

The Effect of the Attitude, the Mental Involvement and the Good will of Sport Fans on the Purchase Intention of the Products of the Sponsor Company

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ABSTRACT

Today, sponsorships are regarded as one of the promotional instruments of commercial and non-commercial companies with the purpose of achieving their aims and their marketing strategies. Our purpose from doing this research is to evaluate the sponsorships followed by the companies through sport events. For this purpose, the effect of three independent variables including fan's attitude toward the sponsor company, fan's goodwill in the sponsor company and fan's mental involvement with the event through which sponsorship is done on the dependent variable, i.e. fan's intention to purchase the products of the sponsor company is examined. The present research is conducted among the students of Tehran University, Allameh Tabatabaie University and Islamic Azad University, Science & Research branch, in Tehran and they were asked about the sponsorships followed by their favorite teams or events. The sample size of this research is 228 and the sampling method is a judgmental and an availability one. The results of the research show that every three independent variables including fan's attitude toward the sponsor company, fan's goodwill in the sponsor company and fan's mental involvement with the event have a positive direct effect on the dependent variable of the research, i.e. fan's intention to purchase the products of the sponsor company. And among these three variables, fan's mental involvement with the event has the highest effect on his/her intention to purchase the products of the sponsor company.

KEYWORDS: Sponsorship, Fan's mental involvement, Goodwill, Attitude toward sponsor, Purchase intention

INTRODUCTION

Today, using the traditional marketing communication means such as media advertisements, and sales promotions to achieve the customers markets and the target customers faces with some challenges, because customers markets are increasingly segmented by new and various needs, and achieving these customers needs huge costs and creating disorders to do the advertisements and sales promotions, while using sponsorships solves such these problems and makes the companies able to communicate with the target market by identifying well defined sectors through demographic indicators and the life style (Meenaghan, 1999). According to the researchers conducted, it is shown that attitude toward the advertisements in the public media, especially in TV and internet, is going to be negative, and the researchers have suggested that sport can be used as a launch pad to develop positive attitudes towards the products of the commercial companies. Contrary to the traditional advertising, sponsorships are generally viewed as very desirable and suitable by the customers (Meenaghan, 1991).

With the development of the media industry and the establishment of the vast information networks such as internet and satellite networks, the domain of the sport audiences has significantly increased. This is evident especially in the international competitions such as the World Cup or the Olympics. People's welcome from the sport events, especially football, and identification of the importance of the effect of famous athletes as the opinion leaders have provided an opportunity for different institutions and companies to increase their audiences and the effect of their promotional and advertising activities through a commercial transaction by sponsoring sport events financially and non-financially and entering into contracts with famous athletes or coaches as the approvers of their products or their services. On the other hand, creating sponsorship and validation opportunities in the sport has injected many financial resources into the sport industry and market and in some cases, athletes' income from their contracts of supporting the products and the services is much more than that from formal contracts (Yousefi and Hasani, 2010).

Sponsorship is quickly growing as a type of marketing communications to achieve the target customers. Today, the growth rate of the investments in these activities is more than that in the traditional media advertising and sales promotions. The investments in sponsorships grew 15% in 1998, while this value was 7% for media advertising and 4% for sales promotions. Global investments in sponsorship reached 37 billion dollars in 2007 that shows a 12% growth compared to 2006, and it increased 72 times compared to 1982. Investments in sponsorship are mainly related to the sport sector and 54 to 65% of them are in sport (International Events

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Group (IEG), 2007). In this research, we have tried to answer the question that what affects the attitude, the mental involvement and the goodwill of a fan has on his/her intention to purchase the products of a sponsor.

Sponsorship

As the needs of the customers become various, marketers increasingly use the sponsorships for their marketing activities. Generally, sponsorship by a company is to provide financial and nonfinancial supports for an activity (sport events, music, festivals, and art events) to achieve the business objectives (Meenaghan, 1991). Recently, marketing through sponsorships has grown very quickly and marketers try to improve their brand image and increase the loyalty to their brand by sponsorships through sport and cultural events (Cornwell, 2008). As a type of marketing communications to achieve the target customers, sponsorship is growing very quickly. Gratton&Taylor (2000) stated that sponsorship is considered as a part of profit-maximizing behavior that is generally resulted when the rate of return on investment due to advertisements shows that other strategies must be also used. However, this is an economic approach and other aims of sponsorship are not considered. The method of cigarette manufacturing companies to limit using other communicational instruments gradually, especially using advertisement, is an evident example of this issue. Alternative strategies of these producers to follow sponsorships through motorcycle racings and billiard games were to achieve their marketing objectives; a strategy that makes them able to be still significantly exposed to TV audiences. The attraction and the quick growth of sponsorship have made it be an effective substitute for advertisement.

Attitude toward the sponsor

Attitude can be defined as one's overall evaluation of an object (Eagly&Chaikem, 1993). Therefore, attitude toward a sponsor can be defined as the overall evaluation of a consumer from an organization acting as the sponsor of an event (Keller, 2003). People's attitude is affected by their beliefs and an attitude forms based on these beliefs. People have some beliefs about many organizations, products and other people and many of these beliefs are measurable (Howkins, Best, 2007). According to the sponsorship effects model by Meenaghan (2001), positive attitudes toward a sponsor are seen as a background for the purchase intention and also the actual purchase behaviors. When an attitude forms toward a sponsor, it can affect significantly on the behavior of the consumer. Past researches have shown that an attitude toward a sponsor affects on a consumer's intention to purchase the products of a sponsor company (Madrigal, 2001).

Goodwill

According to Wolf (2007), when the fans and the audiences of sport programs and activities notice that the financial supports of the companies are necessary for doing a sport event (building a gymnasium, athletes' programs, etc), and their favorite team or athlete has financial problems, the support of a company being able to support these events financially will result in a good reputation for it. Goodwill is the positive attitude of the consumers toward a sponsor company supporting their favorite event or team and makes them support their favorite event or team enthusiastically. The most important factor making sponsorship distinct from advertisement is goodwill (Meenaghan, 2001). It not only has advantages for the sponsor company, but also promotes the event sponsored by the company. While the traditional advertisements such as those by TV are done with the aim of promoting the company's business and increasing its sales, sponsorships often provide substantial funds for the event and the stadium and indirectly affect on the local economy where the event takes place (Meenaghan, 2001). When the business companies support an event which the consumers enjoy watching, the consumers find that these companies are not just going to exploit the consumers and the fans, but they also want to support the events and the teams and achieve a good social reputation (Meenaghan, 1991). About the structure of the goodwill in sponsorships, it is found that goodwill is something provisional. It means that goodwill is obtained through the general behavior of the sponsor towards all aspects of the sponsored event and this is formed by the judgment of the fans of the event. Even if a consumer has a high goodwill in a sponsor, this behavior may vary based on the activities of the sponsor. Some occasional variables stated by Meenaghan (2001) about it are: the time of entering the sponsorship event and exiting from it by the company, the level of the commitment of the consumer to the sport event or team and the level of attention paid to the event or team. If the sponsor companies don't pay any attention to these aspects, the consumers won't have any goodwill in the sponsor company.

Fan's mental involvement with the event

Azjen (1985) has defined the high mental involvement with a team as follows: "one's sympathy for and interest in a team or a group". Many fans of sport teams try to identify themselves by their favorite athletes in their favorite teams and always try to follow them as their model. When these teams and their stars are supported by a company through sponsorship activities, the love to and the interest in the team are also transferred to the sponsor company and its products. Sutton (1997) classified the sport fans based on the identification levels of a team. He found that a high level of mental involvement with a team by a fan affects on fan's behavior. Fans with a high mental involvement with a team have a high desire to watch sport events, buy products publicized by the team, and also be known by the products of the sponsor company (Dees&Bennett&Villegas, 2008). The fan's mental involvement is a part of the social identity theory (Madrigal,

2001), which is defined as follows: the level at which the consumers are known through their mental involvement with and their belonging to an activity or an event. Fan's mental involvement is a combined structure at the time of evaluating the effectiveness of sponsorship activities, because the emotional levels of the fans are supported by the event and determine the level of the attention of the fans to the company sponsoring the event. Relying on the level of the involvement of the consumers with their favorite sport events, the level of their communication with the sponsor company can be determined (Quester&Tompson, 2001).

Consumers with a high involvement with a sport event are those having a lot of knowledge about their favorite team or event (Meenaghan, 2001). These people are generally aware of the sponsor company and of the fact that whether the company helps with the growth of the sport or prevents from it. Consumers with a high mental involvement with an event are very sensitive to the sponsor company and react positively and negatively to it based on its behavior. If a sponsor company is viewed as a partner or a supporter of an event by the customers, consumers will have higher goodwill in the company sponsoring the event (Meenaghan, 2001). However, if that company is known as a company tending to exploit the event, the consumers will reject it.

Fans with a high involvement and belonging to their favorite team or events can't see themselves far from their favorite team and this is due to the intense belonging they feel to their favorite team (Fisher&Wakefield, 1998). A review conducted by Kohn and Armstrong (2002) showed that fans with a high mental involvement not only buy more products of the sponsor company, but when facing the products of these companies, they have a high motive for buying these products. In this research, it was known that the pleasure of the purchase activity, the available time, the amount of the money available and the knowledge of the team affect on the purchase activity instantaneously and without previous decision making. Also, the factor, knowledge of the team, was determined as the most effective factor of the instantaneous purchase activity.

Purchase intention

The purchase intention of a consumer is in fact one of the response measures that can be defined as follows: one's motive and feeling to try more to show or direct a behavior. Although tendency to purchase is not to actually purchase, ones desires highly affect on his/her future behaviors (Zhang&Pastore&Won). Krompton (2004) states that purchase intention can be perhaps seen as the most useful measure of the effect of the sponsorship activities on future sales. Many studies have stated that consumer's tendencies are one of the results of sponsorship activities. Fishben and Asgen (1975) view the purchase intention as the relation between one's attitude to something and its resulting behavior. Therefore, if a consumer has a positive attitude to a brand, his/her intention to purchase a brand is formed as a background for an actual purchase activity. According to Piro and Van Doren (1994), consumers form the purchase intention based on their previous experiences and their purchase behaviors are often repeated. Rosenberg and Sespial (1983) concluded that marketing for the current customers and keeping them and increasing the sales are easier than attracting new customers. A central factor mentioned in this research is that the concept of the purchase intention is related to the perceived value and the consumer's satisfaction. Past researches showed that consumer's satisfaction can be seen as a reliable predicting factor of the repurchase intention (Patterson&Spereng, 1997). When examining consumer's behavior widely in an event, examining the purchase intention is very important, because an early aim of the sport marketers is to provide satisfied customers, develop the backgrounds of having loyal fans and increase the repurchase (Zhang&etal, 2005).

According to what was stated above and the results of the past researches, the theoretical model of the present research is drawn as figure 1. The variables, attitude toward the sponsor company, goodwill and the fan's mental involvement with a sport event, are the independent variables affecting on the consumer's purchase intention that is the dependent variable

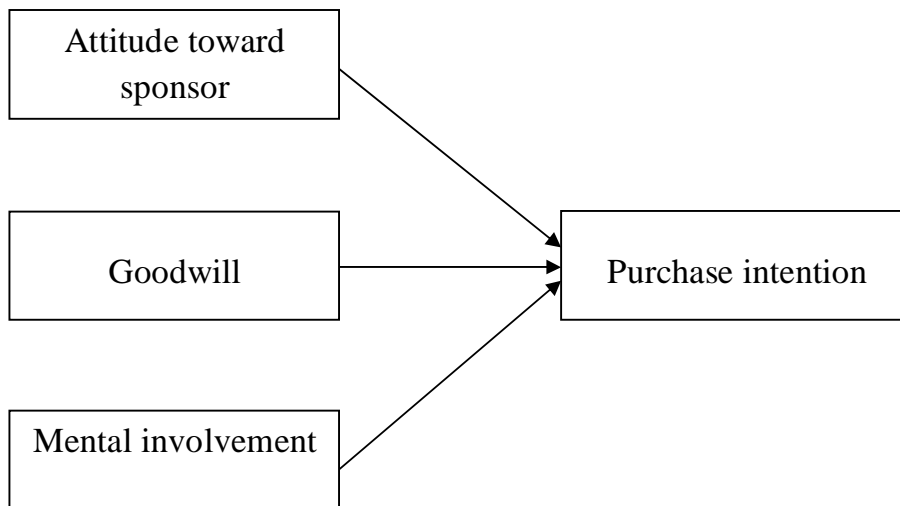


Figure 1: The effect of the attitude, the mental involvement and the goodwill of sport fans on the purchase intention of the products of the sponsor company (Dehdashti, Khazae & Hashemi, 2012)

Hypotheses

According to the literature of the research and the findings of the researchers, three hypotheses are examined in this research.

Hypothesis 1: the attitude of the sport fans to the sponsor companies affects positively on their intention to purchase their products.

Hypothesis 2: the goodwill of the sport fans in the sponsor company affects positively on their intention to purchase its products.

Hypothesis 3: the mental involvement of the sport fans with a sport event affects positively on their intention to purchase the products of the sponsor company.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

This research is a descriptive-survey one that is conducted in the community of the university football fan students in Tehran. The sampling method of the research is a judgmental one, in which three universities were chosen from the universities of Tehran including Alameh University as the biggest human science university of the country, Tehran University as the original and the biggest university of the country, and Azad University, Olum-o-Tahghighat branch, as an agent of the only private university of the country, and the questionnaires were accessibly distributed among the students of these universities. 360 questionnaires were distributed among the football fan students in these three universities, among which 288 questionnaires were returned (the rate of returning 80%). Of course, it must be mentioned that before giving the questionnaires, the participants were asked whether they were football fans or not, and in the case of a positive answer, a questionnaire was given to them to fill out. The researchers participated in distributing the questionnaires and if the respondents had a question, they answered the questions.

Instrument of data collection

Data were collected by field and library methods. The field method was followed by distributing the questionnaires and the library method was followed by examining the articles, the theses and the internet sources. The questionnaire contained 21 questions, among which 16 questions were for the four variables of the research and 5 questions were for collecting the demographic data. The questions of the four variables of the research were set based on the sequential scale and Likert spectra as strongly agree, agree, nor agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree, so that four questions were assigned for any variable. The four variables were: attitude toward the sponsor company, the fans' goodwill in the sponsor company, the fan's mental involvement with an event and the fan's purchase intention.

In this research, the formal method was used for measuring the validity. After designing the questionnaire, the opinions of some skilled experts were asked about the questions of the questionnaire and the way the questions were arranged. The opinions were used to design the questionnaire and finally, a suitable questionnaire was designed to measure the variables of the research.

The reliability of the questionnaire was also confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha for the questions proposed about the attitude toward the sponsor company was $\alpha = 0.719$, it was $\alpha = 0.776$ for the questions proposed about the goodwill, it was $\alpha = 0.853$ for the questions proposed about the fan's mental involvement with the event and it was $\alpha = 0.761$ for the questions proposed about the purchase intention. Also, the total Cronbach's Alpha for all of the four variables was $\alpha = 0.76$. Since the value of Cronbach's Alpha computed for any of the variables and also that of the total Alpha are more than 0.7, the questionnaire has a suitable reliability.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The demographic variables analyzed in this study are gender, age, marital status and the level of education of the participants. In this study (N=288), the demographic characteristics of the sample are as follows: 79.5% of the participants in the questionnaire are male. The frequency of the age groups participating in this questionnaire is 0.559 for those between 25 to 40 years old, it is 0.43 for those between 25 to 40 old years, and it is 1% for those older than 40 years old. According to the marital status, 93% of the participants are single and 7% of them are married. According to the level of education, 4.2% had high school diploma, 5.2% had associate degree, 48.3% had Bachelor's degree, 39.2% had master's degree and 3.1% had PhD. Also, 43.1% were unemployed and 56.9% were employed.

Table 1: The correlation analysis

| | | Attitude | Goodwill | Fan | Purchase |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------|----------|--------|----------|
| Attitude | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .323** | .238** | .432** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 288 | 288 | 288 | 288 |
| Goodwill | Pearson Correlation | .323** | 1 | .338** | .322** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 288 | 288 | 288 | 288 |
| Fan involvement | Pearson Correlation | .238** | .338** | 1 | .379** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | | .000 |
| | N | 288 | 288 | 288 | 288 |
| Purchase | Pearson Correlation | .432** | .322** | .379** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| | N | 288 | 288 | 288 | 288 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In the first stage, the correlation analysis was done for the four variables. The result of the analysis showed that all of the variables were significantly and positively related to each other at the level of significance $P < 0.01$. The results of this analysis are shown in table 1. The correlation between the attitude toward the sponsor company, goodwill and the fan's mental involvement don't threaten the regression analysis due to being multilinear, because they are all lower than 0.80, and the factors of the rate of variance are lower than 10, which shows that there is a low collinearity between the mentioned independent variables. For this reason, in the next stage, the multiple regression analysis was conducted on the model.

Standard multiple regression analysis of the model

To answer the three questions of the research evaluating the relation of the attitude toward the sponsor company, goodwill and the fan's mental involvement with the purchase intention, the following expansion was used:

$$\text{Purchase intention} = f(\beta + \beta_{BrandAtt} + \beta_{Goodwill} + \beta_{FanInv} + \varepsilon)$$

Table 2: Coefficient of the correlation between the variables

| Model Summary ^b | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| 1 | .516 ^a | .266 | .259 | .63868 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Fan, Attitude, Goodwill

b. Dependent Variable: Purchase

Table 2 shows the summary of the model. The value of the coefficient of the correlation between the variables (R) is 0.516 which shows that there is a rather strong correlation between the dependent and the independent variables. But the value of the adjusted R square (R^2_{adj}) which is equal to 0.259 shows that 26% of the total changes in the purchase intention among people are dependent on the three factors above.

Table 3: Variance analysis

| Model Summary ^b | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| 1 | .516 ^a | .266 | .259 | .63868 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Fan, Attitude, Goodwill

b. Dependent Variable: Purchase

According to the significance of the F value at the level of error lower than 0.01, it can be concluded that the regression model of the research composed of a dependent variable and three independent variables is a good model and the independent variables can determine the changes of the dependent variable, i.e. the purchase intention.

Table 4. standardized regression coefficients and the t-value

| Model | Coefficients ^a | | | | | | | |
|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|--------------|---------|------|
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Correlations | | |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Zero-order | Partial | Part |
| (Constant) | .833 | .222 | | 3.760 | .000 | | | |
| 1 Attitude | .237 | .063 | .210 | 3.760 | .000 | .370 | .218 | .191 |
| Goodwill | .208 | .057 | .207 | 3.656 | .000 | .378 | .212 | .186 |
| Fan | .218 | .045 | .269 | 4.816 | .000 | .411 | .275 | .245 |

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase

The results of table 4 show that the effect of the three variables including Attitude (the attitude toward the sponsor company), Goodwill (fan's goodwill) and Fan (fan's mental involvement) is significant on the purchase intention ($P < 0.01$). The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = Beta$) helps us determine the relative contribution of any independent variable to state the changes of the dependent variable (the purchase intention).

In the regression analysis, we can only predict the direct effect of any of the independent variables on the dependent variable and it is not possible to see the indirect effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. To solve this problem, the path analysis method can be used. For this reason, we face several standardized regression line equations in the path analysis, while we had only one standardized regression line equation in the regression analysis. In the following, introducing the data and the model in Lisrel Software, the output of the path analysis is obtained as follows:

What the results of the model show is almost equivalent to those of the regression analysis, that can be due to the absence of sensible indirect effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

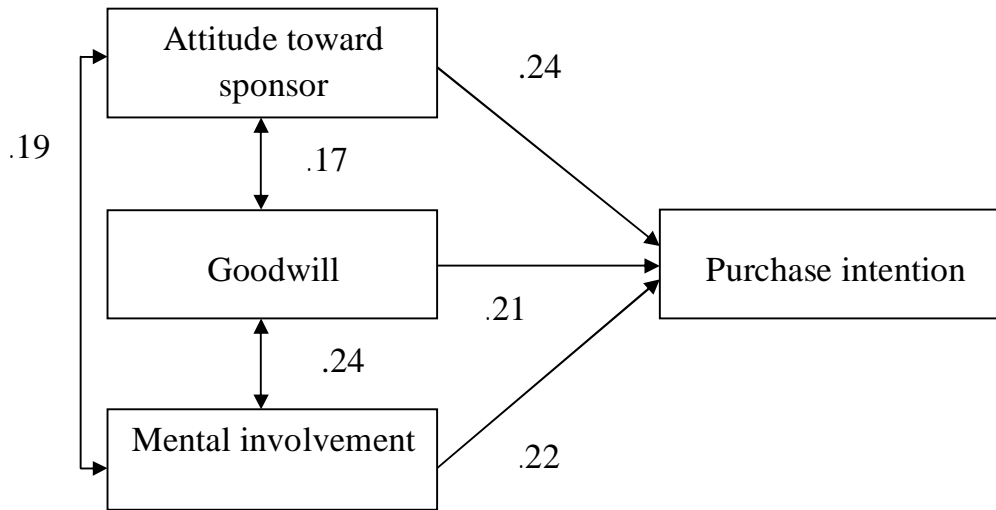


Figure 2: The Final model

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

According to the analyses conducted, it is clear that fans with a high level of attitude to the sponsor have a higher purchase intention than those with a low level of attitude. As the results of the regression analysis showed ($P < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.210$), those that were football fans and had a positive attitude to the sponsor companies were more willing to use the products of these companies than those with a less positive attitude. Past researches also confirm the above results, as they say that attitude toward a sponsor is an important factor affecting the perception of sponsorship activities by the fan, because the level of the perception and the belief of the customer in the importance of sponsorship activity affect on the level of his/her support from the company. The results of the present research also confirm what was mentioned above, so that positive attitudes toward the companies sponsoring sport events (football, in this research) will result in a high intention of the fans to buy their products. According to the model-based affect theory, memories and feelings recorded by the customers during a sport event emerge in similar situations. Therefore, if there is a positive attitude toward the sponsors of an event in sport environments, it is probable that participants in that event transfer the feeling and insight to other environments where these companies act.

Fans with higher levels of goodwill in the sponsor companies have a higher intention to buy their products than those with lower levels of goodwill. According to the results of the regression analysis ($\beta = 0.207$), those believing that the sponsors support the teams have a higher intention to buy the products and the services of these companies than those that think otherwise. According to Minaghan (2001), goodwill is something making sponsorship activities distinct from other past advertising methods and customers identify and pay attention to the companies supporting and improving their favorite events. According to the above results, sponsor companies must induce the feeling in the fans that they are really the sponsor of the event. Sponsor companies can induce this feeling and the goodwill in the fans on the spectator platforms whether during the game or before the game through activities different from advertisement. For example, they can use the means including the hats, free tags of the company's logo given to the fans. These are activities that can make the sport events more attractive to the fans and can make the sponsor's activities more tangible for the fans. Or it can be said that offering the services outside of the stadiums or even inside the stadiums for the welfare of the families and people can be very effective. Dis et al. (2008) states that if the customers interested in the sport feel that their support from the sponsors makes them seen as the serious fans of their team, it is more possible for the fans to show the purchase behaviors.

According to the results of the regression analysis in the third hypothesis of the research ($P < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.269$), it became clear that people calling themselves as the loyal and committed fans of a team or an event are more likely to use the services and the products of the sponsors than those that are not loyal to a team. These results confirm those obtained before.

As the analyses conducted in the research show, the mental involvement of a fan affects more on the purchase intention than other factors proposed in this research. According to the social identity theory, fans with a high involvement tend to act in a way that their intergroup connections are improved. So the behavior of purchasing from the sponsors of a team can be a way for connecting one to the team and its other fans.

In sum, the results showed that there is a positive significant relation between the independent variables including the attitude toward the sponsor, the fan's goodwill in the sponsor and the fan's mental involvement and the dependent variable, i.e. the fan's purchase intention, and any of them can significantly affect on the fan's purchase intention.

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