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THE INFLUENCE OF SPONSORSHIP ENGAGEMENT ON BRAND LOYALTY:
AN ANALYSIS OF ON-SITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS

By

Achyut Kulkarni

I.M.A. University of Hyderabad, 2014

M.S. Sheffield Hallam University, 2015

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Human Development
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Organizational
Development

Department of Health and Sport Sciences
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2022

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A Dissertation Approved on

August 1, 2022

By the following Dissertation Committee

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mom, Amba Kulkarni, and my brother, Kedar Kulkarni, for encouraging and supporting me at every step of my professional career. Thank you for being there always. This would not have been possible without you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Frederick, and other committee members, Dr. Greenwell, Dr. Immekus, and Dr. Shuck, for their invaluable support and mentorship throughout my doctoral journey. Thank you, Dr. Frederick, for not only being my mentor but also a constant source of support throughout the program. I appreciate your time and the feedback you provided at each step of this process which inspired and guided me to complete this work. I would also like to thank Dr. Greenwell for believing in me and providing expert advice on my research topic. Every time I struggled to take my research idea forward, I knew I could always talk to you and feel confident in the value of this work. To Dr. Immekus, you are a brilliant educator and I have thoroughly enjoyed learning various methodologies in your classes. I appreciate you taking time and being part of my committee. To Dr. Shuck, this idea came to life in your 780 course and your feedback at the end of the course proved instrumental in me successfully passing my comps. In addition, I have learnt a lot from the thoughts you share on your social media accounts on the importance of engagement. So, thank you for being a part of my committee and helping me in this process.

I also must thank other Sport Administration faculty members, Dr. Hums, Dr. Shreffler, Dr. Moorman, Dr. Hambrick, Dr. Hancock, and Professor Presley, for giving me the opportunity to learn from you during the program. The discussions and interactions we had in the classroom played a significant role in me reaching where I am today. And finally, this would not have been possible without my fellow doctoral students, Dr. Adam Cocco, Dr. Tyler Spencer, Dr. Seonghun Lee, Dr. Brigitte Burpo, Dr.

Liza Reader, Dr. Sarah Williams, Dr. Addison Pond, Dr. Jessica Murfree, Dr. Chelsea Police, Dr. YoungJik Lee, Dr. Nina Seigfried, Dr. Ehren Green, and Nicholas Swim.

Your support and friendship over the years made this a memorable and enjoyable experience.

ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF SPONSORSHIP ENGAGEMENT ON BRAND LOYALTY: AN ANALYSIS OF ON-SITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Achyut Kulkarni

August 1, 2022

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to sponsors' activational communications. Specifically, this study aimed at examining if interaction and engagement with their team's sponsors' activational communication on-site, as well as on social media, influenced loyalty towards the sponsors. The study utilized service-dominant (S-D) logic as the theoretical framework. The S-D logic perspective recognizes that consumer behavior is centered on the interactive experiences between a consumer and an object, in this case the sponsor, and that a level of consumer interest and/or personal relevance with respect to the sponsor is required prior to the emergence of specific engagement levels, the outcome of which is brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013). Additionally, the study also recognizes the multidimensional nature of consumer engagement, and that the engagement consumer has with a sponsor differs across contexts. Based on this perspective, six hypotheses were tested. The first hypothesis formulated was that sport team involvement will have a positive relationship with

sponsorship engagement. Second, brand interactivity will be positively associated with sponsorship engagement. Third, sponsorship engagement will be positively related to brand loyalty. Fourth, sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between sport team involvement and brand loyalty. Fifth, sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty. Sixth, gender will act as a moderator in these relationships with sponsorship engagement as the mediator.

To address the purpose of the study, two separate research contexts were used. The first research context of the study was social media (study-1). In this study, a questionnaire was distributed to U.S.-based fans of a women's professional soccer team via Facebook groups organized around fan support and interactions for the women's professional soccer team. The second research context was on-site (study-2), and U.S.-based fans of a professional football team, who visited the sponsor activation zone and interacted with the representatives, were intercepted and asked to fill out a questionnaire. Both questionnaires assessed fans' levels of involvement with their team, perceived interactivity of the sponsorship activation, level of engagement with the sponsorship activation, and level of loyalty towards the sponsor. Data were collected from a total of 422 respondents - 241 survey respondents recruited via Facebook groups for the social media study, and 181 survey respondents intercepted at the site of activation. Data were analyzed using path analysis. The results from both contexts supported the multi-dimensional structure of consumer brand engagement. Further, all the hypotheses were supported as involvement with the sport team and brand interactivity were found to be significant drivers of sponsorship engagement, which was also found to exert a

significant impact on brand loyalty. The mediating effect of sponsorship engagement was also confirmed while gender acted as a moderating variable in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement. Overall, the conceptual model performed better in an on-site context (sport team involvement, brand interactivity, and sponsorship engagement explained 39% of the variance in brand loyalty) compared to the social media context (sport team involvement, brand interactivity, and sponsorship engagement explained 35% of the variance in brand loyalty).

The findings offer several theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, this research finds support for the use of S-D logic as a theoretical lens to investigate the multi-dimensional nature of CBE in a sport sponsorship setting. In addition, the findings also broaden the theoretical application of S-D logic to sponsorship effectiveness/evaluation models by establishing the importance of fan-sponsor interactions and fan involvement with the sport team. The results also provides researchers with a sponsorship engagement model which they can utilize in a variety of new research contexts covering sponsorship activations. Practitioners are informed by this research on the importance of engaging the fans through activations, which offers sponsors an avenue to break through the sponsorship clutter and achieve the key marketing objective of building loyalty with the fans.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Corporate sponsorships of sport events and teams began as early as the 1950s, and they were driven by philanthropic motives (Blake et al., 2019). However, as professional sport evolved, it led to the creation of new revenue avenues for teams in the form of media rights and sponsorship deals. These sponsorship deals were struck with the sole purpose of promoting the brand through business-oriented marketing objectives (Cornwell, 1995). Initially, sponsorships were seen as an alternative medium to traditional advertising techniques, as sponsors promoted themselves using brand signage and logos inside the venues. However, over the past few decades, sponsorships have gone beyond a mere logo placement or signage to include a myriad of marketing activities, and these activities have become a sine-qua-non in reaching intended communication objectives (Dreisbach et al., 2017). For instance, Hyundai, the official automotive sponsor of Superbowl LIII, had their logo visible on the ground and on various NFL marketing communications. They also created ancillary marketing activities such as a Hyundai themed zone at the venue (sportbusiness, 2020) and a selfie contest on social media (Hyundai USA, 2018).

Such ancillary marketing activities have become the new norm in the sponsorship environment, and they are seen as a critical ingredient for marketers engaging customers through traditional and experiential marketing strategies (see Skandalis et al., 2019). This evolving marketing communications environment has provided both the impetus and the

shift in the importance of sponsorships in integrated marketing strategies. For instance, to reach consumers through experiences, marketing strategies have shifted from traditional passive media (signage and logos) toward engaging customers through active channels often associated with sponsorship rights in today's experience economy (IEG 2018). This shift has also resulted in an unprecedented rise in sponsorship expenditures. In 2018, global sport sponsorship expenditures crossed the \$70 billion mark, including the amount spent on activating a sponsorship deal (IEG, 2018). Per the same report, sponsors spent an average of \$2.20 on activating their deal for every \$1 they spent on acquiring the rights. Activations allow the sponsors to engage consumers, which is best executed through promotions, events, public relations, direct (e)mail, social media, websites, and mobile communication (Batra & Keller, 2016). This engagement with consumers is often an active mode of interaction, which offers a comparative advantage over more passive marketing channels such as televised programming, radio, print, etc. (Wakefield, 2012).

Sponsors activate through various channels, with on-site (80% of sponsors use this activation channel) and social media activations (98% of sponsors use this medium) the most prominent channels for activation (IEG, 2018). A unique ability of on-site activation is that it helps generate brand-consumer interaction and stimulates the consumer to try the product (Sneath et al., 2005). With the advent of social media, sport fans are using social networking sites to follow and interact with their favorite teams and athletes on a daily basis. This increasing use of social networking sites by fans has created an opportunity for sponsors to engage and build a connection with their target audience (Abeza et al., 2013). As a result, social networking sites are an important component of brands' sponsorship activation strategies (Chanavat & Desbordes, 2014)

with Facebook being the most used channel to communicate the activation message (IEG 2018). Overall, increased spending, a shift in focus from exposures to engagement, and the digital media revolution, have changed the sponsorship landscape.

Problem Statement

The changing sponsorship landscape demands the creation of new metrics to measure the effectiveness of sponsorship (Wakefield et al., 2020). The success of sponsorship is no longer guaranteed by simply acquiring property rights, or naming a venue, or placing a logo on a jersey, but through the creation of activations and engaging with both past and future consumers (Donlan & Crowther, 2014). This notion has led to scholars advocating for the measurement of engagement when conceptualizing sponsorship effectiveness models. Specifically, Meenaghan et al. (2013) criticized existing models for excessively focusing on measuring sponsorship outcomes of recall, recognition, and attitudes as well as their inability to account for the measurement of engagement.

More recently, Cornwell (2019) called for future research to account for consumer engagement with sponsors when assessing the effectiveness of sponsorship effectiveness models. This is because sponsorship activations connect with an individual's passion for sport, while also fulfilling sponsorship objectives including increasing brand awareness, brand image (Cornwell, 2019). Further, if marketing-defined engagement with the property is the goal behind the sponsorship, other models are needed which go beyond "the memory-oriented models of association that have been central in sponsorship theorizing" (Cornwell, 2019, p. 54). From a social media perspective, Delia and Armstrong (2015) called for future research to gauge whether

sponsors seek to realize benefits of sponsorship activations on social networking sites. Therefore, there is a need to develop new sponsorship effectiveness models which examine how consumers respond to sponsorship activations. Specifically, assessment of the effectiveness of sponsorship activations need to consider the influence of consumer engagement with the sponsor and the outcomes of such engagement.

Measuring the Effectiveness of Sponsorship Activations

How to measure a successful sponsorship campaign is a controversial topic. Despite three decades of research pertaining to measuring the effectiveness of sponsorship, researchers are yet to agree on what constitutes an effective sponsorship model (Koronios, & Dimitropoulos, 2020). From a practitioner standpoint, measurement of sponsorship is non-existent. Survey after survey finds that practitioners do not put much effort into measuring sponsorship outcomes. For instance, business reports suggests that 65% of marketers do not track the effectiveness of sponsorship activities, and 75% do not even collect data (Hartley, 2015). More recently, a 2018 survey by the Association of National Advertisers and the Marketing Accountability Standards Board found insufficient measurement and assessment of sponsorship, especially in terms of return on investment (ROI) and return on objectives (ROO).

Early sponsorship research was conducted to define and separate sponsorship from other marketing activities as well as to develop appropriate measures for sponsorship effectiveness that could confirm or disconfirm sponsorship outcomes. Initial measures of sponsorship effectiveness were derived from the marketing literature and were measured in terms of cognitive outcomes such as consumer awareness of the brand and sponsor-event image transference (Johar & Pham, 1999; Pham, 1991). However,

Cornwell (1995) alluded to integrating sponsorship into marketing, considering that sponsorship involved a number of marketing related activities that were part of larger marketing communications. This led to the development of a conceptual model of sponsorship-linked marketing communications by Cornwell et al. (2005) that extended the theoretical understanding of the effect of sponsorship on the minds of consumers.

The conceptual model developed by Cornwell et al. (2005) has been fundamental to subsequent research on the measurement of sponsorship-linked marketing, which is derived from a traditional advertising measurement model (i.e., hierarchy of effects model). According to Cornwell et al.'s (2005) model, the effectiveness of sponsorship programs is measured in terms of consumer-focused outcomes such as cognitive outcomes (brand recall and recognition), affective outcomes (brand attitudes, brand image, and brand equity), and conative outcomes (purchase intentions). Similar works were conducted by Walraven et al. (2012) and Kim et al. (2015) in which they reviewed the literature on sponsorship measurement and delineated the factors affecting sponsorship outcomes. The study conducted by Kim et al. (2015) reviewed findings from over 100 studies involving more than 50,000 participants. Their analysis of the findings showed that numerous factors have a broad range of effects on cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes. The authors categorized the factors into sponsor-related antecedents, property-related antecedents, and the dyadic antecedent of fit. Sponsor-related antecedents include exposure, sponsor motive, ubiquity, leverage, articulation, and cohesiveness. Property-related antecedents include identification, involvement with the property, and prestige. Finally, the dyadic antecedent of fit is defined as congruence between the sponsor and sponsored property.

Measurement of marketing campaigns has gone beyond exposure-based metrics such as brand recall and “incorporated new ways of quantifying and measuring actions by consumers, particularly consumer engagement and experience” (Araujo et al., 2020, p. 436). As sponsorship is considered to be a part of overall marketing activity, measurement of sponsorship needs to find new metrics to evaluate success of sponsorship. One way of doing that is to go beyond measuring the traditional sponsorship outcomes (i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral) and focus on consumers’ engagement with sponsors and the outcomes of such engagement activities. Doing so can enhance our understanding of consumers’ interactions with the sponsors as well as the outcomes of these interactions (Araujo et al., 2020).

An effort was made by Tsordia et al. (2018) to examine the influence of sport sponsorship on consumer-based brand equity. Specifically, Tsordia and her co-authors (2018) focused on the role of brand engagement in building consumer-based brand equity amongst fans of a Greek basketball club. They found that fans were likely to be loyal towards the sponsor and show purchase intentions only if they perceived the sponsorship with their team to be engaging. However, they used the actual brand engagement framework proposed by Keller (2013) to measure sponsorship engagement. A major shortcoming of using Keller’s (2013) framework is that it conceives brand engagement as activities that consumers exhibit towards brands, and therefore focuses only on behavioral manifestations towards a brand. Consumer brand engagement has also been conceptualized from a psychological point-of-view and is considered to be multi-dimensional, consisting of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011; Calder et al., 2009; Hollebeek, 2011a). This point-of-view is yet to be explored in a

sport sponsorship context and can provide important insights regarding consumers' motivational states and state of mind during the engagement process.

Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE)

Consumer engagement is considered to be an important factor for building firms' competitive advantage within markets (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). With the broader context of consumer engagement, a research concept that is emerging and being examined in various contexts is consumer engagement with the brand, more commonly referred as *consumer brand engagement* (CBE). While practitioners as well as some academicians consider consumer engagement with a brand as how consumers behave when engaged with the brand (e.g., Schivinski et al., 2016; Van Doorn et al., 2010), there is a consensus growing amongst a majority of academicians that consumer brand engagement is a multi-dimensional construct that also encompasses psychological components of emotions and cognitions (Brodie et al., 2013; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Mirbagheri, & Najmi, 2019). Regarded as a key marketing research priority (MSI, 2018), CBE refers to “the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related, and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011a, p. 790). Pansari and Kumar (2017) suggest that a positive consumer engagement results in increased levels of cognitive, affective, and behavioral activity towards the brand. In other words, consumers who are engaged with the brand, think more about the brand, display positive feelings towards the brand, and are more likely to show positive behavioral intentions (Cornwell, 2019). The concept of CBE can also help capture consumers' responses to advertising and marketing stimuli (Hollebeek, & Macky, 2019).

The theoretical roots of the concept of consumer brand engagement are derived from the service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2008). The S-D logic perspective highlights consumers' role in proactively co-creating their experiences and values by having active dialogue and interactions between the service provider and consumers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2008). Such interactions often transform consumers from a passive to an active state (Prahalad, & Ramaswamy, 2000), leading them to be involved with the service provider (Woodruff, & Gardial, 1996). As a result, consumers become value co-creators who link their values with the engagement object, and hence engage with them (Muniz, & O'guinn, 2001). Further, consumers' interactive and value co-creative experiences with organizations and/or stakeholders can predict behavioral outcomes (Brodie et al., 2011). Hence, S-D logic presents a strong theoretical foundation to examine the drivers of consumer engagement with the brand and its related outcomes.

There is empirical evidence to support that interactivity and involvement drive consumer engagement with a brand. Past research works in various contexts including mobile phone consumers (Dwivedi, 2015), online brand communities (Wirtz et al., 2013), social media (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and non-profit organizations (Algharabat et al., 2018) found that consumers with heightened levels of involvement exhibit intensified levels of brand engagement. The construct of involvement has been conceptualized as either involvement with a team or involvement with a sport (Tsiotsou et al., 2014), with empirical studies demonstrating the positive relationship between highly involved fans and cognitive, behavioral, and conative sponsorship outcomes (Kim et al., 2015). Involvement with a sport property also increases consumers' attention to sponsor

information, suggesting a positive relationship with cognitive engagement (Boronczyk et al., 2018).

Similar results were found in studies investigating the influence of interactivity on CBE as consumers who perceived the communication to be a two-way process between them and the brand demonstrated higher levels of engagement (e.g., Cheung et al., 2020; France et al., 2016). Within a sponsorship context, practitioners view activating a sponsorship as a way to involve and interact with sport fans (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). Sponsorship research suggests that interaction with sponsors communications on-site (Kim & Kaplanidou, 2014) as well as on social media (Kaushik et al., 2020) and fan involvement (Bee & Dalakas, 2015; Dreisbach et al., 2018) directly influence consumers' responses to sponsor activations. For instance, Kim and Kaplanidou (2014) found that spectators of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games who interacted with sponsors at the on-site activation zones displayed heightened levels of emotional engagement (pleasure), which in turn resulted in positive attitudes towards the sponsor. Similarly, Weeks et al. (2008) found that activational communications on sponsor websites promote more favorable attitudes towards the sponsor compared to non-activational communications websites. Collectively, the findings of studies from consumer engagement literature as well as sport sponsorship literature reveal that consumers' who perceive the brand communication message to be interactive and consumers who are involved with the brand/sport team, display higher levels of engagement with the brand. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H₁: Team sport involvement will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

H2: Brand Interactivity will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

Sponsorship Activations

Sponsorship activations, often used in conjunction with sponsorship leveraging, are marketing and communication activities that are crucial to a successful sponsorship campaign (Weeks et al., 2008). As effective marketing tools, leveraging and activation strategies are used to highlight or promote the link between the sponsor and an event (IEG, 2018). Weeks et al. (2008) provide a clear demarcation between both terms – leverage and activation - by defining *sponsorship leverage* as “the act of using collateral marketing communications to exploit the commercial potential of the association between a sponsored property and sponsor” (p. 639). Whereas *sponsorship activations* are defined as “communications that promote the engagement, involvement, or participation of the sponsorship audience with the sponsor” (p. 639). However, since the term engagement differs from involvement and participation (c.f. Solem & Pedersen, 2016), the definition provided by Pons et al. (2016) will be the operational definition for this study. According to the authors, sponsorship activation is defined as “operational methods of sponsorship implementation in events organizing with the objective of connecting fans (or the indirect audience) to sponsors” (Pons et al., 2016, p. 30). Sponsorship activations and leverage require spending in excess of the sponsorship deal, and this is done in various ways such as theme-based advertising, promotions, social media campaigns, and public relations (Cornwell, 2020). Activation is a term reserved here for leveraged communications that promote interaction between the sponsor and audience such as online contests, brand-consumer interaction inside the stadium, etc. (Cornwell, 2020). In other words, leverage

is the total amount of spending beyond the sponsorship deal, and activation is a subset of this that is often on-site or online, and interactive (Cornwell, 2020).

The success of sponsorship relies on the proper utilization of leveraging and activation, which may be more important than simply creating a link between the brand and sport property (Weeks et al., 2008). Marketing and sport management scholars have asserted that activation is what brings sponsorship to life (Carrillat & d'Astous, 2016; Cornwell, 2019), and have emphasized repeatedly the importance of activating a sponsorship (e.g., Cornwell & Kwon, 2019; DeGaris et al., 2017; Wakefield et al., 2020). Although, majority of these studies have focused on traditional modes of sponsorship activations (on-site), research on social media sponsorship activation is fast emerging. Findings from studies on offline sponsorship activations suggest that consumers react positively to activational communications, that is to say, they are more likely to be aware of the sponsoring brand, develop positive feelings towards the brand, and show a greater intent to purchase a brand's product or service (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019; DeGaris et al., 2017; Wakefield, et al., 2020). However, these studies have focused primarily on measuring consumers' responses using the traditional advertising measurement of cognitive (brand awareness), affective (brand image), and conative outcomes (purchase intentions), and provide limited understanding of engagement that is enacted in sponsorship activations (Cornwell, 2019). This means that although it has been demonstrated that metrics such as brand awareness, brand attitude, and purchase intentions are effective in delivering the sponsorship objectives of increasing brand awareness, sales, and enhancing brand image, the consumer engagement related

objectives of “consumer connection, bonding, and action must be the focus of future sponsorship effectiveness metrics” (Meenaghan & Sullivan, 2013, p. 413).

On the other hand, findings from social media sponsorship activations suggest that a consensus is yet to be reached on what constitutes an effective measure of social media sponsorship engagement. This is because the meaning of social media engagement is different for everyone (Bolton, 2011), and therefore, different measurement techniques have been proposed to measure the effectiveness of social media activations. For instance, Steyn (2009) recommended measuring electronic word-of-mouth as the ultimate yardstick to measure sponsorship effectiveness. Meenaghan and colleagues (2013) suggested incorporating the notions of buzz, sentiment, and engagement as measures of sponsorship effectiveness in a social media setting. Based upon these suggestions, Delia and Armstrong (2015) explored how an in-depth analysis of sponsor mentions can support sponsor-related buzz and sentiment on Twitter. More recently, Kaushik et al. (2020) proposed analyzing users’ sentiments to capture consumers’ online responses to a sponsor’s activation messages. Despite these attempts to measure consumer responses to social media sponsorship, measurement of engagement among consumer with the sponsor’s communication via social media is missing. Addressing digital engagement and its importance in a social media context, Scheinbaum (2016) cautioned that any measurement of digital engagement must consider the three dimensions of engagement i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Hence, this study also seeks to address the issue of engagement in the digital sponsorship space by considering the multi-dimensional aspect of engagement and its influence on consumers’ responses to such activations.

A consumer's connection or strong bond with a brand is commonly associated with loyalty towards the brand. In relation to CBE, "commitment and connection of the highly engaged customer is expected to be influential in their loyalty behavior" (France et al., 2016, p. 127). This is further supported by the actual engagement framework of Keller (2013) in which brand engagement is regarded as the strongest predictor of brand loyalty. Unsurprisingly, most sponsors rank achieving a loyal consumer base, alongside driving sales, as one of the primary goals behind sponsoring a sport property (Deitz et al., 2012). There is also empirical evidence that suggests consumer brand engagement leads to a strong brand loyalty (e.g., France et al., 2016; Leckie et al., 2016). From a sponsorship perspective, research investigating the influence of sponsorship on brand loyalty is limited, but an emerging area of research (Brownlee et al., 2015; Mazodier, & Merunka, 2012; Tsordia et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the findings from these studies do indicate a positive influence of sponsorship exposure on brand loyalty. However, these studies have failed to take into consideration the activational efforts of sponsors as part of the sponsorship, both on-site as well as online. Therefore, this is an area which requires further investigation to delineate the relationship between sponsorship engagement and brand loyalty. Based on the findings of existing studies on consumer engagement (e.g., France et al., 2016) and sponsorship activations (e.g., Tsordia et al., 2018), it is hypothesized that consumer engagement with sponsors' activities will lead to a sense of loyalty towards the sponsoring brand.

H₃: Sponsorship engagement will have a direct positive effect on brand loyalty.

This study also seeks to address the relationship between the antecedent variables of consumer engagement – involvement and interactivity, consumer engagement itself,

and the outcome variable of consumer engagement – brand loyalty. The relationship between involvement and loyalty has been studied previously with the results being mixed. Some studies have found that there exists a correlation between team involvement and team loyalty (e.g., Kunkel et al., 2013), while some studies have found that involvement only leads to a degree of commitment towards the team but not behavioral intentions (Levin et al., 2004). Similarly, studies have found a direct as well as an indirect effect of interactivity on loyalty (Cyr et al., 2009; Dholakia & Zhao, 2009). From a consumer engagement literature standpoint, studies have established that the multi-dimensional construct of consumer engagement i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement, acts as a mediator in the relationship between involvement-loyalty (Dwivedi, 2015) as well as interactivity-loyalty (e.g., Kaur et al., 2020). Therefore, it is hypothesized that, engagement with a sponsor will have a mediating effect on the relationship between team sport involvement and sponsor loyalty as well as brand interactivity and sponsor loyalty.

H4: Sponsorship engagement mediates the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty.

H5: Sponsorship engagement mediates the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty.

Moderating Role of Gender

Consumer marketing literature posits that gender can be a determining factor in consumer responses to promotional materials (Islam et al., 2019). According to Bern's gender schema theory (1981), individuals develop certain gender schemas and behave in ways consistent with those schemas. For instance, male schemas are associated with

individualistic goals such as success and achievement while female schemas align with communal or relationship-oriented goals such as building connections and maintaining relationships (Firat & Dholakia, 1998). Females are also more likely to comprehensively pay attention to information they come across while males tend to be selective in their approach to information processing (Ganesan-Lim, Russell-Bennett, & Danaher, 2008). From an online perspective, females tend to use internet for hedonic purposes while males are more likely to use internet for utilitarian purposes (Okazaki, Navarro, & Lopez-Nicolas, 2013).

Prior research on the role of gender in consumer responses to brand engagement has produced mixed results. Phua, Lin, & Lim (2018) found gender significantly impacted consumer engagement with e-cigarettes advertisements. On the contrary, Nadeem et al. (2015) did not find any gender differences among online Italian Generation Y consumers and their engagement with e-tailor website. This was also true in the case of online brand communities as males and females did not differ in how they interact with brands which help enhance their self-concept and approximate their ideal selves. From a sport sponsorship perspective, research has produced mixed results as well. Early research on examining gender differences in individuals' attitudes and behaviors towards the sponsors suggested that females are more likely to display favorable attitudes towards the sponsor and more likely to purchase sponsor's product (McDaniel, 1999; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Alay, 2008). However, recent findings indicate that gender does not influence sport fans responses to activational promotions, although females do tend to participate more in sponsorship promotions than males (Dodds, DeGaris, & Perricone, 2014). Hence it is hypothesized that:

H₆: Gender will moderate the relationship between team sport involvement and sponsorship engagement as well as the relationship between brand interactivity and sponsorship engagement.

Purpose of the Study

Despite a plethora of research measuring sponsorship effectiveness, it remains a topic that demands considerable attention from researchers. There is a lack of clear understanding regarding how sponsors engage with consumers and how that engagement influences subsequent consumption behaviors (see Cornwell, 2019; Meenaghan, 2013). Consumer engagement in sports has been conceptualized as fan engagement, which provides an understanding of consumption behaviors related to the sport team (Yoshida et al., 2014). This perspective of fan engagement mainly focuses on the interaction of sports fans with their favorite teams and does not provide insights about other relationships the fans can have within the sport network, for instance a consumer-sponsor relationship (Buser et al., 2020). Specific to sponsorship, engagement is enacted through activational communications, primarily through on-site marketing activities and social media channels. The consumption behaviors related to such communications have received limited attention from researchers (Cornwell, 2019). Given that large amounts of money are spent on activating a sponsorship through multiple modes of communications, coupled with the fact that marketers are constantly under scrutiny from executive boards to justify the spending (Kim et al., 2015), it is crucial that measurement of engagement is accounted for in the overall sponsorship effectiveness model.

An overview of sponsorship effectiveness literature suggests that researchers have largely focused on assessing consumers' responses to sponsors (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019;

Kim et al., 2015). In doing so, they have not yet explored the multi-dimensional nature of consumer engagement. Therefore, when measuring the effectiveness of sponsorship-linked marketing, it is imperative that the multi-dimensional nature of a sponsor's engagement activity is considered (Cornwell, 2019; Scheinbaum, 2016; Wakefield et al., 2020). Failure to measure the construct of engagement creates a problem in the industry, because sponsors are currently demanding metrics that further provide justification for money spent to sponsor sport entities (Meenaghan, 2013). Hartley (2015) attributes the lack of investing in ROI, and other metrics (e.g., engagement, buzz, etc.) to a 'just feels right' attitude, or marketers not possessing the knowledge to effectively conduct the appropriate measurements. As such, there lies an opportunity for researchers to further the knowledge base by measuring consumers engagement with the sponsor and their responses to such engagement activities. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to a sponsors' activational communications. In doing so, the study aims to provide a conceptual model for measuring on-site sponsorship effectiveness as well as social media sponsorship effectiveness.

Research Hypothesis

In order to investigate the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to sponsors' activational communications, the following hypotheses were developed for on-site as well as social media sponsorship activations:

H₁: Team sport involvement will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

H2: Brand Interactivity will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

H3: Sponsorship engagement will have a direct positive influence on brand loyalty.

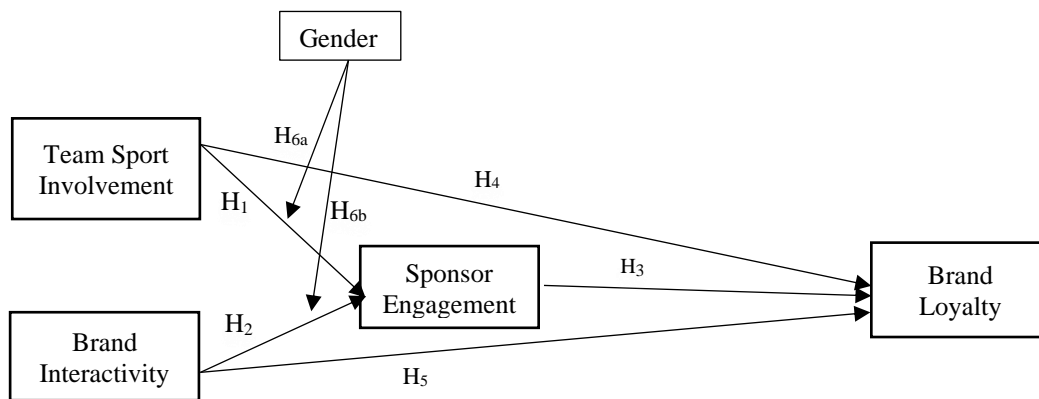
H4: Sponsorship engagement mediates the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty.

H5: Sponsorship engagement mediates the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty.

H6: Gender moderates the relationship between team sport involvement and sponsorship engagement and the relationship between brand interactivity and sponsorship engagement.

Figure 1

Hypothesized Paths (Relationships)



Significance of the Study

The proposed study intends to extend the sponsorship literature by answering calls made by Cornwell (2019) and Delia and Armstrong (2015) to measure consumer

engagement, as it can enrich our understanding of the effects of sponsorship-linked marketing. Engagement in sponsorship has been studied as a uni-dimensional construct, either as an affective (e.g., Kim & Kaplanidou, 2014), or behavioral aspect of engagement (e.g., DeGaris et al., 2017; Wakefield, 2012). The results of these studies have demonstrated that engagement in such activities enhances consumers' responses towards sponsors. However, studies focusing on consumer engagement have concluded that engagement is a multi-dimensional construct, comprised of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014). Therefore, consumers' responses to sponsors are impacted by how they process sponsorship-related information, feel about the information, and act on it. By incorporating this multi-dimensional aspect of consumer engagement, it is expected that this study's results will provide deeper insights regarding which aspect of consumer engagement is a stronger predictor of loyalty towards the sponsor.

Secondly, investigations of the effectiveness of social media sponsorship are at a nascent stage. Previous studies examining social media sponsorship activations failed to provide an understanding of fans' engagement with a sponsor, enacted via the social media posts (Delia & Armstrong, 2015). The proposed theoretical model is expected to expand the social media sponsorship literature by measuring consumer engagement with a sponsor's activations, and the influence of engagement in creating sponsor loyalty. Moreover, by adapting the social media activation campaign scale to a sport context, it is expected that the results of this study will lay the foundation for future empirical studies measuring social media sponsorship activation in sport.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

The purpose of the study is to examine the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to sponsors' activational communications in the context of on-site as well as social media sponsorship activations. Previous studies that have explored the measurement of sponsorship effectiveness have extensively focused on sponsorship outcomes and not accounted for the construct of consumer engagement, which is one of the primary objectives behind activating a sponsorship (e.g., Abeza et al., 2015; Gilooly et al., 2017; Meenaghan et al., 2013; O'Reilly & Horning, 2013). This study aims to address that gap in the literature and provide a sponsorship effectiveness model that accounts for sponsorship engagement and its influence on loyalty towards the sponsor. The results of this study can inform both sponsorship decision-makers as well as academics researching the area of sponsorship and consumer engagement.

The study advances theory in sponsorship and marketing by applying the S-D logic approach to measuring sponsorship effectiveness. Co-creation of value and interactive experiences are the foundational basis of S-D logic. Using this approach provides a direct explanation of the importance of two-way communications and interactions between sponsor and consumer in building long-lasting relationships. The study also adds to existing consumer engagement and sport sponsorship literature. Consumer engagement has been extensively studied and conceptualized in various contexts outside of sponsorship (e.g., Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2014). This study uses the previous conceptual works to develop a consumer engagement-based sponsorship effects model. In doing so, it examines the influence of consumer engagement with sponsors on the engagement outcome of brand loyalty within

the specific context of on-site and social media communications. Such a model can provide valuable insights related to the effectiveness of sponsorship communications and the relationship between the factors driving consumer engagement, and the engagement outcome of brand loyalty. Existing theoretical frameworks of sponsorship effects have measured activation in terms of either interaction, involvement, or participation of the consumer. In theory, consumer engagement is distinctive from these terms as it provides an understanding of consumers' attention, interest, and behaviors during their interaction with the sponsor, as opposed to only the psychological state of mind of the consumer during the interaction. Therefore, it is expected that the different dimensions of consumer engagement will influence sponsorship outcomes in different ways in the contexts of on-site and social media activation communications.

This study has several significant implications for sponsorship managers and executives. Sponsorship activations have become a prominent part of the sponsor's overall marketing strategy (IEG, 2018). However, they require additional investments, which are growing at a remarkable rate. As such, sponsorship managers are often questioned by CEOs to justify such investments (Kim et al., 2015). This study provides a measurement model, that not only allows sponsors to measure the effectiveness of their sponsorship across different channels, but also allows them to gain insights regarding the engagement aspect of the activations. Specifically, the results will inform managers in terms of the degree to which consumers are attentive to the information, their interest and enjoyment of the sponsorship activities, and their willingness to invest time and energy in such activities. Based on the results of this study, sponsors will be able to customize their

activation space and/or social media content, which will help generate positive consumer responses to their communication.

The second significant implication for sponsorship managers and executives is the importance of creating interactive activations. It is expected that consumers' perceptions of sponsor communication are vital to their engagement with the sponsor. Therefore, sponsors will need to create activation strategies or social media posts that genuinely seek to connect with the fans. Finally, the ultimate goal of sport team sponsors is to shift part of the loyalty that fans exert for the team toward their own products, leading them to actual purchase behavior. Toward this goal, the current study intends to inform sponsorship managers and executives regarding the importance of engaging with fans, which can result in generating loyalty towards their products or services.

Delimitations

The first delimitation of this study is the selection of activation tactics employed by one sponsor. Every professional sports team has associations with multiple sponsors, and each sponsor engages with their target audience in multiple ways through activations. However, the proposed study will use activations carried out by only one sponsor of a particular professional sports team. This will be done because obtaining consumer responses to every sponsorship-linked marketing activity would be overly time consuming, and therefore beyond the scope of this study.

Secondly, this study intends to measure sponsorship effectiveness in a professional sport setting. Although, the results might be generalizable to a collegiate or an international sport setting, caution needs to be taken when drawing direct correlations to other realms. The rationale for selecting a professional sport setting was that college

athletics only account for 2% of total sponsorship spending (IEG, 2018), as practitioners believe that college sport properties are not as effective as professional sport properties in activating their sponsorship (National Sports Forum, 2020). Therefore, it was decided that professional sport will be the focus of this study.

The final delimitation of the study concerns the participants of the study. The study will be restricted to only those fans who attend the on-site sponsorship activation sites and are a frequent visitors of the team's social media account. Further, due to financial and time considerations, a convenience sampling method will be utilized for collecting data from on-site participants, while a voluntary response sampling method will be used for collecting data from online participants.

Limitations

The study utilizes scales adapted from broader marketing literature to measure consumer engagement. The scales were designed with the purpose of measuring marketing campaigns specific to retail, online, and social media settings. However, the scales have been applied to other settings such as tourism, and they have shown good construct validity. Due to the lack of an instrument specifically measuring consumer engagement in sponsorship, the scales will be adapted to this study and slight modifications will be made to make it more sport specific as well as sponsorship specific.

The research participants will be recruited on a voluntary basis. A convenience sample will be utilized. The participants will complete the questionnaire voluntarily and privately. The survey will be a one-time, self-report questionnaire. It is assumed that the questions will be answered accurately and according to the participants' true beliefs, feelings, and experiences. In addition, data will be collected from fans of a particular

professional sport team situated in the mid-west of the United States, thus making it difficult to have a sample that is representative of the entire population of soccer spectators.

The study questionnaire will be based on participants' exposure to sponsors at the on-site exhibits and via social media communications. However, participants may have also noticed sponsors from other media outlets, especially television and magazines, which might potentially affect their responses. This can happen because sponsors communicate with their fans in myriad of ways throughout the season, which leads to fans getting exposed to sponsors and their marketing activities.

Definitions of Key Terms

Activation (On-site as well as Social Media Behavioral Engagement dimension): “a customer’s level of energy, effort and/ or time spent on a brand in particular brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 569).

Attention (Social Media Cognitive Engagement dimension): “the extent to which a consumer concentrates on, is attentive to, thinks about, and is absorbed or engrossed in a social media activation campaign” (Mirbagheri, & Najmi, 2019, p.381).

Brand Interactivity: “the consumer’s perception of the brand's willingness and genuine desire for integration with the consumer” (France et al., 2016, p.124).

Brand Loyalty: “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (Oliver, 1999, p. 34).

Consumer Brand Engagement: “cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 566).

Immersion (On-site Cognitive Engagement dimension): “a customer’s level of brand-related concentration in particular brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 566).

Interest/ Enjoyment (Social Media Affective Engagement dimensions): “the extent to which consumers become interested in, or excited about a social media activation campaign, as well as the extent to which they derive pleasure and joy from their experiences with it” (Mirbagheri, & Najmi, 2019, p.381).

Passion (On-site Affective Engagement dimension): ‘the degree of a customer’s positive brand-related affect in particular brand interactions’ (Hollebeek, 2011, p.568).

Social Media: “the tools, platforms, and applications that enable consumers to connect, communicate, and collaborate with others” (Williams & Chinn, 2010, p.422).

Team Sport Involvement: “as a psychological state of motivation, arousal, or interest in an athletic team and related activities that is evoked by individual characteristics and situational factors that possess drive properties” (Funk et al., 2004, p. 52).

Sponsorship: “a cash or in-kind fee paid to a property ([a property rights holder] typically in sports, arts, entertainment, or causes) in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential of that property” (IEG, 2018, p.1).

Sponsorship Activation: “operational methods of sponsorship implementation in events organizing with the objective of connecting fans (or the indirect audience) to sponsors” (Pons et al., 2016, p.30).

Sponsorship Leverage: “the act of using collateral marketing communications to exploit the commercial potential of the association between a sponsored property and sponsor” (Weeks et al., 2008, p.639).

Sponsorship-linked Marketing: “the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the purpose of building and communicating an association to a sponsorship” (Cornwell, 1995, p.15)

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Investigation of sport sponsorship effectiveness is a broad area of research with academicians mostly focusing on consumer responses to sponsorship (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). Sponsorship is a term borrowed from advertising and therefore, research assessing consumer responses to sponsorship began in the area of advertising (Meenaghan, 2001). Consequently, a majority of such studies have borrowed the theories underpinning advertising effectiveness and applied it in the context of sport sponsorship. This has led to scholars forming a consensus on the outcomes of sponsorship (Kim et al., 2015). Similar to sponsorship, the construct of consumer engagement has been borrowed from marketing literature; however, it has been relatively unexplored in the context of sport sponsorship (Cornwell, 2019). In the following review of literature, the primary focus is to explore the construct of consumer engagement with a sponsor and its relevance to consumers' responses to the engagement. Given the importance of engagement in activational communications, an emphasis will also be placed on exploring what drives such sponsorship engagement and the outcomes of such engagement activities. The review of the literature is organized into the following four sections. As the primary focus of the study is to investigate the influence of engagement in sponsorship communications, the first section will review the literature on consumer engagement with a brand, otherwise known as consumer brand engagement. This will be followed by reviewing the factors that drive engagement with brand using S-D logic as the theoretical

lens. The next section will introduce the concept of consumer brand engagement in sponsorship and review the findings of previous studies that have investigated consumer responses to sponsors engagement activities. The final section will review the literature on effectiveness of sponsorship and propose a conceptual model that can help understand the influence of sponsorship engagement on consumer responses to sponsor engagement activities.

Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE)

This study focuses on sponsorship engagement, which is engagement of consumers (subjects) in relation to sponsors' activities (objects). Therefore, this section will review the theoretical background and literature on consumer engagement with a brand, commonly known as consumer brand engagement (CBE). The concept of engagement originated in the fields of educational psychology (e.g., Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004), sociology (e.g., Achterberg et al., 2003), and organizational behavior (e.g., Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engagement was first applied as a concept by William Kahn (1990) in the context of personal engagement at work. Describing the behavior of engaged employees, Kahn suggested that employees at work bring all aspects of themselves – cognitive, emotional, and physical – when performing their work roles.

Based on this seminal work on engagement, Shuck and Wollard (2010) defined work engagement as “an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes” (p. 103), thereby alluding to the multi-dimensional nature of engagement. Engagement in the field of sociology is referred to as involvement and performance in voluntary works, which facilitates the development of

social networks, and consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimension (Jennings, & Stoker, 2004). Finally, engagement in educational psychology is conceptualized through school engagement, which also is considered to be a multidimensional construct comprised of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004). This point of view notes that behavioral engagement includes attendance and participation in school activities, emotional engagement includes a sense of belonging or valuing of the school, and cognitive engagement includes willingness to engage in effortful tasks, purposiveness, strategy use, and self-regulation. While the researchers in psychology and organizational behavior defined engagement as a motivational variable or a state of mind that drives behavior, sociological researchers refer to it as a behavioral activity itself. However, a common theme that arises from the various engagement concepts is that engagement is context specific; in other words, engagement involves different actors who act upon a specific subject in relation to a specific object or focus. For instance, in an organizational behavior context, employee engagement consists of employees as the subject who focus on their work. Therefore, context-specific factors need to be taken into account when studying engagement which relate directly to the engagement actors. Further, it should also be noted that the actors that are involved change according to the context of engagement (Dessart et al., 2015).

The concept of consumer engagement in marketing is based on the premise that engagement occurs between a subject, usually the consumer, and an object, which is context specific (Dessart et al., 2016). Due to the context-dependent nature, the focus of engagement (the object) varies, and therefore, consumer engagement has been studied in a variety of contexts including consumer engagement with a brand (CBE), consumer

engagement with social media (social media consumer engagement), and consumer engagement in online brand communities (online brand community engagement). Despite the inconsistency in the operationalization of the concept, many researchers agree that consumer brand engagement is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Solem & Pedersen, 2016). The combination of these three dimensions is foundational to the idea of engagement as it provides a richer conceptualization of the construct, compared to a single dimension (Fredricks et al., 2004). Further, Fredericks et al. (2004) contend that the three dimensions are interrelated in reality, and together constitute an abstract construct of engagement. This indicates that consumer engagement is a second-order construct involving the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Academicians have widely supported this notion, both through theoretical conceptualizations as well as through empirical evidence. However, they have failed to reach a consensus on the definition of the construct (Dessart et al., 2016).

A key reason behind the disagreement concerning the definition is the three dimensions of consumer engagement vary across contexts, and therefore the objects with which consumers engage differ. The most studied engagement object is brand and academics have defined consumer engagement with a brand in diverse ways. A review of literature on the conceptualization of CBE reveals that the definitions can be categorized as either uni-dimensional, bi-dimensional, or multi-dimensional. Academics advocating for uni-dimensional perspective have defined consumer brand engagement as behavioral responses to engagement. A definition of consumer engagement behaviors was proposed by Van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) who defined consumer engagement as “the customers’

behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers”. The second perspective of CBE considers the cognitive and affective component of engagement. That is, engagement is supposed to arise from being involved psychologically in a brand interaction as well as being devoted to that interaction.

Mollen and Wilson (2010, p. 5) defined online consumer brand engagement using the bi-dimensional perspective as “a cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value.” However, this perspective of consumer engagement drew heavy criticisms from the other scholars for their failure to incorporate the rich, interactive nature of consumer engagement (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Dessart et al., 2015; 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2014). These academicians considered consumer engagement with a brand as consumers’ psychological state or state of mind that occurs in conjunction with a customer’s interactive experience with a focal brand. They further contend that the process of consumer engagement with a brand comprises of a cognitive, affective, and behavioral state indicating the multidimensional nature of the construct. (see Appendix A, for a review of literature on the conceptualization of CE with a brand). This multi-dimensional concept of CBE has been increasingly used in empirical studies and gaining acceptance widely among academicians (Dessart et al., 2015). Since this study focuses on consumer engagement with a sponsors’ activation campaign, the definition provided by Hollebeek et al. (2014) is deemed appropriate. Consumer brand engagement is defined as a “consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or

related to focal consumer–brand interactions” (p.154). The next section will review the literature on the three dimensions of CBE.

CBE Dimensions

Marketing scholars have agreed that CBE is a higher-order multi-dimensional construct (e.g., Dessart et al., 2015). Studies that have focused on conceptualizing CBE have described each of the three dimensions differently due to its context-specific nature. Appendix A provides a summary of dimensions of CBE proposed in the literature. An in-depth review of the dimensions revealed that there exists some consistency in relation to how the three dimensions have been expressed. For instance, cognitive engagement has been expressed in various terms, including conscious attention (Vivek et al., 2014), attention (Dessart et al., 2016), absorption (Dessart et al., 2016), immersion (Hollebeek, 2011b), and cognitive processing (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Despite the various terms used, the difference in the definitions of cognitive engagement is often negligible and leads to a common theme that cognitive engagement represents a consumer’s level of concentration, focus, attentiveness, and thought processing in a particular consumer-brand interaction. Similarly, affective engagement has been defined in terms of enthused participation (Vivek et al., 2014), enthusiasm (Dessart et al., 2016), passion (Hollebeek, 2011b), affection (Hollebeek et al., 2014), enjoyment (Dessart et al., 2016), and dedication (Patterson et al., 2006). As evident, the terminology used to describe the affective state of engagement is diverse. A closer analysis of the definitions suggests that some of the terms can be used interchangeably. For example, enthusiasm and dedication are similar to enjoyment, while passion and affection reflect the same meaning of brand-related affect. Overall, affective engagement

relates to consumer's positive emotions (enjoyment, pleasure, satisfaction) derived from a particular consumer-brand interaction. The third dimension, behavioral engagement, has been labeled in terms of social connection (Vivek et al., 2014), activation (Hollebeek, 2011b; Hollebeek et al., 2014), vigor and interaction (Patterson et al., 2006), and sharing, learning, and endorsing (Dessart et al., 2016). Unlike the previous two dimensions, this dimension of CE has multiple interpretations, and therefore, it is difficult to draw common themes from it. In Vivek et al. (2014), behavioral CE is captured as enhancement of the consumer-brand interactions based on interactions with others, while Dessart et al. (2016), Hollebeek et al. (2014), and Patterson et al. (2006), all refer this dimension as a consumer's willingness to invest time and energy in the brand interaction. Recent studies on CE have adopted the latter definition of the behavioral CE dimension.

As this study focuses on online as well as offline activation campaigns, the terminology of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions for these contexts as developed by Hollebeek (2011b) and Mirbagheri and Najmi (2019) respectively will be employed. For offline marketing, Hollebeek (2011b, p. 555) defines CBE as the level of a consumer's "cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions." She identifies three dimensions of CBE; namely, immersion as the cognitive engagement dimension, passion as the affective or emotional engagement dimension, and activation as the behavioral engagement dimension. *Immersion* is defined as "a customer's level of brand-related concentration in particular brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011b, p. 566). The affective dimension of *passion* signifies the extent of individuals' emotional attachment to the brand in specific brand interactions. It is defined as 'the degree of a customer's positive brand-related affect in particular brand

interactions' (Hollebeek, 2011b, p. 568). *Activation* is the highest level in terms of customer brand engagement. It is referred as “a customer’s level of energy, effort and/ or time spent on a brand in particular brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011b, p. 569).

Mirbagheri and Najmi (2019) define CBE with a social media activation campaign (SMAC) as “the extent of cognitive, affective, and behavioral energies that consumers simultaneously and holistically devote into a campaign” (p. 360). In their study of SMAC, the researchers adapt the definitions of the three dimensions from previous studies. For example, they define behavioral engagement as activation, similar to the definition of Hollebeek (2011b). *Activation* in SMAC refers to “the consumers’ level of effort, energy, and time spent on a SMAC, or their willingness to spend such effort and time during the campaign” (Mirbagheri, & Najmi, 2019, p. 381). Similarly, they use the term *attention* to describe cognitive engagement which refers to “the extent to which a consumer concentrates on, is attentive to, thinks about, and is absorbed or engrossed in a social media activation campaign” (Mirbagheri, & Najmi, 2019, p. 381). This is again similar to Hollebeek’s (2011b) definition of *Immersion*. Finally, Hollebeek (2011b) defined the affective engagement dimension as a consumers’ brand-related affect during the interaction which consists of pleasure, joy, satisfaction, interest, and excitement. Mirbagheri and Najmi (2019) used this notion to define *interest* and *enjoyment* as their behavioral dimension. In their study, interest and enjoyment refers to “the extent to which consumers become interested in, or excited about a social media activation campaign, as well as the extent to which they derive pleasure and joy from their experiences with it” (Mirbagheri, & Najmi, 2019, p.381). As the definitions of Mirbagheri and Najmi (2019) align more closely with the context of this study (i.e.,

sponsorship activation), they will be the operational definitions of CBE and the dimensions of CBE within this study. The next section will discuss the theoretical roots of the concept of consumer engagement which lie in the service-dominant (S-D) logic proposed by Lusch and Vargo (2006).

S-D Logic as Theoretical Framework

According to Lusch and Vargo (2006), “S-D logic suggests that marketing can be defined as the process in society and organizations that facilitates voluntary exchange through collaborative relationships that create reciprocal value through the application of complementary resources” (p. 408). Essentially, S-D logic shifts the focus from goods to consumers, thus suggesting organizations are in service of the consumers and should strive to create value with them, as opposed to market to them (Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Merz et al., 2009). Recognizing there is involvement with the consumer pre- and post-sale provides opportunities for relationship development and has the potential to impact customer repurchase decisions (Ballantyne & Varey, 2008). If S-D logic is implemented, the marketer’s role changes to one of managing communications and interactions with customers on a variety of channels and facilitating relationships with them (Ballantyne & Varey, 2008).

Brodie et al. (2011) describe five fundamental propositions (FP) to create a distinctive conceptual framework of customer engagement (CE) based on S-D Logic.

They include:

FP1: CE reflects a psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships.

When a customer interacts with an agent/object, psychological state of a customer is created through first-hand experiences, meaning the customer must in some way interact with an agent/object. This agent/object is often a specific brand and its platforms/channels of communication. These interactions then lead to customer behavior that extends beyond transactions and purchases. The interactional experiences a customer has with brands and their products, services and online content depicts the engagement and loyalty the customer will have toward the specific brand (Brodie et al., 2011).

FP2: CE states occur within a dynamic, iterative process of service relationships that co-creates value.

This FP describes the importance of a customer's ability to be a part of creating content and CE is created through iterative dynamic relationships. This content can be in the form of dialogue, service delivery and communication between a customer and a firm. Co-creating contributes to the creation of loyalty among customers. The interaction and co-creating process is iterative and leads to different levels of engagement states in customers. Through iteratively engaging with an object/agent, a customer's relationship can go from being short-term to long-term as well as from stable to variable (Brodie et al., 2011).

FP3: CE plays central role within a nomological network of service relationships. The concept of CE does not exist isolated from other relational concepts; it is rather a part of a network of social relationships. While some relational concepts are required antecedents (participation and involvement) to CE, flow and rapport are potential antecedents but not required. Specifically, Brodie et al. (2011) point out that consumer's level of interest or perceived relevance with an object is a requirement for the consumer

to become engaged with the object. The proposition also states that consequences of engaging with the object may include commitment, trust, self-brand connection, emotional attachment, and loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011).

FP4: CE is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. In the analysis of the definition of CE a conclusion is made that it is a multidimensional and complex concept. It can be seen that CE includes combinations of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. The importance of the different dimensions may also vary depending on the specific environment in which the CE level is observed, which further indicates the multidimensional view of the concept (Brodie et al., 2011).

FP5: CE occurs within a specific set of situational conditions generating differing CE levels.

Depending on the situation and context that CE is observed in, different levels of engagement can be found. There is a difference between online and offline environments as well as advertisement and other types of marketing. These different environments in which CE is observed might affect the level of engagement regarding a customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects from an interactive experience (Brodie et al 2011).

In sum, the S-D logic perspective recognizes that consumer behavior is centered on the interactive experiences between a consumer and an object (FP1) and that a level of consumer interest and/or personal relevance with respect to the object is required prior to the emergence of specific engagement levels (FP3). Additionally, it also recognizes the multidimensional nature of consumer engagement, and that the engagement consumer

has with an object differs across contexts. The next section will discuss the antecedent variables of involvement and interactivity and their relationship to the three dimensions of consumer engagement (i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral).

Involvement

Zaichkowsky (1985) defined involvement as “a person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests” (p. 342). Involvement also refers to the perceived importance of the object (i.e., brand) to the individual as well as the centrality of the object to an individual’s ego-structure (Russell-Bennett et al., 2007). In the context of sport, the term involvement has been used in conjunction with involvement with a sport (e.g., Alexandris et al., 2007; Bachleda et al., 2016; Tsiotsou, & Alexandris, 2009) or involvement with a sport team (Funk et al., 2004). An individual’s involvement in a sport is defined as “an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreation activity or associated product” (Havitz, & Dimanche, 1997, p. 24). Funk et al. (2004) developed the team sport involvement model (TSI) and defined involvement with a sports team as a “psychological state of motivation, arousal, or interest in an athletic team and related activities that is evoked by individual characteristics and situational factors that possess drive properties” (p. 52). Involvement with a sport activity or sport team has a direct impact on consumption behavior with previous works revealing that highly involved fans spend more time viewing the sport (or their team) on television, reading about the event, and attending the event (Gwinner & Bennett, 2006; Bennett et al., 2009; Olson, 2010). As a result, they are more likely to have a positive consumption experience, get exposed to sponsorship stimuli (Ko et al., 2008), and engage in active processing of the information (Wakefield et al., 2007).

Specific to social media marketing, involvement is linked to information-seeking behavior and can be explained through the users and gratification theory (U&G). According to U&G, media usage is driven by specific goals to satisfy needs and achieve gratification (Katz et al., 1973). Information needs are perceived to be salient motivations for media use and social media channels serve as a tool to meet these needs (Park et al., 2009). In a review of sport-specific social media research, Filo et al. (2015) found that a key reason why sports fans follow their teams on social media is to indulge in information-seeking behavior. Other frequently cited user motivations to engage with sport teams on social media include social interaction, remuneration, entertainment, etc. (Vale, & Fernandes, 2018). Hence, it is not surprising that sponsors engage with consumers on social media by posting brand-related information and entertaining content such as promotional contests, prize competitions, event-related sweepstakes (Gillooly et al., 2017).

An individual's involvement is seen as a motivation to process information regarding the brand, and this motivational state is governed by the perceived relevance of the brand to the individual (Celci & Olson, 1988; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Once the individual recognizes the relevance of the object (i.e., brand), they are likely to exert greater cognitive efforts such as engage in extensive external search and process the information in great detail (Beatty & Smith, 1987). As individuals become more focused on processing brand-related information, they are likely to exhibit higher brand-related thoughts and make inferences based on them (Celsi & Olson, 1988). In other words, the individuals engage in a deeper level of brand-related cognitive elaboration, which in turn

elicits emotional responses (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Consequently, individuals invest more time and effort in processing such information (Hepola, et al., 2017).

Involvement with a sports team has attracted limited attention from sport marketing scholars (Funk et al., 2004; Tsotsou, 2013) and therefore, there is limited evidence on the relationship between individuals' team involvement and brand engagement. However, outside of the context of sports, studies have demonstrated that involvement has a direct positive impact on the three dimensions of consumer engagement (cognitive, affective, and behavioral). Dwivedi (2015) observed that highly involved consumers of a mobile phone category demonstrated higher levels of engagement with the mobile phone brand. This finding was further supported in an Australian context as Leckie et al. (2016) found the mobile phone users to be highly engaged with the mobile service providers. In another retail context, Hepola et al. (2017) found that customers of a tableware brand, who had a high level of personal involvement with the brand, displayed higher levels of cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement with the brand. From an online perspective, Wirtz et al. (2013) found that involvement with online brand communities intensified the positive impact on brand engagement. Hollebeek et al. (2014) investigated the impact of involvement with a social networking site and found a positive relationship with the three dimensions of consumer brand engagement – cognitive processing, affection, and activation. Therefore, it is hypothesized that

H₁: Team sport involvement will have a direct positive effect on sponsorship engagement.

Interactivity

Interactivity has been defined in multiple ways in marketing and advertising literature (for a review, see McMillan & Hwang, 2002). However, the extant literature on interactivity indicates three approaches to defining the construct. The first stream of researchers identified interactivity as a functional feature (Liu & Shrum, 2012; Sundar et al., 2003). This approach to interactivity considers the structural element of the medium of communication (e.g., websites or interface of gaming site). The second stream of researchers defined interactivity in terms of interactive processes (Cho & Leckenby, 1999). The focus of this approach is on the actions that consumers do to make communication interactive. Among the actions seen as interactive are two-way communication or exchange of information (Cho & Leckenby, 1999), user control (Bezjian-Avery et al., 1998), and responsiveness (Rafaeli, 1988). The final stream of researchers investigated what individuals perceive to be interactive. McMillan and Hwang (2002) outlined the three dimensions that define perceived interactivity. They include control, two-way communication, and time.

In the context of sponsorship activations, the sponsors aim to persuade consumers through various brand-related communications which informs the consumers about the brands (or sponsors) desire to interact with them and form a relationship (France et al., 2016). In response, consumers form a perception of the communication in terms of the genuine desire the brand shows to connect with their audience. Therefore, France et al. (2016) define brand interactivity in terms of consumers' perceptions of the communication. The authors conceive brand interactivity as "the consumer's perception of the brand's willingness and genuine desire for integration with the consumer" (p.124). Sundar et al. (2003) alluded to the fact that interactivity can be perceived as a function of

either structural features or message elements and proposed a two-item scale. From a consumer engagement perspective, a consumer evaluates brand interactivity according to the brand's technical facilitation of the interaction and the willingness to have a genuine connection with the consumers (France et al., 2016). To put this in the context of sponsorship activations, the consumer evaluates the sponsorship communication in the following two ways: (a) on the functional ability of the sponsor to interact with them (i.e., on-site through exhibits or activation zones and on social media via their brand account or sponsored property's account); and (b) the brand's willingness to connect with the consumers.

Interactivity is considered to be a fundamental driver of consumer engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Marketing scholars have found interactivity to be a motivational factor for the consumer to engage with advertisers (Sundar, & Kim, 2005), participate in event-marketing strategies (Wohlfeil, & Whelan, 2006), and consume social media content (Mollen, & Wilson, 2009). This is because messages that are interactive usually involve two-way communication between the sponsor and consumer, and subsequently lead to a consumer engagement with the brand (Ariel, & Avidar, 2015). This consumer engagement occurs through various communications (e.g., asking sport/product/ service/firm-related questions to consumers, allowing consumers to ask any questions, inviting consumers to visit sponsors kiosk, engaging in an online/offline activity to win a prize/award), which serve as sponsorship activation for enhanced consumer-brand interactions (Weeks et al., 2008).

Previous studies have found a positive relationship between interactivity and cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement. Consumers who perceive brand-related

communication to be highly interactive, demonstrate a greater ability in cognitive processing of such information (Liu, & Shrum, 2002). That is, when exposed to the website and product-related content that is highly interactive, individuals process such information in great detail (Sicilia et al., 2005). High levels of interactivity are also associated with increased pleasure and arousal (Fiore et al., 2005). As a result, individuals spend more time interacting with such communication and think more about the advertising message and the brand that they are exposed to (Bellman et al., 2011). Fiore and Jin's (2003) study demonstrated that adding an interactivity feature on an apparel website resulted in participants spending more time on the website. In an experimental study on interactivity through websites, Fiore et al. (2005) used image interactivity feature on an e-commerce website as the stimulus. They found that emotional arousal and emotional pleasure were significant predictors of image interactivity. Within the context of sponsorship, Kim and Kaplanidou (2014) conceptualized a sponsorship engagement model based on Fiore et al.'s (2005) study on website interactivity. Their study investigated consumer responses to on-site Olympic sponsorship activation with a particular focus on the role of interactivity in driving consumer responses. The authors found that interactivity drives consumers affective engagement (i.e., pleasure and arousal), which in turn leads to positive attitudes and purchase intentions toward the sponsored brand.

Similarly, in an online context, utilization of social media as a sponsorship activation tool has become common place as it helps sponsor achieve wide range of marketing objectives including interacting and engaging with the audience (Abeza et al., 2015). Weeks et al. (2008) posit that interactivity is an integral component of effective

online sponsorship activations. The interactivity of messages on digital platforms leads to higher consumer participation, involvement, flow, and emotional arousal (Kujur & Singh, 2017; Zhang et al., 2017). Research by Weeks et al. (2008), as well as Mahapatra and Mishra (2017), support that consumers generally have more favorable dispositions, both emotional and behavioral, towards SNS messages that lead to active interaction between the sponsor and consumer. Further, de Vries et al. (2012) demonstrated that interactive posts resulted in greater affective and behavioral engagement, while Luarn et al. (2015) found that user engagement on social networking sites is influenced by higher interactivity. Therefore, it is hypothesized that interactivity is positively related to enhanced cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses regarding the advertised brand.

H₂: Brand interactivity will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

Sport Sponsorship

Researchers in the area of sports sponsorship, have defined sponsorship in various ways. Abratt et al. (1987) were the first to provide a comprehensive definition, and they stated that sponsorship is “an agreement in terms of which a sponsor provides some aid to a beneficiary, which may be an association, a team, or an individual, to enable the latter to pursue some activity and thereby derives the benefits contemplated in terms of its promotion strategy” (p. 300). Further, they went on to list the benefits a sponsor derives from sponsoring a property including increasing brand awareness, media exposure, promoting public relations of the sponsor or publicity. Meenaghan (1991) argued that sponsorship is a commercial activity and should not be treated as an act of patronage. He defined sponsorship as “an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity, person or event

(property), in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity, person, or event by the investor (sponsor)” (p. 36). This definition is the most cited and widely accepted in the sponsorship literature; therefore, it will be the operational definition used within this study.

Sponsorship has existed since the 1950’s and was conceptualized as marketing promotions aimed at creating enthusiasm in the community through an act of patronage by the corporations (Cornwell, 1995). Since then, it has evolved from a philanthropic oriented activity to a market-oriented activity with the aim of creating mutually beneficial relationships (strategic alliances) between the sponsor and the sponsored property (Blake et al., 2019). Over the past 20 years, sponsorship has been the fastest-growing form of marketing with corporate brands allocating almost 20% of their marketing budget to sponsorship (IEG, 2018). Sports properties including franchises, athletes, and venues remain the primary focus for sponsors as they constitute over 70% of all sponsorship-related activities. The total global spending by corporations on such activities in 2018 was reported at \$63 billion, a rise of 4.5% from the previous year (IEG, 2018).

When a corporate brand agrees to a sponsorship deal with a sport property, two activities are involved in the making of that sponsorship (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). The first activity involves a financial transaction between the sponsor and the property, through which the sponsor receives the right to associate with the property in return for the rights fee paid. The second activity involves only the sponsor, wherein it develops marketing activities to communicate the sponsorship with its target audience, otherwise known as sponsorship-linked marketing. Cornwell (1995) defines sponsorship-linked marketing as “the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the

purpose of building and communicating an association to a sponsorship” (p.15). Such activities usually require an additional investment which can range from one to eight times the amount spent on acquiring the sponsorship rights (O’Reilly & Horning, 2013). A quote by Crimmins and Horn (1996) perfectly describes why sponsors invest additional amounts on communicating their sponsorship - “If the brand cannot afford to spend to communicate its sponsorship, then the brand cannot afford sponsorship at all” (p.16). In other words, the researchers suggested that sponsors should invest in ancillary marketing activities that can help them achieve the set objectives of the sponsorship.

As sponsorship-related investments continue to grow at an exponential rate, a consensus amongst both academicians and practitioners has yet to be reached on what determines the ‘true value’ of sponsorship, or in other words, the effectiveness of sponsorship (Kim et al., 2015). Moreover, due to widespread economic uncertainty, such increased spending is constantly subjected to enhanced scrutiny as sponsorship managers and executives are questioned frequently from key decision-makers (e.g., CEOs, CFOs, executive boards) to justify such hefty investments as well as to maximize sponsor benefits. Consequently, greater importance is now placed on understanding the effectiveness of sponsorship.

Consumer Engagement in Sport Sponsorship

Engagement in sponsorship has largely been discussed through sponsorship activation. The term ‘sponsorship activation’ in sponsorship research was first used in a 2006 *sport marketing quarterly (SMQ)* issue (Wakefield, 2012). Studies prior to that used the term ‘activation’ interchangeably with another term called ‘leverage.’ Weeks et al. (2008) caution against the usage of both the terms interchangeably and provide a clear

demarcation between the two. They define sponsorship leverage as “the act of using collateral marketing communications to exploit the commercial potential of the association between a sponsor and the sport property” while sponsorship activation is defined as “communications that promote the engagement, involvement, or participation of the sponsorship audience with the sponsor” (Weeks et al., 2008, p. 639). The authors further clarify that the term leverage is used to describe all sponsorship-linked marketing communications and activities collateral to the sponsorship investment, while the term activation is often reserved for those where the potential exists for audiences to interact or in some way become involved with the sponsor. Examples of activations include event-related sweepstakes, event-driven mobile telephone competitions, and event-themed brand web sites. Non-activational communications promote the association in a rather passive way, including on-site signage and sponsor name exposures.

The definition of sponsorship activation provided by Weeks et al. (2008) consists of three terms that can be used interchangeably (engagement, involvement, and participation), whereas the engagement literature differentiates between the constructs of consumer participation, consumer involvement, and consumer engagement. A consumer’s level of involvement is viewed as their perceived personal relevance to an object, situation, or action (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Consumer engagement, on the other hand, goes beyond involvement as it is considered to be a consumer’s active state of mind with an object as opposed to merely a level of interest in the object. Participation has been defined as “the degree to which the consumer is involved in producing and delivering the service” (Dabholkar, 1990, p. 484). Based on the definition, it appears that consumer participation occurs as part of an exchange

process and involves an activity (i.e., a series of actions oriented towards a specific goal). Engagement, meanwhile, may or may not require the process of exchange to take place (Solem & Pedersen, 2016). Therefore, to avoid the ambiguity in Weeks et al. (2008) definition of sponsorship activation, this study uses the definition provided by Pons et al., (2016). The researchers define sponsorship activation as “operational methods of sponsorship implementation in events organizing with the objective of connecting fans (or the indirect audience) to sponsors” (Pons et al., 2016, p. 30).

The IEG 2018 sponsorship decision-makers survey indicated that the most common methods of sponsorship activations include social media, public relations, and on-site/experiential marketing, with 98% of sponsors using the social media, 79% of the sponsors using public relations, and 77% taking the experiential marketing route. A primary reason for this is the mass-audience reach these channels offer. The other channels such as hospitality, internal communications, direct marketing, and promotions are limited in their audience reach. For instance, the audience receiving hospitality at events are key clients, government officials, high-level managerial employees, very important persons (VIPs), and prize winners of sweepstakes. Similarly, internal communications involve only employees of the sponsoring company, while direct marketing and promotional offers are received only by those who have consented to receive such information. As such, less than 50% of sponsors choose to activate their association through these platforms (IEG, 2018). Irrespective of the platform chosen, ancillary marketing communications can help foster the viewpoints of the sponsorship relationship in the minds of the consumers (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2014). Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of activations in forwarding sponsorship

objectives on-site (e.g., Ballouli et al., 2018; Kim & Kaplanidou, 2014; Wakefield, 2012) as well as on digital/social media (Cahill & Meenaghan, 2013; Kaushik et al., 2020).

On-Site Sponsorship Activations

Lardinoit and Quester (2001) noted that there are two kinds of sponsorships, on-site or field sponsorship and television broadcast sponsorship. *On-site or field sponsorship* refers to the placement of a logo on sports equipment or billboards at the stadium or arena (Lardinoit & Quester 2001). *Broadcast or television sponsorship* refers to advertisers' association with a specific TV program or its promotion (Lardinoit & Quester, 2001). A unique aspect of a field sponsorship is that sport properties provide sponsors with additional space to leverage their sponsorship by interacting with the sport fans (e.g., Close et al., 2006; Sneath et al., 2005). For instance, Pizza Hut is the official sponsor of NFL Super Bowl. During the 2019 Super Bowl, Pizza Hut created a "Pizza Hut Dance Party" in which a giant screen displayed an augmented reality experience which fans could participate in. Fans would try dance moves on the floor and seconds later, Pittsburgh Steeler's star receivers Antonio Brown and JuJu Smith-Schuster would appear with the fans on the big screen dancing next to them (Vladem, 2019). Therefore, *on-site sponsorship activation* can be defined as a sponsorship-linked marketing activity that aims at connecting the audience present at the event site with the sponsor.

Research investigating sponsors' use of ancillary marketing communications has generally been supportive that consumers respond positively to such communications. However, initial studies did not make any distinction between communications that actively engage audiences (sponsorship activations) and communications that might be more passively processed (sponsorship leverage). McDaniel and Kinney (1998)

investigated whether there were any differences in consumers' responses to commercials of official sponsors and non-official sponsors (ambushers) of 1996 Atlanta Olympics. They found that the official sponsor which used more creative ads (sponsorship leveraging) was recognized more, had a more favorable attitude, and was more likely to be purchased than the non-official sponsor. One study that found a clear relationship between sponsorship leverage and outcomes is that of Quester and Thompson (2001). Although in the context of arts sponsorship, it is still the most cited article in the sponsorship-linked marketing literature. The study considered consumers' responses to three companies who differed in the amount spent on leveraging activities which included both activation as well as non-activation communications. The authors concluded that the sponsor that spent the most in activations, was more recalled and received greater increase in brand image. This was further supported by Grohs et al. (2004) in the context of Alpine Ski championships where they found a significant relationship between sponsorship-linked marketing activities and event-sponsor image transfer. However, a major shortcoming of these studies was that it did not include direct measures of sponsorship leveraging efforts. More recently, Biscaia et al. (2017) found that marketing activities surrounding sponsorship can prove to be effective in increasing fans' familiarity with the sponsor's products or services. Thus, it appears that when considered as a whole, leveraging communications generally assist in promoting positive sponsorship outcomes.

A primary reason why sponsors invest heavily in activations is because of its' ability to generate two-way communication between the sponsor and its target audience, thus surmounting the limitations of one-way communications, which is often the case of a traditional sponsorship or advertising (Nickell et al., 2011). This is supported through

empirical studies where audience involvement and interactivity with sponsors has led to more positive sponsor outcomes. For instance, Sneath et al. (2005) surveyed attendees of a charity sporting event and examined their attitudes towards the title sponsor (an automobile manufacturer), who had invested heavily on activating their sponsorship through on-site product exhibits. This provided the attendees an opportunity to interact with the brand representatives to gain more insight about the sponsor's products and services such as inspecting vehicles, asking questions about the product, and entering a competition for a new vehicle. The researchers reported that the attendees who interacted at on-site exhibits rated the automobile manufacturer's sponsorship marginally more favorably, rated the automobile manufacturer itself more favorably, and were more likely to report that they would consider the automobile manufacturer at the time of their next vehicle purchase. Similarly, Bennett et al. (2006) found that spectators, who attended a tennis event and were exposed to sponsorship activations at the event, successfully recalled brands who sponsored the event, and displayed positive attitude towards them.

In a deviation from the previous studies, Choi et al. (2006) utilized a qualitative method and interviewed 17 attendees of an Action Sports event after asking them to capture pictures of the sponsor LG's activations at the event. The findings suggested that the majority of the attendees recognized LG's activations. However, they also expected more consumer-brand interaction and engagement opportunities such as free giveaways of the products, product promotions, and one-on-one demo sessions. To confirm whether product promotions lead to sponsor activation effectiveness, DeGaris et al. (2009) and DeGaris, and West (2012) interviewed 1000 NASCAR fans that had participated in a NASCAR-related promotion. The results of both studies revealed that a high majority of

the participants held positive attitudes towards sponsors of NASCAR and bought the sponsors' product because it was a sponsor of NASCAR. Similarly, Kim, and Kaplanidou (2014) found that consumers who interacted with on-site sponsors, experienced significant levels of arousal and pleasure during that interaction, which led to favorable attitudes towards the brand.

Researchers have also compared the effects of activational leverage at a non-main event site (fan fest) with that of non-activational leverage at the main event site (F1 main race) (Ballouli et al., 2018). They found that activations at the non-main event site outperformed the main event on-site non-activational leverage in terms of consumers' attitudes toward the sponsor, word of mouth, and purchase intentions. DeGaris and colleagues (2017) also highlight the importance of on-site sponsor engagement. In a NASCAR event context, they found a direct relationship between cognitive and behavioral outcome for fans who visited sponsor exhibits and interacted at the event. Through this, they concluded that on-site sponsorship activation, as well as articulation of the sponsorship, mediated the relationship between sponsor recognition and attitude towards the sponsor. Further, they also found attitude towards the sponsor to be a significant predictor of purchase intentions. However, a limitation of NASCAR studies is that the fans have a high recall and recognition of the sponsors due to repeated exposure to the sponsors. Hence, the generalizability of the studies involving NASCAR consumers have been questioned (Cornwell, 2020). Thus, overall, it appears that sponsorship activities that directly engage audiences generate more positive outcomes than those that can be processed more passively.

Social Media Sponsorship Activation

Social media is defined as “the tools, platforms, and applications that enable consumers to connect, communicate, and collaborate with others” (Williams & Chinn, 2010, p. 422). Since its inception as Web 2.0 in 2004, numerous social media platforms and applications, otherwise known as Social Networking Sites (SNS), have emerged such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat. One of the most prominent social media platforms is Twitter, which as of 2019 has 330 million monthly active users generating more than 550 million tweets per day (Twitter, 2019). Twitter is commonly used by users to rapidly share small amounts of information on a plethora of topics which often contain current events (Heinrich et al., 2011; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Hambrick (2012) noted that many sport organizations also use Twitter for the same purpose of sharing information, communicating, and interacting with their stakeholders due to Twitter’s ability to facilitate two-way communication (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012) and build relationships (Lipsman et al., 2012). Sponsors have recognized this potential in SNS and hence have integrated social media-based communication as a way to activate their sponsorship (Abeza et al., 2015). The 2018 IEG sponsorship report states that 98% of sponsors activate their sponsorship through social media, with Facebook being the most prominent one (95%) followed by Twitter (90%) (IEG, 2018).

With the advent of social media, SNS have now become an integral form of a sponsor’s marketing communications strategy (Shawky et al., 2019). This is primarily because SNS possess a multitude of advantages such as simplicity, accessibility, contact availability, and transparency brought to users, thus making them a viable option for corporate brands to use SNS as a marketing tool (Abeza et al., 2013). These features

provide sponsors with an opportunity to interact and engage with customers (Burton, 2013; Cahill & Meenaghan, 2013). Studies have looked at how sponsors use social media to activate their sponsorship. Abeza et al. (2015) explored how TOP sponsors of the 2014 Sochi Olympics activated their global sponsorship. Results demonstrated that producing tweets, broadcasting of tweets, and retweeting were the three methods of communication used by TOP sponsors. Similarly, Geurin and Gee (2014) examined the effectiveness of Molson Canadian brand's social media sponsorship activation during the 2014 Winter Olympics. The findings relating to MC's sponsorship activation strategy on multiple social media platforms suggested that the posts on Facebook were informational in nature while those on Twitter were promotional in nature suggesting that sponsors use SNS in various ways to activate their sponsorship. To delineate between the different ways of sponsorship activation on social media, Gillooly et al. (2017) thematically categorized the content posted by sponsors on Twitter. The typology that was developed comprised of 17 categories grouped under four main types: informing, entertaining, rewarding and interacting, with the majority of sponsor tweets (68.3 %) falling into the informing type, followed by interacting (16.6%), entertaining (12.9%), and rewarding (2.2%). This finding has been well supported outside of sport sponsorship literature that has studied Twitter's usage as an informational and promotional tool in sport. For instance, Pegoraro (2010) studied professional athletes use of Twitter and found that most athletes used the online social network to communicate with fellow athletes and followers. Similarly, Hambrick et al. (2010) analyzed professional athletes' tweets to understand why they use Twitter and concluded that they used it as a medium to interact with other athletes and their fans rather than promote themselves. Hambrick (2012), using the specific case of

bicycle race organizers, specified that Twitter can be a critical tool for a brand to spread information and promotional messages. Interestingly, he also found that popular users following the brand play an important role in the dissemination of the information. Collectively, these studies highlight how social media acts a vehicle for brands to communicate, interact, and promote themselves amongst users, while also developing a strong relationship with them.

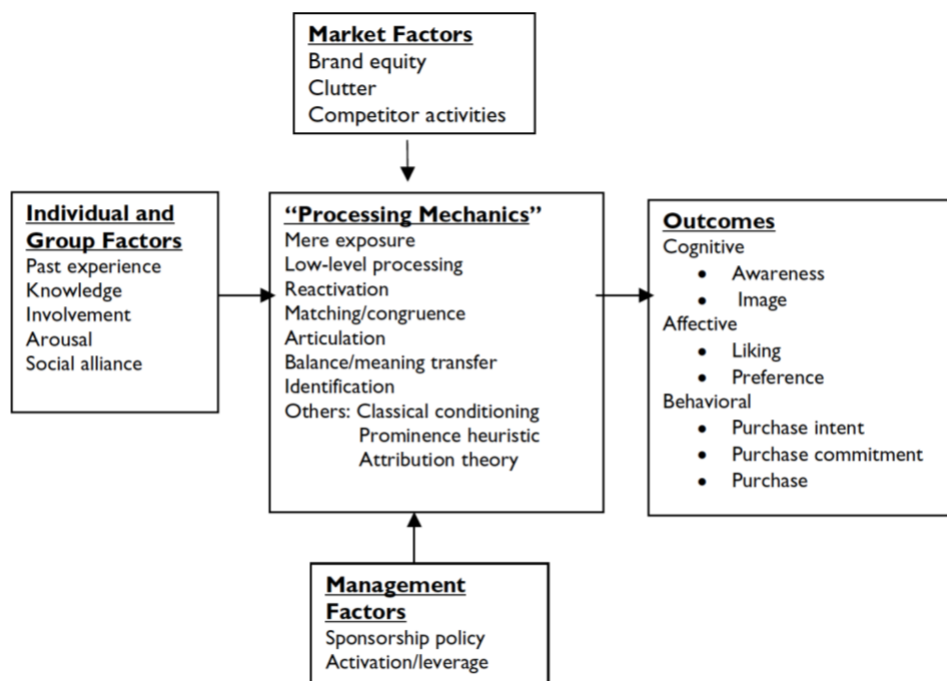
Sponsorship Effectiveness

To understand the effectiveness of sponsorship, it is imperative that we first understand the theory behind how audiences respond to sponsorship stimuli. Previous studies investigating the measurement of sponsorship effectiveness have used various theories to understand consumer responses to the sponsorship (Cornwell et al., 2005). For example, studies have used Keller's (1993) associate memory model to evaluate consumer's recall and recognition of sponsorship. Similarly, mere exposure hypothesis has been used to understand consumers affective responses (liking, preferences) to sponsorship. The schema congruity theory was used to examine how consumers perceive the fit between a sponsor and the sponsored property. Collectively, the theories used highlight the various factors that influence consumer responses to sponsorship. The conceptual frameworks proposed to understand sponsorship effectiveness have incorporated these factors into their models. For instance, in Cornwell et al.'s (2005) model of consumer-focused sponsorship-linked marketing communications (see Figure 1), information processing of sponsorship (i.e., sponsor-property congruence, identification, and articulation) is contingent upon individual and group factors (e.g., involvement, prior knowledge, experience), management factors (e.g., sponsorship

activation and leverage), and market factors (e.g., clutter and brand equity). The processing mechanics then lead to the classic tripartite sponsorship outcomes (cognitive, affective, and conative).

Figure 2

Model of Consumer-Focused Sponsorship-Linked Marketing Communications (Cornwell et al., 2005)

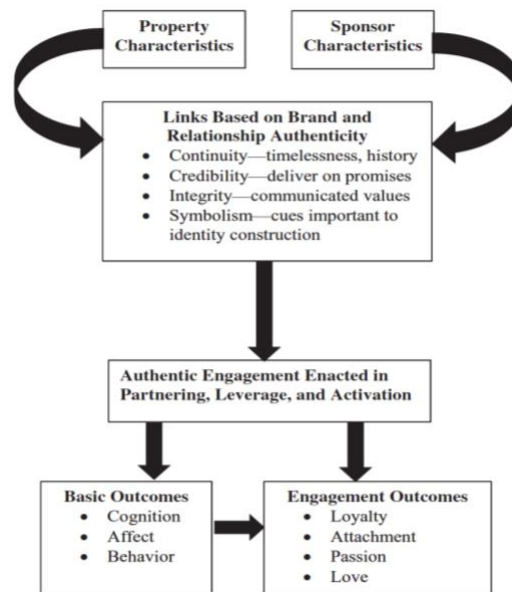


The model of consumer-focused sponsorship-linked marketing communications proposed by Cornwell et al. (2005) has been foundational to future theoretical models developed to understand sponsorship effectiveness. These models have gone beyond the basic outcomes of brand awareness, brand image, and purchase intentions, and factored in the engagement aspect of sponsorship activations. Cornwell (2019) proposed a ‘sponsorship engagement model’ (see Figure 2) based on authenticity. According to this model, authentic engagement is enacted in sponsorship leveraging or activations, which

leads to basic sponsorship outcomes as well as engagement specific outcomes. Specifically, Cornwell (2019) asserts that the tripartite outcomes of cognition, affection, and conation are basic outcomes of sponsorship, while engagement outcomes go beyond these basic outcomes to include more deeper and long-lasting outcomes such as brand loyalty and brand attachment.

Figure 3

Sponsorship Engagement Model (Cornwell, 2019)

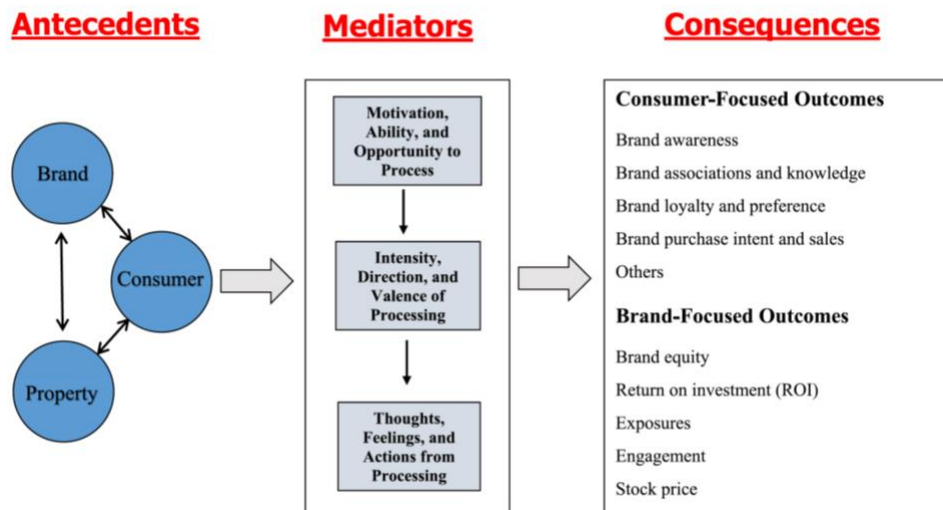


Similarly, Wakefield et al. (2020) proposed an information processing model of communications (see Figure 3) that offers a rich theoretical perspective to understand sponsorship effects. According to this theoretical approach, the antecedent factors of consumer-property (e.g., involvement, identification), property-brand (e.g., fit, leverage, activation), and consumer-brand (e.g., awareness of the sponsor, image) influence a consumer’s motivation, ability, and/or opportunity to process sponsorship information. This, in turn, determines the resulting intensity, direction, and valence of that processing.

The thoughts, feelings, and actions that occur as part of the sponsorship information processing determine both consumer-related (e.g., brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty) and brand-related (e.g., engagement) outcomes.

Figure 4

Information Processing Model of Sponsorship Communications (Wakefield et al., 2020)



From a social media marketing perspective, measuring the effectiveness of marketing campaigns on social networking sites can be done similarly to how traditional marketing campaigns are measured (Rishika et al., 2013). Previous research has suggested that social media marketing can increase brand awareness, word of mouth, purchase intentions, and even actual purchases (Achen, 2017; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). A study conducted by Dholakia and Durham (2010) examined whether users who liked a café’s Facebook page and users who did not like the same page displayed any differences in their intention to visit and re-visit the café. They found that users who like the café’s Facebook page increased their store visits per month and generated more positive word of mouth, although it did not have any impact on the amount of money spent per visit by

both groups. Similarly, Hutter et al. (2013) found that consumers' purchase decisions of the sponsor are likely to be influenced through social media engagement. The authors analyzed the influence of a car manufacturer's social media activities and participants' social media involvement on the purchase decision process of consumers. Their findings demonstrated that engagement with a Facebook fan page has positive effects on consumers' brand awareness, word-of-mouth activities, and purchase intentions.

Understanding the effectiveness of sport sponsorship in the realm of social media is at a nascent stage. Research on assessing internet-based sport sponsorship began in 2008. Weeks et al. (2008) found a three-way relationship between leverage, congruence, and articulation. This was further confirmed by Carrillat, d'Astous, and Morissette (2014) in an experimental study where participants displayed favorable attitudes towards the sponsor when the activation message was sponsor focused. Steyn (2009) noted that the use of traditional measures of advertising effectiveness to measure sponsor effectiveness in the digital medium might be insufficient for understanding how sponsorship works in the consumer's mind. This is because cognitive outcomes such as awareness of the sponsor and perceived image of the sponsor are merely first-line measures of sponsorship impact and do not themselves serve to facilitate understanding of the consumer's online engagement with sponsor brands. Hence, he suggested that brand recommendation via electronic word of mouth should serve as the ultimate yardstick to measure sponsorship effectiveness.

Meenaghan et al. (2013) concurred with Steyn's (2009) idea that the "immediacy of interaction and conversation between engaged and empowered consumers require a different monitoring and measurement structure" (p. 452). Further, the authors added that

measurement of sponsorship on social media should take place in relation to buzz, sentiment, and engagement. Delia and Armstrong (2015) implemented this measurement technique in the context of the 2014 French Open Tennis championships by collecting 300,000 tweets of sponsors of the event. The data was analyzed, first by measuring the buzz (mentions via tweet by followers of the sponsor) and sentiment (positive or negative tweet), and second, by analyzing the sponsor tweets through content analysis. They found that unintended misrepresentation of sponsors and sponsorship activation drove the Twitter conversation, while the sponsorship campaigns failed to generate buzz and sentiments among the users. In addition, the study did not engage with consumers directly, hence there was no evaluation of consumers' degrees of engagement. However, recently Kaushik et al. (2020) collected 1788 tweets from 131 sponsors of 2016 and 2017 Tennis Grand Slams to examine consumer responses to the sponsor communication message. The results established that articulation of the tweets influenced sentiments of the fans and their willingness to recommend the brand on Twitter while interactivity of the tweet had a positive effect only on electronic word-of-mouth. Collectively, these studies suggest that effectiveness of sponsorship on social media should take place in relation to the interaction with the sponsors' communication message. This study attempts to do so and go a step further by examining consumers cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses during such interactions.

Outcomes of Sponsorship Engagement

Consumer engagement is considered to be a part of a network of social relationships (Brodie et al., 2013). As illustrated in FP3 of the conceptual framework of consumer engagement proposed by Brodie et al. (2011), some of the relational concepts

such as involvement and participation are antecedents to consumer engagement, while other concepts such as brand commitment, brand trust, and brand loyalty are considered to be consequences of consumer engagement. Dessart (2017) reviewed the conceptual works on consumer engagement and found that consumer loyalty was an outcome of engagement in almost all conceptual works. For instance, Bowden (2009) describes consumer engagement as a psychological process driving consumer loyalty, while van Doorn et al.'s (2010) consumer engagement behaviors model illustrates brand trust and brand commitment, which are antecedents to brand loyalty, as outcomes of consumer engagement. Similarly, Hollebeek (2011b) indicates that engaged customers exhibit greater loyalty with focal brands. This has also been conceptualized in a social media setting as well (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that consumer loyalty to brands will be an outcome of sponsorship activation communications.

Brand Loyalty

Achieving a loyal customer base has become a core marketing objective for brands as it benefits the companies in terms of increased revenue as well as decreased expenses on acquisition of new customers (Gee et al., 2005). Further, customer loyalty can help achieve competitive advantage (Bansal & Gupta, 2001). From a sponsorship context, the IEG sponsorship survey (IEG, 2018) revealed that 46% of sponsors rate increasing brand loyalty as an extremely important sponsorship objective. Oliver (1999, p. 34) defines brand loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having

the potential to cause switching behavior.” This definition of brand loyalty has been extensively used in the engagement and sponsorship literature due to its emphasis on the attitudinal as well as the behavioral aspects of loyalty. Behavioral, or purchase loyalty relates to repeat purchase behaviors of the brand whereas attitudinal brand loyalty concerns one’s level of commitment to the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). The two dimensions of loyalty are actually an extension of Oliver’s (1997) theory of brand loyalty stage, which posits that loyal customers first form attitudes towards the brand which translate into behaviors. This is based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA) proposed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). The theory assumes that customers carefully process decision making by considering the consequences of the alternative behaviors and choosing the one that leads to the most desirable consequences. The result of this reasoned choice process reveals a behavioral intention to engage in the selected behavior. Based on TRA, Oliver (1997) claimed that attitudinal brand loyalty develops in three stages – cognitive (expectations and preference for a brand), affective (liking towards a brand based on satisfying experience), and conative (desire to repurchase a brand). That is, customers become “loyal first in a cognitive sense, then later in an affective sense, and still later in a conative manner” (Oliver, 1997, p. 392). The fourth stage of Oliver’s loyalty model concerns the behavioral aspect of loyalty, and he terms it action loyalty, which is the willingness to engage in a purchase behavior repeatedly.

The examination of the relationship between CBE and brand loyalty is a novel concept and an emerging area of research (Kaur et al., 2020). Having said that, the few studies that have examined the relationship suggest higher levels of brand engagement can increase loyalty towards the brand. In their conceptualization of the social media-

based engagement scale, Hollebeek et al. (2014) found that users that engaged with the LinkedIn platform indicated a high usage intent of the platform, which included loyalty towards LinkedIn. Dwivedi (2015) surveyed Indian mobile phone customers and found that engagement with brand manufacturers was a vital predictor of loyalty intentions such as recommending the brands to friends and repurchase intentions. Similarly, in the context of Australian consumers of mobile service providers, Leckie et al. (2016) found that the activation and affection dimension of CBE influenced loyalty towards the mobile phone service providers, but not the cognitive dimension. This means that once the level of CBE goes beyond an optimal point, consumers tend to show lower levels of attitudinal loyalty, however it does not have any effect on the behavioral loyalty of the consumer (Leckie et al., 2016). Research in social media settings have also supported the theory that engaging individuals on social media can influence brand loyalty. Jahn and Kunz (2014) suggested that active participation on a Facebook page led to brand attachment which in turn influenced loyalty towards the brand. More recently, research in social media engagement has started to investigate the influence of engagement with a virtual brand community on various business outcomes. The studies by Casaló et al. (2010) and Laroche et al. (2012) found that participation in online brand communities increased loyalty towards the brand. More recently, from a sport consumer context, Kaur et al. (2020) found that Indian Facebook users who perceived Nike's page to be engaging demonstrated a high degree of loyalty towards Nike.

Brand loyalty as an outcome of sponsorship engagement is a novel concept and an emerging area of research. Within the sponsorship literature, loyalty towards the sponsor was first examined by Sirgy et al. (2008) in their study of extending the self-congruity

theory to marketing communications in sports. They found that fans of a sponsorship event, who identify with other fans at the event, feel more loyal towards the sponsoring brand when they are emotionally involved with the event and are aware of the sponsoring brand. Mazodier and Merunka (2012) extended this thought and investigated the relationship between sponsoring a sport team or event and brand loyalty towards the sponsor of the team or event. The researchers used an experimental design and showed advertisements related to sponsorship to the experimental group and non-sponsorship related advertisement to the control group. The results revealed that brand loyalty towards the sponsor increased significantly for the participants exposed to sponsorship advertisements. In a mobile sport video games context, Brownlee et al. (2015) found that avid gamers recalled and recognized significantly more brands than casual gamers and had significantly higher brand loyalty towards the brands that were advertised in the game. Tsordia et al. (2018) investigated the influence of Microsoft's X-Box sponsorship of a Greek basketball club on fans' loyalty towards Microsoft. They found that fans who were engaged with X-Box showed higher levels of loyalty towards Microsoft.

Despite the investigation of the relationship between sponsorship engagement and brand loyalty being at a nascent stage, results from previous studies indicate a positive significant influence of sponsor engagement in generating loyal consumer towards the sponsor. Therefore, it is hypothesized that

H₃: Sponsorship engagement will have a direct positive effect on brand loyalty.

Mediating Effect of Sponsorship Engagement

This study also intends to test the mediating role of sponsorship engagement in the relationship between the antecedents and outcome of sponsorship engagement. That

is, this study seeks to empirically test whether sponsorship engagement mediates the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty as well as the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty. Mediation can occur fully or partially (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In full mediation, the independent variable affects the dependent variable only through the mediating variable. Stated otherwise, full mediation occurs when there is an indirect effect of independent variable on dependent variable. In partial mediation, the independent variable has an indirect as well as a direct effect on the dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Applying the concept of mediation to the current study's context, a full mediation will occur if team sport involvement and brand interactivity affect the brand loyalty only through their effect on sponsorship engagement. Similarly, a partial mediation will occur if the team sport involvement and brand interactivity affect the brand loyalty directly, as well as indirectly through its effect on sponsorship engagement.

The relationship between involvement and loyalty is a sequential psychological process that takes place in three stages (Iwasaki & Haritz, 1998). In the first stage consumers get involved with the activity/brand which leads to the second stage of development of a commitment towards the brand, which Oliver (1997) termed as attitudinal loyalty. The third and final stage is the formation of behavioral loyalty i.e., resistance to change preference of the brand. Academics have found mixed results when examining the relationship between the two variables. Warrington and Shim (2000) found that the correlation between product involvement and brand commitment was almost negligible. On the contrary, Quester and Lim (2003) suggested that a link exists between the two variables although they could not establish if involvement precedes loyalty in the

relationship. This finding was later determined in a sport spectator context by Bee and Havitz (2010) who concluded that involvement was a prerequisite to becoming a loyal supporter. Similar conclusion was drawn by Kunkel et al. (2013) in an Australian sport context where involvement with the team and league created a loyal fan base. However, from a sponsorship perspective, highly identified fans of a sport only showed strong attitudinal loyalty towards the sponsors of the sport event but not behavioral loyalty (Levin et al., 2004).

Similar to the involvement-loyalty relationship, academics have found a direct as well as an indirect effect of interactivity on loyalty. Srinivasan et al. (2002) found that two-way communication between customer service representatives of a retail website and customers of a enhances customers return intentions to the website. This finding was further corroborated in an e-commerce study by Dholakia and Zhao (2009). The stream of researchers who have found an indirect effect have investigated the relationship in various contexts. Examining the website interactivity of web-poll interfaces, Cyr et al. (2009) developed a model in which website interactivity indirectly influence loyalty to websites through cognitive and affective variables including effectiveness of website and website trust. In a study involving mobile phone users, Lee et al. (2015) found that usability of the mobile phones mediated the relationship between interactivity with mobile phone and loyalty towards the mobile brand.

The role of consumer engagement as a mediator in the relationship between involvement and loyalty as well as interactivity and loyalty has also been investigated recently. Highly involved users of a mobile phone displayed higher levels of engagement with the mobile phone brand which influenced loyalty towards the brand (Dwivedi,

2015). In an online retail context, Parihar et al. (2019) found that consumer engagement mediated the involvement-loyalty relationship while similar findings were revealed in a small service brands context by France et al. (2016). With regards to the interactivity variable, Kaur et al. (2020) found that interactivity with online brand communities resulted in heightened levels of consumer engagement with the community which in turn resulted in loyalty towards the brand community. Overall, results from previous works reveal that consumer engagement with a brand has a mediating effect on the relationship between involvement and loyalty as well as interactivity and loyalty. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H4: Sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty.

H5: Sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty.

Moderating Role of Gender

In the consumer marketing literature, gender is determined to be an important demographic variable affecting customer behavior (Islam et al., 2019). This is guided by Bern's (1981) gender schema theory, which posits that individual identifying with a particular sex tend to process information in terms of a gender schema using the traditional bipolar masculinity/femininity dimension. On the contrary, individuals who do not restrict their identity to a specific sex, use other nongender related dimensions to organize information making them less likely to engage in gender-schematic processing. This indicates that gender acts as both differentiating biological sex variable as well as a psychological construct affecting consumer behavior. According to gender schema

theory, males tend to develop individualistic goals whereas females tend to develop relationship-oriented or communal goals (Firat & Dholakia, 1998). Females also tend to process information more comprehensively while males tend to be selective in their approach (Ganesan-Lim et al., 2008). Therefore, females are more likely to have their evaluation of the interaction influenced when communicating with the staff employees. From an online perspective, research suggests that females are motivated by hedonic values to co-create activities with brand while males do so if they perceive the activity to be socially important. In general, both genders co-create with a brand when the activity aligns with their personal values (Kennedy, Guzman, & Ind, 2022). This suggests that females are more likely to favorably evaluate the activations on social media than males.

However recent studies on consumer engagement have found mixed results on Bern's gender schema theory. Phua et al. (2018) studied users of e-cigarettes and found gender significantly impacted consumer engagement with e-cigarettes advertisements. Tram (2021) provided an in-depth understanding of CE and its nomological network in the Vietnamese tourism service industry and found that gender does influence the relationship between CE and its antecedents and consequences. On the contrary, Nadeem et al. (2015) did not find any gender differences among online Italian Generation Y consumers and their engagement with e-tailor website. Islam et al. (2019) investigated the role of gender as a moderating variable in the relationship between self-brand image congruity, value congruity, and consumer engagement and did not detect any impact gender had in the relationship. From a sport sponsorship perspective, majority of the studies have detected gender differences in consumer responses to sponsorship. Specifically, females demonstrated favorable attitudes towards the brand and were more

likely to purchase a sponsor's product (McDaniel, 1999; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Alay, 2008) while Bennett, Ferreira, Lee, and Polite (2009) found that young male fans of action sports were more likely to consume Mountain Dew than females. However, a few studies have also revealed that gender does not have any effect on outcomes of sponsorship. Maxwell and Lough (2008) studied event spectators and observed gender did not contribute significantly to correct sponsorship recognition, a finding that was also observed by McDaniel and Kinney (1998) among U.S. university students. This was also true in the case of sponsorship activations as gender did not have any impact on baseball fans responses to activational promotions (Dodds et al. 2014). However, the authors did note that females participated more in those promotions than males. Collectively, these findings suggest that further research is warranted to establish the influence of gender on consumer engagement and its antecedents. Hence it is hypothesized that:

H₆: Gender will moderate the relationship between team sport involvement and sponsorship engagement as well as the relationship between brand interactivity and sponsorship engagement.

Summary of Literature

Sponsorship spending is increasing at an unprecedented rate, including spending on sponsorship activations. Sponsors' activational communications can help sponsors engage with the audience, who respond to them more positively compared to non-activational communications. Therefore, proper utilization of sponsorship activations can influence the success of sponsorship. As sponsorship activation primarily deals with engaging the consumer through various communications, it is important to account for the measurement of engagement during such consumer-brand interactions. This chapter

first examined the broad literature on engagement and theoretical domains of the construct set in S-D logic. The five propositions of S-D logic informed this research about the importance of interactivity and involvement in value co-creation activities. Therefore, it was concluded that these two variables are antecedents to CBE. Next, the area of sport sponsorship was discussed, which included a discussion on sponsorship activations followed by various theoretical models developed to explain measurement of sponsorship. Finally, the chapter provided a summary of the findings of studies that focused on assessing consumer responses to sponsorship activations, both on-site as well as on social media. The summary revealed that brand loyalty was an important outcome of sponsorship engagement. Collectively, a sponsorship engagement model was formulated to explore the influence of sponsorship engagement in predicting consumer responses to sponsorship activations.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This section focuses on the proposed methodological framework to address the research questions. The methodology that was employed in this study is broadly categorized into five sections: (a) research design, (b) participants (c) sampling and data collection, (d) instrumentation, and (e) data analysis.

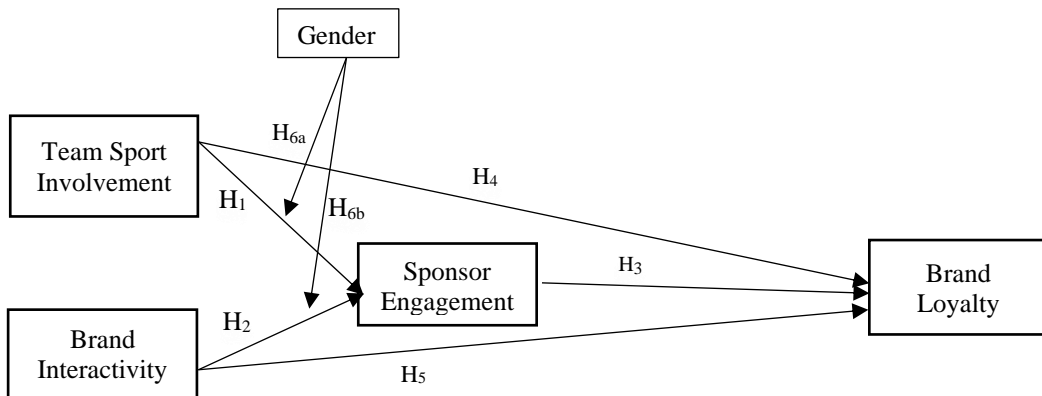
The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to sponsors' activational communications. Based on the S-D logic perspective, interactivity and involvement were identified as the antecedents to consumers' engagement with a sponsor and sponsor loyalty was identified as a consequence of that engagement. The proposed hypotheses in this study provide an understanding of how sponsorship works in the minds of consumers when they are engaged through various marketing activities linked to the sponsorship. The results of the study provide valuable insights for sponsorship managers and executives on the use of activational communications as a channel to successfully enhance consumer-brand relationships. As noted by O'Reilly and Horning (2013), sponsors spend \$3 on activating the sponsorship for every \$1 they spend on obtaining the property rights. Such increased spending is constantly subjected to enhanced scrutiny as sponsorship managers and executives are questioned frequently by key decision-makers (e.g., CEOs, CFOs, executive boards) to justify such hefty investments as well as maximize sponsor benefits. In order to measure their investment, managers can use the

scales of different constructs in this study to track the success of the sponsorship. The results of the study also inform managers of how consumers think, feel, and act during their interactions with the sponsor activities, both at the venue as well as on social media. Such an understanding allows sponsors to make changes to their on-site exhibits and social media content, which may elicit higher consumer responses to the sponsorship stimuli.

To investigate the influence of sponsorship engagement on brand loyalty, the following hypotheses (see Figure 4) were developed using S-D logic as the theoretical lens. The model tests the relationship between the antecedents of sponsorship engagement and the outcome of brand loyalty. Specifically, the study sought to address the following research questions and hypotheses:

Figure 1

Hypothesized Paths (Relationships)



The first research question involves how team sport involvement and interactivity influence sponsorship engagement.

H₁: Team sport involvement will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

H2: Brand interactivity will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

The second research question involves how sponsorship engagement influences consumer responses to the sponsorship.

H3: Sponsorship engagement will have a direct positive influence on sponsor loyalty.

The third research question relates to examining the mediating role of sponsorship engagement in the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty, as well as the relationship between interactivity and brand loyalty. This was tested through the following hypothesis

H4: Sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty.

H5: Sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty.

The fourth research question relates to investigating the impact of gender on consumer engagement. This was tested through the following hypothesis

H6: Gender will moderate the relationship between team sport involvement and sponsorship engagement as well as the relationship between brand interactivity and sponsorship engagement.

Research Design

To investigate the research questions listed above, a cross-sectional survey was utilized (Creswell, 2020). Cross-sectional survey design utilizes a sample from a representative subset in order to make implications regarding the larger population. Utilizing this design has several advantages for the researcher. Firstly, it is helpful in

measuring “current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices” (Creswell, 2020, p. 386). Secondly, the researcher can gain information in a relatively short period of time, as administrating the survey and acquiring the information is less time consuming. (Creswell, 2020). A cross-sectional design is a commonly used research design in studies investigating consumer engagement (e.g., Lee et al., 2018; Solem, 2016) and has also been used in examining consumers’ responses to sponsorship-linked marketing activities (e.g., DeGaris et al., 2017; Donlan, 2014). A major reason behind using cross-sectional research design over experimental research design (the other frequently used method in sponsorship studies), is to overcome a prominent shortcoming of experimental research, which is the lack of generalizability to real-life market conditions (Donlan, 2014). Additionally, collecting data in a live sponsorship environment better assesses sponsorship effectiveness, as it takes into consideration the real-time condition of consumers receiving sponsorship messages. As such, the ecological validity (Gill & Johnson, 2002) of the study is increased, by more accurately representing the reality of consumer decision making and sponsorship exposure, compared with controlled and isolated experimental conditions.

Participants

The target population for the on-site sponsorship activation study were U.S. based individuals who self-identify as fans of a professional football team. The target population for the social media sponsorship activation study were U.S. based individuals who self-identify as fans of a professional women’s soccer team.

Corporate brands invest in sport properties to achieve a variety of objectives including increased brand awareness, enhanced brand image, increased market share,

achieving a competitive advantage, and product sales (Stotlar, 2004). A key reason behind sponsoring sport properties is because fans of sport teams have a high level of emotional attachment and abiding interest towards their team (Schlesinger, 2013). Findings from previous studies on sport fandom and sponsorship have suggested that highly involved fans of sport teams show higher likelihood to support sponsors of the team (e.g., Pope & Voges, 2000). Research has also indicated that highly involved fans of a team spend more time viewing the sport (or their team) on television, reading about the event, and attending the event (Gwinner & Bennett, 2006; Olson, 2010; Wakefield et al., 2007), as well as following their team on social media (Moyer et al., 2015). Consuming such activities results in generation of more event-related and sponsor-related thoughts among the fans (Biscaia et al., 2013). Therefore, targeting this population will provide greater insights into how sponsorship information is processed.

Sample Size

Sample size requirements vary according to the statistical technique being used to conduct the data analyses. For Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), ‘a good rule’ recommended by Kline (2015) is to have at least ten times as many subjects as the variables. Other scholars have recommended a minimum sample size of 200 for conducting SEM (Loehlin, 1998; Whittaker & Stapleton, 2006). For path analysis, Kline (2015) recommends a minimum of 10 cases for every parameter in the model, although researchers should aim for 20 cases. In this study, there are five hypothesized paths which means an adequate sample size would be at least 100 cases. Considering the above suggestions, the researcher attempted to collect data from at least 200 fans of a professional sport team to assess their responses to sponsorship activation at the on-site

location. Similarly, the researcher attempted to collect data from at least 200 social media followers of a professional women's soccer team to assess their responses to sponsorship activation on social media.

Two different studies were conducted with one focusing on the social media sponsorship activation, while the second focused on on-site sponsorship activation. The first study involved collecting data from fans who were exposed to a sponsor's activation posts on Facebook and Twitter, while the second study involved collecting data from fans who were exposed to on-site sponsorship activities during a regular season.

Study 1: Social Media Sponsorship Activation

Sampling Technique

A voluntary response sampling technique was used to collect data from fans of a women's professional soccer team to understand their responses to activation communication of a sponsor on the team's Twitter and Facebook handles. Voluntary response sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researchers put in a request for members of a population to be a part of the study, and the members decide whether to participate in the sample (Creswell, 2008). This type of sampling is used when the researcher cannot get access to the entire target population. Since getting access to the entire population of fans of a professional sport team, who are exposed to sponsorship activation content on social media accounts, was impossible, this sampling technique was deemed appropriate for this study.

Dixon (2006) noted certain disadvantages of using a voluntary sampling procedure. Firstly, implementing this type of sampling may not truly represent the targeted population. This is because not every member of the population has access to the

internet and/or is engaged with their team on social networking sites. Therefore, the makeup of participants involved in the sample may not accurately represent the demographic makeup of the target population (Creswell, 2008). Secondly, like convenience sampling, this approach to sampling also involves the risk of under-representation or over-representation of the target population. This disadvantage can be lessened by selecting a large sample size. Finally, the researcher also faces the risk of selecting a sample, who are likely to hold strong opinions and beliefs. However, according to Moore (1997), this risk is present largely, when the topic being studied is controversial. Although sponsorship deals with a sport property can get controversial (e.g., Roberts et al., 2018), none of the current sponsors chosen as part of the study have been involved in any controversy. Therefore, this risk was minimized within the sampling process.

Sampling Method

The data was collected through posting the link of the online survey on social networking site fan groups. Two Facebook fan groups of a women's professional soccer team, together comprising approximately 28,000 members, were targeted for data collection. Previous studies investigating consumer behavior have used social networking sites as a data collection source (e.g., Wolfe et al., 2014). Moreover, Ruihley and Hardin (2014) suggest that collecting data through message boards via social networking sites is an acceptable form of data collection as long as the researcher minimizes the issues of intrusion and multiple responses. The issue of intrusion was lessened by familiarizing oneself with the rules and regulations of the message board, as well as requesting permission from the administrator(s) of the group to post the link of the online survey.

The second issue was solved by recording the IP address of each respondent who completed the survey. Qualtrics monitors the IP address of each respondent who completed the surveys. The IP address is a unique numerical value and therefore, it can help the researcher identify multiple responses to the survey.

Stimuli

Once the respondents met the inclusion criteria, they were shown actual social media communication of a sponsor of the women's professional soccer team through which they activated their sponsorship. The selection of the sponsor's posts/tweets was done based on Gillooly et al. (2017) typology of sponsor activation communication content. The typology that was developed included 17 categories of tweets which were grouped under four main types: informing, entertaining, rewarding, and interacting. To check for the content validity of the tweets, two professors of sport management with expertise in social media marketing and sponsorship were asked to review the content of the tweets and whether the activation posts fit into the '*interacting*' typology. The reason behind choosing '*interactive*' sponsor tweet is because it ascertains the element of interactivity with the sponsor, which the other three types may or may not. Once the content validity was established, the Facebook and Twitter posts of the sponsor were integrated into the online questionnaire (see Appendix B for the stimuli used).

Study 2: On-Site Sponsorship Activation

Sampling Technique

This study utilized convenience sampling to collect fans' responses to on-site sponsorship activations. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be

studied (Creswell, 2020). A convenience sampling method was used, given the absence of an adequate sampling frame. This method is commonly used in sporting events that are marketed to spectators (e.g., football or soccer games) as it is difficult to ascertain the population base of the spectators (Mazodier & Merunka, 2012). An advantage of using this type of sampling is that it is less expensive, efficient, and simpler to execute, while a key disadvantage of it is that it may over-represent or under-represent portions of the population and thus, may not be representative of the entire population (Jager et al., 2017). Despite its disadvantages, there are a few ways in which the results of convenience sampling may better represent that of the population. One way of doing this is by collecting larger sample sizes as they are more likely to represent the population. This would also mean that the obtained results are more likely to be generalizable to the population (Rogelberg, & Stanton, 2017).

Sampling Method

Participants were recruited through an event intercept method which is a very common form of convenience sampling. A team of trained data collectors ($n = 3$) assisted the primary researcher in the data collection process. Undergraduate students, enrolled in business and sport management courses at a small Midwest educational institution in the United States, were recruited and trained to be data collectors for the study. The training lasted two hours and was conducted by the primary researcher and a professor of sport management having expertise in survey research methodologies. Upon completion of the training, the data collectors accompanied the primary researcher at the venue. Spectators who visited a sponsor activation site located at a designated site, and interacted with the sponsorship execution staff, were intercepted, and invited to complete a survey at the

location. Each researcher carried with them an iPad device on which the fans answered the survey questionnaire.

There are a few advantages of using intercept surveys as a way of convenience sampling (Rea, & Parker, 2014). This type of sampling is cost-effective, less time consuming, and results in a higher response rate as compared to telephone or postal surveys. Also, any complexities that arise can be solved due to the presence of the researcher. For example, the availability of the data collector ensures that any unclear questions can be explained to the respondent. Rea and Parker (2014) also note a few limitations of using intercept surveys. Firstly, it can result in self-selection bias as the researcher may recruit participants based on certain characteristics. This can be avoided by selecting participants at random. Secondly, intercept surveys can often lead to non-response bias as participants might not be interested in completing the survey. However, this can be avoided by keeping the survey length short. The estimated time to complete this survey was between 5-7 minutes, thus limiting the occurrence of non-response bias.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire for this study consisted of screening questions, scales used to gather data on the variables of interest (team sport involvement, brand interactivity, consumer brand engagement, and brand loyalty), and demographic information.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The first section of the questionnaire included screening questions to determine the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of the participants. The social media sponsorship activation survey began with participants answering a series of screening questions. The first screening question asked whether they are 18 years and above. The second screening

question asked the participant whether they follow the account of the women's professional soccer team on Facebook/Twitter or not. An answer of "No" for both questions was used to identify respondents who did not meet the criteria for study participation. The third screening question asked how much time they spend on Twitter/Facebook daily. An answer of less than 15 mins meant the respondent did not qualify to take part further in the study. The rationale for choosing more than 15 mins time spent per day on Twitter/Facebook was based on the findings of the study by Yim et al. (2021) in which they reported that minutes spent per day on social media by sports fans varies across generations. The study found that Millennials (26.16 min) and Generation X (23.27 min) spend more time on social media activity participation than Baby Boomers (12.41 min). Based on these findings, it was decided to include only those individuals who spend more than 13 mins on Twitter/Facebook (rounded off to 15 mins in the survey).

For the on-site sponsorship activation study, only those fans who interacted with the sponsorship staff at the sponsor's designated activity area were approached by the research team to respond to a short questionnaire. Prior to completing the questionnaire, the researchers informed the fans about the purpose of the study and that participation in the study was voluntary. They were also told that they could quit the survey at any point. There was only one screening question to determine the inclusion of the respondent in the study. The question asked them whether they were at or above 21 years of age and an answer of 'No' meant they could not further continue the questionnaire. The inclusion criteria was set due to the sponsor being an alcohol brand. Since the minimum legal

drinking age in the United States is 21 years (CDC, 2021), it was only logical to include individuals who were 21 years of age and above.

Team Sport Involvement

The second section of the questionnaire assessed the participants involvement with the sport team. A review of literature revealed that involvement is a key antecedent of consumer engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2012). An individual's involvement with their team was measured using Inoue, Funk, and McDonald's (2017) 9-item involvement scale. The scale includes three subscales: centrality (3 items), pleasure (3 items), and sign (3 items). An example of centrality subscale includes: "I find a lot of my life is organized around following this team", an example of pleasure subscale includes: "I really enjoy following this team", and an example of sign subscale includes: "I feel like this team is part of me." In this study, nine items from the Inoue et al. (2017) scale were adapted and modified to fit the context of the study. The modification related to replacing the term *team* with the names of the professional sport teams that were chosen to be part of this study. All the items in the scale were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree*). The full listing of the nine items used to measure team sport involvement can be found in Appendix B and Appendix C.

Inoue et al. (2017) gathered evidence of score reliability and validity for the sport involvement scale used in their study. Reliability refers to the degree to which an instrument consistently measures whatever the instrument was designed to measure, while validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure with its investigated subjects (Salkind, 2010). Reliability is commonly assessed

via internal consistency using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha. A high CR value indicates higher levels of internal consistency reliability. For example, values between 0.6 - 0.7 are acceptable, values between 0.7 - 0.9 are considered to be good, and values 0.95 and above indicate redundancy (i.e., reduce the construct validity) (Hair et al., 2019). For Cronbach's alpha, Henson (2001) suggested that values above 0.80 can be considered a good indicator of the reliability of the scale.

Validity of an instrument is assessed through convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is the extent to which the construct converges to explain the variance of its items (Salkind, 2010). This is evaluated using the average variance extracted (AVE) for all items on each construct. AVE is calculated by squaring the loading of each indicator on a construct and subsequently computing the mean value. The acceptable value for AVE is 0.5 or higher. This indicates that the construct explains at least 50 per cent of the variance of its items (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity is the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the structural model (Salkind, 2010). This is evaluated using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) method of comparing each construct's AVE to the squared inter-construct correlation (as a measure of shared variance) of that same construct and all other reflectively measured constructs in the structural model. The shared variance for all model constructs should not be larger than their AVEs.

In their research, Inoue et al. (2017) examined the relationship between involvement, perceived corporate social responsibility, and behavioral loyalty, and measured involvement using the three subscales of centrality, pleasure, and sign. The three facets of involvement recorded composite reliability values ranging between 0.84 –

0.96 and average values extracted (AVE) ranging between 0.63 – 0.88. The second-order construct of involvement had standardized factor loadings between 0.81 – 0.93, CR = 0.90, and AVE = 0.76, demonstrating adequate reliability and convergent validity. In addition, the square root values of AVE for each construct were greater than the correlation coefficients between any pair of the constructs, supporting discriminant validity for all constructs. Funk, et al. (2011) also used Beaton et al.'s (2009) 9-item scale to measure marathon runners' involvement with the sport and classify them into theoretically meaningful groups. They reported that the Cronbach's Alpha values for the three dimensions of sport involvement ranged from 0.82 to 0.86, indicating evidence of reliability, while the correlations between them were moderate to high ranging from 0.66 to 0.74. The three facets were further examined for discriminate and convergent validity. The standard regression coefficients exceeded the 0.70 threshold and AVE's recorded values above the 0.50 benchmark. Further, the AVE's for each construct were greater than the squared correlations between the construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Combined, these values provided evidence that the scale was psychometrically sound. Similar results were found in the Kunkel, Funk, and Hill (2013) study where they examined the relationship between involvement with a team and league and loyalty towards the team and league.

Brand Interactivity

The second antecedent variable of sponsorship engagement identified in previous research was brand interactivity. This served as the third section of the questionnaire. Within this study, brand interactivity was measured using a three-item scale adopted from Read et al.'s (2019) study. Their study investigated consumer engagement with brands on

the social media platform of Twitter and used a four-item scale to measure brand interactivity. The four-item scale itself was an adaptation from the original perceived interactivity scale developed by McMillan and Hwang (2002), which consisted of 18 items measuring the dimensions of real-time communication, no delay, and engaging. Examples of items from Read et al. (2019) include: “The brand gives me the opportunity to respond via its Twitter account” and “The brand facilitates real-time communication with its followers via its Twitter account.” Since the context of this study is different than Read et al.’s (2019) study, items were modified to fit the context of sponsorship activations, both on-site as well as on social media. Examples of modified item statements for on-site sponsorship communication are as follows: “[name of the sponsor] gave me the opportunity to respond during my visit to their exhibits” and “[name of the sponsor] facilitated real-time communication with fans who visited their exhibits.” The corresponding modified items for social media communication are as follows: “[name of the sponsor] gives me the opportunity to respond via its Facebook post” and “[name of the sponsor] facilitates real-time communication with its followers via the tweet/ post.” All the items in the scale were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree*).

The original scale developed by McMillan and Hwang (2002) demonstrated strong reliability as the three sub-scales had high alpha coefficients (.90 for real-time conversation, .92 for no delay, and .79 for engaging). The scale has subsequently been utilized and validated across various contexts. Choi et al. (2008) measured perceived interactivity towards mobile advertisements using McMillan and Hwang’s (2002) 18-item scale, and the three dimensions of perceived interactivity showed acceptable levels

of internal consistency reliability ($\alpha_{\text{Control}} = 0.77$, $\alpha_{\text{Two-way communication}} = 0.90$, and $\alpha_{\text{Time}} = 0.93$). Kim and Lee (2019) used an adapted 10-item version of the original scale to measure perceived interactivity of luxury brand communities and found adequate reliability and validity ($\alpha = 0.89$, $\text{CR} = 0.91$, and $\text{AVE} = 0.51$). In a sport context, Suh et al. (2015) measured perceived interactivity of sport websites. They modified the three dimensional 18-item scale to 9-items, with all the dimensions displaying reliability scores above the recommended threshold ($\alpha_{\text{Control}} = 0.87$, $\alpha_{\text{Two-way communication}} = 0.96$, and $\alpha_{\text{Time}} = 0.79$; $\text{CR}_{\text{Control}} = 0.81$, $\text{CR}_{\text{Two-way communication}} = 0.96$, and $\text{CR}_{\text{Time}} = 0.88$; $\text{AVE}_{\text{Control}} = 0.60$, $\text{AVE}_{\text{Two-way communication}} = 0.83$, and $\text{AVE}_{\text{Time}} = 0.71$) suggesting the scale was reliable and valid. In the study conducted by Read et al. (2019), the adapted four-item scale had standardized factor loadings above 0.50 indicating item-reliability, and displayed CR score of 0.91, which are well above the 0.70 cutoff recommended by Hair et al. (2019), thus finding support for convergent validity. The scale also showed evidence of discriminant validity as the square root values of AVE for each construct were greater than correlation coefficients between any pair of the constructs. In sum, the original scale as well as its adapted versions have provided evidence for sound psychometric properties. Appendix B and Appendix C provide a full listing of the brand interactivity scale items used in this study.

Consumer Brand Engagement

The fourth section of the questionnaire gauged an individual's level of engagement with the sponsor. For the purpose of this study, sponsor engagement was conceptualized as consumer engagement with the brand, or CBE in short. As consumer brand engagement is context-specific, the social media activation campaign scale

developed by Mirbhadgeri and Najmi (2019) was adapted to measure both on-site as well as social media activation campaigns. The modified scale consisted of 12 items, with 4 items measuring attention (cognitive engagement dimensions), 4 items measuring interest and enjoyment (affective engagement dimensions), and 4 items measuring activation (behavioral engagement dimensions). An example of an attention item includes “When I was exploring [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation], my mind was only occupied with it and not with other things.” Examples of items of interest and enjoyment include “[name of the sponsor] [name of the activation] was interesting” and “Participating in [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation] was an enjoyable experience.” Examples of activation items include “I’d follow posts/tweets related to [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation]” and “I’d like to comment on [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation]”. All the items in the scale were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree*).

For the on-site sponsorship activations, three items from Tsordia’s (2018) brand engagement measure were adapted. The three items originally were suggested by Keller (2013) as a means to measure actual brand engagement. Since the definition of Keller’s (2013) actual brand engagement framework dovetails with that of activation definition defined by Hollebeek (2011b) and subsequently Mirbhadgeri and Najmi (2019), it makes sense to use the four-item scale to measure consumers’ behavioral engagement at on-site sponsorship activities. Examples of these items include “I really like to talk about [name of the sponsor] with others,” “I am proud to have others know I drink [name of the sponsor],” and “I like to visit the [name of the sponsor] Web site.” All the items in the scale were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly*

Agree). The adapted three-item scale demonstrated sound psychometric properties as all the item statements had standardized factor loadings above 0.50 indicating item-reliability, CR score of 0.92, which are well above the 0.70 cutoff recommended by Hair et al. (2019), and the square root values of AVE for each construct were greater than correlation coefficients between any pair of the constructs, thus providing evidence for convergent and discriminant validity respectively.

The results of the study conducted by Mirbhadgeri and Najmi (2019) to develop the social media activation campaign scale showed high internal consistency and reliability of the construct. The Cronbach's α of each dimension ($\alpha_{CE} = 0.88$, $\alpha_{AE} = 0.90$, $\alpha_{BE} = 0.83$) was higher than the acceptable value of 0.80 (Henson, 2001). CR values for both the first-order dimensions ($CR_{CE} = 0.88$, $CR_{AE} = 0.90$, and $CR_{BE} = 0.83$) and the second-order construct ($CR_{CBE} = 0.93$) were higher than the acceptable value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). In addition, all factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold value of 0.7 and AVE values ($AVE_{CE} = 0.64$, $AVE_{AE} = 0.69$, $AVE_{BE} = 0.55$ and $AVE_{CBE} = 0.81$) exceeded the 0.5 threshold as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). These values lend support to the convergent validity of the scale. The scale was further tested for its nomological validity, and the results showed that the values of Cronbach's α , CR, AVE were all above the recommended threshold, indicating strong evidence for the reliability and validity of the scale (Mirbhadgeri & Najmi, 2019). Appendix B and Appendix C provide a full listing of the CBE scale items used in this study.

Brand Loyalty

The fifth section of the questionnaire measured consumers' loyalty towards the sponsor. In the marketing literature, there exists two research streams that have defined

and operationalized consumer loyalty. One stream advocate for the psychological aspect of loyalty (i.e., attitudinal loyalty), while the other stream operationalizes it in terms of behaviors (i.e., behavioral loyalty) (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2002). In professional sports, brand loyalty has been measured using a combination of both (e.g., Kaynak et al., 2008; Mazodier & Merunka, 2012; Tsordia et al., 2018). The four-item scale developed by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) was used to assess consumer loyalty towards the sponsor. The scale consists of both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty items and displayed strong evidence of reliability and validity ($\alpha = 0.87$ and AVE was greater than 0.70). The two item statements for behavioral loyalty include “I will buy this [name of the sponsor] the next time I buy [sponsor category]” and “I intend to keep purchasing this [name of the sponsor].” Attitudinal loyalty was measured by two statements: “I am committed to [name of the sponsor]” and “I would be willing to pay a higher price for [name of the sponsor] over other competitors of [name of the sponsor].” All the items in the scale were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ($1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree$).

The rationale behind using the scale for this study was that it has been used extensively in various contexts and demonstrated strong evidence of reliability and validity. For example, Xi and Hamari (2020) utilized the scale to examine the effect of gamification on brand engagement and brand loyalty in the context of online mobile phone communities. The study assessed convergent validity with three metrics: average variance extracted (AVE = 0.69), composite reliability (CR = 0.90) and Cronbach’s Alpha ($\alpha = 0.85$). All the values were greater than the recommended threshold ($\alpha > 0.7$, AVE > 0.5, and CR > 0.8). The conditions for the discriminant validity (square root of the AVE = 0.83 and greater than squared inter-construct correlations loadings) were also

met, indicating the scale to be reliable and valid. Similarly, Ebrahim (2019) assessed the impact of social media marketing on the two dimensions – attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, which were measured using the three-item scale adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). The validity of the measures was assessed through CFA, while Cronbach's α , AVE, and CR values served as the metrics to assess reliability of the scale. All the conditions were satisfied, suggesting strong evidence of psychometric properties of the scale. From a sponsorship perspective, Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2001) four-item scale has been used by Mazodier and Merunka (2012) and Tsordia et al. (2018) to examine sponsorship effects on brand loyalty. In their study, Mazodier and Merunka (2012) found the scale to have strong internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .94$) and convergent validity (AVE = .72), while the discriminant validity condition was also met. Similar scores were obtained in the Tsordia et al. (2018) study (CR > 0.83, $\alpha = .92$, and AVE = 0.70).

Participant Demographics

On the final section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked about their demographic information. Specifically, respondents were asked their age, gender, and ethnicity they identify with, along with their annual household income and their education level (See Appendix B and Appendix C). These variables were measured using frequencies and other descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation.

Quality Assurance and Control

Since this study developed the instrument by utilizing various items from previous studies as well as using original scales, it was important to check for the reliability and validity of the instrument. Dillman et al. (2014) suggest several methods to

test web-based questionnaires. These include expert reviews, cognitive interviews, experimental evaluations, and pilot studies.

First, to evaluate the content validity of the questionnaire, the researcher consulted a panel of experts (two sport management professors familiar with the topic of sponsorship and another professor who is an expert with quantitative methodology) to review the content relevance of the items. Upon agreement, the panel were provided with the purpose of the study and the full list of items used to assess various constructs. They were asked to provide their comments and feedback on the clarity of the items. Specifically, they provided feedback on the item wording and if the statements are understandable. This was done because complicated wording can result in non-responses (Dillman et al., 2014). Based on the item ratings and feedback provided in the response form, items on the instrument were modified.

Next, the questionnaire was examined by undergraduate students enrolled in a business administration course at a small Midwest educational institution in the United States. The purpose of conducting this pilot test was to analyze the questionnaire in terms of appropriateness, phrasing, and clarity. The students were asked to complete the survey on an iPad device and identify any errors they encountered while taking the survey. Based on the feedback received from the individuals, modifications were made to the questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection activities for the two studies within this project were conducted via an online questionnaire. Two separate online questionnaires were designed via a web-based survey software known as Qualtrics. First, approval to conduct the study was

sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving the approval, the Qualtrics survey link, consisting of questionnaire assessing fans' responses to social media sponsorship activation, was posted on the two Facebook group fan pages of the women's professional soccer team. Also, fans of a professional football team based in the Midwest region in the United States were approached at the sponsor activation site on the eve of a regular season game to take part in the study. The researchers informed them about the purpose of the study and obtained their verbal consent to fill out a short survey on an iPad device. The survey consisted of questions assessing their responses to the on-site sponsorship activation which they were exposed to on the game day. Both surveys consisted of 30 questions and the anticipated time to complete the survey was 5-7 minutes. Participation in both studies was voluntary and there was no monetary incentive to take part in the study. All the data collected from both surveys was securely stored in the primary researcher's password protected personal computer. The primary researcher alone has access to this computer.

Data Analyses

The data was analyzed using path analysis through the SPSS AMOS 22.0 version statistical package. This statistical technique was deemed appropriate as it offers multiple distinct advantages compared to other statistical tests such as OLS regression or multiple regression (Salkind, 2010). Firstly, path analysis provides a graphical representation of a set of algebraic relationships among variables that concisely and visually summarizes those relationships. Secondly, path analysis provides a basis for testing the direct as well as the indirect effects of the predictor variables on the dependent variables. Thirdly, the researcher can also get an understanding of the magnitude of the relationships between

the predictor and dependent variables (i.e., strong, weak or no relationship). Finally, this technique offers the ability to account for shared variance among variables included in the model. Moreover, testing the relationships in a unitary model instead of multiple separate analyses such as multiple regressions is advantageous as it reduces the impact of error related to conducting multiple, separate analyses.

Data Screening

The collected data was first screened for number of usable responses. Any survey that did not meet the criteria or had invalid responses were eliminated. The next step was to check for the assumptions of linearity and normality. Normal distribution among the dependent variables was examined by computing the Skewness and Kurtosis indices, which measure the symmetry and peakedness of the distribution. Any value above $|1|$ will signal a departure from normality. The assumption of normality was further checked by plotting a histogram of the frequencies of responses. The assumption of linearity states that the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable must be linear. This was determined using scatterplots. Any outliers found in the scatterplot analysis were removed from the data.

Descriptive Statistics

The analysis of the descriptive statistics began with a summary of the demographic information of the participants using frequencies, means, and standard deviation. After examining the demographic variables of the participants, an assessment of the descriptive statistics of the four variables – sport team involvement, brand interactivity, consumer brand engagement, brand loyalty – commenced. An examination of item quality for each variable was conducted by computing the means, medians, and

ranges. In addition to these metrics, a correlational matrix was computed to examine the strength and direction of association between the four variables.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA is a theory-testing model in which the researchers, based on a strong theoretical foundation, specify the number of factors a priori and which variables are correlated with which factors (Stevens, 2012). In other words, CFA is concerned with the structure of data, and confirms how well the items and factors are related to one another. The purpose of CFA is to test goodness of fit of a model and ensure unidimensionality of each hypothesized factor (Anderson & Gerbing, 1982). CFA is a useful technique for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it can help in our understanding of the structure underlying a set of measures (Wang & Wang, 2019). Secondly, it represents the set of measured variables in as few factors as it can therefore reducing the redundancy among the set of measured variables. In other words, a major strength of CFA is that it tests for the unidimensionality of the scale (Wang & Wang, 2019). Thirdly, CFA is used to determine and confirm the factorial structure of an already developed measuring instrument in application among a target population. CFA tests for the construct validity of the instrument (i.e., whether the theoretically defined or hypothesized factorial structures of the scales in an existing measuring instrument are valid). If the hypothesized CFA fits the data, we confirm the factorial structure is valid for the population (Wang & Wang, 2019).

To perform CFA, the first step relates to specifying the scale's theoretical model and assessing the unidimensionality. The assessment of unidimensionality is considered to be paramount, as it is a necessary condition for establishing reliability and validity of the scale (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). In the specified measurement model, individual

items constituting the construct are examined to see how closely they represent the same construct. Once the model is specified, the next step is to identify the model. The aim here is to create an over-identified model (i.e., $df > 1$). The statistical identification approach was used for model identification. Statistical identification refers to the concept that a CFA solution can be estimated only if the number of freely estimated parameters (e.g., factor loadings, uniqueness, factor correlations) does not exceed the number of pieces of information in the input matrix (e.g., number of sample variances and covariances) (Brown & Moore, 2012). A model is over-identified when the number of knowns (i.e., individual elements of the input matrix) exceeds the number of unknowns (i.e., the freely estimated parameters of the CFA solution). The difference in the number of knowns and the number of unknowns constitutes the model's degrees of freedom (df). Over-identified solutions have positive df. For over-identified models, goodness of fit evaluation can be implemented to determine how well the CFA solution was able to reproduce the relationships among indicators observed in the sample data (Brown & Moore, 2012).

The overall fit of the measurement model was evaluated by using the following fit indices as discussed in Kline (2015): comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), the standardized root mean residual (SRMR), and the root means square error of approximation (RMSEA). The cutoff value for CFI and NFI values is 0.95, which indicates excellent fit (Hu, & Bentler, 1999). For SRMR, the cutoff value is 1.0 or less (Kline, 2005). For the RMSEA, Browne and Cudeck's (1992) categorization of close fit (0.05 or less), reasonable fit (0.08 or less) and poor fit (0.10 or greater) was utilized. If the model fit is poor, respecification is needed to improve the fit of the model. This

iterative process must consider theory when making respecifications to the model to achieve acceptable model fit. Respecification includes an examination of areas of concern (e.g., Chi-square test for significance, correlation residuals, factor loadings, error variances, modification indices, cross loadings, etc.), bearing in mind theoretical implications before making any model adjustments. The final step of CFA involves checking the parameter estimates. This is done by assessing the indicator loadings and their significance. Hair et al. (2019) recommended loadings to be above 0.708 and an associated t-statistic above ± 1.96 to be significant for a two-tailed test at the 5% level, since they explain more than 50 per cent of the indicator's variance, thus providing acceptable item reliability.

Conducting CFA also helps researcher estimate the construct validity and reliability of the scale (Brown & Moore, 2012). Assessment of internal consistency reliability was done using McDonald's (1999) coefficient omega (ω). The internal consistency of a test indicates whether items on a test (or a subscale of a composite test), that are intended to measure the same construct, produce consistent scores. The reliability criteria for coefficient omega is that the value needs to be above 0.70 (McDonald, 1999). Convergent validity is the extent to which the construct converges to explain the variance of its items. The metric used for evaluating a construct's convergent validity is the average variance extracted (AVE) for all items on each construct. An AVE value above 0.50 indicates that the construct explains at least 50% of the variance of its items. To assess discriminant validity, which is the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the structural model, Fornell and Larcker's (1981) proposed traditional metric was used. They suggested that each construct's AVE should

be compared to the squared inter-construct correlation (as a measure of shared variance) of that same construct and all other reflectively measured constructs in the structural model. The shared variance for all model constructs should not be larger than their AVE's.

Path Analysis

Once the model fit was determined to be good, the hypothesized relationships between the four observed variables – team sport involvement, brand interactivity, consumer brand engagement and brand loyalty – were examined through path analysis. Path analysis is a variation of multiple regression analysis through which the researcher can assess the effects of a set of variables on one another (Spaeth, 1975). The aim of path analysis is to provide estimates of the magnitude and significance of hypothesized causal connections among sets of variables displayed using path diagrams. A path diagram is a representation of the theoretically based casual relationships of a set of variables (Loehlin & Beaujan, 2016). In a path diagram, the variables are connected through a single-headed or a double-headed arrow and grouped into two classes: exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) variables. A single-headed arrow points from cause to effect, while a double-headed curved arrow represents correlations between the exogenous (independent variables) only and does not indicate any casual effect. Exogenous (independent) variables may or may not be correlated with other exogenous (independent) variables (Loehlin & Beaujan, 2016). Once the path diagram is established, AMOS provides overall tests of model fit and individual parameter estimates (regression coefficients for each path) simultaneously. The criteria for rejecting the null hypothesis was set at a significance level of 0.05. The resulting standardized path coefficients (β)

generated from the path analysis indicated the direct effects of the dependent variable that are caused by the independent variables. The resulting R-square indicated the percentage of variance in brand loyalty (dependent variable) that can be explained by this model.

The path analysis also allows a researcher to identify the indirect effects that may exist between the independent and dependent variables. An indirect effect occurs when an independent variable affects a dependent variable through another variable, also known as mediating variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). To test the mediating effects of consumer engagement in the relationship between team sport involvement and sponsorship outcomes, as well as in the relationship between interactivity and sponsorship outcomes, the bootstrapping bias-corrected confidence interval procedure in AMOS was used (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Zhao et al., 2010). Although Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal steps strategy for establishing mediation is the most used approach, the procedure has been questioned (Hayes, 2009). The bootstrap resampling procedures was set at 2000 samples with a bias-corrected confidence interval set at 95%. According to Hayes (2013), this method is widely recommended for inference about indirect effects in mediation analyses, as it balances validity and power considerations. The bootstrapping method is employed to generate an empirically derived representation of the sampling distribution of the indirect effect, and this empirical representation is further used for the construction of a confidence interval. Bootstrap bias-corrected confidence intervals better respect the irregularity of the sampling distribution and, as a result, produce inferences that are more likely to be accurate (Hayes, 2013).

Finally, the analysis included checking for heteroscedasticity and multicollinearity. The term homoscedasticity is used to refer to constant variance (i.e., the

difference between the actual and predicted value of an observation), whereas heteroscedasticity means that the variance is not constant (Salkind, 2010). It is important to detect whether heteroscedasticity exists or not as it may potentially compromise the standard methods used for developing confidence intervals and conducting significance tests. As recommended by Cohen and colleagues (2003), one method to detect heteroscedasticity is plotting the residuals against the predicted values, which will give an indication of whether the assumption of heteroscedasticity has been violated or not.

Multicollinearity occurs when independent variables are highly correlated with other independent variables (Cohen et al., 2013). Although some degree of multicollinearity is generally present in most datasets, it is important to examine measures that are very highly correlated (i.e., close to ± 1), as highly collinear measures can lead to serious statistical problems and unreliable inferences (Yu et al., 2015). The assumption of multicollinearity was checked through bivariate correlations and variance inflation factors (VIFs) values. The correlation matrix consisting of bivariate correlations between the variables determined the strength and the direction of relationship between the variables, while the VIF values measured the degree of linear association between a particular independent variable and other independent variable included in the analysis (Meyers et al., 2016). Previous business research studies have indicated a range of VIF values to determine multicollinearity issues. These VIF values vary from a high of 20 (Greene, 2003) to 10 (Sarstedt, & Mooi, 2014), to five (O'Brien, 2007; Rogerson, 2001), and as low as 3 (Hair et al., 2019). This study followed the cutoff value of VIF close to 3 or lower, as suggested by Hair et al. (2019).

Moderated Mediation Model

The hypothesized moderated mediation model (see Figure 5 and 6) was tested in a single model using a bootstrapping approach to assess the significance of the indirect effects at differing levels of the moderator (Hayes, 2013). A “moderated mediation occurs when the strength of an indirect effect depends on the level of some variable, or in other words, when mediation relations are contingent on the level of a moderator” (Preacher et al., 2007, p. 193). Moderated mediation analyses test the conditional indirect effect of a moderating variable (i.e., gender) on the relationship between a predictor (i.e., team sport involvement and brand loyalty) and an outcome variable (i.e., brand loyalty) through a potential mediating variable (i.e., sponsorship engagement). The “PROCESS” macro, model 7, v2.16 (Hayes, 2013) in SPSS version 26 with bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals ($n = 10000$) was used to test the significance of the indirect (i.e., mediated) effects moderated by gender (i.e., conditional indirect effects). This model explicitly tests the moderating effect on the predictor to mediator path. An index of moderated mediation was used to test the significance of the moderated mediation (i.e., the difference of the indirect effects across gender) (Hayes, 2015). The acceptance of the hypotheses was based on the confidence interval (CI) levels. If the CI (lower, upper) level does not include zero, then the hypothesis is accepted (Hayes, 2015).

Figure 5

Moderated Mediation Model 1

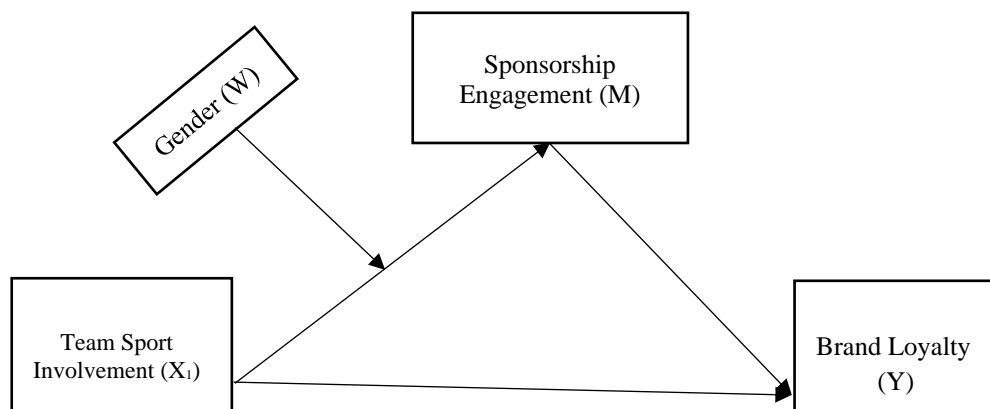
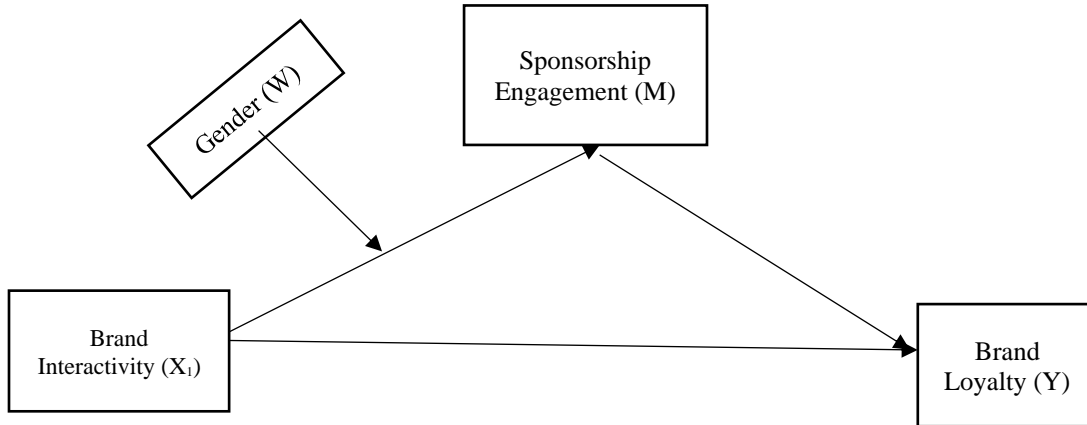


Figure 6

Moderated Mediation Model 2



Summary of Method

This study investigated the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to sponsors' activational communications. Sport team involvement and brand interactivity were identified as the drivers of sponsorship engagement, and brand loyalty was determined to be the outcome of such an engagement. Two separate questionnaires were developed, one for the social media activation and the other for on-site activation, which assessed professional sport fans responses to the activations. A modified version of Inoue, Funk, and McDonald's (2017) 9-item involvement scale provided an estimate of team sport involvement. Brand interactivity was measured using a three-item scale adopted from Read et al.'s (2019) study while consumer brand engagement items needed modification and adaptation according to the context. Social media activation campaign scale developed by Mirbhadgeri and Najmi (2019) was adapted to measure both on-site as well as social media activation campaigns. The modified scale consisted of 12 items, with 4 items

measuring attention (cognitive engagement dimensions), 4 items measuring interest and enjoyment (affective engagement dimensions), and 4 items measuring activation (behavioral engagement dimensions). Finally, the four-item scale developed by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) was used to assess consumer loyalty toward the sponsor. The data analysis was conducted as a four-step process. First, the demographic information of the participants along with the descriptive statistics of each independent and dependent variables were computed. This was followed by confirming the factor structure of CBE scale and providing evidence of reliability and validity among the CBE items used in this study. In addition, the overall fit of the measurement model was evaluated. In the third step, the hypothesized relationships between the four observed variables – team sport involvement, brand interactivity, consumer brand engagement, and brand loyalty – were analyzed through path analysis. Finally, Hayes (2013) PROCESS model was used to test the significance of the indirect effects of sponsorship engagement moderated by gender.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to sponsors' activational communications. Specifically, this study aimed at examining if interaction and engagement with their team's sponsors' activational communication on-site, as well as on social media, influenced loyalty towards the sponsors among the fans of the team. To address this, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Team sport involvement will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

H2: Brand interactivity will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

H3: Sponsorship engagement will have a direct positive influence on brand loyalty.

H4: Sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty.

H5: Sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty.

H6: Gender will moderate the relationship between team sport involvement and sponsorship engagement as well as the relationship between brand interactivity and sponsorship engagement.

Scale Validation and Pre-Testing

Prior to data collection, Dillman et al. (2008) suggested that it is important to determine the instrument's reliability and validity. This was done by performing pre-tests. The first step involved reviewing the instrument by a panel of experts who recommended minor changes to the questionnaire. The second step involved pilot testing the instrument. In addition to the pre-tests, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to confirm the factor structure of the instrument.

Field Test

Two field tests were conducted with one focusing on the on-site sponsorship activation and the other on the social media sponsorship activation. For the first pilot study, a group of twenty-seven (27) individuals who self-identified themselves as fans of a soccer team and followed them on Twitter/Facebook responded to the social media sponsorship activation questionnaire. The participants were asked to provide feedback regarding the readability, structure, and general understanding of the questions. In addition, they were also asked to provide feedback on any errors they encountered while taking the survey. Participants completed the survey using one of the following three devices: desktop computer, an iOS device, or an android device.

The participants did not report any issues regarding the readability or structure of the survey. However, they noted two major issues related to the stimuli used. Participants who took the survey via a desktop computer could not access the AT&T activity webpage as it was not compatible with the device. A similar issue was noted by participants who took the survey via an iOS device and on the Google Chrome browser. However, no issues were reported by participants who took the study via iOS device on the Safari browser. These issues were addressed in the questionnaire by stating the following after

the stimuli was displayed: “Note: If you are taking this survey on a desktop computer/laptop, the above link is not compatible. You will have to use a smartphone to access the link. You can do so by scanning the QR code below. For iPhone users, please copy the link and open in Safari browser.” Responses gathered from this group were not included in the final dataset. The data was analyzed to calculate the reliability of the instrument. McDonald’s ω values greater than 0.70 were deemed adequate for internal consistency reliability of the scale.

In the second field test, undergraduate students enrolled in a business management course at a small liberal arts institution, were invited to participate in return for extra credit points. The participants completed the survey in the classroom using an institution-assigned iPad device and provided feedback on general readability and clarity of survey items, the length of time it took to complete the survey, and the structure and workflow of the survey. Overall, 24 individuals participated in this field test. The approximate time taken to complete the survey was five minutes. The participants agreed on the overall readability and clarity of items as well as the structure and workflow of the survey and did not recommend any changes to the questionnaire. Table 1 shows the internal consistency reliability of each construct for both field studies. McDonald’s ω estimates for each construct was greater than 0.80, suggesting strong internal consistency reliability.

Table 1

Internal Consistency Reliability Estimates for the two Field Studies

| Scale | Number of Items | McDonald's ω (Study – 1) | McDonald's ω (Study – 2) |
|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Team Sport Involvement | 9 | .91 | .90 |
| Brand Interactivity | 3 | .82 | .88 |
| Sponsor Engagement | 12 | .84 | .85 |
| Cognitive Engagement | 4 | .85 | .87 |
| Affective Engagement | 4 | .91 | .85 |
| Behavioral Engagement | 4 | .87 | .90 |
| Brand Loyalty | 4 | .94 | .90 |

Study 1 – Social Media Sponsorship Activation

Data Collection and Screening

Data collection for this study occurred through the social media webpages of Reddit and Facebook. Two social media fan groups of a professional women's sport team were targeted and a Qualtrics link to the survey instrument was posted to the two groups. A total of 841 questionnaires were submitted. However, only 249 (29.6%) participants responded to all the questions in the survey. This resulted in 592 survey responses (70.4%) being eliminated from further analysis. One of the reasons for such a high number of incomplete responses could have been because of the stimuli used. The AT&T social media activity webpage was not compatible with desktop devices. Also, iOS users could not access the webpage through the Google Chrome browser. Therefore, participants who took the survey on these devices could not access the activity and as a result failed to complete the entire questionnaire. Other reasons for elimination of the survey responses included failure to follow the team on social media, spending less than 15 mins on Twitter/Facebook, and incorrectly responding to the captcha item ("Please select somewhat disagree for this item"). Thus, a total of 249 usable surveys were utilized in this study, representing a response rate of 29.6%. The lower response rate is not considered to be a problem in consumer engagement literature as long as an appropriate statistical technique is adopted. Kumar and Nayak (2019) note that multiple studies

focusing on consumer brand engagement “have obtained low response rates but used statistical techniques in line with the sample size and objectives of the study” (p.191).

Demographic Information

The study sample ($n = 249$) consisted of 80 males (32.1%), 155 females (62.2%), and 14 (5.6%) who chose to not respond. The participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 72, with a mean age of 36.1 and a standard deviation of 11.22. Regarding the ethnic composition of the participants, 189 (76%) of them were White, 20 (8%), were Asian/Asian Americans, 13 (5.2%), were Hispanic/Latino, 12 (4.8%), were Black/African Americans, two (0.8%) were American Indian/Alaska Native, two (0.8%) were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and 11 (4.4%) chose other/preferred not to state. Regarding income, 32.5% of the respondents had a household income over \$100,000 with the median household income between \$50,000 and \$75,000. In terms of education, 38.6% of the sample indicated bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education and 38.5% of respondents were postgraduates. Table 2 shows the frequency distributions of demographic variables included in the survey.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution and Descriptive Statistics of the Demographic Variables for Study 1

| Variables | N | Frequency |
|-------------------------|----------|------------------|
| Gender | 249 | |
| Male | 80 | 32.1% |
| Female | 155 | 62.2% |
| Other/Prefer not to say | 14 | 5.6% |
| Race | 249 | |
| White | 189 | 76% |
| Asian/Asian American | 20 | 8% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 13 | 5.2% |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Black/African American | 12 | 4.8% |
| American Indian/ Alaska Native. | 2 | 0.8% |
| Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander | 2 | 0.8% |
| Other/Prefer not to say | 11 | 4.4% |
| Age Range | 179 | |
| 18-29 | 98 | 54.7% |
| 30-44 | 54 | 30.2% |
| 45-54 | 19 | 10.6% |
| 55-64 | 6 | 3.4% |
| 65+ | 2 | 1.1% |
| Income | 249 | |
| Under \$25000 | 21 | 8.4% |
| Between \$25000 - \$50,000 | 50 | 20.1% |
| Between \$50000 - \$75000 | 57 | 22.9% |
| Between \$75000 - \$100000 | 40 | 16.1% |
| Over \$100,000 | 81 | 32.5% |
| Education | 249 | |
| High School or GED | 11 | 4.4% |
| Some college | 46 | 18.5% |
| Bachelor's degree | 96 | 38.6% |
| Master's degree | 80 | 32.1% |
| Doctoral Degree | 16 | 6.4% |

Descriptives of Survey Items

The assessment of participant demographics was followed by an examination of the descriptive information of the individual items of the survey questionnaire. Table 3 provides descriptive statistic data for these items including mean, standard deviation, median, range, kurtosis, and skewness. The range of each item was six, indicating participants chose all the possible responses from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*. The mean score for the team sport involvement was 5.44 ($SD = 1.35$), suggesting participants indicated an above-average involvement with the women's professional soccer team. The mean scores for brand interactivity ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.59$) and sponsor

engagement ($M = 4.26, SD = 0.96$) suggested that an average participant felt neither a strong nor a weak interaction and engagement with the brand. Regarding the brand loyalty items, participants indicated a weak loyalty with the brand ($M = 3.23, SD = 1.89$). Finally, normal distribution of the data was assessed through the skewness and kurtosis values. Hu and Bentler (1999) argued that data is normally distributed if skewness is between -3 to +3 and kurtosis is between -8 to +8. The results revealed that all items of team sport involvement, brand interactivity, and sponsor engagement were within these threshold values (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Further, a histogram chart was constructed for each item, and the charts indicated that data was relatively normally distributed.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Team Sport Involvement, Brand Interactivity, Sponsor Engagement, and Brand Loyalty Items for Study 1

| Item | M | SD | Median | Range | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Team Sport Involvement | 5.44 | 1.35 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.90 | 0.59 |
| TSI Item #1 | 4.31 | 1.84 | 6.00 | 6.00 | -0.49 | -0.85 |
| TSI Item #2 | 4.61 | 1.88 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.59 | -0.67 |
| TSI Item #3 | 4.27 | 1.87 | 4.00 | 6.00 | -0.42 | -0.88 |
| TSI Item #4 | 5.00 | 1.84 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.83 | -0.23 |
| TSI Item #5 | 6.21 | 1.23 | 7.00 | 6.00 | -2.05 | 4.98 |
| TSI Item #6 | 5.75 | 1.28 | 6.00 | 6.00 | -1.27 | 2.37 |
| TSI Item #7 | 5.04 | 1.63 | 6.00 | 6.00 | -0.78 | 0.07 |
| TSI Item #8 | 5.64 | 1.43 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.95 | 0.64 |
| TSI Item #9 | 4.94 | 1.67 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.71 | -0.08 |
| Brand Interactivity | 4.10 | 1.59 | 4.00 | 6.00 | -0.38 | -0.41 |
| BI Item #1 | 4.32 | 1.76 | 4.00 | 6.00 | -0.43 | -0.42 |
| BI Item #2 | 4.08 | 1.80 | 4.00 | 6.00 | -0.20 | -0.66 |
| BI Item #3 | 3.89 | 1.78 | 4.00 | 6.00 | -0.12 | -0.65 |
| Cognitive Engagement | 3.85 | 1.53 | 4.50 | 6.00 | -0.07 | -0.55 |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| CE Item #1 | 4.30 | 1.86 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.39 | -0.94 |
| CE Item #2 | 4.50 | 1.76 | 6.00 | 6.00 | -0.51 | -0.63 |
| CE Item #3 | 3.42 | 1.70 | 4.00 | 6.00 | 0.25 | -0.58 |
| CE Item #4 | 3.19 | 2.01 | 3.00 | 6.00 | 0.46 | -0.97 |
| Affective Engagement | 4.79 | 1.63 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.73 | -0.10 |
| AE Item #1 | 4.97 | 1.73 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.73 | -0.05 |
| AE Item #2 | 4.90 | 1.72 | 6.00 | 6.00 | -0.80 | -0.02 |
| AE Item #3 | 4.80 | 1.83 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.68 | -0.33 |
| AE Item #4 | 4.48 | 1.73 | 4.00 | 6.00 | -0.39 | -0.45 |
| Behavioral Engagement | 4.14 | 1.65 | 4.75 | 6.00 | -0.42 | -0.62 |
| BE Item #1 | 4.39 | 1.83 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.46 | -0.73 |
| BE Item #2 | 3.83 | 1.86 | 4.00 | 6.00 | -0.05 | -0.95 |
| BE Item #3 | 3.81 | 1.85 | 4.00 | 6.00 | -0.93 | -0.91 |
| BE Item #4 | 4.54 | 1.88 | 6.00 | 6.00 | -0.59 | -0.62 |
| Sponsor Engagement | 4.26 | 1.43 | 5.00 | 6.00 | -0.39 | -0.40 |
| Brand Loyalty | 3.23 | 1.89 | 3.00 | 6.00 | 0.43 | -1.07 |
| BL Item #1 | 3.31 | 1.95 | 4.00 | 6.00 | 0.26 | -1.09 |
| BL Item #2 | 3.80 | 2.14 | 4.00 | 6.00 | 0.02 | -1.26 |
| BL Item #3 | 3.21 | 2.22 | 3.00 | 6.00 | 0.45 | -1.23 |
| BL Item #4 | 2.62 | 2.11 | 1.00 | 6.00 | 0.96 | -0.55 |

N = 249; M = mean; SD = standard deviation

Note: All items measured on seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

After screening the data and analyzing the descriptive statistics, the next step in the analysis was to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Before examining the overall CFA model consisting of all the constructs, a CFA was run only for the consumer brand engagement (CBE) construct to check for unidimensionality. The unidimensional model included the 12 items of the CBE scale and hypothesized a relationship with a

higher-order latent variable, sponsorship engagement. The results showed poor fit ($\chi^2_{55} = 555.62$, $\chi^2/df = 10.10$, $p < .001$, NFI = .79, CFI = .81, RMSEA = .20, SRMR = 0.08). As the unidimensional model resulted in a poor fit, it was decided that an assessment of the correlated, bifactor and second-order models should take place.

The correlated factor model included the 12 observed items of the CBE scale and the three latent variables – cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement. The model hypothesized four items of each dimension of CBE to associate with their respective dimensions. This was done based on the theoretical finding that CBE is a multi-dimensional construct comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2012). In addition, the model also had the three latent variables to covary with each other. The results of the correlated factor showed a good fit ($\chi^2_{51} = 146.38$, $\chi^2/df = 2.87$, $p < .001$, NFI = .94, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .09, and SRMR = 0.04) with all the standardized loadings above the cutoff of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). The third model that was tested within the CFA was the bifactor model, which hypothesized relationships for each item between both its respective factors and a single higher-order latent variable, sponsor engagement. Although the model showed a relatively good fit ($\chi^2_{42} = 159.27$, $\chi^2/df = 3.79$, $p < .001$, NFI = .94, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .04, and SRMR = 0.02), the standardized loadings of the nine of the twelve items for sponsorship engagement factor were below the cutoff of 0.7.

The final model tested within the CFA was a second order factor model which hypothesized that each item of the CBE scale to associate with the three dimensions – cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement, and these three items were further hypothesized to associate with a second-order latent variable, sponsor engagement. The

results of the higher order model showed identical results as that of the correlated factor model. ($\chi^2_{51} = 108.76$, $\chi^2/df = 2.13$, $p < .001$, NFI = .96, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .07, and SRMR = 0.04). A closer inspection of the standardized factor loadings revealed that all values were between 0.77 to 0.94, surpassing the cutoff point of 0.70. Based on findings of previous studies (e.g., Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Leckie et al., 2016; Mirbagheri & Najmi, 2019), it was decided that a second-order model of sponsorship engagement provided the best model for further analyses. Figure 7 shows the higher order model structure of the CBE construct, while Table 4 provides the model summary for CFA for the four models.

Table 4

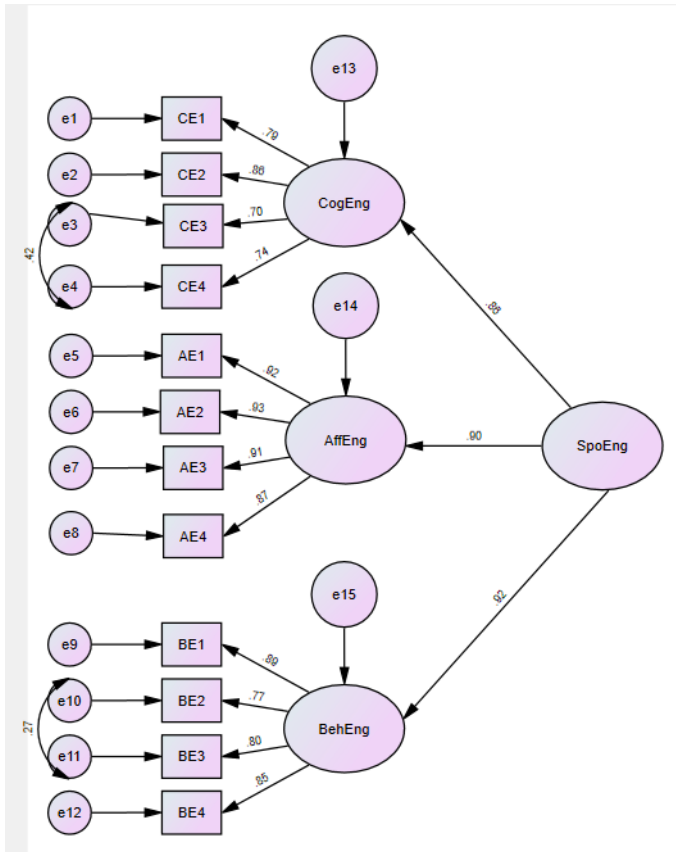
Model fit summary for CFA on CBE items for Study 1

| Model | Chi-square | df | χ^2/df | NFI | CFI | RMSEA | SRMR |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| Unidimensional | 555.62* | 55 | 10.10 | .79 | .81 | .20 | 0.09** |
| Correlated Factor | 146.38* | 51 | 2.87 | .94** | .96** | .09*** | 0.04** |
| Bifactor | 159.27* | 42 | 3.79 | .94** | .95** | .10** | 0.04** |
| Second-Order | 108.7* | 51 | 2.13 | .96** | .98** | .07** | 0.04** |

Note: * = significant at .05 level; ** = good fit; *** = acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999)

Figure 7

Confirmatory Factor Analysis for second-order CBE construct for study 1



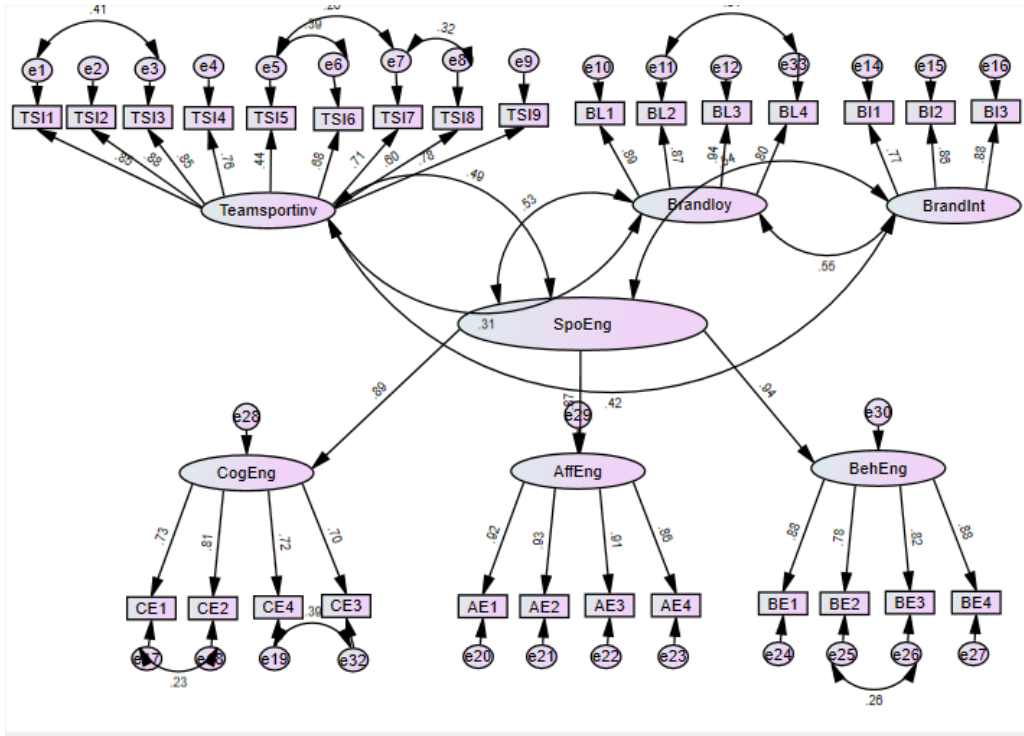
After establishing that CBE is best represented as a higher order construct, an examination of the construct validity followed. Construct validity was assessed by checking for convergent and discriminant validity of the scale. The average variance extracted (AVE) value of each of the sub-dimensions was greater than 0.5 indicating the constructs explain at least 50% of the variance of its items. Discriminant validity was checked through the Fornell and Larcker's (1981) method of comparing each construct's AVE to the squared inter-construct correlation (as a measure of shared variance) of that same construct and all other reflectively measured constructs in the model. The shared variance for all model constructs was found to be less than their AVE's, suggesting that the measures of constructs observed are not related to each other. Table 5 provides information on standardized factor loadings for each CBE item as well as measures to assess convergent and discriminant validity. Internal consistency reliability was assessed

through McDonald's ω . All the values for the first-order CBE dimensions, as well as the second-order CBE construct, were above the 0.8 threshold providing adequate evidence for internal consistency reliability.

After confirming the factor structure of the CBE, a CFA was conducted with the four constructs – sport team involvement, brand interactivity, second order construct of sponsorship engagement comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, and the dependent variable of brand loyalty. Figure 6 shows the CFA model structure of the overall model. The results revealed a significant Chi-square test for the model indicating a poor model fit due to significant differences between covariance matrices in the observed and expected models. However, marketing researchers do not consider the χ^2 statistic as a basis for acceptance or rejection due to it being sensitive to sample size (Gallagher et al., 2008). Bentler (1990) noted Chi-square tests can become an unreliable measure of model fit as sample size increases. Given the large sample size for these CFA tests ($n = 249$), Chi-square test results did not provide the best gauge for model fit. As such, other fit indices were examined, and the result was a poor fit. Therefore, modification indices were examined, and specifications were made consistent with the theory. The results after re-specifications to the model indicated an acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{332} = 606.09$, $\chi^2/df = 1.83$, $p < .001$, NFI = .91, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .06, and SRMR = 0.06). Figure 8 shows the CFA of the overall model structure.

Figure 8

Confirmatory Factor Analysis on the overall model for study 1



This was followed by estimating the validity and reliability of the model. The standardized loadings, McDonald’s ω , and the AVE were all recorded above the respective threshold values of 0.5, 0.7, and 0.5 respectively (see Table 5). Finally, evidence for discriminant validity was also established, as the square root of the AVE estimates for each construct were greater than the correlation of all other constructs.

Table 5

Scale Items, Standardized Loadings, McDonald’s ω , and Average Variance Extracted for Study 1

| Construct | Item Label | Standardized Loadings | McDonald’s ω | AVE |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------|
| Team Sport Involvement | TSI1 | .85 | 0.93 | 0.55 |
| | TSI2 | .88 | | |
| | TSI3 | .85 | | |
| | TSI4 | .76 | | |
| | TSI9 | .49 | | |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|------|-----|------|------|
| | TSI5 | .44 | | |
| | TSI6 | .68 | | |
| | TSI7 | .71 | | |
| | TSI8 | .60 | | |
| | TSI9 | .78 | | |
| Brand Interactivity | | | 0.88 | 0.70 |
| | BI1 | .77 | | |
| | BI2 | .86 | | |
| | BI3 | .88 | | |
| Sponsor Engagement | | | | 0.62 |
| Cognitive Engagement | | | 0.86 | 0.55 |
| | CE1 | .73 | | |
| | CE2 | .81 | | |
| | CE3 | .72 | | |
| | CE4 | .70 | | |
| Affective Engagement | | | 0.95 | 0.82 |
| | AE1 | .92 | | |
| | AE2 | .93 | | |
| | AE3 | .91 | | |
| | AE4 | .86 | | |
| Behavioral Engagement | | | 0.91 | 0.71 |
| | BE1 | .88 | | |
| | BE2 | .78 | | |
| | BE3 | .82 | | |
| | BE4 | .88 | | |
| Brand Loyalty | | | 0.92 | 0.77 |
| | BL1 | .89 | | |
| | BL2 | .87 | | |
| | BL3 | .94 | | |
| | BL4 | .80 | | |

As displayed in Table 6 below, all factor correlations were positive and statistically significant. This suggests that there exists a positive relationship between each of the four variables. All the four variables had a correlation coefficient between 0.3 and 0.6 with each other, indicating a low positive or moderate positive relationship (Post, 2016).

Table 6*Inter-correlation Matrix of the Constructs for Study 1*

| Construct | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Team Sport Involvement (1) | 0.74 | | | | | | |
| Brand Interactivity (2) | .38** | 0.84 | | | | | |
| Cognitive Engagement (3) | .45** | .48** | 0.74 | | | | |
| Affective Engagement (4) | .38** | .48** | .63** | 0.91 | | | |
| Behavioral Engagement (5) | .40** | .41** | .71** | .77** | 0.84 | | |
| Sponsor Engagement (6) | .46** | .51** | .86* | .90* | .93* | 0.79 | |
| Brand Loyalty (7) | .29** | .50** | .53** | .41** | .46** | .52** | 0.88 |

Note: ** significant at 0.01 level; diagonals in bold are square root of AVE

Study 2 – On-Site Sponsorship Activation

Data Collection and Screening

The second study focused on fan responses to on-site sponsorship activation. The data was collected over four game days. The primary researcher along with two other individuals intercepted fans at three different locations wherein the official beer sponsor of the professional football team had set up a kiosk and an activity in which fans could participate. Specifically, fans were intercepted while they were exploring the activity and interacting with the sponsorship execution staff. Upon interception, the researchers explained the purpose of the study and invited them to participate. After obtaining their consent to participate, they were asked to fill out a short questionnaire on an iPad device. A total of 208 questionnaires were submitted. However, only 181 participants responded to all the questions in the survey, indicating a response rate of 87.1%. Previous studies which focused on on-site sponsorship activations have obtained similar or lower response

rates in comparison to the present study. For instance, Bredikhina & Kunkel (2022) obtained a response rate of 53.9%, however with a much larger sample size of over 2000 participants. Kim & Kaplanidou (2014)'s study on Olympic sponsorship activations obtained a response rate of 78.8%, while Tsordia et al. (2018)'s study obtained a response rate of 84.9%.

Demographic Information

The study sample ($n = 181$) consisted of 109 males (60.2%) and 62 females (34.3%), while 14 (5.5%) chose 'not to respond' or 'other'. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 72, with a mean age of 31.67 and a standard deviation of 20.05. The second segment in the set of demographic questions was concerned with the ethnicity of the participants. An overwhelming majority 158 (87.3%) were White, four (2.2%) of the participants identified themselves as Asian/ Asian Americans, six (3.3%) as Black/African Americans, two (0.8%) as American Indian/Alaska Native, four (2.2%) as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, while one of them identified themselves as Hispanic. Seven (4.4%) participants chose other/preferred not to state. Table 7 shows the frequency distributions of demographic variables included in the survey.

Table 7

Frequency Distribution and Descriptive Statistics of the Demographic Variables for Study 2

| Variables | N | Frequency |
|-------------------------|----------|------------------|
| Gender | 181 | |
| Male | 109 | 60.2% |
| Female | 62 | 34.3% |
| Other/Prefer not to say | 10 | 5.5% |
| Race | 181 | |
| White | 158 | 87.3% |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-------|
| Asian/Asian American | 4 | 2.2% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 1 | 0.6% |
| Black/African American | 6 | 3.3% |
| American Indian/ Alaska Native. | 1 | 0.6% |
| Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander | 4 | 2.2% |
| Other/Prefer not to say | 7 | 3.9% |
| Age Range | 181 | |
| 21-29 | 23 | 12.7% |
| 30-44 | 70 | 38.7% |
| 45-54 | 36 | 19.9% |
| 55-64 | 24 | 13.4% |
| 65+ | 0 | 0 |
| Did not Indicate | 28 | 15.3% |
| Income | 181 | |
| Under \$25000 | 4 | 2.2% |
| Between \$25000 - \$50,000 | 17 | 9.4% |
| Between \$50000 - \$75000 | 45 | 24.9% |
| Between \$75000 - \$100000 | 37 | 20.4% |
| Over \$100,000 | 78 | 43.1% |
| Education | 181 | |
| High School or GED | 26 | 14.4% |
| Some college | 75 | 41.4% |
| Bachelor's degree | 59 | 32.6% |
| Master's degree | 19 | 10.5% |
| Doctoral Degree | 2 | 1.1% |

Descriptives of Survey Items

Table 8 provides descriptive statistic data for the survey items including mean, standard deviation, range, kurtosis, and skewness. The range of each item was six, indicating participants chose all the possible responses from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*. The mean score for team sport involvement was 5.89 ($SD = 1.02$), suggesting respondents were highly involved fans of the professional football team. The

mean scores for brand interactivity ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.38$) and sponsor engagement ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.28$) suggested that an average participant felt that the activity of the sponsor was very interactive and engaging. Regarding the brand loyalty items, participants indicated a high loyalty with the sponsor ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.67$). Finally, normal distribution of the data was assessed through the skewness and kurtosis values. Hu and Bentler (1999) argued that data is normal if skewness is between -3 to +3 and kurtosis is between -8 to +8. It was found that only one item (i.e., TSI 5) did not meet the criteria to be included in the dataset. Additionally, a histogram chart was computed for all items and the results also suggested that the data for TSI 5 item was the only one which was not relatively normal. Hence, this item was removed from the data for subsequent analyses.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Team Sport Involvement, Brand Interactivity, Sponsor Engagement, and Brand Loyalty items for Study 2

| Item | M | SD | Range | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Team Sport Involvement | 5.89 | 1.02 | 6.00 | -1.37 | 2.61 |
| TSI Item #1 | 5.73 | 1.37 | 6.00 | -1.11 | 0.80 |
| TSI Item #2 | 5.78 | 1.31 | 6.00 | -1.41 | 2.15 |
| TSI Item #3 | 5.54 | 1.47 | 6.00 | -1.04 | 0.69 |
| TSI Item #4 | 5.95 | 1.18 | 6.00 | -1.30 | 1.69 |
| TSI Item #5 | 6.71 | 0.61 | 6.00 | -2.67 | 9.34 |
| TSI Item #6 | 6.29 | 0.88 | 6.00 | -1.38 | 1.98 |
| TSI Item #7 | 5.61 | 1.46 | 6.00 | -1.08 | 0.77 |
| TSI Item #8 | 6.18 | 1.10 | 6.00 | -1.77 | 4.26 |
| TSI Item #9 | 5.90 | 1.37 | 6.00 | -1.40 | 1.65 |
| Brand Interactivity | 5.75 | 1.38 | 6.00 | -1.26 | 1.58 |
| BI Item #1 | 5.71 | 1.25 | 6.00 | -1.22 | 1.83 |
| BI Item #2 | 5.75 | 1.45 | 6.00 | -1.25 | 1.37 |
| BI Item #3 | 5.79 | 1.45 | 6.00 | -1.32 | 1.53 |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Cognitive Engagement | 5.00 | 1.30 | 6.00 | -0.58 | -0.10 |
| CE Item #1 | 5.67 | 1.44 | 6.00 | -1.02 | 0.23 |
| CE Item #2 | 6.03 | 1.30 | 6.00 | -1.50 | 1.89 |
| CE Item #3 | 3.87 | 1.80 | 6.00 | 0.12 | -0.86 |
| CE Item #4 | 4.69 | 1.85 | 6.00 | -0.45 | -0.89 |
| Affective Engagement | 6.26 | 1.29 | 6.00 | -2.08 | 3.99 |
| AE Item #1 | 6.43 | 1.19 | 6.00 | -2.60 | 7.05 |
| AE Item #2 | 6.29 | 1.20 | 6.00 | -2.12 | 4.53 |
| AE Item #3 | 6.31 | 1.38 | 6.00 | -2.48 | 5.95 |
| AE Item #4 | 6.26 | 1.33 | 6.00 | -1.98 | 3.46 |
| Behavioral Engagement | 6.00 | 1.58 | 6.00 | -1.74 | 2.13 |
| BE Item #1 | 6.06 | 1.51 | 6.00 | -1.81 | 2.65 |
| BE Item #2 | 6.13 | 1.62 | 6.00 | -1.89 | 2.48 |
| BE Item #3 | 5.99 | 1.69 | 6.00 | -1.68 | 1.79 |
| BE Item #4 | 6.10 | 1.50 | 6.00 | -1.80 | 2.54 |
| Sponsor Engagement | 5.75 | 1.28 | 6.00 | -1.93 | 1.67 |
| Brand Loyalty | 5.14 | 1.95 | 6.00 | -0.80 | 0.82 |
| BL Item #1 | 5.09 | 1.43 | 6.00 | -1.09 | 1.24 |
| BL Item #2 | 4.98 | 1.57 | 6.00 | -0.77 | 0.26 |
| BL Item #3 | 5.54 | 1.66 | 6.00 | -1.22 | 0.91 |
| BL Item #4 | 4.93 | 2.05 | 6.00 | -0.12 | 0.86 |

N = 181; M = mean; SD = standard deviation

Note: All items measured on seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

This study followed the same approach to data analysis as study 1. First, a CFA was conducted to examine the CBE construct. The check for unidimensionality of the construct revealed a poor fit ($\chi^2_{54} = 496.28$, $\chi^2/df = 9.19$, $p < .001$, NFI = .81, CFI = .83, RMSEA = .18, SRMR = 0.08), resulting in an assessment of the correlated, bifactor and second-order models. The results of the correlated factor showed a good fit ($\chi^2_{51} = 146.38$, $\chi^2/df = 2.87$, $p < .001$, NFI = .94, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .09, and SRMR = 0.04),

with all the standardized loadings except for CE3 item above the cutoff of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). Next, the bifactor model, which hypothesized relationships for each item between both its respective factor and a single higher-order latent variable, sponsor engagement, was assessed and the model showed a relatively good fit ($\chi^2_{43} = 115.06$, $\chi^2/df = 2.68$, $p < .001$, NFI = .96, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .10, and SRMR = 0.02).

Table 9

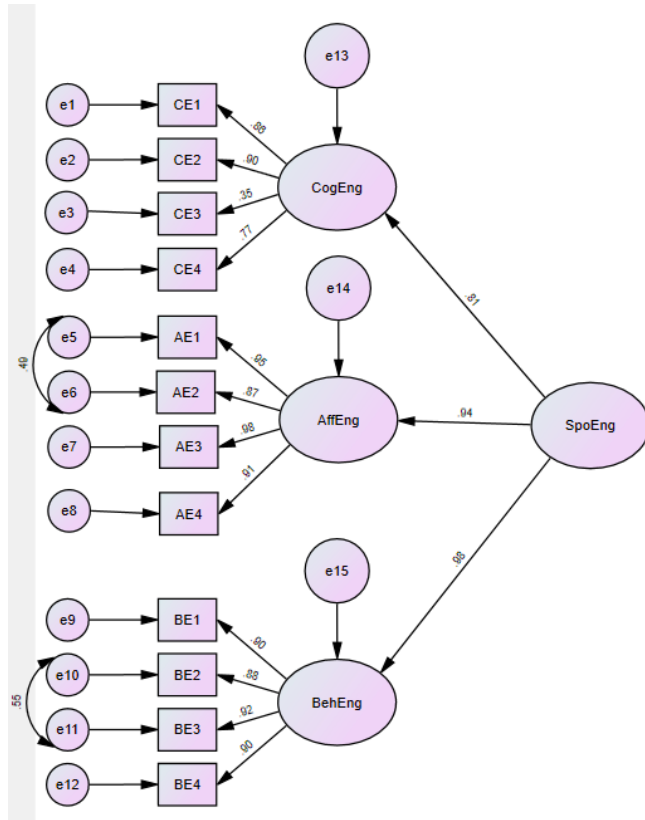
Model Fit Summary for CFA on CBE Items for Study 2

| Model | Chi-square | df | χ^2/df | NFI | CFI | RMSEA | SRMR |
|-------------------|------------|----|-------------|-------|-------|--------|---------|
| Unidimensional | 483.116* | 55 | 8.78 | .81 | .83 | .21 | 0.09** |
| Correlated Factor | 191.01* | 51 | 3.75 | .93** | .94** | .12*** | 0.04** |
| Bifactor | 115.06* | 43 | 2.67 | .96** | .97** | .08** | 0.10*** |
| Second-Order | 105.91 | 49 | 2.16 | .96** | .98** | .07** | 0.04** |

Note: * = significant at .05 level; ** = good fit; *** = acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999)

Figure 9

Confirmatory Factor Analysis on second-order CBE for study 2



A second order factor model for the CBE construct - comprising the three dimensions of cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement, and their association with a second-order latent variable, sponsor engagement – was tested. The results of the higher order model showed a good fit and much better than the previous models ($\chi^2_{49} = 105.91$, $\chi^2/df = 2.16$, $p < .001$, NFI = .96, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .08, and SRMR = 0.04). A closer inspection of the standardized factor loadings revealed that except for one item (CE3), all other values were between 0.77 to 0.94, surpassing the cutoff point of 0.70. Therefore, this item was removed from further analysis. The results of this CFA also indicated that the construct of sponsorship engagement is best represented as a second-order construct comprising the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Figure 9 shows the higher order model structure of the CBE construct, while Table 9 provides the model summary for CFA for the four models.

After establishing that CBE is best represented as a higher order construct, an examination of the construct validity followed. Construct validity was assessed by checking for convergent and discriminant validity of the scale. The average variance extracted (AVE) value of each of the sub-dimensions was greater than 0.5, indicating the constructs explain at least 50% of the variance of its items. Discriminant validity was checked through the Fornell and Larcker's (1981) method of comparing each construct's AVE to the squared inter-construct correlation (as a measure of shared variance) of that same construct and all other reflectively measured constructs in the model. The shared variance for all model constructs was found to be less than their AVE's, suggesting that the measures of constructs observed are not related to each other. Table 10 provides information on standardized factor loadings for each CBE item as well as measures to assess convergent and discriminant validity. Internal consistency reliability was assessed through McDonald's ω . All the values for the first-order CBE dimensions, as well as the second-order CBE construct, were above the 0.8 threshold providing adequate evidence for internal consistency reliability.

After confirming the factor structure of the CBE, a CFA was conducted with the four constructs – sport team involvement, brand interactivity, higher order construct of sponsorship engagement comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, and brand loyalty. Figure 10 shows the CFA model structure of the overall model. The results revealed a significant Chi-square test for the model indicating a poor model fit due to significant differences between covariance matrices in the observed and expected models. However, marketing researchers do not consider the χ^2 statistic as a basis for acceptance or rejection due to it being sensitive to sample size (Gallagher, Ting, & Palmer, 2008).

Bentler (1990) noted Chi-square tests can become an unreliable measure of model fit as sample size increases. Given the large sample size for these CFA tests ($n = 181$), Chi-square test results did not provide the best gauge for model fit. As such, other fit indices were examined, and the result was a poor fit. Therefore, modification indices were examined, and specifications were made consistent with the theory. The results after re-specifications to the model indicated an acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{333} = 667.592$, $\chi^2/df = 2.01$, $p < .001$, NFI = .87, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .06, and SRMR = 0.06). Figure 9 shows the CFA of the overall model structure.

This was followed by estimating the validity and reliability of the model. The standardized loadings, McDonald's ω , and the AVE were all above the respective threshold values of 0.5, 0.7, and 0.5 respectively. Only one item, BL4, did not meet the standardized loading threshold value of 0.5 and was thus eliminated from further analyses. Finally, evidence for discriminant validity was also established, as the square root of the AVE estimates for each construct were greater than the correlation of all other constructs. Table 10 provides information on standardized factor loadings of the four constructs as well as measures to assess internal consistency reliability and convergent validity.

Figure 10

CFA on the Overall Model for study 2

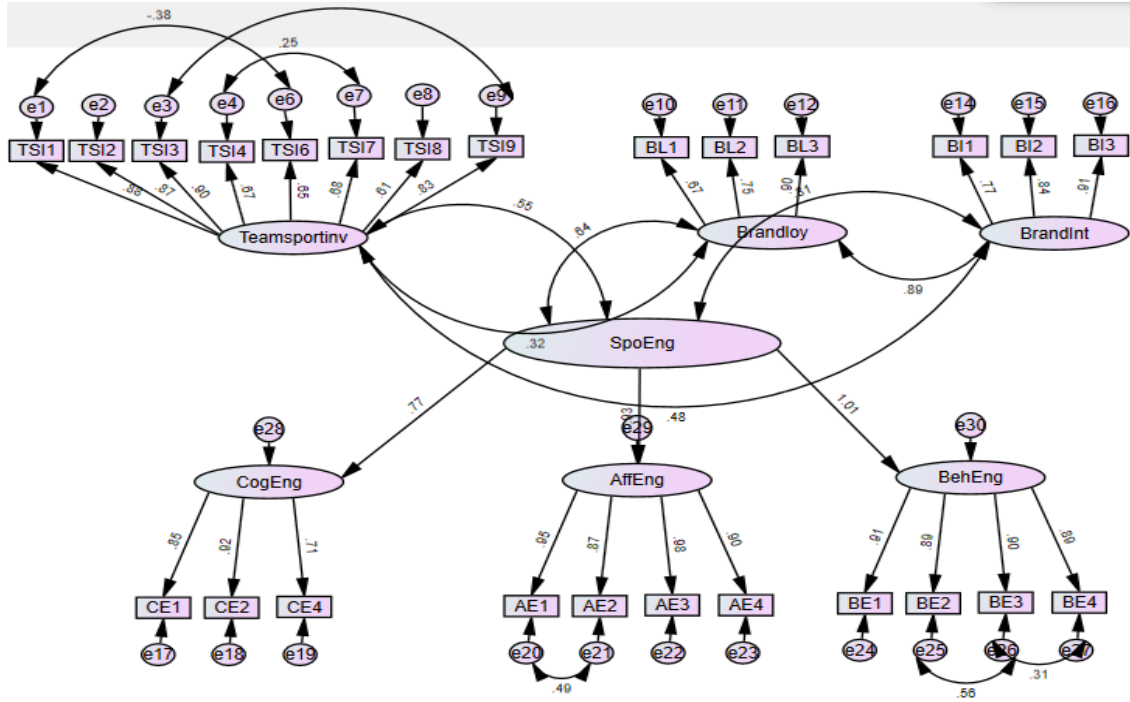


Table 10

Scale Items, Standardized Loadings, McDonald's ω , and Average Variance Extracted for Study 2

| Construct | Item Label | Standardized Loadings | McDonald's ω | AVE |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------|
| Team Sport Involvement | | | 0.92 | 0.59 |
| | TSI1 | .88 | | |
| | TSI2 | .87 | | |
| | TSI3 | .90 | | |
| | TSI4 | .67 | | |
| | TSI6 | .65 | | |
| | TSI7 | .68 | | |
| | TSI8 | .61 | | |
| | TSI9 | .83 | | |
| Brand Interactivity | | | 0.88 | 0.71 |
| | BI1 | .77 | | |
| | BI2 | .84 | | |
| | BI3 | .91 | | |
| Sponsor Engagement | | | 0.92 | 0.79 |
| Cognitive Engagement | | | 0.85 | 0.70 |
| | CE1 | .85 | | |
| | CE2 | .92 | | |
| | CE4 | .71 | | |
| Affective Engagement | | | 0.96 | 0.80 |
| | AE1 | .95 | | |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----|------|------|------|
| | AE2 | .87 | | |
| | AE3 | .86 | | |
| | AE4 | .90 | | |
| Behavioral Engagement | | 1.01 | 0.95 | 0.81 |
| | BE1 | .91 | | |
| | BE2 | .89 | | |
| | BE3 | .90 | | |
| | BE4 | .89 | | |
| Brand Loyalty | | | 0.83 | 0.71 |
| | BL1 | .87 | | |
| | BL2 | .75 | | |
| | BL3 | .90 | | |

As displayed in Table 11, all factor correlations were positive and statistically significant. This suggests that there exists a positive relationship between each of the four variables. All the four variables had a correlation coefficient between 0.2 and 0.6 with each other indicating a low positive or moderate positive relationship (Post, 2016).

Table 11

Inter-construct Correlation Matrix for Study 2

| Construct | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Team Sport Involvement (1) | 0.77 | | | | | | |
| Brand Interactivity (2) | .31** | 0.84 | | | | | |
| Cognitive Engagement (3) | .56** | .38** | 0.83 | | | | |
| Affective Engagement (4) | .47** | .58** | .66** | 0.90 | | | |
| Behavioral Engagement (5) | .53** | .58** | .71** | .90** | 0.90 | | |
| Sponsor Engagement (6) | .57** | .56** | .86* | .93* | .96* | 0.79 | |
| Brand Loyalty (7) | .40** | .20** | .27** | .19** | .24** | .25** | 0.84 |

Note: **significant at 0.01 level; diagonals in bold are square root of AVE

Path Analysis

After confirming the factor structure of the model, and deeming the model fit to be acceptable, an examination of the hypothesized relationships between the four observed variables using path analysis occurred. The mean sport team involvement score

and mean brand interactivity score for participants, calculated by averaging participant responses to Funk et al.'s (2003) nine-item sport team involvement scale and Read et al.'s (2019) brand interactivity scale respectively, served as the exogenous (independent) variables in this analysis. Average participant responses to the 12-item consumer brand engagement scale served as the mediating variable, while the average participant responses to the 4-item Holbrook and Chaudhuri (2001) brand loyalty scale served as the endogenous (dependent) variable in this analysis.

Prior to running the analysis, basic assumptions of path analysis were checked. Because path analysis is an extension of multiple linear regression (MLR). Many of the assumptions of MLR hold for path analysis too. The first assumption of independence of responses was checked differently for the two studies. For the social media sponsorship study, Qualtrics respondents' IP addresses were verified to ensure there was no duplication of the IP addresses. For the on-site sponsorship study, this assumption was met as the responses submitted were in the presence of the research team, who ensured that fans took the survey only once.

The second assumption of normality of the dependent variable was conducted by assessing the skewness and kurtosis values (see Table 3 and Table 8) as well as a visual examination of the histogram chart. The skewness and kurtosis coefficients for consumer brand engagement and brand loyalty were below 1.0, indicating the data was relatively normally distributed. In addition, a visual inspection of the histogram chart (see Figure 11 and Figure 12) provided evidence of relatively normally distributed data.

Figure 11

Histogram for Mean Sponsor Engagement Score and Mean Brand Loyalty Score (Study

1)

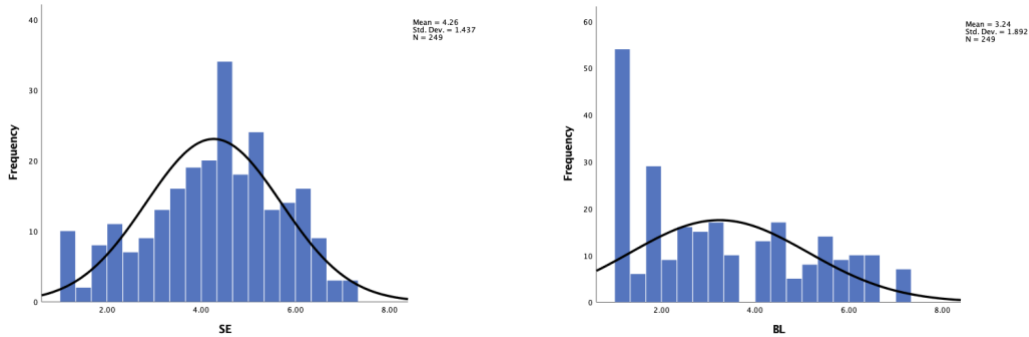
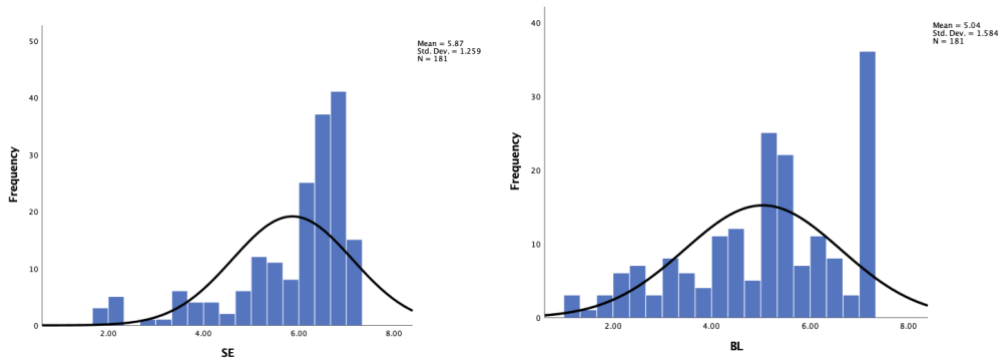


Figure 12

Histogram for Mean Sponsor Engagement Score and Mean Brand Loyalty Score (Study

2)



A probability plot of standardized residuals was computed to check for the linearity assumption (see Figure 11 and Figure 12). A linear relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables was recognized based on the standardized residuals closely mirroring the least squares regression line overlaid on the chart. Apart from the linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables, path analysis also requires the relationship to be non- recursive or one-way. The path diagram (see Figure 13 and Figure 14) shows the one-way casual flow between the variables.

Figure 13

P-Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals (Study 1)

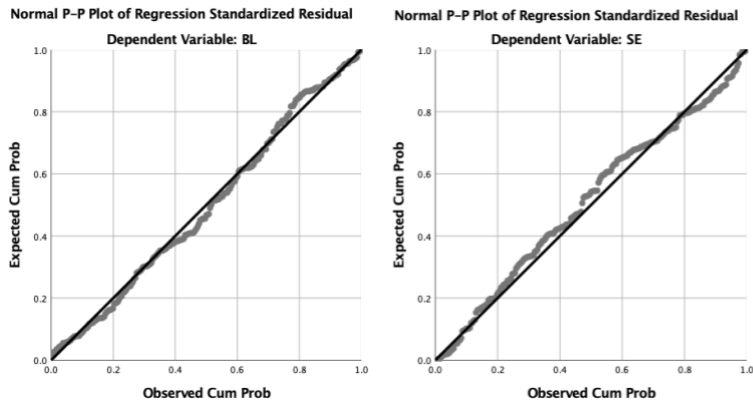
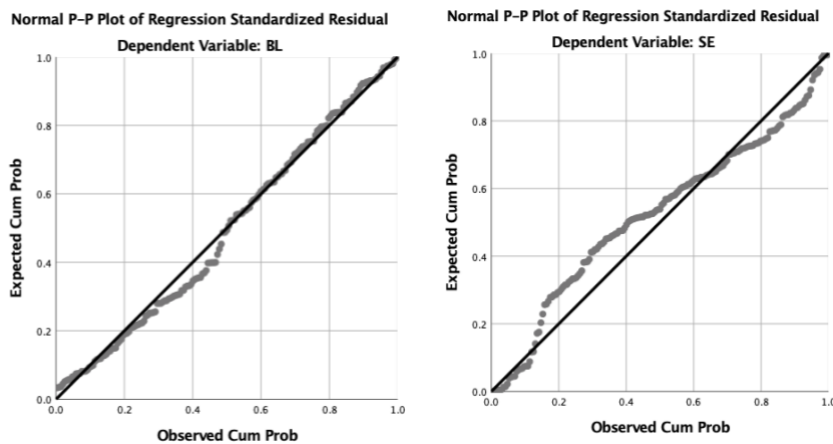


Figure 14

P-Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals (Study 2)



The fourth assumption is that the residuals must be uncorrelated (i.e., there does not exist a relationship between the residuals and the variables). A scatterplot of standardized residual and standardized predicted values was computed to check for this assumption. No conical patterns were found, indicating that the assumption was met. Finally, the assumption of multicollinearity was checked through computing the bivariate correlation and variable inflation factor (VIF) values. The cutoff value of VIF close to 3

or less suggests that there is lack of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019). The results yielded values ranging between 1.4 and 1.6. The bivariate correlation values ranged from 0.2 to 0.6, also indicating that a weak to moderate positive relationship between the independent variables. Combined, these values indicate that the assumption of absence of multicollinearity was met.

Following the validation of the assumptions, evaluation of the path coefficients occurred. Since the model was just identified, that is, the number of equations that can be constructed to describe the model is equal to the number of parameters to be estimated ($df = 0$), it was not possible to evaluate the model fit. Instead, the statistical significance of the specified paths was examined.

Study 1 Results

Looking first at the results for sponsorship engagement, results indicate that the paths from team sport involvement ($\beta = 0.30, t = 5.45, p < 0.01$) and brand interactivity ($\beta = 0.40, t = 7.21, p < 0.01$) to sponsorship engagement were statistically significant, thus supporting H₁ and H₂ respectively. These results show that there exists a direct positive relationship between involvement with a sport team and engagement with the sponsor of the team, as well as a direct positive relationship between interaction with the brand and engagement with the sponsor. Finally, the path between sponsorship engagement and brand loyalty was also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.36, t = 5.23, p < 0.01$). This result suggests that engagement with the sponsor has a direct positive influence on brand loyalty, thus supporting H₃. The model accounted for 34% variance ($R^2 = 0.34$) in sponsorship engagement and 35% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.35$) in brand loyalty (see Figure 15). In other words, results showed that 34% of variance in

sponsorship engagement can be explained by team sport involvement and brand interactivity and 35% of variance in brand loyalty can be explained by sponsorship engagement. Table 12 shows the standardized regression coefficients, t-values, and standard errors of the hypothesized paths for Study 1.

Table 12

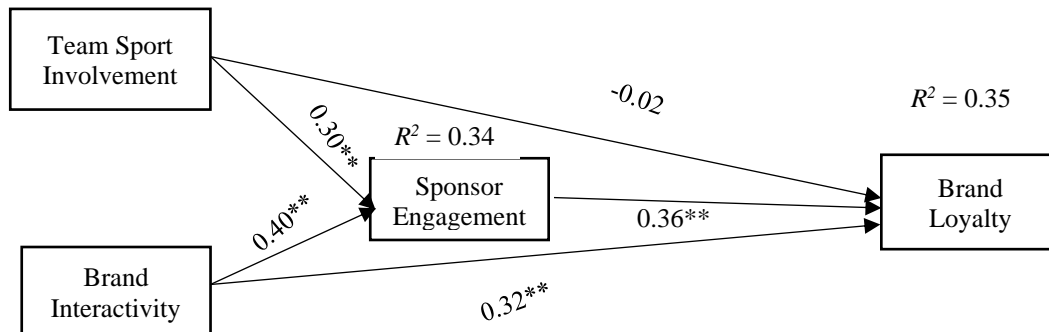
Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-values, and Standard Errors of the Hypothesized Paths for Study 1

| Path | | β | t | SE |
|---|--------------------------|---------|-------|------|
| Direct Effect | | | | |
| H1: Sport Team Involvement | ➔ Sponsor Engagement (S) | 0.30** | 5.45 | 0.06 |
| H2: Brand Interactivity | ➔ Sponsor Engagement (S) | 0.40** | 7.21 | 0.05 |
| H3: Sponsor Engagement | ➔ Brand Loyalty (S) | 0.36** | 5.23 | 0.08 |
| H4: Sport Team Involvement | ➔ Brand Loyalty (NS) | -0.02 | -0.20 | 0.06 |
| H5: Brand Interactivity | ➔ Brand Loyalty (S) | 0.32** | 5.75 | 0.06 |
| Indirect Effect | | | | |
| H4: Sport Team Involvement ➔ Sponsor Engagement ➔ Brand Loyalty (S) | | 0.11** | 3.90 | 0.03 |
| H5: Brand Interactivity ➔ Sponsor Engagement ➔ Brand Loyalty (S) | | 0.15** | 4.30 | 0.03 |

Note: S, supported; NS, not supported; ** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 15

Standardized Estimates of the Paths for Study 1



Note: ** $p \leq .001$.

One of the aims of this study was to investigate the mediating effect of sponsorship engagement. To test this, it was hypothesized that the antecedent variables of sport team involvement and brand interactivity both have a direct effect on sponsorship engagement, which in turn has a direct effect on the outcome variable, brand loyalty. In addition, partial and full mediation of sponsorship engagement was also tested by examining the direct effect of team sport involvement and brand interactivity on brand loyalty. To assess the indirect effect of both team sport involvement and brand interactivity through sponsorship engagement on brand loyalty, the bootstrap test was used. The bootstrap test uses 5000 random bootstrap samples to determine a 95% confidence interval of where path coefficients may fall. If the p value is less than 0.05, we conclude that indirect effect is significant (Hayes, 2012; Hayes & Rockwood, 2017).

Results of bootstrapping procedure revealed a significant indirect effect of team sport involvement ($\beta = 0.17, t = 3.90, p < 0.01$) as well as brand interactivity ($\beta = 0.20, t = 4.30, p < 0.01$). However, the direct effect of sport team involvement on brand loyalty was found to be non-significant ($\beta = -0.52, t = 0.84, p > 0.05$), while the direct effect of brand interactivity on brand loyalty was found to be statistically significant ($\beta = 0.26, t = 3.97, p < 0.01$). Collectively, these results suggest that sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty, as well as in the relationship between sport team involvement and brand loyalty, thus supporting H₄ and H₅.

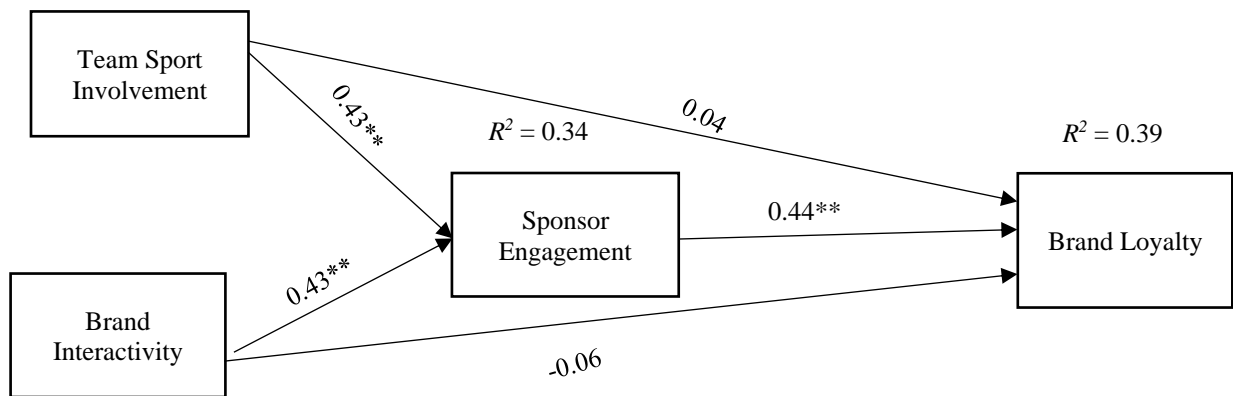
Study 2 Results

The results of the hypothesis testing support three of the five postulated paths. It was found that team sport involvement ($\beta = 0.43, t = 7.63, p < 0.01$) and brand

interactivity ($\beta = 0.43, t = 7.74, p < 0.01$) was positively associated with sponsorship engagement. Additionally, sponsorship engagement ($\beta = 0.44, t = 5.93, p < 0.01$) was positively associated with brand loyalty. Hence, H₁, H₂, and H₃ were supported. The model accounted for 34% variance ($R^2 = 0.34$) in sponsorship engagement and 39% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.39$) in brand loyalty (See Figure 16). Alternatively, these results showed that 34% of variance in sponsorship engagement can be explained by team sport involvement and brand interactivity and 39% of variance in brand loyalty can be explained by sponsorship engagement.

Figure 16

Standardized Estimates of the Paths for Study 2



Note: ** $p \leq .001$

In addition to testing the direct effects of team sport involvement, brand interactivity, and sponsorship engagement on brand loyalty, the mediating effect of sponsorship engagement was also tested (H₄ and H₅). Results of bootstrapping procedure revealed a significant indirect effect of sport team involvement ($\beta = 0.17, t = 3.90, p < 0.01$) and brand interactivity ($\beta = 0.20, t = 4.30, p < 0.01$) through sponsorship engagement on brand loyalty indicating that H₄ and H₅ were partially supported. Overall, these results

suggest that sponsorship engagement mediates the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty, and the relationship between sport team involvement and brand loyalty. Table 13 shows the standardized regression coefficients, *t*- values, and standard errors of the hypothesized paths for Study 2.

Table 13

Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-values, and Standard Errors of the Hypothesized Paths for Study 2

| Path | | β | <i>t</i> | SE |
|----------------------------|--|---------|----------|------|
| Direct Effect | | | | |
| H1: Sport Team Involvement | ➡ Sponsor Engagement (S) | 0.43** | 7.63 | 0.07 |
| H2: Brand Interactivity | ➡ Sponsor Engagement (S) | 0.43** | 7.74 | 0.05 |
| H3: Sponsor Engagement | ➡ Brand Loyalty (S) | 0.44** | 4.72 | 0.12 |
| H4: Sport Team Involvement | ➡ Brand Loyalty (NS) | 0.04 | 0.53 | 0.13 |
| H5: Brand Interactivity | ➡ Brand Loyalty (NS) | -0.06 | -0.73 | 0.10 |
| Indirect Effect | | | | |
| H4: Sport Team Involvement | ➡ Sponsor Engagement ➡ Brand Loyalty (S) | 0.19** | 3.90 | 0.04 |
| H5: Brand Interactivity. | ➡ Sponsor Engagement ➡ Brand Loyalty (S) | 0.19** | 4.30 | 0.05 |

Note: S, supported; NS, not supported; ** $p < 0.01$

Moderating Role of Gender

The hypothesized moderated mediation model was tested using the PROCESS macro model number 7, which tests a model whereby gender moderates the effect of team sport involvement on brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement (Figure 16) as well as the effect of brand interactivity on brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement (Figure 17) (Hayes, 2013). For study 1, that focused on social media sponsorship activations, gender was found to moderate the effect of brand interactivity and brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement. The interaction effect of brand interactivity and gender was found to be statistically significant ($\beta = -0.30$, 95% CI [-0.48, -0.10], $t = -2.97$, $p < 0.05$).

The overall moderated mediation model was supported with the index of moderated mediation = -0.13 (95% *CI* = -0.24; -0.04). As zero does not fall within the upper and lower values of *CI*, this indicates a significant moderating effect of gender on brand interactivity on the indirect effect via sponsor engagement (Hayes, 2015). The conditional indirect effect was stronger among females (effect = .62, *SE* = 0.07, 95% *CI* = 0.48; 0.76) than males (effect = .33, *SE* = 0.07, 95% *CI* = 0.20; 0.46), suggesting that the effect of brand interactivity on sponsor engagement was higher among females than males. In other words, although both males and females felt that interacting with the sponsor activation led to them being more engaged with the sponsor, this effect was stronger among females than males. Hence, H₆ was supported. The moderating effect of gender in the relationship between sport team involvement and brand loyalty, with sponsorship engagement acting as a mediating variable, was found to be non-significant. The interaction effect of sport team involvement and gender was not found to be statistically significant ($\beta = -0.21$, 95% *CI* [-0.47, -0.05], $t = -1.60$, $p > 0.05$). The overall moderated mediation model was not supported with the index of moderated mediation = -0.14 and zero falling in between the *CI* upper and lower values (95% *CI* = -0.32, 0.05).

Similar analysis was conducted for study 2 as well, which focused on sponsorship activations at the site/venue. Gender moderated the effect of brand interactivity and brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement. The interaction effect of brand interactivity and gender was found to be statistically significant ($\beta = 0.54$, 95% *CI* [0.33, 0.75], $t = 5.07$, $p < 0.05$). The overall moderated mediation model was supported with the index of moderated mediation = 0.14 and zero did not fall between the *CI* upper and lower values (95% *CI* = 0.04, 0.29). The conditional indirect effect was strongest again among females

(effect = .67, $SE = 0.06$, 95% $CI = 0.55; 0.79$) compared to males (effect = .13, $SE = 0.09$, 95% $CI = 0.05; 0.30$), suggesting that the effect of brand interactivity on sponsor engagement was higher among females than males. Thus, H_6 was supported.

However, as was the case in study 1, the moderating effect of gender in the relationship between sport team involvement and brand loyalty, with sponsorship engagement acting as a mediating variable, was found to be non-significant. The interaction effect of sport team involvement and gender was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.26$, 95% $CI [-0.72, 0.20]$, $t = -1.12$, $p > 0.05$). The overall moderated mediation model was not supported with the index of moderated mediation = -0.09 and zero falling in between the CI upper and lower values (95% $CI = -0.33, 0.18$). Collectively, the results obtained from the mediation moderation analysis suggest that gender moderates the indirect effect of brand interactivity on brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement, with the indirect effect being stronger for women than men. However, it did not moderate the indirect effect of sport team involvement on brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement, as no gender differences were reported in that relationship. Thus, these results indicate that fans perception of interactivity of the sponsor activations influences their level of engagement with the sponsor which in turn influences their loyalty towards the sponsor, and this is more prominent among females than males. The results also suggest that fans involvement with the sport team influences their level of engagement with the sponsor which in turn influences their loyalty towards the sponsor. However, unlike in the previous case, the gender of the fan is observed to have no impact on this relationship. The implications and discussion of these findings can be found in the next chapter.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to sponsors' activational communications. Specifically, this study aimed at examining if interaction and engagement with their team's sponsors' activational communication on-site, as well as on social media, influenced loyalty towards the sponsors among the fans of the team. The target population for the social media research setting were U.S. based fans of women's professional soccer team while for on-site research context, U.S. based fans of professional football team were targeted. Prior to administering the survey to the target population, reliability and validity of the instrument was checked by consulting a panel of experts. The panel recommended minor changes to the instrument. Next, a pilot study was conducted with undergraduate students enrolled in a business administration course at a small Midwest educational institution in the United States. Again, minor changes were made to the questionnaire based on the feedback provided. The data collection occurred in two different contexts. For the social media study (study – 1), the questionnaire was distributed to Facebook fan groups of a women's professional soccer team. For the on-site study (study -2), fans at the sponsor activation space were intercepted and asked to complete a questionnaire. A total of 241 usable surveys were obtained for the study -1 while the sample size for the study -2 was 181.

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to confirm the multi-dimensional nature of consumer brand engagement. For study -1, the results of the higher order model showed good model fit ($\chi^2_{51} = 108.76$, $\chi^2/df = 2.13$, $p < .001$, NFI = .96, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .07, and SRMR = 0.04). A closer inspection of the standardized factor

loadings revealed that all values were between 0.77 to 0.94, surpassing the cutoff point of 0.70. Based on findings of previous studies (e.g., Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Leckie et al., 2016; Mirbagheri & Najmi, 2019), it was decided that a second-order model of sponsorship engagement provided the best model for further analyses. Similar results were obtained for study-2 as model showed good model fit ($\chi^2_{49} = 105.91$, $\chi^2/df = 2.16$, $p < .001$, NFI = .96, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .08, and SRMR = 0.04). Path analysis results for study-1 revealed the paths from team sport involvement ($\beta = 0.30$) and brand interactivity ($\beta = 0.40$) to sponsorship engagement were statistically significant, thus supporting H₁ and H₂ respectively. The path between sponsorship engagement and brand loyalty was also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.36$). The model accounted for 34% variance ($R^2 = 0.34$) in sponsorship engagement and 35% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.35$) in brand loyalty. For study-2, the results of the hypothesis testing indicated that team sport involvement ($\beta = 0.43$) and brand interactivity ($\beta = 0.43$) was positively associated with sponsorship engagement. Additionally, sponsorship engagement ($\beta = 0.44$) was positively associated with brand loyalty. The model accounted for 34% variance ($R^2 = 0.34$) in sponsorship engagement and 39% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.39$) in brand loyalty suggesting model performed better for on-site activations than social media. Overall, these results suggest that sponsorship engagement mediates the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty, and the relationship between sport team involvement and brand loyalty. Finally, gender was found to moderate the effect of brand interactivity and brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement. The overall moderated mediation model was supported with the index of moderated mediation for study-1 = -0.13 (95% CI = -0.24; -0.04). The conditional indirect effect was stronger among females (effect = .62, SE = 0.07, 95% CI =

0.48; 0.76) than males (effect = .33, *SE* = 0.07, 95% *CI* = 0.20; 0.46), suggesting that the effect of brand interactivity on sponsor engagement was higher among females than males for social media activations. While for study -2, the index of moderated mediation = 0.14 (95% *CI* = 0.04, 0.29) and the conditional indirect effect was strongest again among females (effect = .67, *SE* = 0.06, 95% *CI* = 0.55; 0.79) compared to males (effect = .13, *SE* = 0.09, 95% *CI* = 0.05; 0.30), suggesting that the effect of brand interactivity on sponsor engagement was higher among females than males for on-site activations as well.

Overall, these results show the importance of engaging with sponsors as sponsorship engagement plays a central role in driving consumer loyalty towards the sponsor. Moreover, females perceive sponsor activations to be more interactive than males and the effect of sponsorship engagement is also stronger among females than males in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty. The next chapter discusses the interpretation of these results in detail as well as explains the implications of these findings for academicians and practitioners.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The focus of sport sponsorship has shifted from generating more brand awareness among fans to enhancing fans' engagement with the brand. To achieve this objective, sponsors invest vast amounts of their marketing budgets on communicating the sponsorship with the fans, primarily through activations across multiple channels (IEG, 2020). As a result, the sport industry has seen an unprecedented rise in sponsorship expenditures in addition to an increase in spending on activating the sponsorship. Recent studies have called for future research to go beyond the traditional metrics of measuring sponsorship (i.e., measuring brand recall, brand image, and product sales), and demanded for the creation of new metrics, specifically the engagement of the fan with the sponsor, to assess sponsorships investments (Cornwell, 2019; Wakefield et al., 2020). Therefore, academics and practitioners need better sponsorship measurement models that include the activational communication component of the sponsorship in order to better understand the effectiveness of such sponsorship investments. Based on the results of this study, sponsors will be able to customize their activation space and/or social media content, which will help generate positive consumer responses to their communication.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to sponsors activational communications. Based on the S-D logic perspective, interactivity and involvement were identified as the antecedents to consumers engagement with a sponsor

and sponsor loyalty was identified as a consequence of that engagement. Specifically, four research questions were addressed and six hypotheses were proposed:

The first research question sought to address how team sport involvement and interactivity influence sponsorship engagement.

H₁: Team sport involvement will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

H₂: Brand interactivity will have a direct positive influence on sponsorship engagement.

The second research question sought to address how sponsorship engagement influences consumer responses to the sponsorship.

H₃: Sponsorship engagement will have a direct positive influence on sponsor loyalty.

The third research question was concerned with examining the mediating role of sponsorship engagement in the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty, as well as the relationship between interactivity and brand loyalty. This was tested through the following hypotheses:

H₄: Sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty.

H₅: Sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty.

The fourth research question investigated the impact of gender on consumer engagement.

This was tested through the following hypothesis

H₆: Gender will moderate the relationship between team sport involvement and sponsorship engagement as well as the relationship between brand interactivity and sponsorship engagement.

This chapter is divided into five sections: First, an interpretation of the results of the sponsorship activation model will be discussed. The second section will discuss theoretical implications of the study, and how the results contribute to the body of literature surrounding S-D logic. This will be followed by a discussion of the practical implications of the study. The next section of this chapter will highlight the limitations of the study and present ideas for future research. The final section of this chapter will provide a summary of the study.

Interpretation of Results

To address the four research questions and six hypotheses, two studies were conducted – study 1 involving U.S. based fans of Professional Women’s Soccer in the US with social media serving as the sponsorship activation platform, and study 2 involving U.S. based fans of National Football League with on-site as the sponsorship activation platform. RQ1 examined the impact of team sport involvement and brand interactivity on sponsorship engagement. The results from both the studies found that team sport involvement ($\beta = 0.30$, $\beta = 0.43$) and brand interactivity ($\beta = 0.40$, $\beta = 0.43$) possessed a significant positive relationship with sponsorship engagement, thus supporting the first and second hypothesis. The percentage of variance ($R^2 = 0.34$) in sponsorship engagement explained by the two antecedent factors was similar across the two research settings. These findings suggest that highly involved fans of a professional sport team are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of engagement with the sponsor. Similarly, fans

who perceive the sponsor activation, both on social media as well as at the venue, to be highly interactive are more likely to show higher levels of engagement with the sponsor. In other words, participant differences in involvement with the sport team and perceived interactivity of the sponsor activation significantly explained differences in the level of sponsor engagement expressed by participants.

Sport Team Involvement

One of the antecedents to consumer brand engagement was identified as involvement, and in this study, it was the fans' involvement with their sport team. The results revealed that higher fan involvement with the sport team resulted in higher engagement with the sponsor, and this was true for both on-site and social media sponsor activations. This finding makes sense as highly involved fans tend to invest considerable amounts of time and energy in consuming team-related information (Wakefield et al., 2007). Fans of professional sport teams engage in information-seeking behavior online (Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012) as well as offline (Alexandris et al., 2007), and therefore it is not surprising that they participated in the activities designed by the sponsors on the social media accounts of the team as well as outside the stadium where the team plays. Further, these findings also highlight the importance of creating fun and enjoyable activities as it causes fans to emotionally invest in the activity and finally act on it by either sharing/recommending the activity with/to other fans. Previous research suggested strong positive relationships between involvement and brand engagement. Wirtz et al. (2013) indicated higher levels of involvement with online brand communities significantly predicted higher levels of engagement with the brand. Hollebeek et al. (2014) found a positive association between involvement with a social networking site

and engagement with that site. Similar findings were observed by Dwivedi (2015) and Leckie et al. (2016) among mobile phone consumers, wherein involvement with a mobile phone category/service possessed a strong relationship with the mobile phone brand/mobile service provider respectively.

In the context of spectator sports, the construct of team sport involvement has garnered limited attention from scholars. Past studies have highlighted the influence it has on identification with the team (e.g., Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Tsiotsou, 2013; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2010;) and various aspects of fan loyalty including attending sport events, watching games on TV, and word-of-mouth activity (Bee & Havitz, 2010; Bennett et al, 2009; Funk et al., 2004; Pritchard & Funk, 2006). However, none of these studies provided any insights on how fans' involvement with a sport team influences their level of engagement with the team or any of its sponsors. This study addresses this gap in sponsorship literature and provides empirical support for the relationship between team sport involvement and sponsorship engagement across two different research contexts – on-site and social media activations. From a theoretical perspective, these findings demonstrate the importance of including an involvement construct in assessing effectiveness of sponsorship activations. Further, the findings also align with one of the fundamental propositions of S-D logic theory which recognizes that consumers' levels of interest/perceived relevance with an entity is a necessary requirement for the consumer to become engaged with the entity (Brodie et al., 2011). From a practical perspective, the results indicate that sponsorship managers should consider fans' involvement with the team they are sponsoring as an important factor when evaluating the engagement level. The practical implications section found later in

this chapter outlines specific actions sponsors and professional sport teams can take that can lead to higher fan engagement with the sponsors.

Brand Interactivity

The second antecedent factor of consumer engagement was brand interactivity, which under the theoretical framework of S-D logic is considered to be a fundamental driver of consumer engagement. Results from the two research contexts of this study revealed that fans' perceived interactivity with the sponsoring brand significantly explained variations in fans' engagement with the sponsoring brand. This suggests that fans who perceived the sponsorship activations (both the post on social media as well as at the venue) to be highly interactive (i.e., felt that the sponsoring brand displayed a genuine willingness to connect with them), demonstrated higher levels of engagement with the sponsor. In other words, they processed the information communicated positively, enjoyed the activation, and were likely to engage in positive brand-related behaviors such as liking, commenting, and sharing the social media post and engaging in word-of-mouth communication with other fans about the on-site activation.

This study provided empirical evidence regarding the relationship between brand interactivity and sponsorship engagement. Previous research indicated a strong positive association between interactivity and engagement. Liu and Shrum (2002) explored the role of interactivity in effectiveness of advertising and found that consumers perceived interactive communication in great detail. Fiore et al. (2005) predicted that interactive features on e-commerce websites leads to strong positive emotions among the users. This was corroborated in a sponsorship context by Kim and Kaplanidou (2014) who found that on-site sponsor activities drive consumers affective engagement (i.e., pleasure and

arousal), which in turn leads to positive attitudes and purchase intentions toward the sponsored brand. Similar findings were noted in the context of social media as interactive messages on digital platforms lead to higher user participation, involvement, flow, and emotional arousal (Kujur & Singh, 2017; Zhang et al., 2017). This was also found to be true in the case of brand-user communication on SNS (Mahaptara & Mishra, 2017; Weeks et al., 2008).

The findings from the study indicate the importance of creating interactive experiences, on social media as well as on-site, as it will lead to fans' being more cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally engaged with the sponsoring brand. From a theoretical perspective, sponsorship evaluation models need to factor in interactivity as a construct when determining fan responses to sponsorship engagement. These findings also support the first fundamental proposition of S-D logic which states that engagement reflects the psychological state of a consumer, and this occurs only when the consumer is in some way interacting with an object, in this case the sponsoring brand (Brodie et al., 2011). From a practical perspective, these results indicate that sponsorship executives and managers should design activation strategies wherein the fans have an opportunity to communicate with the sponsor. Specifically, sponsors should provide an opportunity to the fans to interact with them. This can be done by creating social media posts where fans have a chance to respond and feel like they are part of the message that is being communicated. In the context of in-venue/on-site activations, sponsors should create activation spaces and have a representative present at the space who can facilitate an interaction with the fan. This will ensure a two-way communication between the fan and the sponsor and enhance the interactive potential of the activation.

CBE as a Multi-Dimensional Construct

The fourth fundamental proposition of consumer engagement based on S-D logic is that consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011). A CFA was conducted to test for the multidimensionality of the CBE construct. The results of the second-order factor model demonstrated a good fit for the social media research context ($\chi^2_{51} = 108.76$, $\chi^2/df = 2.13$, $p < .001$, NFI = .96, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .07, and SRMR = 0.04) as well as for the on-site research context ($\chi^2_{49} = 105.91$, $\chi^2/df = 2.16$, $p < .001$, NFI = .96, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .08, and SRMR = 0.04). Based on these results, it was concluded that sponsorship engagement is best represented as a second-order construct comprising the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The emotional component, defined as passion for the on-site study, emerged as the strongest dimension of consumer brand engagement, indicating fans strong emotional attachment to the sponsor during the interactions. The emotional component for the social media study was defined in terms of interest and enjoyment suggesting fans displayed lots of interest and derived pleasure and joy from the activity they participated in. Activation, the behavioral component, was the second strongest dimension of consumer brand engagement, implying that fans seem to be investing time and effort into the on-site as well as social media activity. Immersion (on-site) and attention (social media), the cognitive component was the third strongest dimension, suggesting that fans were attentive to and engrossed in brand-related interactions. Taken together, this is an important finding from this study as it outlines the psychological process of a fan in a specific brand interaction. It supports the fourth

fundamental proposition of S-D logic by empirically finding that fans make significant positive cognitive, affective, and behavioral investments in a specific sponsor-related interaction. The CFA results suggest that fans are attentive to the information presented by sponsors in the activations and seek useful and relevant information during those specific interactions. Once they find the information positive and relevant to them, they feel enthused which further results in them responding to the interactions by sharing their experiences with other fans, providing positive feedback about the brand's product/service/experience to other fans, and following brand-related information on various channels including social media, TV, and internet web pages.

This multi-dimensional nature of consumer engagement, comprised of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, is well supported in the literature and in variety of contexts including virtual brand communities (Brodie et al., 2013), brand campaigns on social media (e.g., Mirbhadgeri & Najmi, 2019), brand pages on social media (e.g., Reitz, 2012), social networking sites (e.g., Santos et al., 2018), tourism (Rather, Hollebeek, & Islam, 2019) and airlines (e.g., Hapsari et al., 2017). This study adds to this literature by studying the construct in a specific context of sponsorship activations. Further, it also responds to the calls made by service marketing scholars to validate and empirically test the CBE scale in different contexts (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Calder et al., 2016; So et al., 2014). Theoretically, these findings serve as an essential step toward building further knowledge of consumer brand engagement in the context of fan-sponsor relationship development. From a practical perspective, the findings recommend that sponsorship managers and executives design activation strategies which can lead to significant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investments by fans.

Brand Loyalty

RQ2 examined the impact of sponsorship engagement and brand loyalty. The third hypothesis was supported as sponsorship engagement was found to have a significant positive relationship with brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.44$, $\beta = 0.32$). The results highlight the relevant role of sponsorship engagement in the context of social media and on-site sponsorship activations by showing support for the positive effects on brand loyalty. Through this, it can be concluded that fans who participated in the sponsor activities on social media and on site, felt highly engaged with the sponsoring brand and demonstrated greater loyalty towards the brand.

The findings from this study garner support from the extant CBE literature and add to it by exploring the association between consumer brand engagement and brand loyalty in the specific context of sponsorship activations. The fundamental proposition three (FP3) of S-D logic states that consumer engagement plays central role within a nomological network of service relationships. This study provides empirical evidence for this proposition by confirming the mediating role of consumer engagement, which is discussed below. This study also indicates that a consumer's engagement with the brand is vital for the consumer to show a sense of loyalty towards the brand. The results further confirm that positive association between consumer brand engagement and brand loyalty. Additionally, the results provide an accurate picture of the importance of engaging consumer with the brand if loyalty towards the brand is the ultimate marketing objective (Islam et al., 2017).

This study also finds supports for Keller's (2013) argument that "the strongest affirmation of brand loyalty occurs when customers are engaged or willing to invest time,

energy, money, or other resources in the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption of the brand” (p.121). For example, the social media activation in this study was focused on fans of a professional women’s soccer team participating in an activity and experiencing a unique way of interacting with the team and the sponsor. The activity did not involve any kind of transaction nor direct consumption of the brand, yet fans invested their time and energy by participating in it. Similarly, the on-site activation focused on fans of a professional football team visiting a sponsor activation space and interacting with the sponsor representative. Additionally, the sponsor also placed a giant product replica for fans to take photographs with. However, this activity, unlike the social media sponsor activity, involved direct consumption of the brand through product samples. Perhaps that might be the reason why the relationship between brand loyalty and sponsorship engagement was stronger for the social media sponsorship activation than the on-site sponsorship activation. To provide support for Keller’s argument, further investigation warranted in the context of on-site sponsor activation with activities designed without sample promotions.

Although examination of CBE and brand loyalty is a novel concept, researchers have begun to test the role of CBE in developing brand loyalty. The results have demonstrated the positive influence of CBE and brand loyalty in various contexts. For instance, Hollebeek et al. (2014) found that LinkedIn users showed heightened levels of loyalty towards the social networking site after engaging with the platform. Similarly, Dwivedi (2015) and Leckie et al. (2016) found that engagement with mobile service providers and brand manufacturers was a significant predictor of loyalty towards the mobile service provider and mobile manufacturer respectively. This is further

corroborated in a social media setting as users tend to be more loyal with the brand once they feel engaged with a virtual brand community (Casalo et al., 2010), online brand communities (Laroche et al., 2012), and brand pages on social media (Jahn & Kunz, 2014, Kaur et al., 2020). Taken collectively, findings from previous research and the current study provide insight into the relationships between CBE and brand loyalty from various contexts and underscores the central role of CBE in generating committed and loyal consumers.

Mediating effect of CBE

The central role of CBE in the nomological network governing service relationships in which other related concepts (e.g., involvement, interactivity, and loyalty) act as antecedents and consequences was also confirmed as CBE was found to mediate the relationship between sport team involvement and brand loyalty as well brand interactivity and brand loyalty in both the research settings, providing support for H4 and H5. The results of the bootstrap procedure performed to test the mediating effect of CBE suggests that fans who are highly involved with their team and perceive the sponsor activity to be highly engaging demonstrate higher loyalty towards the sponsor. Similarly, fans' perceived interactivity of the sponsor activity enhances their engagement with that activity which further enhances their loyalty towards the sponsor. Another key interpretation of this result is that interactivity and involvement with a sport team do not directly lead to brand loyalty. This means fans who interact with a sponsor post on social media or with a sponsor activity at the venue need to feel engaged during the interaction if they are to become loyal customers of the brand. On the same note, fans who are highly involved with their team often come across sponsor-related activities on social media or

at the venue. However, that necessarily would not translate into a brand loyalty towards the sponsor unless they become cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally invested in the sponsor activity.

Previous marketing scholars have established the mediating effect of CBE in service marketing context (Dwivedi, 2015; France et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kaur et al., 2020; Rather et al., 2019; Read et al., 2019). However, in a sponsorship context, this is an important addition to the existing literature as previous studies have not explicitly focused on the central role of CBE when evaluating outcomes of sponsorship. For instance, Tsordia et al. (2018) found brand engagement to be a significant predictor of brand loyalty and purchase behavior. However, they did not test for the mediating role of brand engagement in their sponsorship evaluation model. Interestingly, in their consumer-centric sponsorship model, Wakefield et al. (2020) described the mediator variables (which can also potentially be moderators) as “the thoughts, feelings, and actions of consumers as they process information from interactions with the brand and/or property during the experience” (p.323). Findings from this research confirm this notion as the CBE construct comprising of the cognitive (attention), affective (pleasure, enjoyment), and behavioral (activation) was empirically validated and the definition of these three components essentially implied how fans think, feel, and act during a specific brand interaction. This central role of CBE is a key finding to emerge from this study as it emphasizes the importance of engaging a fan if the objective of the sponsoring brand is to generate brand loyalty. Theoretically, this is a valuable contribution to our understanding of CBE in a sponsorship context and it highlights the importance of including the construct as a mediating variable in future sponsorship evaluation models. From a

practical perspective, these findings inform sponsorship managers and executives as well as the marketing executives of professional sport teams to utilize activations as a tool for fan engagement. In addition to that, they should also focus on creating activations that enhance two-way communication between the fans and the sponsor and include some identifiable elements of the professional sport team (such as players, coaches, mascots, key moments, nostalgic elements etc.) to achieve the ultimate objective of generating a loyal customer base.

Moderating Role of Gender

This study also examined the role of gender in fans evaluation of sponsorship activations. The moderated mediation analysis revealed the moderating role of gender in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement. However, gender did not have any impact on the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty, which was mediated by sponsorship engagement. Particularly, perceived interactivity of the sponsorship activation positively influenced engagement with the sponsor, and the effect of this relationship was stronger among females than males. Although, perceived interactivity of the sponsor activation did not directly lead to loyalty towards the sponsoring brand, it was contingent upon the level of engagement with the sponsor activation. That is, if a fan perceived the interaction to be highly interactive, they also found the interaction with the sponsor highly engaging, and this relationship was stronger among females than males. Further, because of the high engagement with the sponsor, the fans showed increased levels of loyalty towards the sponsor. The results are partially in agreement with the works of Dodds et al. (2014) who observed that gender played a crucial role in baseball fans' evaluation of sponsorship

activation tactics. They are also congruous with the findings of McDaniel (1999) and McDaniel & Kinney (1998), who found that women process information differently and have more favorable attitudes and purchase intentions towards the sponsor than males. Moreover, women also tend to place greater value on sharing sport experiences (Ridinger & Funk, 2006) implying that the on-site and social media sponsor activations were perceived to be more than mere activities and experiences worth sharing with others. From an online perspective, this result supports Kennedy et al.'s (2022) finding that females are more likely to co-create with a brand if the activities reflect hedonic values.

On the other hand, the mediating effect of sponsorship engagement in the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty did not vary across gender. This finding is also consistent with some recent studies on consumer engagement which found no significant gender differences and therefore, support the argument of a declining gender gap in consumer marketing research (Islam et al., 2019; Islam & Rahman, 2017; Nadeem et al., 2015). An interpretation of this result is that although highly involved female and male fans perceived the sponsorship activations to be highly engaging, this relationship did not vary across gender. Moreover, involvement with the team did not directly lead to an increase in loyalty towards the sponsor. This was again contingent upon the level of engagement with the sponsor activation, with higher sponsor engagement indicating increased sponsor loyalty.

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study offer several theoretical implications. First, this work responds to the call made by Marketing Science Institute for “research generating enhanced understanding regarding the development and maintenance of suitable

customer engagement levels across contexts” (Hollebeek, Conduit, & Brodie, 2016, p.394). In addition, this study also responds to the several calls made by service marketing scholars to empirically investigate the phenomenon in various contexts including offline and online (see Brodie et al., 2011; Behnam et al., 2021; Calder et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011a; Kumar et al.,2019). Likewise, the nomological network of CBE in the context of sponsorship activations is appropriate given the CBE scale exhibited a good fit in the offline and social media sponsorship contexts. The constructs within the network related positively with each other, and the model explained a large proportion of the variance. Thus, the study finds support for use of S-D logic as a theoretical lens to investigate CBE in a sport sponsorship setting.

Second, this study broadens the theoretical application of S-D logic to CBE dynamics by establishing the importance of interactions between the consumer and the brand (or the sponsor). Sponsorship activations have a built-in advantage over other marketing promotions in that they are inherently interesting to the fans because of their interactive nature. The results of the study shed light into this as fans perceived interactivity of the on-site as well as social media activation as a key driver of engagement. This presents a great opportunity for sponsors to initiate a dialogue with the match-going spectators as well as followers on social media, in their attempt to nurture long-term relationships with the fans. Additionally, involvement with a sport team was also a key driver of sponsorship engagement confirming the notion that cognitive, affective, and behavioral investments in a sponsor-fan interaction require a prior level of consumer interest with the professional sport team (Brodie et al., 2011). Fans who have a high-level of interest in their team are more susceptible to process information about the

team (Wakefield et al., 2007) and by extension interact with the sponsors of the team on social media (Filo et al., 2015) as well as at the venue (Gillooly, Crowther, & Medway, 2017). This provides the professional sport teams an added avenue, albeit an indirect one, to communicate with their fan base and build relationships that can enhance loyalty amongst them.

This study demonstrated that sponsorship engagement has a mediating influence on the linking between team sport involvement and brand loyalty as well as between brand interactivity and brand loyalty. Sponsorship activations that focus on including team-related stimuli and creating interactive activities enhances engagement with fans. This in turn can lead to increased loyalty intentions among fans because they are more willing to invest their time and effort into the activations. Therefore, the research supports the S-D logic CBE perspective which views consumers (fans) and sponsors as co-creators of value with each party actively contributing to enhancing the fan experience at the venue and on social media platforms (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2002; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Fourth, this study provides a conceptual model that can measure sponsorship activations in the dual context of on-site and social media activations. In doing so, it stresses the fact that an activation's primary purpose is to connect fans with the sponsors, which can be achieved by creating interactive communications that ultimately lead to fan engagement with the sponsor. Thus, it extends the sponsorship effectiveness literature by providing valuable insights on assessing information-processing models of sponsorship communications with a specific focus on the multi-dimensional nature of sponsorship

engagement, which thus far has received scant attention from sport marketing scholars (Cornwell, 2019; Wakefield et al., 2020).

Finally, the results of the study also highlight the differing dynamics of sponsorship engagement for female versus male fans of professional sport teams. The findings revealed that both the genders perceived the interaction to be highly interactive and found the interaction with the sponsor highly engaging. However, this relationship was stronger among females than males, which is plausible given females are likely to co-create with a brand if they reflect hedonic values. Therefore, this work also extends the literature by combining S-D logic with the gender schema theory in a sponsorship context.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several managerial implications. First, this study tested an empirical conceptual model of sponsorship engagement with two different sponsor categories in two different research settings. This can provide sport marketing and communication professionals with insights to understand the effectiveness of their investments in sport sponsorship deals and activation campaigns. The findings of this study indicate that team sport involvement and interactivity with the sponsor are two antecedents to engagement with the sponsor. The implication of this result for marketers and executives of professional sport teams is twofold: First, managers and executives of the sponsoring brands need to utilize activations to enhance team-fan relationships, as highly involved fans of a team are more likely to perceive them positively. Further, a sport teams' financial success is predicated on creation of commercial partnerships with sponsors. To this end, the teams and their sponsors should work in tandem to design

activations and include team-related elements, given their crucial role in driving engagement among the fans. This can be done by designing on-site as well as social media sponsor activations that include recognizable team-related elements as it can lead to strong team-fan as well as sponsor-fan relationships (Rose et al., 2021). For on-site activations, this could include using team colors, jersey, logos, mascots, and images of players and coaches in the activities they create at the venue. For social media activations, the content created for the activations could include a specific team-related element such as the stadium the team plays in, iconic moments from the team's history, and/or short clips of famous players and coaches as fans are more likely to pay attention and respond positively to them (Anagnostopoulos, Parganas, Chadwick, & Fenton, 2018).

Second, the activations designed should focus on two-way communication between the fan and the sponsor. Specifically, the sponsors should strive to create activations that are fun and exciting, and activations that provide fans with an opportunity to communicate back with the brand. These include posting social media content that are reciprocal in tone (Filo et al., 2015). For the fans to act on that specific post, it is worth noting that the content should be fun and enjoyable as it can evoke positive sentiments among the fans and in turn lead them to respond to it. With regards to the on-site activities, sponsors can create activities in designated spaces allocated to them by the professional sports team. The activities should be led by sponsor representatives and ensure that they are fun and enjoyable. Further, the representatives should make attempts to strike a brief conversation with the fans ensuring relevant brand-related information is passed on. For instance, Zulily activated their sponsorship with Reign FC, a U.S. based professional women's soccer team, by creating a 'thrill of the find' giant ball pit treasure

hunt outside the stadium (Arispe, 2016). The objective of the activation was to ensure fans felt immersed in the experience and enjoy it together with friends and families.

Reign FC Fans who visited the activation space interacted with the sponsor representatives to gain more information about the treasure hunt (Arispe, 2016). The brief conversation encouraged them to participate in the treasure hunt and share the experience with others via word-of-mouth or social media.

Third, by empirically testing the dimensions of CBE and outcomes that drive engagement, this research provides managers with potential strategic initiatives that can assist them in achieving those outcomes. The findings of this study show that brand loyalty is one of the key outcomes of sponsorship engagement. The ultimate goal of a sponsor is to generate loyalty among fans, which can then lead to actual consumption of the brand's products/services (Tsordia et al., 2018). Regarding this, the findings suggest that fans need to demonstrate high levels of engagement with the sponsorship activation, which can then lead to them exerting increased loyalty towards the sponsor. Thus, sponsors should aim to ensure fans are highly attentive to their activations, show a deep interest in them, and perceive them worthy of responding to or sharing them with their peers. In addition, sponsors should also strive to initiate conversations to maintain the fans interest in the activations. This could essentially develop a sense of belonging among the fans and co-create value for them. For instance, having multiple sponsorship staff present at the on-site activations space to inform fans about the activation could be one way of achieving this goal. This would be much easier to achieve on social media given most sponsors have a dedicated team that works on creating such activations. Co-creation of value is a basic tenet of consumer engagement (Brodie et al., 2011) and it is imperative

that sponsors make the fans feel they are contributing to the conversations and therefore, co-creating value, which as literature indicates, subsequently results in increased loyalty towards the sponsor.

Fourth, the sponsorship engagement model developed in this study provided empirical evidence for the mediating effect of consumer engagement in the relationship between team sport involvement and brand loyalty as well as in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty. For marketers, this result indicates the importance of activating a sponsorship as fans need to feel engaged with the sponsor before showing a sense of loyalty. The finding also explains why sponsors should additionally invest in the sponsorship deal by activating the sponsorship and not just relying on the benefits of non-activational sponsorship (logo signages, jersey patch sponsorships, facility naming rights, etc.), which are proven to be more effective when the goal is to increase brand awareness (Martin, Bourdeau, & Stephan, 2020). Fifth, gender was found to affect the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty which was mediated by sponsorship engagement. Practitioners could tailor specific activations that reflect hedonic values to cater to the female supporters. This is because female fans are more likely to interact with the supporting staff and co-create online activities with the brand thus ensuring their higher engagement with the brand. However, this does not mean the sponsors should not target male supporters/fans. Although, they are less likely to interact with the sponsorship staff or co-create online brand activities, male fans tend to pursue activities that are socially important (Kennedy et al., 2022). Therefore, sponsors could tailor specific activations for male supporters wherein they can focus on creating experiences that are enjoyable from a collective standpoint rather than an individual

standpoint. An example of this would be creating activations which involve competitive games such as penalty kick challenge, slam dunk challenge where spectators can participate and challenge other fans or friends or family members. Another way sponsor could grab the attention of male spectators would be by designing interactive photo and video booths at tailgates which have a social atmosphere and promote harmony and togetherness among the spectators (Drenten, Peters, Leigh, & Hollenbeck, 2009).

Finally, practitioners can also use the conceptualization of consumer engagement and the definitions of the individual dimensions to set goals for their activations. They can further measure the success of the activations using the consumer engagement scale as it was empirically validated in the dual context of on-site and social media. Overall, the implications discussed above provide practitioners with a conceptual framework that is empirically validated in two different sport research contexts that managers of sponsoring brands can use to design activations. To this end, the findings from this study suggest sponsors of professional sport teams should use activations as a marketing communications tool to enhance fan-sponsor relationship. Specifically, sponsorship marketers should devise activations strategies which include team-related elements as they can pique fan interest leading them to be more engaged with the brand. Further, they should also focus on creating interactive activations which allow for a two-way communication between fans and sponsors, thus ensuring higher fan-sponsor engagement and increased fan loyalty.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite this study's theoretical and practical implications, the study has certain limitations that offer opportunities for future research. First, this study's research context

was restricted to a professional sport setting and two sponsor activations – one sponsor activated at the venue and the other on social media. Therefore, it is possible that certain characteristics of the sponsor activations (such as the sponsor category, stadium atmospheres, choice of social media platform, fan culture, etc.) may have influenced the external validity of results. Thus, it is strongly recommended that researchers proceed with caution when generalizing the findings from this study. Future studies should replicate and cross-validate the findings of this research in a different setting with different contexts. This could be done by replicating the current study in a collegiate sport setting or even in a non-sport setting given experiential marketing activations are popular in music, wine, and tourism industries. In addition, studies should also seek to examine fans' responses to sponsorship engagement on other social networking platforms including Instagram and TikTok which can lead to more diverse understanding of the construct. Further, researchers should also cross-validate the findings using samples from non-western countries as the results could help us understand the role of cultures in the consumer engagement process. Finally, future studies should consider adopting a longitudinal approach to data collection by considering fans' responses to sponsor activations over a period rather than at a specific point of time.

Secondly, the study used service-dominant (S-D) logic as the theoretical lens and examined brand loyalty as the sole consequence of consumer brand engagement. However, CBE as an area of research has been studied through different theoretical frameworks and therefore multiple consequences of CBE have been proposed and empirically validated. For instance, social exchange theory posits that consumers combine with marketers to create exchanges through a co-creation process (Vargo &

Lusch, 2008), a consequence of which is self-brand connection (Harrigan et al., 2018). Scholarly works from a relationship marketing perspective indicate that consumer brand engagement leads to brand trust and brand commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, future conceptual models focusing on sponsorship activations should investigate the role of CBE with other outcome variables including brand satisfaction, self-brand connection, brand trust, brand commitment, and actual purchase behavior. This will enhance our understanding of the nomological network of consumer brand engagement in a sponsorship context. Additionally, experiential marketing techniques that focus on a consumer's sensory and emotional responses to stimuli are being adopted by sponsors. This is an area that future studies can explore to better understand how customer experiences with a sponsor activation influences their engagement with the sponsor.

Another limitation of this study was that non-response error and coverage error affected the study's results. While, the on-site sponsorship research context saw a high response rate, the social media research context produced a response rate of 29.6%. This was primarily because of the stimuli used in the survey which was not accessible on certain mobile applications. Future research studies must exercise caution when choosing brand-related stimuli. Since cross-sectional surveys were employed as a way to gather consumers' responses, coverage error likely occurred. This could be mitigated in the future by conducting probabilistic sampling of the target population. Finally, this research only considered positive valenced CBE. However, consumers can also respond negatively to a specific sponsor activation. The consumer culture theory highlights the reasons behind consumers negative reactions to brand communication (e.g., Brandao &

Popoli, 2021; Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2011; Thompson & Arsel, 2004). Future research should examine this phenomenon from a sponsorship perspective as it would assist practitioners in understanding the drivers of negative sponsorship engagement.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of sponsorship engagement (enacted via sponsorship activations) on consumers' responses to sponsors' activational communications. Specifically, this study aimed at examining if interaction and engagement with their team's sponsors' activational communication on-site, as well as on social media, influenced loyalty towards the sponsors. The study utilized service-dominant (S-D) logic as the theoretical framework. The S-D logic perspective recognizes that consumer behavior is centered on the interactive experiences between a consumer and an object, in this case the sponsor, and that a level of consumer interest and/or personal relevance with respect to the sponsor is required prior to the emergence of specific engagement levels, the outcome of which is brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013). Additionally, the study also recognizes the multidimensional nature of consumer engagement, and that the engagement consumer has with a sponsor differs across contexts. Based on this perspective, six hypotheses were tested. The first hypothesis formulated was that sport team involvement will have a positive relationship with sponsorship engagement. Second, brand interactivity will be positively associated with sponsorship engagement. Third, sponsorship engagement will be positively related to brand loyalty. Fourth, sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between sport team involvement and brand loyalty. Fifth, sponsorship engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty. Sixth, gender

will act as a moderator in these relationships with sponsorship engagement as the mediator.

To address the purpose of the study, two separate research contexts were used. The first research context of the study was social media (study-1). In this study, a questionnaire was distributed to U.S.-based fans of a women's professional soccer team via Facebook groups organized around fan support and interactions for the women's professional soccer team. The second research context was on-site (study-2), and U.S.-based fans of a professional football team, who visited the sponsor activation zone and interacted with the representatives, were intercepted and asked to fill out a questionnaire. Both questionnaires assessed fans' levels of involvement with their team, perceived interactivity of the sponsorship activation, level of engagement with the sponsorship activation, and level of loyalty towards the sponsor. Data were collected from a total of 422 respondents - 241 survey respondents recruited via Facebook groups for the social media study, and 181 survey respondents intercepted at the site of activation. Data were analyzed using path analysis. The results from both contexts supported the multi-dimensional structure of consumer brand engagement. Further, all the hypotheses were supported as involvement with the sport team and brand interactivity were found to be significant drivers of sponsorship engagement, which was also found to exert a significant impact on brand loyalty. The mediating effect of sponsorship engagement was also confirmed while gender acted as a moderating variable in the relationship between brand interactivity and brand loyalty via sponsorship engagement. Overall, the conceptual model performed better in an on-site context (sport team involvement, brand interactivity, and sponsorship engagement explained 39% of the variance in brand loyalty) compared

to the social media context (sport team involvement, brand interactivity, and sponsorship engagement explained 35% of the variance in brand loyalty).

The findings offer several theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, this research finds support for the use of S-D logic as a theoretical lens to investigate the multi-dimensional nature of CBE in a sport sponsorship setting. In addition, the findings also broaden the theoretical application of S-D logic to sponsorship effectiveness/evaluation models by establishing the importance of fan-sponsor interactions and fan involvement with the sport team. The results also provides researchers with a sponsorship engagement model which they can utilize in a variety of new research contexts covering sponsorship activations. Practitioners are informed by this research on the importance of engaging the fans through activations, which offers sponsors an avenue to break through the sponsorship clutter and achieve the key marketing objective of building loyalty with the fans.

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APPENDIX A

Summary of conceptualization of the consumer brand engagement construct

| Context | Authors | Construct Name | Construct Definition | Engagement object | Construct Dimensionality |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|
| Social media | (Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2016) | Consumer's engagement with social media brand-related content | "a set of online activities on the part of the consumer that are related to a brand, and which vary in the levels of interaction and engagement with the consumption, contribution, and creation of media content." | Brand per se and Brand-related content on social media | Consumer's engagement dimensions: 1- consumption, (B), 2- contribution (B), and 3- creation (B) |
| Social media | (Syrdal & Briggs, 2018) | Engagement with social media content | "A psychological state of mind experienced when consuming social media content in which an individual is highly absorbed in the content and experiences a sense of excitement." | The content on social media sites | Engagement dimensions: 1-enjoyment (E), 2- involvement and 3- absorption (C) |
| Social networking sites | (Yang, Lin, Carlson, & Ross, 2016) | Brand engagement on social media | Brand engagement on social media is composed of three dimensions: 1- affiliation (i.e., "brand-related connections among | A brand's page on a social network and the brand per se | Brand engagement dimensions: 1-Affiliation (B) 2- Conversation (B), and 3 - Responsiveness (B) |

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| | | | consumers”), 2-conversation (i.e., “brand-related talk and brand-supporting actions among consumers”), and 3-responsiveness (i.e., consumers’ responses to “firm-initiated and firm-generated content on social media”). | | |
| Companies’ pages on social networks | (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015) | Engagement in a company’s social media activities | “Consumer’s familiarity with a company’s social media activities (i.e., cognition) and the online following of these activities (i.e., behavior).” | Companies’ activities in their pages on social networks | Unidimensional (combination of C & B) |
| online brand communities on social networks | (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015, 2016) | Consumer engagement in online brand communities | Consumer engagement in online brand communities “is expressed through varying levels of affective, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations that go beyond exchange situations.” Affective engagement is composed of two sub-dimensions: enthusiasm (i.e., excitement and interest) and enjoyment (i.e., “feeling of pleasure and happiness”). Two sub-dimensions | Online brand communities embedded in social networks and Brand | E- Enthusiasm and Enjoyment C- Attention and Absorption B- Sharing, learning and endorsing |

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| | | | of cognitive engagement are attention (i.e., active thinking about the focus of engagement) and absorption (i.e., concentration and immersion). Behavioral engagement is also broken down into three sub-dimensions: sharing, learning, and endorsing. | | |
| Social media | (Campbell, Jewell, & Hessick, 2015) | Online brand-engagement | “The extent of conscious performance of brand-related public consumer behaviors online beyond purchase and consumption.” Online brand engagement is a behavioral construct with three dimensions: 1- interaction (i.e., communication with other consumers or with the brand, for example by commenting), 2- creation (i.e., generation of brand-related content by consumers), and 3- sharing (i.e., sharing of brand-related content, such as photos and videos). | Brand in itself and Brand-related content on social media | Three-dimensional (B, B, and B) Online brand engagement dimensions: 1- Interaction (B), 2- Creation (B), and 3- Sharing (B) |
| Companies’ pages on | (Reitz, 2012) | Online consumer engagement | Three aspects of online consumer engagement are | A brand’s page on a | C – focus and concentration |

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| social networks | | | 1- cognitive engagement (i.e., focus and concentration on a company's Facebook page, as well as learning about the company, brand, or its products), 2- affective engagement (i.e., pleasure and satisfaction with a company's Facebook page), 3- participation (i.e., "posting, sharing, conversing, and co-creating content with the company and/or other consumers"). | social network | A – pleasure and satisfaction B - participation |
| Websites | (Mollen & Wilson, 2010) | Online engagement | "A cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value." | brand website, or company sponsored website | Bi-dimensional (C, E) |
| Online brand communities | (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014) | Brand engagement | Consumer brand engagement consists of three dimensions: 1- immersion (i.e., "the level of a consumer's positively/negatively valenced brand-related thoughts, concentration and reflection in | Brand | Brand engagement dimensions: 1- Immersion (C), 2- Passion (E), and 3- Activation (B) |

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|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| | | | specific brand interactions”), 2-passion (i.e., “the degree of a consumer’s positively/negatively valenced brand-related affect exhibited in particular brand interactions”), and 3-activation (i.e., “consumer’s positively/negatively valenced level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in particular brand interactions”). | | |
| Social networking platforms | (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014) | Customer engagement with an online social platform brand | “A consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions.” Engagement has three dimensions: 1- cognitive processing (i.e., “a consumer’s level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration in a particular consumer/brand interaction”), 2- affection (i.e., “degree of positive brand-related affect in a particular consumer/brand interaction”), | Online social platform brands (e.g., Twitter) | C – cognitive processing E – affection B - activation |

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| | | | and 3-activation (i.e., “level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction”). | | |
| online brand communities | (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013) | Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community | “Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community involves specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other members of the community. Consumer engagement is a context-dependent, psychological state characterized by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement processes. Consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement | Brand and/or online community | Three-dimensional (C, E, and B) |

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| | | | antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community.” | | |
| No specific context | (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011) | Customer engagement | “Customer engagement (CE) is a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and exists as a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships that cocreate value. CE plays a central role in a nomological network governing service relationships in which other relational concepts (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative CE processes. It is a | No specific engagement object | Three-dimensional (C, E, and B) |

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| | | | multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dimensions.” | | |
| No specific context | (Hollebeek, 2011) | Customer brand engagement | <p>“The level of a customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions.”</p> <p>Three themes of customer brand engagement are 1-immersion (i.e., “the level of brand-related concentration in particular brand interactions”), 2-passion (i.e., “the degree of a customer’s positive brand-related affect in particular brand interactions”), and 3-activation (i.e., the “level of energy, effort and/or time spent on a brand in particular brand interactions”).</p> | Brand | Immersion (C) Passion (E) Activation (B) |
| service industries | (Patterson, Yu, & Ruyter, 2006) | Customer engagement | <p>“The level of a customer’s various presence in their relationship with a service organization. The</p> | Service organization | Customer engagement dimensions: 1-absorption (C), 2-dedication (E), 3-vigor (B), and 4-interaction (B) |

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| | | | presences include physical presence, emotional presence and cognitive presence.” | | |
| Brand communities | (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005) | Community engagement | “The consumer’s intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with community members” | Brand community | Unidimensional |
| No specific context | (Higgins & Scholer, 2009) | Consumer engagement | “Engagement is a state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed, or engrossed in something—sustained attention.” | No specific engagement object | Unidimensional (C) |
| No specific context | (van Doorn et al., 2010) | Customer engagement behaviors | “The customers’ behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” | Brand or firm | Unidimensional (B) |
| No specific context | (Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, & Morgan, 2014) | Consumer engagement | Three dimensions of customer engagement are 1- conscious attention (The degree of interest in having knowledge of the focus of engagement and the degree of consciousness in interacting with the focus of engagement), 2- enthused participation (“The zealous reactions and | Offerings, consumption activities, or events | Cognitive attention (C) Enthusied participation (E) Social connection (B) |

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| | | | feelings of a person related to using or interacting with the focus of their engagement”), and 3- social connection (“Enhancement of the interaction based on the inclusion of others with the focus of engagement, indicating mutual or reciprocal action in the presence of others”). | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

APPENDIX B

Study Instrument for On-site Activation (Study 2)

Section 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Are you 21 years of age and older?

- Yes
- No

Section 2. Measurement of construct

Team Sport Involvement

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

Note: Each item measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree

- 1) I find a lot of my life is organized around following [name of the sport team]
- 2) Following [name of the sport team] has a central role in my life
- 3) A lot of my time is organized around following [name of the sport team]
- 4) Following [name of the sport team] is one of the most satisfying things I do
- 5) I really enjoy following [name of the sport team]
- 6) Compared to other activities following [name of the sport team] is very interesting
- 7) Watching [name of the sport team] says a lot about who I am
- 8) When I watch [name of the sport team] I can really be myself
- 9) I feel like [name of the sport team] is part of me

Brand Interactivity

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

Note: Each item measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree

- 1) [name of the sponsor] gave me the opportunity to respond during my visit to their exhibits
- 2) [name of the sponsor] facilitated real-time communication with fans who visited their exhibits
- 3) [name of the sponsor] enabled conversations with its visitors at their exhibits

Consumer Brand Engagement

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

Note: Each item measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree

Attention (Cognitive Engagement dimension)

- 1) When I'm exploring [name of the sponsor]'s exhibit, my mind was only occupied with the exhibits and not with other things.
- 2) Participating in [name of the sponsor]'s exhibit took my mind off other things.
- 3) While exploring [name of the sponsor]'s exhibit, it was difficult to detach myself.
- 4) Nothing could distract me while doing the requested activities at the [name of the sponsor]'s exhibits.

Interest and Enjoyment (Affective Engagement dimension)

- 1) The visit to [name of the sponsor]'s exhibit was fun.
- 2) I think [name of the sponsor]'s exhibit was interesting.
- 3) Participating in [name of the sponsor]'s exhibit was an enjoyable experience.
- 4) [name of the sponsor]'s exhibit was exciting.

Activation (Behavioral Engagement dimension)

- 5) I really like to talk about [name of the sponsor] with others
- 6) I am always interested in learning more about [name of the sponsor]'s
- 7) I am proud to have others know I drink [name of the sponsor]
- 8) I like to visit [name of the sponsor]'s website

Brand Loyalty

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

Note: Each item measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree

- 1) I will buy [name of the sponsor] the next time I buy [sponsor category]
- 2) I intend to keep purchasing [name of the sponsor]
- 3) I am committed to [name of the sponsor] brand
- 4) I would be willing to pay a higher price for [name of the sponsor] over its competitors

Section 3. Demographic Information

- 1) Please indicate your current age.

A sliding scale with response options ranging from 18 to 100

- 2) With which gender do you most closely identify?

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

- 3) What is your race?

- White/ Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Native American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

4) Please indicate your current annual gross household income.

- Under \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$50,000
- \$50,001 - \$75,000
- \$75,001 - \$100,000
- Over \$100,000

5) Please indicate your highest level of education obtained.

- High school or GED
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's or professional (e.g., JD) degree
- Doctoral degree

APPENDIX C

Study Instrument for Social Media Activation (Study 1)

Section 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- 1) Are you 18 years of age and older?
 - Yes
 - No
- 2) Do you follow the USWNT on Twitter/ US Soccer on Facebook?
 - Follow USWNT on Twitter
 - Follow US Soccer on Facebook
 - I follow both, USWNT on Twitter and US Soccer on Facebook
 - I do not follow USWNT on Twitter/US Soccer on Facebook
- 3) How much time do you spend on Twitter/Facebook daily?
 - More than an hour
 - 30 mins – 1 hour
 - 15 mins – 30 mins
 - Less than 15 mins

Section 2. Measurement of constructs

Team Sport Involvement

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

Note: Each item measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree

- 1) I find a lot of my life is organized around following [name of the sport team]
- 2) Following [name of the sport team] has a central role in my life
- 3) A lot of my time is organized around following [name of the sport team]
- 4) Following [name of the sport team] is one of the most satisfying things I do
- 5) I really enjoy following [name of the sport team]
- 6) Compared to other activities following [name of the sport team] is very interesting
- 7) Watching [name of the sport team] says a lot about who I am
- 8) When I watch [name of the sport team] I can really be myself

9) I feel like [name of the sport team] is part of me

Please review the following social media post carefully. Click on the link below and explore the short activity. Once you're done, come back and finish the rest of the survey.



Note: If you are taking this survey on a desktop computer/laptop, the above link is not compatible. You will have to use a smartphone to access the link. You can do so by scanning the QR code given below. For iPhone users, please copy the link and open in Safari browser.

Brand Interactivity

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

Note: Each item measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree

- 1) [name of the sponsor] gave me the opportunity to respond via the tweet/post
- 2) [name of the sponsor] facilitated real-time communication with its followers via the tweet/post
- 3) [name of the sponsor] enabled conversations with its followers via the tweet/post

Consumer Brand Engagement

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

Note: Each item measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree

Attention (Cognitive Engagement dimension)

- 1) When I was exploring [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation], my mind was only occupied with it and not with other things
- 2) Participating in this [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation] took my mind off other things
- 3) When I saw this [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation] it was difficult to detach myself
- 4) Nothing could distract me while doing the [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation]

Interest and Enjoyment (Affective Engagement dimension)

- 1) [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation] was fun
- 2) [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation] was interesting
- 3) Participating in [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation] was an enjoyable experience
- 4) [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation] was exciting

Activation (Behavioral Engagement dimension)

- 1) I'd follow posts/tweets related to [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation]
- 2) I'd like to comment on [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation]
- 3) I'd like to share [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation]
- 4) I'd click 'like' on posts/tweets related to [name of the sponsor] [name of the activation]

Brand Loyalty

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

Note: Each item measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree

- 1) I will buy [name of the sponsor] next time I buy [sponsor category]
- 2) I intend to keep using [name of the sponsor]
- 3) I am committed to [name of the sponsor]
- 4) I would be willing to pay a higher price for [name of the sponsor] over its competitors

Section 3. Demographic Information

1) Please indicate your current age.

A sliding scale with response options ranging from 18 to 100

2) With which gender do you most closely identify?

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

3) What is your race?

- White/ Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Native American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

4) Please indicate your current annual gross household income.

- Under \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$50,000
- \$50,001 - \$75,000
- \$75,001 - \$100,000
- Over \$100,000

5) Please indicate your highest level of education obtained.

- High school or GED
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree

- Master's or professional (e.g., JD) degree
- Doctoral degree

CURRICULUM VITA

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EDUCATION

| | | |
|-------|--|----------|
| Ph.D. | University of Louisville | (Aug'22) |
| | Educational Leadership and Organizational Development Concentration in Sport Administration Adviser: Dr. Evan Frederick Dissertation: <i>Influence of consumer engagement on sponsorship outcomes: An analysis of on-site and social media sponsorship activations</i> | |
| M.Sc. | Sheffield Hallam University Major: Sport Business Management | 2015 |
| MA. | University of Hyderabad Major: Economics | 2014 |

WORK EXPERIENCE

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Westminster College, School of Business present | August 2021 – |
| Instructor, Strategic and Sport Management Courses taught: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• BUS 220, Fall 2021; Spring 2022; Fundamentals of Management• BUS 300, Fall 2021; Digital Marketing | |

- BUS 340, Fall 2021; International Business
- BUS 450, Spring 2022; Business Strategy
- BUS 315, Spring 2022; Sport Management

**University of Louisville, Sport Administration
August 2022**

August 2018 to

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Courses taught:

- SPAD 445, Spring 2021; Sport Communication – Online
- SPAD 492, 602, Spring 2021; Internship in Sport Administration
- SPAD 404, Fall 2020; Sport Finance - Online
- SPAD 390, Spring 2020: Sport Governance – Online
- HSS 114, Spring 2019 and 2020, Fall, 2019 and 2020: Fitness Walking

Guest Lectures, University of Louisville:

- SPAD 445: Sport Communication, Fall 2020, “Interviews and News Conferences”
- SPAD 509: International Sport, Fall 2020, “Sports in India”
- SPAD 509: International Sport, Spring 2020, “*Sports in India*”.
- SPAD 445: Sport Communication, Fall 2019, “*Public Relations*”.
- ECPY 664: Counselling & Personnel Services, Fall 2019, “Part of a three- student panel on discussion about *International student experiences*”.
- SPAD 490: Senior Seminar in Sport Business, Spring 2019, “*Sponsor responses to transgressions in college athletics*”.
- SPAD 584: Management of Professional Baseball, Spring 2019, “*The sport of Cricket and similarities with Baseball*”.
- SPAD 684: International Sport Policy, Fall 2018, “*Policy factors leading to international sporting success*”.

**ITW Consulting India Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore, India
2018**

June 2017 to July

Assistant Manager, Sponsorship Sales

- Business Development, Sponsorship Sales and Strategic Alliances for different Sport Properties – International Cricket, IPL, PKL etc.
- Conducted independent and objective sponsorship ROI measurement and provided an in- depth understanding of sponsorship’s key value drivers (ROI) & impact on key metrics (ROO)/ consumer perceptions

- Generated media analysis reports as part of client servicing
- Assisted the events production and operations team during match-days
- Mediated corporate ticket sales in collaboration with various cricket state associations

Super Sport India Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, India
May 2017

August 2016 to

Assistant Manager, Media Sales

- Researched trends in a special interest area of media rights
- Developed and conducted advertising sales presentations and spreadsheets.
- Lead copywriting and brainstorming activities as part of sponsor activations

GroupM Media India Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, India
2016

Feb 2016 to June

Business Intern, Sports and Entertainment division

- Researched trends in a special interest area of marketing/sponsorship, such as sponsorship; licensing; merchandising; endorsements; media rights, etc. for different sports properties in India (IPL,ISL,PKL)
- Developed a high-level client list relevant to the sporting activities
- Developed and conducted sponsorship sales presentations and spreadsheets
- Supported business development and sales efforts
- Conducted primary and secondary research
- Analyzed information and updated the marketing and research databases on a weekly basis

Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur
2012

May 2012 – July

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Research Assistant

- Assisted Dr. Vimal Kumar in literature review and data collection on the topic of housing demand in local community

RESEARCH

Research Interests:

My primary research interest is in the area of sport sponsorships and consumer responses to it. I am also interested in understanding consumer behavior pertaining to sponsorship activations in traditional as well as the digital medium.

Research in Progress:

- Lee, Y., Pond, A., **Kulkarni, A.** & Frederick, E.L. (manuscript submitted to International Journal of Sport Communication). Exploring social media commentary pertaining to the culture of Korean ice-skating.
- **Kulkarni, A.** & Frederick, E.L. (manuscript in progress). Influence of consumer engagement on sponsorship outcomes: An analysis of on-site and social media sponsorship activations

Conference Presentations:

National/international refereed presentations

- Lee, Y., Pond, A., **Kulkarni, A.** & Frederick, E.L. (2021, April). Exploring social media commentary pertaining to the culture of Korean ice-skating. 2021 International Association of Sport Communication conference. Virtual.
- **Kulkarni, A.** & Hambrick, M.E. (2020, June, Abstract Only). Use of social media as an activational communication tool: A case study of 2019 rugby world cup sponsors and their dissemination of activation communication message via Twitter. 2020 North American Society for Sport Management Conference. San Diego, CA.
- **Kulkarni, A.,** & Frederick, E. L. (2019, June). Sponsorship and scandal in college sport: A case study of the University of Louisville and the decision-making processes of their sponsors. 2019 North American Society for Sport Management Conference. New Orleans, LA.
- **Kulkarni, A.,** (2013, October). Pressures on resource stock and driver of changes: Implications of Small-Scale Fisheries in Andhra Pradesh. 2013 Too Big to Ignore International Conference on Small-Scale Fisheries Governance. Hyderabad, India.

Non- refereed presentations

- **Kulkarni, A.,** Ramchandani, G. & Shibli, S. (2015, May). An economic analysis of the factors associated with the success of nations at elite sport events. *2015 Graduate Research Conference, Sheffield, United Kingdom*

Funding:

- **Kulkarni, A.** (2019). University of Louisville Graduate Student Council

Travel Award. Funded by the University of Louisville Travel Funding Administration in the amount of \$350. Funded

SERVICE

Department Service:

- UofL Sport Administration Master's Admissions Committee Member, 2018-2021
- Health and Sport Sciences Student Engagement Committee Member, 2018-2021
- Sport Administration Association Committee Member, 2018- 2021

Community Service:

- Volunteer, Litter Walk- City Clean-up initiative, Louisville, 2019
- Guest Lecturer, Louisville Central High School, 2018
- Volunteer, Airtel Hyderabad Marathon, 2014
- Volunteer, Society for Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth 2012-2014

Professional Development:

- Attended Westminster Assessment Technology Team Digital Blue workshop – May'2022
- Completed Online Teaching Foundations course – May'2022
- Attended Workshop presented by the Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning – Feb' 2020
- Completed Delphi U Principles of Online Course Design – Feb' 2020

HONORS AND AWARDS

- Runner-up, *2015 Sheffield Hallam University Graduate Student Conference*. Presentation title "An economic analysis of the factors associated with the success of nations at elite sport events."
- Recipient, **GREAT Scholarship worth GBP 3750** from the **British Council** for pursuing graduate studies at Sheffield Hallam University.
- Recipient, **BBL Fellowship** from the **University of Hyderabad** for the period *August 2009 to May 2014*.

Professional Affiliations:

- North American Society for Sport Management 2019 to Present

List of References

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