. From a sponsor's viewpoint, the buying purposes of a consumer is a critical indicator of sponsorship adequacy given its normal effect on future deals (Choi et al., 2011). Supporters will in general hope that sponsoring organizations sponsoring their preferred teams are allies (Madrigal, 2001), creating beneficial behaviors around them. This beneficial demeanor may even grow through the improvement of buying purposes to the sponsor's product. In view of this assumption, it is normal that behavior toward the sponsoring organization will assume a mediating role between awareness of sponsoring organizations and the purchase purpose of the sponsoring organization's products.

Word of Mouth Intentions

Word of mouth (WOM) is an incredible and distinctive type of communication on account of the individual sentiments and experiences it inspires. Also, past examination proposes that people will spread positive or negative information when they experience extraordinary positives or negatives. Commonly, people disperse this data in a vis-à-vis communication as

well as utilizing social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram). Social media can be a ground-breaking technique in informal conduct in light of the fact that an individual can share and examine a single thought with numerous others and consequently spread messages rapidly and broadly. Sport supporters frequently utilize social media for dispersing current data about their preferred teams, sports, players just as sponsors do (Ahn et al., 2014). Analysts have suggested WOM as a significant result in sponsorship research (Gwinner and Swanson, 2003). Word of Mouth is affected by the attitude towards the brand (Koronios et al., 2016). Koronios et al., (2016) discovered that there was a consensus on a connection between attitude towards the brand and the expectation of spreading positive word of mouth. A few researches including authoritative reputation, corporate social responsibilities of NBA teams and online contexts (Koronios et al., 2016) have shown that behavior towards the brand was a significant indicator of individual's aims to enjoy positive Word of Mouth. Previous examination (Biscaia et al., 2017; Koronios et al., 2016) likewise showed that behavior towards the sponsor impacted the goal to take part in beneficial Word of mouth about the sponsor brand.

Hypotheses Development

According to the previous literature review, the proposed model (Figure 1) shows the suggested interactions by the mediation effect of Sponsor Awareness and Attitude Toward Sponsor to participants' purchase and word of mouth intentions. All the hypothesized variables are displayed in the above-mentioned model, which critically investigates the following hypotheses, for the first time in participant-based sport sponsorship:

H₁: Sport involvement positively influences Sponsor Awareness

H₂: Sponsor's sincerity positively influences Sponsor Awareness

H₃: Social media & website use positively influences Sponsor Awareness

H₄: Beliefs about sponsorship positively influence Sponsor Awareness

H₅: Satisfaction with event positively influences Sponsor Awareness

H₆: Sponsor's Image positively influences Sponsor Awareness

H₇: Awareness of sponsors positively influences Attitude Toward Sponsors

H₈: Attitude toward sponsor positively influences Purchase Intentions

H₉: Attitude toward sponsor positively influences Word of Mouth Intentions

3. Methodology

The survey questions were designed based on methods employed by previous sponsorship researchers (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2017; Eagleman and Krohn, 2012; Alexandris and Tsiotsou, 2012). Mediator scales were used in order to define the measurement under each variable sub-dimension. Content validity analysis took place by using a group of experts as well as a field test. The instrument was edited based on the group of experts' feedbacks. If items were identified as valid by experts at a percentage of 75%, they were kept. The questionnaire was translated from English into Greek after a back-translation procedure with the assistance of a board of specialists.

4. Sample and data Collection

A quantitative methodology was utilized for the scopes of this study and questionnaires hand-delivered to the sampled taekwondo athletes who had participated in 2019-2020 tournaments. Convenience sampling was employed for the scope of the research and athletes from three national events were approached. Data were collected at different intervals during the award ceremonies by a team consisting of eight researchers. Taekwondo athletes were randomly approached while they were waiting for the award ceremony to commence, and they were asked to respond to a survey. Respondents were told that their responses would remain anonymous, that there were no correct or incorrect responses and that they should be as truthful as possible when answering questions. These procedures minimized method bias which has been discovered to affect outcomes in behavioral research (Koronios et al., 2020a). During the three tournaments 1,500 taekwondo athletes were approached for the aim of the research and asked

to complete the questionnaire. Five-point Likert scales were used to evaluate fundamental variables. The data analyses were based in the 1,056 returned questionnaires (70.40% response rate) that were fully completed and analyzed by means of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and SPSS Amos as well.

Construct validity of questionnaire

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), reliability analysis and anti-image correlation were performed to investigate the factorial structure of each scale. One EFA's characteristic is that the observed variables are first standardized with a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1. Data is suitable for factor analysis when Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's (KMO) and the Bartlett Sphericity Test are acceptable. The KMO index ranges from 0 to 1, with values above 0.70 being considered satisfactory for factor analysis (Delen et al., 2013). Additionally, Bartlett sphericity test should be significant at 5% significance level (Delen et al., 2013). Moreover, rotation of axes was performed using Varimax method based on correlation between the variables. The criteria that were used to choose the number of factors and the items corresponding to each factor: eigenvalues should be related to eigenvalues > 1 for each factor and the factor loading of each item in the corresponding factor should be over 0.6. Also, the values above 0.7 are considered acceptable by Cronbach α coefficient. Furthermore, validation analysis was performed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). CFA is a special statistical method of structural data processing that is used to understand whether an instrument has the same factor structure across different groups. Furthermore, determine the Goodness of Fit Index - GFI between factorially structured model. It is an important tool in the second stage of an investigation and has been used in our research to the proposed exploratory model. The rejection or acceptance of a model is based on two types of control. Firstly, the global fit indices and secondly the magnitude of the variance explained by the resulting factors. The general indicators of good adaptation studied were: the index χ^2 , Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) and

Comparative Fit Index (CFI). Accepted results are: χ^2 (χ^2/df) degrees of freedom with ratio <2.0 , RMSEA <0.1 and CFI >0.90 (Lomax and Schumacker, 2012) an acceptable adaptation is shown.

5. Results

Sample descriptive statistics

In total, of 1,056 participants in the study, 862 were males (81.63%) and 194 were females (18.37%). Most of the participants workout from three to five times per week ($n=888$, 84.09%). Most ($n=980$, 92.8%) of the participants usually workout over 60 minutes per time and most of them started taekwondo after the age of 5 years old ($n=868$, 82.19%). 90.9% of participants ($n=960$) usually train in sport clubs while only 9.1% of them train ($n=96$) outdoors. Results regarding the taekwondo experience showed that 38.9% of participants ($n=398$) have participated in 11-30 professional events and 3.3% ($n=34$) of them have taken part in more than 100 events. Finally, 7.67% ($n=81$) of participants have participated in a European championship, while most of them ($n=975$) have participated in one at least national championship.

Tool validation and reliability

Explanatory factor analysis showed that five questions of Sport Involvement Scale (Table A) have factor loadings varied from 0.581 to 0.708, which is accepted for our sample size (Hair et al., 2006). Moreover, EFA analysis showed that three questions of Sincerity Scale (Table B) have a factor explanation of 13.96% of the data's variability. The factor loadings varied from 0.611 to 0.842, which is accepted for our sample size. As far as the social media and website use scale is concerned, seven questions (presented in Table C) created the factor. The factor explains 8.09% of the data's variability, while the factor loadings were between 0.425 to 0.942. The analysis regarding Beliefs About Sponsorship Scale (Table D) showed that three questions create one factor which explains 6.1% of the data's variability, while the factor loadings varied

from 0.828 to 0.607. Moreover, six items of the Satisfaction Scale (Table E) create one factor, which explains 6.9% of the data's variability and the factor loadings were greater than 0.501. Additionally, the EFA analysis showed that four questions of Sponsor Image Scale (Table F) create one factor. The factor explains 9.19% of the data's variance. The factor loadings varied from 0.581 to 0.693 which is accepted for our sample size. Additionally, Awareness of Sponsor scales (Table G) create one factor, with factor's loadings varying from 0.592 to 0.831 and the eigenvalue being 2.12 with 12.5% explain power of data's variance. In the Attitude toward sponsor scale (Table H) loading factors are over 0.815 with eigenvalue 1.453 and variance 9.575%. As for Purchase intention scale, three questions (Table I) create the factor. The factor explains 4.86% of the data's variability, while the factor loadings were between 0.724 to 0.793 respectively. Finally, the analysis regarding Word-of-Mouth scale (Table J) showed that three questions create one factor. The final factor explains the 3.921 with eigenvalue 1.358 and factors loading from 0.431 to 0.761. The reliability analysis showed that all scales had a reliability coefficient over 0.7. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that the proposed model for the structure of the tool was satisfactory (Normed $\chi^2 < 1$, RMSEA < 0.1 and CFI > 0.9). The results indicate that the proposed scales had a satisfactory validity and reliability indexes.

SEM results

Structural equation model (SEM) analysis was used to investigate the hypothesis H₁-H₉. Results are presented in Table K with direct affect and affected based on the mediators. The results of the final model investigate that (1) sport involvement influences sponsor awareness but not purchase intention directly (support hypothesis H₁), (2) sponsor sincerity influences sponsor awareness through the mediating role of attitude toward sponsor, while directly influences purchase and word of mouth intentions (support hypothesis H₂), (3) social media & web use influences sponsor awareness (support hypothesis H₄), (4) beliefs about sponsorship

influence sponsor awareness through the mediating role of attitude toward sponsor (support hypothesis H₄), (5) satisfaction influences awareness of sponsors, purchase and word of mouth intentions (support hypothesis H₅), (6) sponsor image influences awareness of sponsors (support hypothesis H₆), (7) awareness of sponsors affect attitude toward sponsors (support hypothesis H₇), (8) attitude toward sponsor affects participants' purchase intentions (support hypothesis H₈), and (9) participants' attitude toward sponsors affect their word of mouth intentions (support hypothesis H₉).

The investigated model is presented in (Table K) and results pointed out that awareness of sponsors is significantly affected by sport involvement; $b=0.218$, $p<.001$; sincerity $b=0.194$, $p<.001$; social media & web use $b=0.267$, $p<.001$; beliefs about sponsorship $b=0.176$, $p<.001$; satisfaction $b=0.154$, $p<.001$ and sponsor image $b=0.334$, $p<.001$. Furthermore, awareness of sponsors significantly affects attitude toward sponsor $b=0.177$, $p<.001$. Additionally, results showed up that attitude toward sponsor significantly affects participants' purchase intention; $b=0.295$, $p<.001$ as well as their word-of-mouth intentions; $b=0.139$, $p<.001$. Finally, factors with a significant direct effect on purchase intentions are sincerity $b=0.112$, $p<.001$ and satisfaction $b=0.267$, $p<.001$. On the other hand, word of mouth intentions are directly affected by sport involvement $b=0.443$, $p<.001$, sincerity $b=0.038$, $p<.001$ and satisfaction $b=0.063$, $p<.001$. The criteria of best-fitting are confirmed, based on the results (normed $\chi^2=12.8$, CFI=0.938, RMSEA=0.042).

6. Discussion and Implications

Sports sponsorship is becoming more and more significant as shown by both the money spent on it and the quantity of sports events sponsored and it has started to contend with other marketing communication procedures. Organizations are profoundly intrigued by sports sponsorships since they are powerful in improving buyers' behavior towards sponsors, and as a consequence, significantly affect their buying and word of mouth purposes with respect to

sponsoring organizations' products and services. Likewise, sport sponsorships are likely to convey the message planned by the organization to the target group successfully, and the beneficial and positive feeling can be transferred to the brand in order to impact brand awareness, and to normally prompt the product buying purpose. The discoveries of this examination propose that sports sponsorship can prompt brand awareness and can lastingly affect product purchase and word of mouth goals, influencing consumers' brand devotion in the long run. The reason for this examination was to inspect sport sponsorship viability in internal crowds, and all the more explicitly in participant-driven sports. Participant-driven sport may speak to a bigger portion of the sport business than viewer-based sports (Kim et al., 2010). The respondents of this examination were Taekwondo athletes who took part in a sport event of a national scale.

Commonly, the respondents in the investigation showed a serious level of awareness with sponsoring organizations, they exhibited beneficial behaviors with respect to the sponsors and displayed positive sponsor-based attitudinal aims. These discoveries were like those from viewer-based sports contexts, however the mean scores on the determinants in this examination, just as the consequences for attitudinal aims, were more noteworthy than those in past viewer-driven investigations (Koronios et al., 2016). The expanded size of the relations/impacts in this examination could likewise be due to the distinction in setting between a participant-driven and viewer-driven sport event. Sport participants may not see sponsorship in more modest, participant-driven sport events as being economically determined as organizations with profoundly obvious viewer sports.

As indicated by Choi et al. (2011), despite the fact that supporters put resources into regional participant-driven sport events on the assumption that they will receive positive returns, participants do not seem to see sponsorship of these occasions as advertising, as proven by verification of the second hypotheses. Participants anticipate that sponsors have sincere

motives when sponsoring the event, instead of strictly targeting economic objectives. All things considered, sponsors seem, by all accounts, to be seen as attempting to help the occasion and be socially capable in the community. . Although causal inferences are beyond the scope of this study, events such as those under investigation here may provide unique opportunities for sponsors to generate perceived goodwill in the community, and consequently improve their corporate image via the support of non-professional/amateur sport events.

It is imperative to remember that participants were being asked about sponsors and their underlying involvement in this new sport event. This is a significant perspective of this investigation, as the vast majority of past explorations here has been performed utilizing established occasions (Eagleman and Krohn, 2012; Kim et al., 2010), where it has been accepted that the participants, over a long period of time, have built up some extent of attention to occasions' sponsoring organizations. This should make the positive perceptions/goals in this investigation all the more reassuring, since attention to sponsors would probably not have been created before the cooperation related to the occasion, and accordingly would not have been driving perceptions.

One more significant highlight to underline is that the demographic profile of the sample in this examination was fundamentally the same as past exploration on participant-driven sport sponsorship, and all the more explicitly in martial arts. People taking part in these kinds of occasions will in general be dominatingly white, young adults (ages 18-35), single and profoundly educated (Kim and Zhang, 2019). Specifically, individuals that are all the more exceptionally educated appear to be overrepresented in the sport of Taekwondo (Kim et al., 2011). Thus, the findings of this study may be somewhat generalizable not only to other small, regional race events, but also to larger scale events. Given that this demographic profile additionally speaks to a desired group of consumers across numerous product classifications, partnering with participant-driven occasions ought to be considerably more alluring to sponsors.

Hypothetically, the discoveries from this examination would recommend that awareness with sponsoring organizations just as behavior toward them should keep on being examined in sponsorship studies, particularly in participant-driven settings. Despite the fact that these determinants have appeared in past literature, the connection between attitudinal goals and awareness of sponsors with behavior toward sponsoring organizations as an incomplete partial mediator does not seem to have been tried.

The discoveries here back up this recommendation – participants who had a beneficial attitude toward sponsors were bound to buy (supporting H8) or suggest those sponsors' products (supporting H9). Also, an important portion of this relationship was clarified by the way that sponsoring organizations' anticipated level of truthfulness improved participants' awareness of sponsors (supporting H2). This impact is not out of the ordinary since the individuals who have a more positive impression of sponsors will in general have more positive attitude purposes toward those sponsors' products (Alexandris and Tsotsou, 2012; Choi et al., 2011; Dees et al., 2008). Likewise, since individuals generally prefer it when sponsors seem to have unselfish inspirations to help the sport association, it appears to be sensible that the participants would have more beneficial goals toward sponsoring organizations. Subsequently, sponsoring organizations' sincerity seems to assume an important part in behavior development for brands, which can be translated into purchases. It ought to be noted that participants' evaluation of sincerity was for the most part beneficial in this investigation, maybe due again to the fact that the martial art event was a niche in the market.. Future exploration should test this relationship in other, maybe more commercial, contexts to guarantee that the relationships discovered here still hold when impressions of sincerity of the sponsors are more shifted. It is significant to underline that the participants not only responded emphatically toward the sponsors on the whole but in addition, the participants' capacity to perceive real, explicit sponsors was consistent. The findings in this study generally mirrored recognition rates of

participants in comparable settings but were quite poor compared to larger scale spectator-based events (Koronios et al., 2016). Furthermore, a portion of the dummy sponsors (foils) were perceived substantially more frequently in this investigation than in the vast majority of the past explorations. In this manner, some of the occasions' sponsors might not have benefited from the positive results that were noticed, on the grounds that numerous participants just did not understand that they were true sponsors. One clarification for the conflicting acknowledgment rates could be the wide variety in enactment systems. Past discoveries propose that more compelling activations appear to emphatically impact acknowledgment rates (Eagleman and Krohn, 2012; Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006).

7. Limitations and further research

Despite the fact that the current examination had a beneficial outcome in assigning the significant sponsorship factors from the standpoint of the participants, the outcomes should be seen with consideration, as sponsorship actually is a demanding and equivalently minimally apprehended field. To begin with, the aftereffects of the examination were set up upon one participant sport and one tournament. To be more precise, the occasion used here was a public Taekwondo event. To have the option to sum up the results through various sponsorship settings, more examination utilizing various types of occasions, for instance, other martial arts, and at divergent levels, for instance, provincial and transnational, ought to be completed.

Secondly the recommendations for this current examination almost certainly apply to firms and sport entities that have the same features as the ones explored here. Considering that the present study focuses on Greek Taekwondo participants, the result speculation may have been affected. Subsequently, the outcomes could be seen as interesting to the Greek marketplace. Finally, since this investigation is only a snapshot in time of a new sport event, we cannot measure how insights may change, or whether the participants' attitudinal purposes will transform into a different future attitude.

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