

Assessing the Constructs of Sport Sponsorship Effectiveness and Theoretical Relationships between them among Football Fans in Iran

¹Shahram Gilaninia and ²Mohammad Reza Abbaszadeh

¹Assistant professor Department of Industrial management, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran.

²Master of Islamic Azad university Department of business management, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran.

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, sponsorship especially sport sponsorship is one of the most important parts of marketing activities in the world. Sport sponsorship traverses an ascending trend in Iran too. Therefore, managers need accurate and complete information about effectiveness of sport sponsorship to make right decisions about issues such as resource allocation to sport sponsorship. The purpose of this study was to examine theoretical relationships between key variables of sport sponsorship effectiveness (i.e. sports involvement, sponsor awareness, corporate image and future purchase intention) among Persepolis and Esteghlal fans in Iran. The statistical population of this study was all of Persepolis and Esteghlal fans in Iran. In this research, questionnaires were sent electronically to 384 of Persepolis and Esteghlal fans and these fans answered to 16 main questions of questionnaire. By using statistical method (Regression analysis), the relationships between these key variables of sport sponsorship effectiveness were evaluated. According to the findings, Consumer involvement had a direct positive effect on brand awareness, perceptions of corporate image and intention to purchase a sponsor's product. Sponsorship awareness had a direct positive effect on corporate image and finally sponsorship awareness and corporate image had a direct positive effect on intention to purchase a sponsor's products. This test also was performed on Persepolis and Esteghlal fans separately and the result of Persepolis and Esteghlal fans was the same as whole sample.

Key words: Sport sponsorship, Sport involvement, Brand awareness, Corporate image, Purchase intention.

INTRODUCTION

In today's marketplaces companies look for new methods for their marketing activities and they try to be different from competitors and increase their market share and sales and for these purposes they spend a lot of moneys. One of these methods is sport sponsorship that companies look for different goals sponsoring the events or sports club. Corporate sponsorship, defined as "an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity, in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity" (Meenaghan, 2001). Companies have paid more attentions to sport sponsorship in the past few years and they consider it as a suitable communicative method to communicate with consumers which has a high efficiency. Worldwide corporate investment in the sponsorship market grew from approximately US\$2 billion in 1984 to US\$23 billion in 1999 to an estimated US\$28 billion in 2004 (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). In 2002 more than 70% of sponsorship dollars were invested in sport and sports events (Howard & Crompton, 2004). In this environment, sports sponsorship has become an important marketing tool due to its flexibility, its broad reach and the high level of brand or corporate exposure that can be gained through the process (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). One reason for the increase in sports sponsorship expenditure is that sponsorship can contribute to reaching large and diverse audiences--for example, the 37 billion television viewers of the 1998 FIFA World Cup (Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001). According to a recent survey, a second reason driving investment in sports sponsorship is that nearly three-quarters of corporate sponsors of sport have been generally satisfied with their relationships with sports leagues, teams and organizations (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). Now that most of the sports leagues specially soccer have become professional and attract a lot of people, a competition has been formed among companies for sponsoring the events and famous sports club. Nowadays sponsorship is a essential part of incomings in sports club. Fans pay attentions to the product which the name of its company as a sponsor is been curved on the shirt of their favorite team. Fans consider the products of their

*Corresponding Author: Shahram Gilaninia, Assistant professor, Department of industrial management, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran Tel:+989113356977 E-mail: gilani_sh45@yahoo.com

team's sponsor more attractive than the same one. On the other hand, sponsoring the events by big companies can help both sports club and sponsors succeed and benefit from this deal (Eshghi, 2009). In light of the phenomenal growth of sports sponsorship, understanding sponsorship effectiveness has become increasingly important for both sports marketers and sponsors.

Sport sponsorship is often attractive to corporations because sporting events, especially those produced within the same league or association (i.e., NFL, NBA, and NCAA), provide a highly involved, passionate, and loyal audience that is comprised of individuals with similar demographics. Therefore, creating unique marketing messages to target these specific audiences is time efficient and cost effective (Dees *et al.*, 2008). Sponsorship is also appealing to the firm because it can be used to link consumers to sponsoring brands, using the sporting event as the tie, or association, and influence consumers to form positive brand images or make purchases from these corporations. Ideally, sponsoring firms would like the fans of a particular event to equate or connect positive feelings for the property to their brands or specific products and services (Meenaghan, 2001), a process often operationalized as image transfer. Thus, many corporate sponsors seek to develop, improve, or change their brand image by associating their company or brand with a specific sporting event. Other marketing objectives that can be accomplished through sponsorship endeavors include generating goodwill within the target audience (Meenaghan, 2001), fostering positive attitudes toward the brand and increasing consumer purchase intentions (Dees *et al.*, 2008).

2. Statement of Problem

Due to the fact that commercial sponsorship has become a major form of marketing communication, it is necessary to continually study this phenomenon in an effort to determine its impact on consumers and their perceptions of commercial sponsors and their products and services. There is a plethora of original research, position papers, and theoretical manuscripts exploring the topic of advertising effectiveness. While there is a wealth of scholarship on sponsorship, a relative paucity of original research exists on the effectiveness of CS. An even greater disparity exists regarding the relationships between key variables of sponsorship effectiveness (i.e. Sport involvement, Brand awareness, and corporate image and Purchase intentions). Nowadays most of the companies want to evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing activities to make a better decision. Unfortunately a few studies have been conducted that attempt to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness in Iran. Consumer sports involvement, brand awareness, corporate image and purchase intentions need to be measured in the context of sponsorship effectiveness. However, only a few sponsorship effectiveness studies have done so.

Although companies spend a lot of moneys to return their investments, but they have problem in measuring their marketing activities effectiveness. In this study the effectiveness of sport sponsorship among football fans (Persepolis and Esteghlal fans) in Iran is measured by analyzing the constructs of sponsorship effectiveness.

With due attention to the firms attitude towards sports sponsorship and their success in reaching their goals, Iranian companies want to support sports clubs or events, but a few studies have been conducted to examine how these activities influence target market and how to measure the effectiveness of these activities. Sports involvement, brand awareness, corporate image and purchase intentions are the main factors of measuring sports sponsorship effectiveness (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). We want to study these factors and the theoretical relationships between them.

The level of sports involvement, brand awareness, corporate image and purchase intentions among football fans in Iran and the theoretical relationships between these factors have not been examined in any researches. Lack of information in this context is clear in Iran and we want to resolve these requirements.

Therefore the main question of this research is: **Is there any significant relationships between key variables of sponsorship effectiveness (i.e. Sport involvement, Brand awareness, corporate image and Purchase intentions)?**

While previous research has advanced our understanding of single variables, a more complete understanding of sponsorship effectiveness requires assessment of more complex relationships among the key variables. Additionally, many scholars have attempted to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness. However, most have concentrated largely on the use of a single variable such as consumer awareness or effect of sponsor image as a predictor of sponsorship effectiveness.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To evaluate the communication process of sponsorship and the consumer responses to that.
2. To recognize and investigate the factors of measuring the effectiveness of sports sponsorship.
3. To assess the theoretical relationships between key variables of sport sponsorship effectiveness.
4. To investigate how sponsorship works in the minds of consumers.
5. To offer a framework to managers so that they can evaluate the activities of sports sponsorship via that.

3. Literature review

A few studies have been conducted in the context of sponsorship especially sports sponsorship in Iran compared to outside of Iran. Some of the sport sponsorship studies in Iran are as follows:

- **Evaluating effectiveness of sport sponsorship among football fans in Iran** is one of the numerable studies about effectiveness of sport sponsorship in football leagues of Iran that was conducted by kamran Eshghi in 2009. This study evaluated the effect of sport sponsorship on five important variables of consumer maturation process. The results indicated that sport sponsorship enhanced the corporate image, increased the probability of purchase intention and loyalty of fans to the company and its' product but it did not increase brand awareness and liking of company and its' products.
- **Describing the marketing mix elements in football industries of Iran compared to some Asian countries (South Korea & Japan) and offering a theoretical model** is the title of a PHD thesis that was conducted by Reza Mohammad kazemi in 2007. In this research four elements of marketing mix in football industries were measured and compared to South Korea& Japan and ultimately a model was suggested to use these four elements in football industries.
- **Strategic assessment of sport sponsorship as a marketing communication tool in electronic industries of Iran (Faed, 2007)**: The purpose of this research is to achieve a better understanding of how and why companies in the electronic industry get involved in sports sponsorship, also the thesis describes the varieties of objectives when involving in sports sponsorship also the process of sports selection as well as the evaluation approaches that are related to the electronic brands.
- **Describing the factors that effect on corporate sponsors of Irans' professional football in sponsorship attraction (Eezadi, 2004)**: This study was conducted in the context of sponsorship in Iran's football league by Eezadi at Tarbiat Moallem university. He believed that one of the ways of providing sufficient budget for doing sports activities specially championship activities was attracting companies and organizations as sponsors or financial supporters. He noted that commercial advertising was different from sports sponsorship, because sponsorship is an indirect part of sport marketing. The purpose of this research is to describe sponsorship goals of corporate sponsors of Irans' professional football. The results of this study indicated that football sponsorship in Iran could partly help the firm's access to the target markets and competitive advantages against the competitors.

A lot of studies have been conducted in the context of sponsorship specially sports sponsorship in outside of Iran especially in Australia, Ireland, America. One of the most famous researchers in this context is Tony Meenaghan who has provided a lot of articles in the context of sponsorships. Some of these are as follows:

- Commercial sponsorship(1983)
- Sponsorships-Legitimaizing the medium(1991)
- The role of sponsorship in marketing communications mix(1991)
- The effect of medium on Commercial sponsorship(1999)
- Understanding sponsorship effects(2001)

In above researches Tony Meenaghan points out the sponsorship totalities and sponsorship effects on target market and offers some models to evaluate sponsorships effectiveness and communicate with other marketing factors. Other researchers have also conducted important and effective studies in this context. Some of these studies are as follows:

- **Measuring the Effectiveness of Sponsorship of an Elite Intercollegiate Football Program (Dees, Bennett & Villegas, 2008)**: In this study the sponsorship of an elite intercollegiate football program was evaluated by analyzing the effects of the constructs of attitude toward the sponsor, goodwill, and fan involvement on consumer purchase intentions. The results of this study indicates that Although attitude toward the sponsor and fan involvement are important facets of sponsorship effectiveness, goodwill may be one of the keys to transforming avid fans into loyal consumers and has the most impact on consumers' intentions to support the corporate sponsors via purchasing behaviors.
- **The Evaluation of Sponsorship Effectiveness: A model and some methodological considerations (Pham, 2000)**: In this study the Evaluation of Sponsorship Effectiveness has been discussed. The most emphasis of this research is on corporate image and brand awareness. A theoretical model for the objectives of these two dimensions (i.e. Image& Awareness) was suggested that indicated the communication process of sponsorship and the consumer's responses to that. Generally the purpose of this study is to offer a framework to managers so that they can evaluate the activities of sports sponsorship via that.
- **The Effects of Consumer Knowledge on Responses to Event Sponsorships (Roy & Cornwell, 2004)**: Roy and Cornwell stated that the effect of consumer knowledge on responses to sponsorships has received considerably less research attention. This research refers to the difference of events information between experienced consumers and inexperienced consumers and discusses if there is any differences between these

two groups and also if there is any congruencies between sponsor and event. 6 sponsors and events were selected for this purpose and the congruency was evaluated among them.

- **Corporate sponsorship: The measurement of effectiveness** is the title of a thesis that was conducted by Glaser & Rum in Canada. The purpose of this study is to investigate the sponsorships and difficulties of measuring effectiveness. Glaser and Rum investigated the history of sponsorships and methods of measuring sponsorship effectiveness and expressed the sponsorship goals of firms. Finally they concluded that assessing the sales and purchase intentions are two appropriate scales for measuring the effectiveness of sponsorships.
- **Sport Sponsorship Management: Major Australian Sponsor Practices in Objective Setting and Measurement** is the title of a study that was conducted by Kara in Australia. The purpose of this research is to examine the sponsorship management practices of Major Australian Sponsors. This study emphasizes on the objectives of these firms and the tool that they use to evaluate their practices effectiveness.

4. Research model

While various researchers have attempted to measure sponsorship effectiveness, there has been no consistency with respect to the predictor variables and outcomes being measured (Cornwell, 1995). In addition, assessing sponsorship effectiveness based on single variables may not be sufficient due to the complex nature of the process of developing perceptions about a sponsorship.

It has been suggested different models to study sponsorships specially sport sponsorship effectiveness. The researchers have not reached any consensus about sport sponsorship effectiveness, because this field is on its' primary ages. One of these models that have been agreed by experts is a model provided by Yong Jae *et al.*, (2008). This research model was used to delineate the relationships among the four constructs (i.e. sports involvement, sponsor awareness, corporate image and future purchase intention) of sponsorship effectiveness (see Figure 1). Figure 1 illustrates the hypotheses that fan sports involvement directly affects awareness, image and purchase intention. Heightened levels of awareness and image predict a higher level of purchase intention. Corporate image is directly influenced by sponsor awareness. Each construct is discussed next followed by pertinent research hypotheses.

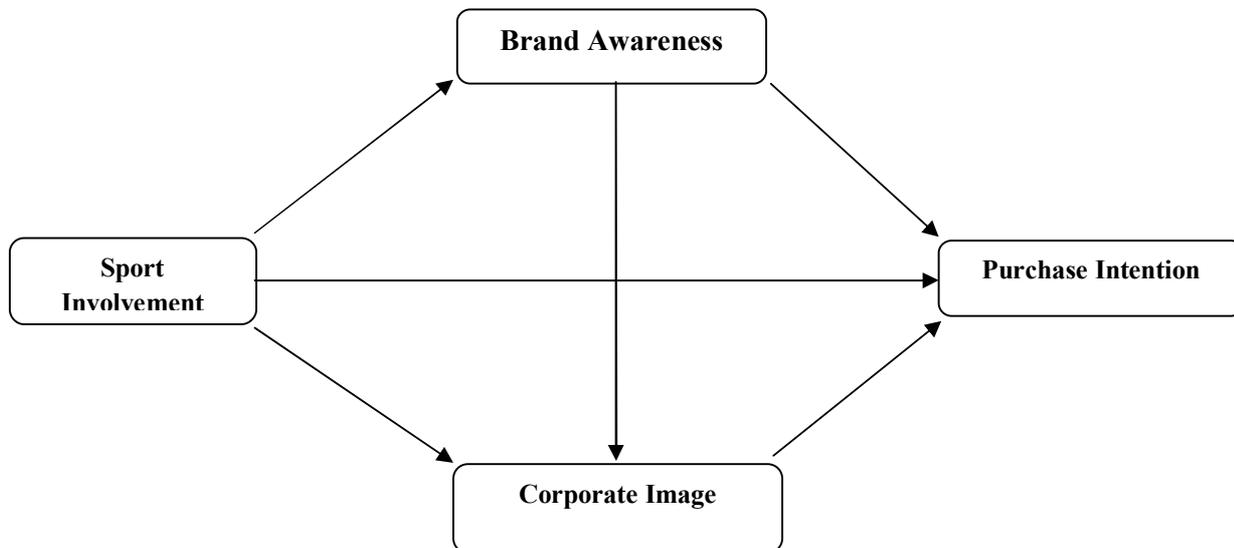


Figure 1: The relationships among the constructs of sponsorship effectiveness (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008)

1.1. Fan sport involvement

A consumer's sports involvement is defined as "the perceived interest in and personal importance of sports to an individual" (Shank & Beasley, 1998, p.436). Highly involved consumers are those individuals who are often most knowledgeable about their favored event, team, or player (Meenaghan, 2001). These individuals are generally aware of the sponsor and whether or not that sponsor is helping or hindering the progress of the sport (Dees *et al.*, 2008). The level of a consumer's involvement provides a powerful explanation of social behavior, as witnessed in the adulatory responses to rock music stars and the fanatical loyalty of sports fans (Meenaghan, 2001). Depending on how involved consumers are with their favorite sports or other events (such as the arts), they can establish a range of relationships with the commercial sponsors (Dees *et al.*, 2008). Because the target market of corporate sponsors is the sports consumer who

watches and participates in sponsored sporting events, consumer sports involvement needs to be measured in the context of sponsorship effectiveness (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). Fan involvement is an integral construct when assessing the effectiveness of commercial sponsorship, because the various emotional levels of commitment fans have with the sponsored event will affect how attentive they are to that event's sponsors (Dees *et al.*, 2008).

Shank and Beasley (1998) developed a Sports Involvement Scale (SIS) that consists of cognitive and affective dimensions of sports involvement. These two dimensions were evaluated relative to viewing sport on television, reading about sport in magazines and newspapers, attending sporting events and participating in sport.

Current sponsorship literature supports the idea that consumer sports involvement plays an important role in determining the overall effectiveness of sports sponsorship (Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001; Lascu *et al.*, 1995; Levin *et al.*, 2001; Meenaghan, 2001; Pham, 2000; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). Research indicates that highly involved consumers are most likely to develop an awareness of sponsors and a positive image of them (Lascu *et al.*, 1995; Levin *et al.*, 2001; Meenaghan, 2001; Pham, 2000; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). For example, Meenaghan (2001), in his focus group interviews, found that increased event or fan involvement in a particular sponsored activity evoked a positive emotional orientation towards the sponsor. These results were further supported by Lascu *et al.*, (1995) in their golf sponsorship research. The authors found that there is a positive relationship between golf spectators' involvement and their ability to identify sponsors of a golf tournament. Spectators at a Professional Golfers' Association of America (PGA) tournament who had a high level of involvement with golf could correctly name the major official sponsors. Similarly, Levin *et al.* (2001) found that individuals who had higher levels of involvement with the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) were more influenced by marketers' sponsorship activities. Therefore, it is expected that:

H1: Consumer involvement has a direct positive effect on sponsorship awareness.

Several studies have found that consumers with high involvement were more likely to buy the sponsor's products and expressed a strong preference for the particular sponsor's product (e.g. Dees *et al.*, 2008; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). The results suggest that future purchase intention can be a strong indicator of sponsorship effectiveness, particularly when a corporate sponsor participates in sports events targeted at sports fans who share a unique identity (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). In sum, involvement has a direct positive influence on consumer awareness and perception of a sponsor's corporate image which is likely to contribute to future purchase intentions (Dees *et al.*, 2008; Turco, 1995; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). Accordingly, the next two research hypotheses are:

H2: Consumer involvement has a direct positive effect on perceptions of corporate image.

H3: Consumer involvement has a direct positive effect on intention to purchase a sponsor's product.

1.2 Brand awareness

Brand awareness is defined as "brand recall and recognition performance by consumers" (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). Generally three levels of brand awareness are recognition, brand recall and top of the mind (Aaker, 1991). In measuring brand awareness, unaided recall and aided recall (recognition) of sponsors are used (Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001). Sports sponsorship researchers often use recall methods to assess awareness of a sponsor's brand. Unaided recall tasks are considered to be a more appropriate measure than recognition tasks because they require the respondent to retrieve the sponsor's name from memory rather than by recognising their brand name from a list (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). Recall increases as a function of duration of exposure to sponsors, previous brand awareness of sponsors, message length and design, sociodemographic variables of the spectators and interest in the event sponsored (Walliser, 2003).

A review of the sponsorship literature indicates that the primary objectives of corporate sponsorship are (a) increasing brand awareness, (b) enhancing corporate image (Meenaghan, 1991) and (c) increasing sales and market share (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). Both brand awareness and corporate image have been used as indicators of whether a sponsorship deal achieved the communication objectives sought through sponsorship involvement (Meenaghan, 1991; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008).

Sponsorship awareness has a positive effect on corporate image (Turco, 1995; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). The researchers found that individuals who could recall sponsors had stronger beliefs (i.e. a more positive image) about sponsors than those who could not recall sponsors. Corporate sponsorship can enhance corporate image, particularly when the company has a positive image before participating in the sponsorship. Corporate sponsorships might exacerbate a negative image if consumers hold prior negative perceptions (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008).

H4: Sponsorship awareness has a direct positive effect on corporate image.

H5: Sponsorship awareness has a direct positive effect on intention to purchase a sponsor's products.

1.3 Corporate image

Corporate image is defined as "the positive or negative image of a particular company or brand that is formed in mind of consumers" (Eshghi, 2009).

Corporate image is the impressions of a particular company held by some segment of the public. Sport encompasses a rich range of values and symbols that can be expressed in image. The image of sport and/or a sports organization has the potential to influence the behavior of all those involved with a sports organization, including its members, spectators and sponsors (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008).

Although enhancement of corporate image is one of the most important communication objectives for corporate sponsors, image-related evaluation has received considerably less research attention (Turco, 1995) than brand awareness. Additionally, previous research has not been consistent in terms of the method used to measure the effect of corporate image. For example, in some studies, consumers' attitude towards sponsors was measured to evaluate corporate image (Dees *et al.*, 2008; Turco, 1995). However, other scholars have suggested that to measure corporate image correctly it is necessary to measure specific 'qualitative' characteristics of a company's personality rather than measuring a consumer's overall attitude towards corporate sponsors (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, while some researchers measure corporate image (Turco, 1995), others measure brand image as an indicator of sponsorship effectiveness. Although brand (i.e. product) image is an important indicator of sponsorship effectiveness, one of the ultimate goals of sponsorship involvement is to enhance overall positive image of corporate sponsors. Accordingly, in this study, we focus on overall corporate image of sponsors and thus measurement of a relatively long-term and broader effect of sponsorship rather than short-term enhancement of a single brand image.

In an empirical study, Turco (1995) found that customers with a more favorable image of a sponsor were more likely to purchase that sponsor's products than those with a less favorable image. Similarly, Dees *et al.*, (2008) examined the impact on consumer purchase intentions of attitude toward sponsors, goodwill and fan involvement. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H6: Corporate image has a direct positive effect on intention to purchase.

1.4 Purchase intention

The final construct in this model is a consumer's future intention to purchase a sponsor's products. Most studies concerned with the prediction of human behavior from attitude have relied on the theory of planned behavior and the theory of reasoned action. People act in accordance with their intentions and perceptions of control over their behavior: intentions are influenced by attitudes towards the behavior, perceptions of behavioral control and subjective norms (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008).

A significant number of studies have shown that attitudinal variables are important predictors of behavioral intentions (e.g. Aaker, 1991). Attitude towards advertising is one of five antecedent variables (i.e. ad credibility, perceptions of ads, attitude towards the advertiser, attitude towards advertising and mood) that may influence attitude towards a specific advertisement. Attitude towards the advertisement then has a significant and positive influence on attitude towards the brand. Attitude towards the advertisement indirectly affects purchase intention through attitude towards the brand or acts as an important mediator variable on brand choice (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008).

The relationship between intention and actual behavior has been supported by previous studies focusing on condom use, dieting and voting. Clearly, intentions play an important role in guiding behavior. However, to date, only a few sponsorship studies have examined sports consumers' future purchase intentions, that is, the sales objective of corporate sponsorship (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). Howard and Crompton (1995, 2004) noted that stages in the communication process could be measured to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness. This approach, as observed in the advertising research, suggests that individuals go through a series of stages from first becoming aware of a company to finally making a purchase decision. More specifically, potential customers move from awareness to interest to intent to purchase before investing in a sales action. "Hence, intent to purchase studies is the most useful indicators of the impact of sponsorship on future sales" (Howard & Crompton, 1995, p. 363).

5. METHODOLOGY

According to Fade (2007), research can be divided in to three different categories of studies. Choosing the analytic strategy for a research will help the researcher treat evidence fairly, produce compelling analytic conclusions, and rule out alternative interpretations. The different types of studies are: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory studies (Faed, 2007).

In view of the fact that we want to gain a better understanding of sport sponsorship effectiveness, our study is to some extent exploratory. The study is also descriptive because we portray the key variables of sport sponsorship effectiveness and theoretical relationships between them. The study is also partly explanatory because it focuses on football fans to try to explain relationships between key variables of sport sponsorship effectiveness.

Given the fact that the purpose of this research is to find out football fans' attitudes, a builds research questionnaire has been used for gathering the data.

The validity and reliability of expected responses to the questionnaire were evaluated using a panel of experts and an internal consistency measure (Cronbach, 1951). The content validity of the initial survey was evaluated first by a panel of experts who were asked to judge the items' content validity. The panel consisted of two management professors and one sport management professor. The experts were asked to comment on the relevance, representativeness, and clarity of items and provide suggestions for improving the questionnaire. Reliability measures were calculated for each of the four variables of the instrument. For the four items constituting consumer sport involvement, $\alpha = .908$. For the three items constituting brand awareness, $\alpha = .863$. For the six items constituting corporate image, $\alpha = .822$. For the three items constituting purchase intentions, $\alpha = .902$. Therefore, coefficient alpha reliability tests run for each factor satisfied Nunally's (1978) criterion of .60 or higher as a standard for an exploratory research study. The total Reliability of the questionnaire was $\alpha = .922$

The questionnaire that was made by the researcher included 16 questions and measured consumer sport involvement, brand awareness, corporate image and purchase intentions. The first section of the questionnaire was related to the demographics of the respondents. There were three items on brand awareness and purchase intentions, four items on consumer sport involvement and six items on corporate image. This amounted to 16 total items measuring the variables of sport sponsorship effectiveness. All of the variables in the analysis were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (Strongly agree) to 1 (Strongly disagree). Table 1 displays the list of questionnaire items for each variable in the study.

Table 1. Questionnaire Items

<p>Fan Sport Involvement items It is important to me to be a part of football. My friends view me as a strong fan of football. It is very important to me that football games are played. I see myself as a strong fan of football.</p> <p>Brand Awareness items (Top of the mind): What is the name of the first sponsor of your favorite team that you can recall? (Unaided Recall Item): Please mention some of the sponsors of your favorite team. (Aided Recall Item): From the list below, please select the sponsors of your favorite team. A: City bank B: Iran furniture market C: Razi insurance D: Tat bank E: Samsung</p> <p>Corporate Image items Companies who sponsor my favorite football team provide quality products/services. Companies that sponsor my favorite football team only want to make money. Companies that sponsor my favorite football team try to help doing sport activities with the intention of improving sports. Companies that sponsor my favorite football team are good companies to work for. Companies that sponsor my favorite football team care about the consumer needs and respond to them. Companies that sponsor my favorite football team are famous and creditable.</p> <p>Purchase Intentions items If I need a product/service that the corporate sponsors of my favorite football team present, I will buy it from them. If the corporate sponsors of my favorite football team present a new product/service, I will try it. My overall attitude toward purchasing products/services from companies that sponsor my favorite football team is positive.</p>

The statistical population of this study included Persepolis and Esteghlal fans who were the members of fan clubs and social sites (Yahoo groups). Finally, 423 Persepolis and Esteghlal fans randomly selected as statistical sample and the questionnaire were sent electronically to them. After collecting the questionnaires, some questionnaires were excluded because of being incomplete and lack of cooperation of fans which in final 384 complete questionnaires [192 Persepolis fans and 192 Esteghlal fans] were used as the sample of this study.

The data analysis in the study included descriptive statistics (i.e. means and standard deviations), reliability measures and regression analysis. Also the analysis of data were in significant level $p < 0.05$ by using software SPSS 16. The overall means of sponsorship effectiveness factors were 5.48 (involvement), 3.23 (image), 3.54 (awareness) and 3.02 (purchase intention), and standard deviations ranged from .73 to 2.90.

6. RESULTS

The demographic variables analyzed in this study were gender, age and education level. Of the 384 respondents, 66% (n=254) were male and 34% were female. The majority of the respondents were between 15 and 29(57.7%) and 30 and 55 years old (27.2%). The majority of the respondents were highly educated (high school, 3%; high school graduate,3%; college graduate,25%; university or higher,69%).

A regression analysis was conducted to answer the 6 research questions that probe the theoretical relationships between the key variables of sport sponsorship effectiveness (i.e. Sport involvement, Brand awareness, and corporate image and Purchase intentions). The results are displayed in table 2.

Hypothesis 1 regression analysis (R=0.534, β =0.367, Sig=0.3) indicates that sport involvement has a direct positive effect on brand awareness and the effect of sport involvement on brand awareness is significant at $p < \%5$ level. According to the results of Hypothesis 2 regression analysis (R=0.641, β =0.389, Sig=0.0), sport involvement has a direct positive effect on corporate image and the effect of sport involvement on corporate image is significant at $p < \%5$ level. According to the results of Hypothesis 3 regression analysis (R=0.549, β =0.433, Sig=0.0), sport involvement has a direct positive effect on purchase intentions and the effect of sport involvement on purchase intentions is significant at $p < \%5$ level. According to the results of Hypothesis 4 regression analysis (R=0.610, β =0.524, Sig=0.0), brand awareness has a direct positive effect on corporate image and the effect of brand awareness on corporate image is significant at $p < \%5$ level. According to the results of Hypothesis 5 regression analysis (R=0.641, β =0.700, Sig=0.0), brand awareness has a direct positive effect on purchase intentions and the effect of brand awareness on purchase intentions is significant at $p < \%5$ level. According to the results of Hypothesis 6 regression analysis (R=0.635, β =0.825, Sig=0.0), corporate image has a direct positive effect on purchase intentions and the effect of corporate image on purchase intentions is significant at $p < \%5$ level.

Table 2. Regression Analysis Results for Research Hypotheses

Factors Hypothesizes	R	R Square	α	β	Std Error	Sig
Hypothesis 1 D.V: Brand awareness I.V: Involvement	.534 ^a	.285	-.974	.367	.030	.030
Hypothesis 2 D.V: Corporate image I.V: Involvement	.641 ^a	.411	15.467	.389	.024	.000
Hypothesis 3 D.V: Purchase intention I.V: Involvement	.549 ^a	.301	3.524	.433	.034	.000
Hypothesis 4 D.V: Corporate image I.V: Brand awareness	.595 ^a	.354	18.811	.524	.036	.000
Hypothesis 5 D.V: Purchase intention I.V: Brand awareness	.610 ^a	.373	6.742	.700	.046	.000
Hypothesis 6 D.V: Purchase intention I.V: Corporate image	.635 ^a	.403	-7.616	.825	.051	.000

7. DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to examine theoretical relationships among the four constructs (i.e. sports involvement, sponsor awareness, corporate image and future purchase intention) of sponsorship effectiveness. Results of the regression analysis generally support the hypothesized relationships. Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 predicted that sports fan involvement would have a direct and positive influence on sponsor awareness, corporate image and consumers' future purchase intentions. Regression analysis between involvement & awareness (R=0.534, β =0.367, Sig=.03), involvement & image (R=0.641, β =0.389, Sig=.0) and involvement & intention (R=0.549, β =0.433, Sig=.0) provided empirical support for these hypotheses. The results support previous findings that highly involved consumers are more likely to be aware of sponsors (Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001; Lascu *et al.*, 1995; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). The results also indicate that increased event or fan involvement in a particular sponsored activity will evoke a positive emotional orientation towards the sponsor and highly involved consumers are more likely to develop a positive image of the sponsors (Turco, 1995; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). In addition, these highly involved consumers are likely to report an intention to purchase sponsors'

products (Dees *et al.*, 2008; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008). According to the results of this study, individuals who described themselves as loyal and dedicated fans of the team or event were much more likely to purchase or consider purchasing from sponsors than those who were not avid fans. This substantiates previous studies indicating that highly involved or loyal fans purchase more sponsors' products and services than casual fans (e.g. Dees *et al.*, 2008; Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008).

On the other hand, Pham (2000) suggested that sports involvement may have a directional property. He found that spectator involvement during a soccer game had a curvilinear (i.e. inverted-U) effect on the recognition of embedded billboards. In this case, as involvement to process the event reaches high levels, attention becomes more focused on the relevant sources of information (e.g. the game itself) and away from irrelevant information such as sponsorship stimuli. Accordingly, people highly involved in sport are no longer willing to process irrelevant billboards while watching a soccer game. Thus, timing of sponsorship activities may be another important aspect of involvement that should be considered in future research. Additional variables for future research might include knowledge and social alliances of consumers, as suggested by Cornwell *et al.* (2005). Additionally, the link between purchase intention and actual purchase behavior needs to be more fully explored in the sports sponsorship context. Further empirical investigation of involvement in the context of sponsorship effectiveness might contribute to a greater understanding of this relationship. Hypothesis 4 predicted that fans that are aware of sponsors are likely to develop a positive image of the sponsoring companies. The results of regression analysis ($R=0.595$, $\beta=0.524$, $\text{Sig}=0$) confirmed that there is a positive relationship between these two salient sponsorship variables. The results support the findings of Yong Jae *et al.* (2008) that individuals who recall sponsors have stronger beliefs (i.e. positive images) about sponsors than those who cannot recall sponsors.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 predicted that favorable purchase intentions are likely to occur for consumers who are aware of sponsors and hold a positive image of them. The highest correlation coefficient between image and intentions (.63) suggests that image is the most significant predictor of sports fans' intention to purchase sponsors' products. These results support previous research findings that customers with a more favorable image were more likely to purchase a sponsor's products compared to those with a less favorable image. Interestingly, however, the result supported that consumers' awareness of sponsors directly influenced their future purchase intention; the significant impact of image on future purchase intention may suggest that corporate image is a better predictor of sponsorship effectiveness than sponsor awareness when we consider future purchase intention as an ultimate dependent variable of sponsorship.

The findings here should be interpreted with caution, for two reasons. First, fans may be aware of corporate sponsors of a sports event, this awareness might not increase purchase intention if fans do not have a positive image of those sponsors. This supports a recent argument that sponsor identification responses may be a judgment task as opposed to a strict memory task, that is, sponsor identification involves a substantial degree of constructive processes that capitalize on general characteristics of the brand such as their perceived relatedness, prominence and general involvement in sponsorship. (Yong Jae *et al.*, 2008).

Second, intention to purchase sponsors' products was determined in a general fashion; the specific questions were not repeated for each sponsor recalled. Overall, this study contributes to the field of sponsorship research by extending our understating of key variables of sponsorship effectiveness and their relationships. Future research should include analysis of sponsor impact on sponsor image as well as the role of sponsor image in evaluating sponsorship effectiveness.

The results of this study also have practical implications for corporate sponsors and sports organizations. One of the most important goals of sponsorship is to develop an association between sponsors and sponsored properties. Although exposure to a brand through such vehicles as on-site signage may increase awareness, awareness alone may not achieve the full potential of sponsorship effectiveness (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). The results of this study suggest that to maximize sponsorship effectiveness, corporate sponsors should go beyond brand awareness efforts and develop more effective marketing strategies geared to enhance consumers' positive perception of sponsors' image.

According to the results of this study that indicates consumer involvement has a direct positive effect on sponsorship awareness, perceptions of corporate image & intention to purchase a sponsor's product, it is suggested that sponsors should consider passionate and devoted fans when creating marketing messages and they should be the target of most sport marketing activities.

It is also suggested that sponsors should develop brand association with sports events that are particularly targeted at sports consumers with a unique identity. Participants in the current study were highly involved loyal fans of soccer events and most particularly their national team. This type of mega-event held in a unique culture provides corporate sponsors with an opportunity to maximize their sponsorship effectiveness due to the high level of interest and identification among the target public.

8. Limitations and Future Research

There were several limitations that took place in the course of the study. First, this was a web-based survey and participants had to complete the questionnaire on-line. Additionally, the fact that a computer and internet access were necessary to participate may have contributed to the age distribution of the sample. The young adults who participated may have been more comfortable completing the questionnaire using the requisite technology. Second, in order to measure sponsorship effectiveness of a global event such as a World Cup soccer event, a broader sample should be selected from various countries. Convenience sampling using a sample within one geographic location limits our ability

to generalize our findings. Finally, to further validate the model it will be necessary to conduct follow-up studies in other sports sponsorship contexts such as the Olympics and various other national and regional sporting events. Further research should examine the constructs of attitude toward sponsor and goodwill and their relationships to purchase intentions and additional constructs. The study of sponsorship effectiveness in other settings is also a suggestion for future research. Since sports at the various levels receive different findings, attract different demographics, and provide different forms of entertainment, it would be very interesting to study how corporate sponsorship is sold, who buys it, who is exposed to it, and how effective it is in each of these diverse settings. It would also be advantageous to further analyze the various constructs with different measurement designs, especially structural equation modeling or path modeling to determine more scientifically the relationships of these constructs. Additionally, a larger sample, increased minority participation, and further analysis of the constructs' reliability and validity would ideally need to be addressed. Future research should also include an in-depth investigation of highly involved fans, such as soccer, and action sports enthusiasts. These types of consumers tend to be so vested that they represent the pinnacle of fan involvement. Therefore, their responses to corporate sponsorship may differ greatly from the average sport or leisure consumer.

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