

Engaging the Consumer through Event Marketing: Linking Attendees with the Sponsor, Community, and Brand

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With an on-site study at a sponsored event, we construct and test competing models to examine the relationship among event attendees, sponsorship, community involvement, and the title sponsor's brand with respect to purchase intentions. We show that an attendee's enthusiasm and activeness in the area of the sponsored event and knowledge of the sponsor's products positively influence the attendee's desire that a sponsor be involved with the community. Then, we show that attendees who are more community-minded have a more positive opinion of the sponsor as a result of their event experience; a better opinion of the sponsor contributes to increased intentions to purchase the sponsor's products. Results from this framework indicate that event marketing, in conjunction with consumers who are enthusiastic, active, and knowledgeable about the sponsor and event, serves as a valuable lever to engage the consumer.

INTRODUCTION

It was nice to see a company sponsoring an event. It shows they are interested in being part of the community. I have a little more respect for them. I think the event sponsor logo was attractive. The logo was everywhere and also on the volunteers' shirts. You know those shirts will be worn again! I am not sure how much they paid for the sponsorship, but this is a good opportunity. I have never owned the (event sponsor's) product. Sure, now that I am in the market to buy, I will certainly consider buying their product. (Anna, age 24)

As Anna, an attendee at a recent sporting event, suggests, the role of event marketing in an effective integrated marketing communications strategy is increasingly important. In lieu of their customary supporting role to traditional promotions such as advertising and publicity, events have assumed a key role in the contemporary marketing mix. Currently, more than 96 percent of U.S. corporations include event marketing in their

promotional strategies (George P. Johnson/MPI Foundation, 2005). Hence, event marketing is earning respect both at the managerial table and with consumers.

Event marketing is a tool for experiential marketing that focuses on consumer experiences, and treats emotionally and rationally driven consumption as a holistic experience (Schmitt, 1999). Experiences often involve "sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and relational values that replace functional values" (Schmitt, 1999, p. 26). Communicating through events involves promotional activities designed to communicate with attendees and add value to the consumption experience; events provide an opportunity to engage the consumer with a company, its brands, and the community. Events create a social setting for attendees and help raise attendees' involvement level; therefore, attendees are apt to be more receptive to marketing messages and images associated with the event than they are to those presented via other methods (Pope and Voges, 2000). This result is true regardless of whether the event is proprietary (*staged* by

the company) or not (*sponsored* by the company) (Sneath, Lacey, Finney, and Close, 2006).

Despite the growing event and sponsorship literature, there is limited empirical research investigating how managers may improve event sponsorship outcomes, and the relationship between consumers' attitudes toward a sponsor's brand and consumers' involvement with the area of the event has yet to be fully explored. Understanding how consumer attitudes influence event success is particularly important for organizations contemplating long-term sponsorship relationships; event-related outcomes are likely to be influenced by both the firm's communications strategy and attendee-specific antecedents to behavior (Sneath, Finney, and Close, 2005).

The current study will investigate the relationships among event attendees' knowledge of an event sponsor's products and activeness and enthusiasm related to the area of the event (i.e., sports). We examine these issues along with attendees' attitudes toward the title sponsor and buying intentions regarding the firm's products. Using field survey results obtained during a prominent annual sporting event sponsored by a major automotive company, a theory-based model will be tested. Specifically, the following questions will be addressed:

1. How does an attendee's knowledge of, enthusiasm for, and activities related to the type of event influence his or her desire that the sponsor be involved with the community?
2. How does an attendee's perception of the sponsor's involvement in the community influence attitude toward the sponsor's brand?
3. Does attitude toward the sponsor's brand influence buying intentions?
4. In what way are these constructs related?

In the following sections, we review the literature on sponsorship, event, and sports marketing, and how events can be utilized in corporate and branding strategies. Next, we present the hypothesized relationships, followed by a description of the methods. Following the data analysis and discussion of results, we present implications and directions for future research.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, we present extant research on sponsorships and event (i.e., sporting event) marketing. Then, as a basis for hypothesis development, we link the existing knowledge with two key issues in marketing: corporate community involvement and branding.

Sponsorship, event, and sports marketing

Sponsorship. Sponsorships involve the acquisition of rights to affiliate or associate with a product, event, or organization for the purpose of deriving related benefits (Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton, 2000). Professionals describe how firms can succeed at sponsorship. Organizations must have a clear idea of what they want to accomplish (Heffler, 1999). Sponsorships are a "lever" used by marketers to engage customers.

While the sponsorship literature has grown in recent years, scholars have only begun to assess the strategic implications of sponsorships (Fahy, Farrelly, and Quester, 2004; Thwaites, 1994). Thus far, the research offers insights into four key issues:

- *Relatedness:* Consumers better recall a sponsor's product when that product is related to the sponsor (Johan, Pham, and Tuan, 1999).

- *Target market:* Research has helped identify those consumers who are most apt to respond to sponsorships. Lower-income, older consumers indicate that they buy more of a sponsor's product than do other consumers (Gardner and Schuman, 1987).
- *Attitude toward sponsors:* Consumers have better recall of a sponsor's product when they had a preference for that product prior to the sponsorship (Nicholls, Roslow, and Dubish, 1999).
- *Managers' views of sponsorships:* Managers generally have positive opinions about the impact of sponsorships (Gardner and Schuman, 1987); there is unprecedented growth in sponsorships in recent years (D'Astous and Bitz, 1995).

While scholars find that the sponsoring entity should be related to the sponsor's product, the consumer's knowledge base in the area of the sponsor's products—in this case, automobiles—remains untested. Thus, we seek to fill this gap in the sponsorship and event marketing literature.

Event marketing. Event marketing is defined as the "practice of promoting the interests of an organization and its brands by associating the organization with a specific activity" (Shimp, 1993, p. 8; Van Heerden, 2001). Recall that a sponsorship may relate to an activity *or* to an organization. Event marketing often involves sponsorship; but this is not always the case. Compared to sponsorship, which involves payment for the association with an activity, individual, or organization, event marketing refers to the staging of an event and/or efforts by a firm to associate with another entity's event with *or* without paying a sponsorship fee.

Firms use event marketing to accomplish a variety of goals. Brand awareness, sales, and image enhancement are the common reasons for participating in event

marketing (Gardner and Schuman, 1987; Gross, Traylor, and Shuman, 1987; Sneath, Finney, and Close, 2005). The *types* of goals that firms hope to accomplish do not account for event marketing's appeal; instead, its popularity is based upon the distinctive *way* it helps firms accomplish their communications goals via consumer interaction.

The unique appeal of event marketing is the sponsor's ability to blend its message into a gathering that engages consumers. Message and media elements are "inextricably linked and imagery is delivered by association with particular activities and events" (Meenaghan and Shipley, 1999, p. 328). The skillful sponsor inserts its message into the medium while engaging the consumer during and after the event. If the sponsor carefully plans and implements the promotional activity, consumers may view the sponsor's message as part of the event rather than as a marketing-oriented communication.

Event marketing offers an additional advantage, in that it actively engages the consumer with the brand and its personality. Firms investing in event marketing have the means through which they may create a hands-on experience for their target market (Sneath, Finney, and Close, 2005). The event attendee decides whether, when, and how this interaction occurs. By contrast, using traditional media the consumer passively receives a firm's message.

Managers are increasingly under pressure to measure return on investment (ROI) from marketing activities (Hieggelke, 2005). Hence, a survey of over 200 decision-making marketing executives in U.S. corporations with recorded sales exceeding \$250 million was conducted by Meeting Professionals International (MPI). The sample covered automotive, healthcare, high-tech, and financial sectors. The main finding is that event marketing offers better ROI than any other marketing com-

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munications medium. The study finds that in terms of ROI, face-to-face event marketing outperforms public relations, internet advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and print and broadcast advertising (MPI Foundation, 2004). Respondents further shared that ROI from events and the strategic importance of event marketing in sales strengthened from prior years (MPI Foundation, 2004).

Sports marketing. As in the current study, event marketing often occurs within the context of a sporting event. Sports marketing refers to sponsorships or event marketing that involves athletes or an athletic event. Sports marketing is an important method of promotion: roughly two-thirds of the sponsorships in the United States are associated with athletic events (Mi-Megasite, 2006). The research investigating sports marketing mirrors that of sponsorship and event marketing in many ways, with key developments that include:

- *Exposure:* Scholars indicate that consumers remember sponsors who promote athletic events. Also, exposure to sports marketing favorably changes attitude toward the sponsor (Bennett, Cunningham, and Dees, 2006).
- *Fit:* Consumers have a more positive image of the sponsor if they believe that the sponsor's image "fits" the image of the sporting event sponsored (Koo, Quarterman, and Flynn, 2006).
- *Objectives:* In the past, "image-building" was the main reason for engaging in sports marketing. Now, sport market-

ers also seek measurable "bottom line" results (Lough and Irwin, 2001).

- *Evaluation:* While managers prefer bottom-line objectives, they are uncertain how to determine whether their sports-related promotions are successful (Stotlar, 2004).

When marketing occurs via a sporting event, the fit of the attendee with the type of event (i.e., sports) is likely to be an important consideration. For example, an attendee of a sporting event who is enthusiastic about and participates in sports is considered to be a better fit for the event than, say, someone who is bored by sports and does not engage in any sporting activities. Scholars have not yet assessed how an event attendee's activeness in or enthusiasm for sports relates to how he or she perceives the sponsorship of a sporting event. Thus, we also seek to fill this gap. We now examine links among the sport, sponsorship, and event research with two issues of great importance to marketing managers: community involvement and branding.

Building blocks for engaging the consumer: Community involvement and branding

Community involvement. The past century has seen a shift in the public's view of business' role in society. Profit is an incomplete measure of business success; today's firm must also be socially responsible (Wulfson, 2001). Socially responsible firms provide a framework of measurable procedures that aim to benefit the individual, workplace, organization, and

community (Roberts, 2004). The successful firm plans strategy both to create profits and to meet its obligations to be socially responsible.

Community involvement is one aspect of social responsibility that is of interest to event marketers. We define community involvement as the amount of noncommercial interaction an organization has with individuals and organizations in the markets in which it operates. Community involvement entails going beyond merely producing and marketing. A firm's community involvement activities are influenced by the preferences of societal stakeholders (Brammer and Millington, 2003), such as attendees at a free event hosted by the local communities. One aspect of community involvement is charitable giving (Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Schultz, 2002). Another aspect of community involvement, most relevant here, is the investment in a sponsorship of an event that draws members of the local and sporting communities.

Sports marketing is one way for a firm to show social responsibility and promote itself and/or its products simultaneously to community members (Lachowetz and Irwin, 2002). The literature suggests that community-minded sports marketing includes attention to the following issues:

Community involvement—consumer expectations: Consumers expect sports organizations and athletes to engage in

The successful firm plans strategy both to create profits and to meet its obligations to be socially responsible.

socially responsible activities (Roy and Graeff, 2003).

- *Community involvement—measurement:* Firms sponsoring sporting events are increasingly under pressure to measure the benefits the sponsoring organization gained from the sponsorship (Mescon and Tilson, 1987).
- *Community involvement—impact:* If a sporting event is linked to a nonprofit firm, consumers indicate that they are more likely to buy the event sponsors' products (Irwin, Lachowetz, Cornwell, and Clark, 2003).

Studies have not fully addressed how community involvement at events contributes to an attendee's opinion of a sponsor's brand. Hence, we will also examine the relationship between involvement in the community and brand opinion. Maintaining a desirable corporate image is a key goal of the contemporary firm; however, establishing a connection between the firm's community involvement and the firm's brand presents an additional challenge.

Branding

In addition to maintaining community ties, marketers increasingly use sponsorships and events to establish and maintain strong

brands. Defined, a brand is a "distinguishing name and/or symbol intended to identify goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors" (Aaker, 1991, p. 7). A brand signals the product source and protects consumers and producers from competitors with seemingly identical products (Aaker, 1991). In event marketing, incorporation of logos, trademarks, or package designs is a way to distinguish one's offerings and synergistically link them to the event. Branding decisions play a critical role in establishing sustainable competitive advantage (Alpert and Kamins, 1995), especially when combined with sponsored events.

Scholars have begun to explore how firm branding strategies influence firm involvement in event and sport marketing. We build on the extant findings shown below:

- *Branding—brand building:* Building a unique brand and then positioning the brand are seen as keys to success in sport marketing (Olberding and Jisha, 2005).
- *Branding—brand image:* Sports sponsorship enhances brand image and consumer intention to purchase the sponsor's product (Pope and Voges, 2000).
- *Branding—transfer:* Sports sponsors often hope that the "cool," "active" image of sporting events will transfer from the event to the sponsor's brand (Bennett and Lachowetz, 2004).

The literature has not focused on how a consumer's opinion of the sponsor's brand,

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as a result of interacting with the brand at a community event, may influence purchase intentions. Hence, we examine the relationships among community involvement, brand opinion, and purchase intentions of the sponsor's branded products.

Conceptual model and hypothesis development

Having reviewed the relevant literature, we present the conceptual model and hypotheses. Because the literature base is richer in the key areas of branding and community involvement, our hypothesis development is primarily based on the literature in these two topics. Thus, the hypothesized relationships are as follows:

H1: An event attendee who is more knowledgeable about a sponsor's products (e.g., automobiles) is more likely to appreciate a sponsor's community involvement.

H2: An event attendee who is more active in the area of the event (e.g., sports) is more likely to appreciate a sponsor's community involvement.

H3: An event attendee who is more enthusiastic in the area of the event (e.g., sports) is more likely to have an appreciation for a sponsor's community involvement.

H4: An event attendee who has more of an appreciation for a sponsor's community involvement is more inclined to have a positive opinion of the sponsor's brand.

H5: An event attendee who has a more positive opinion of the sponsor's brand is more intent on purchasing the sponsor's branded product(s).

Our proposed conceptual model shows a synthesis of these five hypotheses (Figure 1).

METHOD

The event and sponsorship

The event. To test the proposed model, preliminary data were gathered via in-depth interviews with attendees at an international sporting event. Findings from the in-depth interviews contributed to quantitative survey development. The context for the interviews and surveys is the fourth annual Tour de Georgia (TDG) cycling event, a six-day race comprised of six stages across two states. The event was chosen for this study for many reasons. First, cycling is a sport with a strong sense of community—a key aspect of this study. According to Union Cycliste Internationale and USA Cycling, this event is the highest-ranked cycling race in North

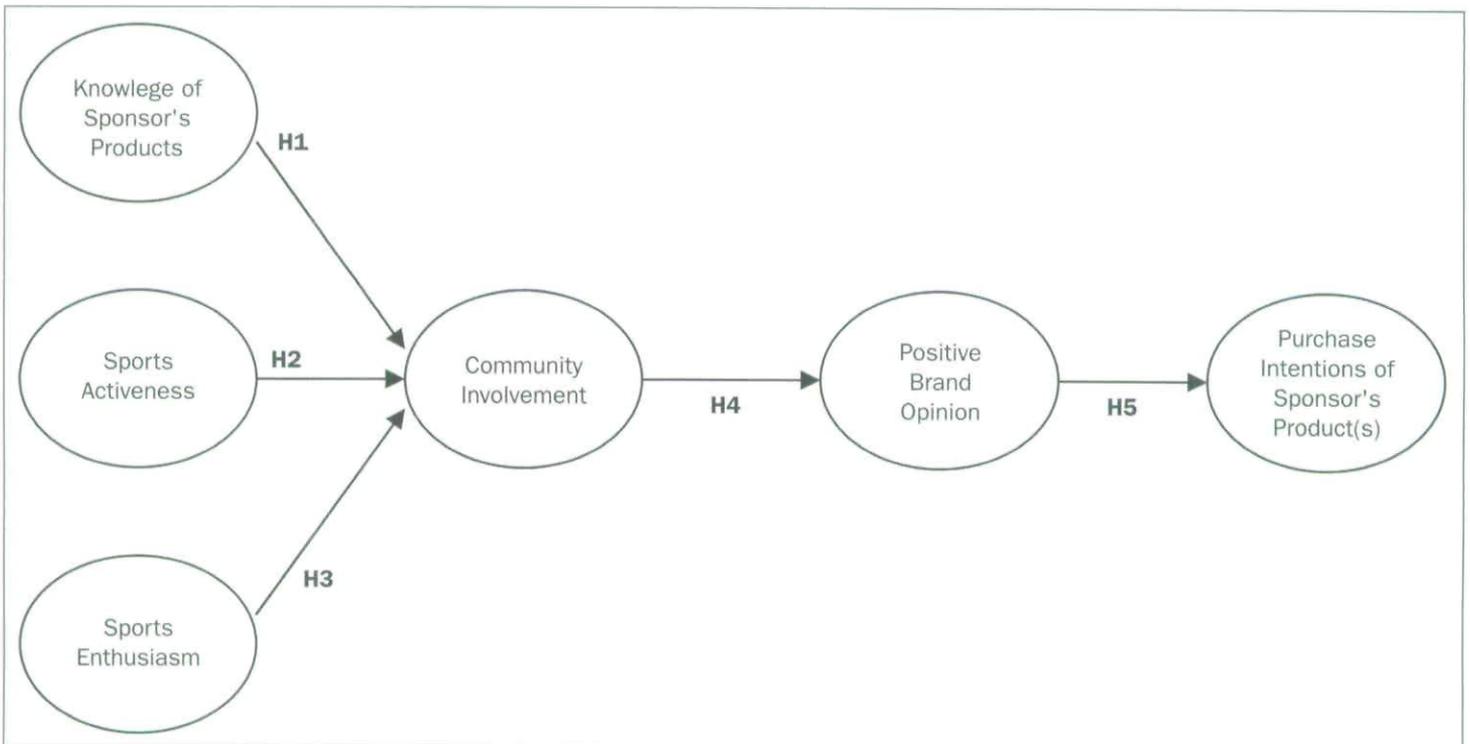


Figure 1 Conceptual Model

America. Also, a multistage event (versus a single event) broadens the scope of the event to multiple local communities. Thus, this event is particularly appropriate to study sponsorship effectiveness, for a relatively diverse group, from a community perspective.

In addition to the bicycle race, event attractions included entertainment and exhibits, such as music, food and alcohol, automotive exhibits, cycling exhibits, and a Health Expo. The event attracted 128 cyclists from 18 countries and over 800,000 spectators, with additional audiences including individuals who tuned in to the live online, television, and radio coverage. Promotion of the event included local, national, and international broadcast and print media, and the official website—all of which contributed to making this event the premier professional cycling event in the United States. Celebrity athletes also helped increase event awareness and attendance, as well as demand for sponsorships.

Sponsors. In the automotive industry, event marketing has become an important component in companies' promotional strategies (MPI Foundation, 2004). For the fourth consecutive year, a major automobile company served as the title sponsor for the 2006 event. Highly visible in each of the six communities in which the event was held, the firm's logo was prominently displayed on banners, tents, tickets, signs, volunteer apparel, and large-screen televisions. In each host city, the automobile company provided interactive exhibits with its new models. For example, attendees could have photographs made with the sponsor's new vehicles, at which time they were given a \$1,000 rebate coupon. The rebate was packaged to look like a backstage V.I.P. pass for the attendees to wear during the event. The sponsor's exhibits also allowed attendees

to sit in the vehicles, obtain brochures, and interact with sales personnel.

The survey

Measure development began with field interviews and pretests of the survey. These steps helped in the survey design and refinement of measures. The 15-item survey was designed to gather information about the attendee's "fit" with the event, how he or she felt about the title sponsor's involvement in the community, his or her perceptions of the sponsor's brand, and intent to purchase the sponsor's products.

We used 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to assess respondents' product knowledge, activeness in and enthusiasm for sports, attitudes toward community involvement, opinion of the sponsor's brand, and purchase intentions. Existing measures for knowledge, activeness, and enthusiasm were utilized. The product knowledge scale was adopted from research conducted by Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgway (1989); the sports activeness scale from Lumpkin and Darden (1989), and the sports enthusiasm measures from Dickerson and Gentry (1989). Each of these scales demonstrated reliability in prior tests.

Procedure

Survey participants were recruited on-site by a marketing faculty member, event marketing professional, and 42 business majors (juniors and seniors). The surveyors completed a training course with the president of an event marketing company. Event sponsors provided shirts and hats to signify researcher status to attendees. The sponsors also provided a tent and supplied incentives (lapel pins and pens) for respondents. To meet the sampling criteria, a participant had to be an adult (age 18 or older) in attendance at one or more of the event activities. The survey

research was conducted at each of six host cities; overall, 1,741 participants completed the survey. Nonresponse rate was estimated to be 5 percent; the most frequent reason for nonresponse was that the attendee had already completed the survey. There are no significant differences in means or variances for the constructs between early and late stages.

Participants

Forty-one percent of survey participants had attended the event in a prior year. The sample of 1,741 adults represents domestic and international event attendees. Four percent of the respondents identified an international primary residence in countries including: Germany (8), Mexico (7), Canada (7), Colombia (6), England (4), Guatemala (3), Puerto Rico (3), Brazil (3), Cuba (2), and Argentina (2). A representative from Denmark, France, Guam, Italy, Kosovo, South Africa, Indonesia, Ireland, Russia, Paraguay, Spain, Taiwan, and Thailand also completed our survey. The sample consists of slightly more men than women, which is consistent with the popularity of cycling among men. There is a relatively even distribution of survey participants in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s, with the median age of 44. Over half of the sample has a household income of over \$50,000. Responses to the classification questions suggest that demographic characteristics of spectators at the event are consistent with the title sponsor's primary target markets, i.e., buyers aged 35–64 with annual incomes of \$50,000–\$80,000 per year (*Event Marketer*, 2003). Table 1 provides the sample demographics.

Participants agreed (mean = 4.01 on a 5-point scale) that they like that the company demonstrates community involvement; participants like that companies care to do more than just "build and sell" products. Holding the title sponsorship is another cue of community involvement.

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of Sample ($n = 1,741$)

| | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| <i>Age (Median = 44)</i> | | |
| 18-29 | 333 | 19.1% |
| 30-39 | 361 | 20.7% |
| 40-49 | 350 | 20.1% |
| 50-59 | 316 | 18.2% |
| 60-70 | 159 | 9.1% |
| 70+ | 46 | 2.6% |
| N/A | 176 | 10.1% |
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Female | 687 | 39.5% |
| Male | 809 | 46.5% |
| N/A | 245 | 14.0% |
| <i>Income</i> | | |
| <10,000\$ | 104 | 6.0% |
| \$10,000-15,000 | 27 | 1.6% |
| \$15,000-25,000 | 70 | 4.0% |
| \$25,000-35,000 | 119 | 6.8% |
| \$35,000-50,000 | 177 | 10.2% |
| \$50,000-75,000 | 320 | 18.4% |
| \$75,000-100,000 | 320 | 18.4% |
| >\$100,000 | 280 | 16.1% |
| N/A | 324 | 18.6% |

Many agree (23.6 percent) or strongly agree (25.1 percent) that their opinion of the title sponsor has changed for the better as a result of the sponsorship. One-third (33.3 percent) of the participants are neutral, while the remaining disagree (8.9 percent) or strongly disagree (9.0 percent) to having a positive attitude change about the title sponsor as a result of the event. Table 2 presents attendees' brand opinions.

We also asked attendees about their purchase intentions toward the title sponsor's products as a result of their experi-

ence at the event. Participants agree (mean = 3.14 on a 5-point scale) that the event created more intentions to purchase the sponsor's products. Many agree (20.3 percent strongly agree; 18.2 percent agree) that their experience brings a positive change with respect to purchase intention (Table 3). Others (32.2 percent) offer a "neutral" response to the question.

RESULTS

Measurement model

The hypothesized relationships were tested using the two-step structural equation

modeling (SEM) procedure advocated by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). This method of measurement and testing relationships allows for rigorous testing of measurement reliability and validity before subjecting the structural model to tests of fit. A correlation matrix for the multi-item scales was created and subjected to confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL 8.71. Results from the full measurement model exhibited acceptable levels of fit with $\chi^2_{(51)} = 748.08$, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.96, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.96, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.93, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = 0.082. We eliminated items with unacceptably low squared multiple correlations as well as items that shared common variance with other indicators (as evidenced by large modification indices (MIs) for Λ_x) and shared common variance with other indicators (as evidenced in the MIs for θ_δ). The final measurement model demonstrated improved levels of fit. Results from the final measurement model improved levels of fit with $\chi^2_{(24)} = 70.94$, CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.017.

The exogenous construct measures of the hypothesized model yielded sound reliability and validity properties (Table 4). Convergent validity is indicated when path coefficients from latent constructs to the corresponding indicators are statistically significant. All items load significantly on their corresponding latent construct, with the lowest t -value = 20.80. Significant t -values meet the criteria for convergent validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the variance extracted for each construct to the square of each off-diagonal value within the phi matrix for that construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). For each construct, the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the Φ^2 estimates. AVE ranged from 0.68 to 0.83, with each

TABLE 2
Attitude toward Title Sponsor

| | Mean (n = 1,739) | Frequency | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--|---------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>I like that a manufacturer cares to do more than just build and sell.</i> | 4.01 | | | |
| Strongly disagree | | 110 | 6.3% | 6.3% |
| Disagree | | 100 | 5.7% | 12.1% |
| Neutral | | 283 | 16.3% | 28.3% |
| Agree | | 419 | 24.1% | 52.4% |
| Strongly agree | | 827 | 47.5% | 100% |
| <i>Having visited the event, my opinion of the sponsor's brand has changed for the better.</i> | 3.47 | | | |
| Strongly disagree | | 157 | 9.0% | 9.0% |
| Disagree | | 155 | 8.9% | 17.9% |
| Neutral | | 580 | 33.3% | 51.3% |
| Agree | | 411 | 23.6% | 74.9% |
| Strongly agree | | 436 | 25.1% | 100% |

Note: 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree

TABLE 3
Purchase Intent of Sponsor's Product

| | Mean (n = 1,739) | Frequency | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--|---------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>As a result of what I've experienced today (at the event), I am more likely to purchase (the sponsor's) products.</i> | 3.14 | | | |
| Strongly disagree | | 270 | 15.5% | 15.5% |
| Disagree | | 237 | 13.6% | 29.2% |
| Neutral | | 561 | 32.2% | 61.4% |
| Agree | | 317 | 18.2% | 79.6% |
| Strongly agree | | 354 | 20.3% | 100.0% |

Note: 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree

measure greater than the 0.50 minimum cutoff suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Finally, to assess internal reliability, composite reliabilities were calculated. Composite reliabilities for all the measures were high, ranging from 0.86 to 0.93; these reliabilities are well above the 0.70 threshold for acceptability (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

Structural model

The structural model was analyzed using the three exogenous constructs resulting from the measurement model analysis and the three dependent variables. If the analysis of the measurement model is successful, measurement respecification is prevented during analysis of the structural model. Such was the case here. Upon moving to the analysis of the structural model, no additional items were deleted. The correlations, means, and standard deviations of the variables are presented in Table 5.

The framework and statistical assumptions were addressed. The framework assumptions include linear relationships among variables, additive effects, stochastic relationship between explanatory and outcome variables, continuous observed variables, and data represented by means, variance, and covariances of observed variables were addressed. Also, the statistical assumptions made to estimate and test the model were considered. These assumptions include a mean zero of disturbances, uncorrelated disturbances with exogenous variables, uncorrelated measurement errors with constructs, uncorrelated measurement errors with disturbances, and that the joint distribution of the observed variables is multivariate normal.

The hypothesized relationships in the model were tested simultaneously using structural equation modeling. In particular, the structural model described in Figure 1 was estimated using LISREL 8.71.

TABLE 4
Confirmatory Factor Analysis

| | Lambda Loadings ^a | Composite Reliability | Variance Extracted |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Knowledge of sponsor's products^b</i> | | | |
| I feel very knowledgeable about vehicles. | 0.82 | 0.86 | 0.68 |
| If a friend asked me about vehicles, I could give advice about different brands. | 0.86 | | |
| If I had to purchase a vehicle today, I would need to gather very little information to make a wise decision. | 0.54 | | |
| <i>Sports activeness^c</i> | | | |
| I cycle, play tennis, golf, or engage in other active sports quite a lot. | 0.89 | 0.93 | 0.81 |
| I exercise regularly to stay fit. | 0.75 | | |
| I cycle, play tennis, golf, or engage in other active sports quite a lot. | 0.87 | | |
| <i>Sports enthusiasm^d</i> | | | |
| I like to watch or listen to sports games. | 0.80 | 0.93 | 0.83 |
| I usually read the sports pages or sports websites. | 0.83 | | |
| I thoroughly enjoy conversations about sports. | 0.91 | | |

^aStandardized solutions

^bAdapted from Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgway (1989)

^cLumpkin and Darden (1989)

^dDickerson and Gentry (1989)

Overall, the fit indices suggest an acceptable fit between the hypothesized model and the observed sample data. Although the overall fit as indicated by the chi-square statistic ($\chi^2_{(49)} = 1148.41$) was significant, this result is not surprising given

the chi-square test's bias against large samples and the sample tested here (Hair et al., 2006). For this reason, attention focused instead on other absolute and incremental fit measures that yielded good levels of fit (Hair et al., 2006), including

CFI = 0.92, IFI = 0.92, GFI = 0.90, and SRMR = 0.073. Moreover, each of the predicted paths was significant ($p < .001$) in the predicted direction. Each of the five hypotheses is supported, as shown via the hypothesized path results in Figure 2.

TABLE 5
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Constructs

| Constructs | Mean | SD | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| 1. Community involvement | 4.008 | 1.199 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| 2. Positive brand opinion | 3.468 | 1.213 | 0.540 | 1.00 | | | | |
| 3. Purchase intentions of sponsor's products | 3.143 | 1.317 | 0.340 | 0.583 | 1.00 | | | |
| 4. Knowledge of sponsor's products | 3.387 | 1.080 | 0.267 | 0.278 | 0.325 | 1.00 | | |
| 5. Sports activeness | 3.725 | 1.204 | 0.227 | 0.191 | 0.135 | 0.215 | 1.00 | |
| 6. Sports enthusiasm | 3.557 | 1.238 | 0.208 | 0.196 | 0.152 | 0.230 | 0.510 | 1.00 |

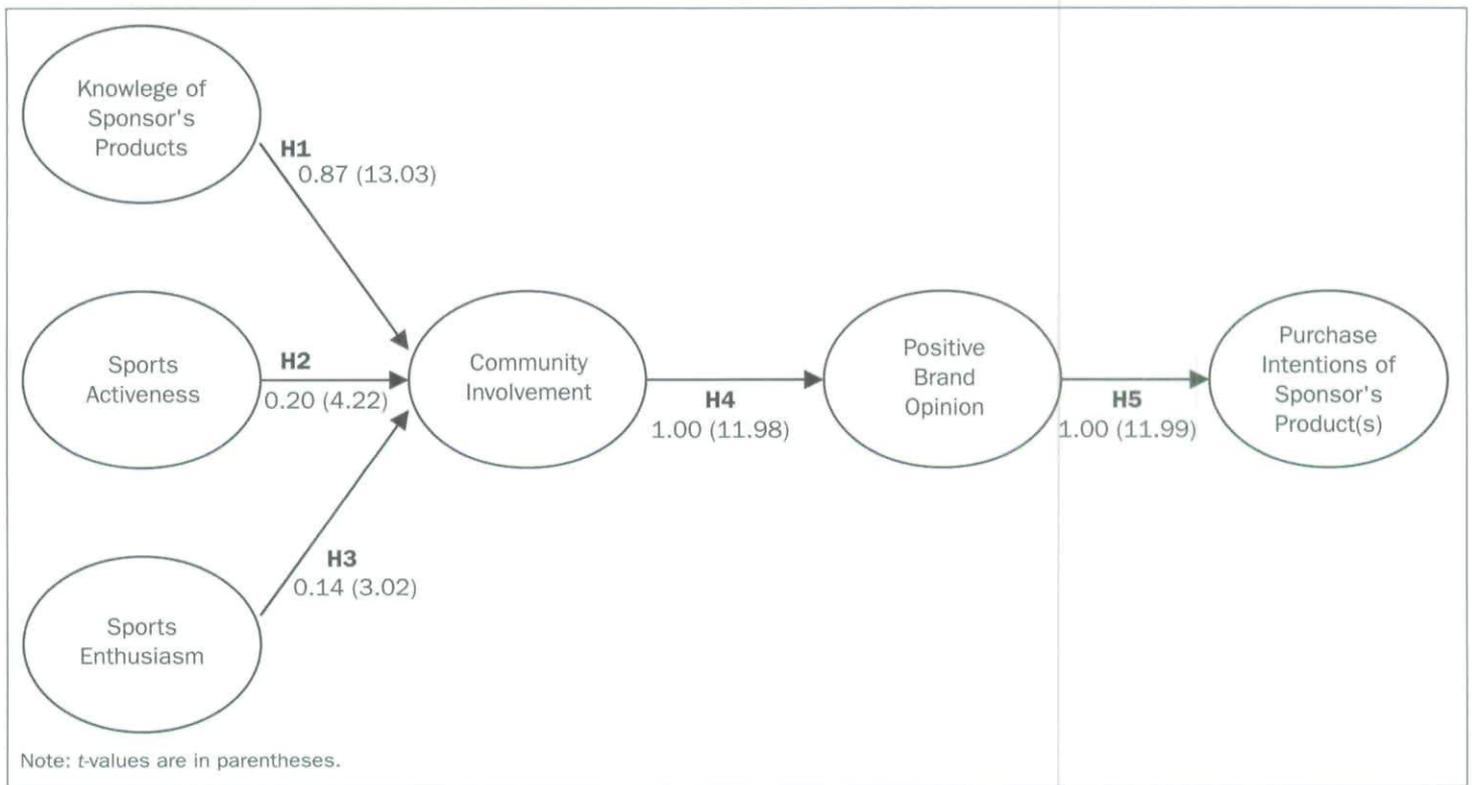


Figure 2 Hypothesized Model with Results (All Results Standardized)

Comparison model

In addition to testing the hypothesized model illustrated in Figure 2, we examined a comparison or rival model. According to Hair and his colleagues (2006, p. 733), "the strongest test of a proposed model is to identify and test competing models that represent truly different hypothetical structural relationships." Given the roles of establishing community involvement and strengthening overall brand opinion in our hypothesized model, we identified a nonmediated model as a theoretically plausible alternative (e.g., Morgan and Hunt, 1994). In this alternative model, the exogenous constructs tested are assumed to have direct effects on all three dependent variables (Figure 3). In terms of testing distinctive competing models, only 3 of the 11 relationships are shared by both tested models.

Based on the data, we find more support for the hypothesized model. For the

competing model, the overall fit is not as good (CFI = 0.92, IFI = 0.92, GFI = 0.90, and SRMR = 0.072) as the hypothesized model. When parsimony fit indices (PGFI and PNFI) are compared, the hypothesized model is especially robust. The PGFI produced a value of 0.52 for the nonmediated model, compared to a PGFI = 0.57 for the mediated model. The competing model's PNFI = 0.62 was lower than the hypothesized model's PNFI value of 0.68. The lower values of the competing model indicate a preference for the hypothesized model (Hair et al., 2006).

DISCUSSION

After testing competing models, we assert that the support for the five hypotheses tentatively reveals the importance to event sponsors of an event attendee's enthusiasm for and activeness in the area of the event. The data suggest that event attendees' knowledge of the sponsor,

enthusiasm, and activeness positively influence their desire that a sponsor be involved with the community. Specifically, active, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable (in terms of the sponsor's product) consumers are shown to be more appreciative of a company's involvement with the community than those who are less active, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable. Moreover, we show that an appreciation for the sponsor's community involvement is more likely to positively enhance the attendee's perceptions of the sponsor's brand. Attendees who perceive that the sponsor is community-oriented are more likely to agree that their opinion of the title sponsor has changed for the better as a result of the event. Finally, we provide evidence to suggest that this opinion change toward the sponsor's brand is associated with heightened intentions to purchase the firm's products.

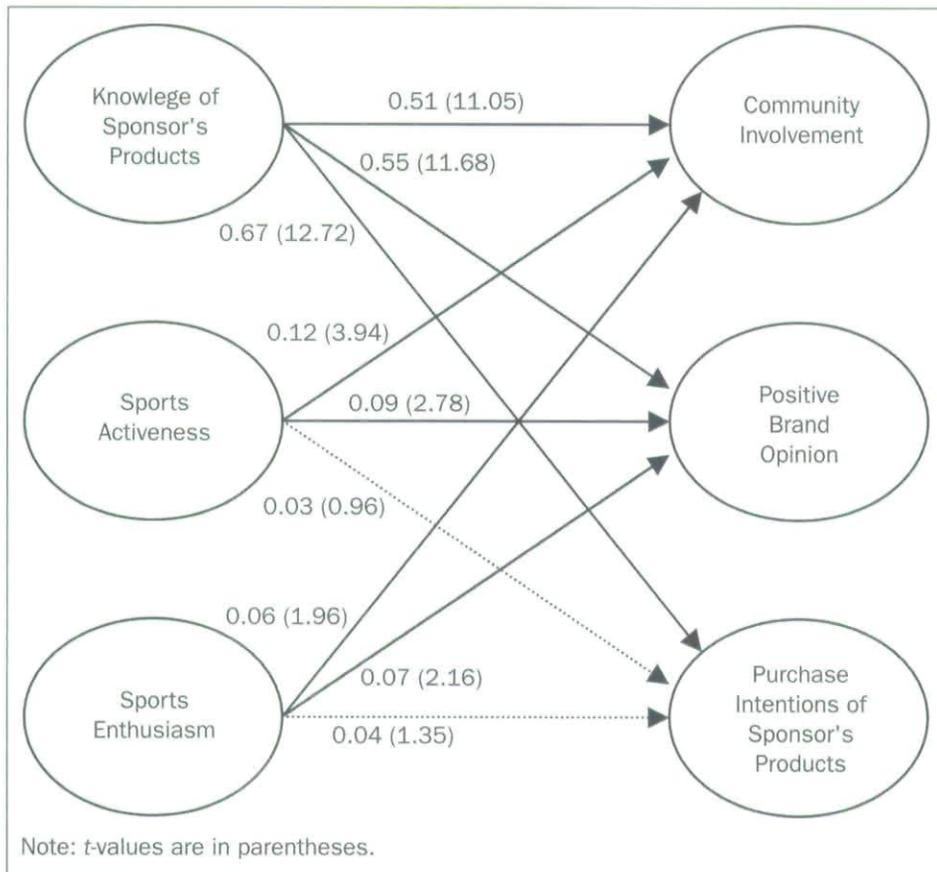


Figure 3 Competing Model with Results (All Results Standardized)

Implications for practice and theory

This set of findings has implications for both practice and theory. For practitioners, the findings provide support for incorporating event marketing and sponsorship into a communications strategy, especially when the event attracts people who are knowledgeable, active, and enthusiastic, in an area that is synergistic with the sponsor. A key implication is that event sponsorship is a way to further engage the consumer with the sponsor's products via establishing community involvement. However, community involvement alone is not sufficient for effective event sponsorship. While providing an interactive display of the product at the event—along with price promotions—may contribute to engaging the attendee

with the brand, marketers must also consider attendees' passion for (i.e., enthusiasm and activeness) the type of event. The area of event studied here is a sporting event; however, the study may be generalizable to other areas such as music, art, theatre, or film events.

Engaging the consumer at a sponsored event involves affect, emotion, and cognition. In the current study, it is shown that attendees who are enthusiastic and active in sports tend to care more about the corporate involvement in the sporting community, have a more positive opinion of the sponsor, and are more inclined to purchase the sponsor's product. These findings suggest the importance of consumer affect concerning the event, type, and sponsor. It is also important to engage the

consumer at a cognitive level, given the role of product knowledge in attendees' attitude and purchase intentions. Attendees who are more knowledgeable about the sponsor and their product set are more fully engaged with the company. Event marketing also provides sponsors with opportunities to educate consumers about their offerings. Events provide ways for active information exchange; therefore, companies considering sponsorship and event marketing activities should not avoid events even if attendees are unfamiliar with their products prior to the event.

Limitations and future research

Some limitations of the method and related avenues for future research follow. A significant goodness of fit of chi-square may also be a reflection of other factors, such as sample size and power of the test. While the hypothesized model fits the data reasonably well, there will always be models that can fit the data as well, if not better, than the model developed for this study (Bollen, 1989). Despite our examination of an alternative model, other models may exist that contribute to consumer engagement through event marketing. To establish convergent validity, replicating this study with other samples would certainly enhance the generalizability of results. Other antecedents, mediators, and moderators of consumer engagement can be added to the conceptual model, including environmental and product characteristics, and preexisting attitudes toward the company. Does the company have credibility with the community and also have ample room to develop this credibility via event sponsorships?

Recently, questions have been raised concerning the transfer of meaning and image at sponsored events (Cornwell and Smith, 2001; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999). While our study sheds some light on issues pertaining to image transfer, more

research in this area is needed. In particular, it is important to explore how the image of the event, organization, or individual (e.g., athlete) "rubs off" (or transfers) onto the sponsoring organization. Companies involved in sponsorship and event marketing may seek to uncover additional insight into the connection between the sponsor and the entity that it pays to sponsor.

Extant research has often ignored the results firms obtain through their sponsorships (McDonald, 1991). Indeed, scholars have only recently begun to understand how sponsorship actually "works" (i.e., produces the result that the firm desires) (Gwinner, 1997). We create a model that links event attendees to attitudes and purchase intentions. Yet, there is a need for further research on the impact of sponsorship and event marketing in both the short and long term. Furthermore, at the present time, there are no longitudinal studies that examine the effectiveness of sponsoring a marketed event.

Scholars need a better understanding of how sponsored events signal corporate community involvement to customers. By investing in event marketing, firms can signal to consumers that they are involved with the community. Advocates for the sponsor may deliver this message at events by disseminating good "seeds" for positive word of mouth throughout the community. While we provide evidence for the importance of a community-involved corporate image, more insights are needed concerning attendees' perceptions of fit between the event and title sponsor. In general, in the context of promotions, "poor fit" negatively impacts consumer beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regardless of the firm's efforts to be socially responsible. Similarly, profit-motivated promotional activities, even if they offer a "good fit," can have the same negative outcomes (Becker-Olsen, Cud-

By investing in event marketing, firms can signal to consumers that they are involved with the community.

more, and Hill, 2006). Thus, effectively engaging the consumer with event marketing entails actions that demonstrate a connection with the community, as well as with the brand. **JAR**

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