

Sport Sponsorship and its Effect on the Employees of Sponsor

Abdavi Mohamad^{1*}, Abdavi Fatemeh²

¹MA, School of Management and Accounting, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

²University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

**Corresponding Author Email:* Mohamadabdavi@yahoo.com

Abstract

This research has been primarily performed with the aim of developing and analyzing a model of sponsorship effect on sponsor's employees. First, the previous research in sponsorship was reviewed. Afterwards, a model was formulated within it, Team identification defines three sponsorship outcomes: perceived external prestige, organizational identification and organizational commitment. For testing the model, a questionnaire with 26 questions was designed and distributed among 360 employees of two major sponsors of a football team in Iran. Results of data analysis showed that team identification as one of the sponsorship antecedents, has an important effect on organizational image improvement among employees, their commitment and existing organizational identification. In addition, it was specified that team identification in turn, is influenced by the team social prestige. Moreover, in this research the moderating role of social contagion on the relationship between team identification and sponsorship outcomes was approved for the first time. While these variables have been used in the sponsorship literature before, they have not been empirically tested in an integrated model.

Keywords: Sponsorship, Team identification, Social contagion, Perceived external prestige.

Introduction

Sport as an important commercial industry is a familiar concept in developed countries. Managers of economic enterprises have acknowledged the importance of sport in marketing and tried to influence consumers' attitudes toward their products and services through using marketing experts and advisors and applying different advertising methods and advanced marketing practices. One of the advanced techniques that can be used for this purpose in sport marketing is sport sponsorship. Sponsorship may be defined as investments in causes or events to support corporate or marketing objectives (Gardner & Shuman, 1988). Sponsoring sport or sport institutions is a marketing strategy that is widely used by companies (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Because of its popularity and good place among people (Meenaghan, 1998), Sport is a natural area for sponsorship as it can carry very strong images, has a mass international audience, appeals to all classes (Abratt et al., 1987). The importance of this area can be seen in the increasing amount of company's investments in support of various sports events such as the Olympics, World Cups, leagues and other sport events. Formal reports represent that sponsorship overall cost has increased from \$28 billion in 2004 to \$46.3 billion in 2010 and \$48.7 billion in 2011 (IEG, 2012).

Why companies' investment in sponsorship has had a growing trend is a question that many researchers have tried to identify its reasons. A short review on research performed in this area reveals that companies pursue different goals by applying sponsorship strategy: Making awareness (Hoek et al., 1990; Copeland et al., 1996; Keller, 2003), enhancing corporate image (Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Keller, 2003), sale increase and profitability improvement (Hoek et al., 1990; Copeland et al., 1996) and change in consumer behavior like purchase intention and word of mouth communications (Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009; Christensen, 2006). But little attention has been attracted to sponsorship effect on the Sponsor's employees. Firms that use sponsorship strategy could be able to achieve their desired goals when they concentrate not only on external goals but also on internal goals of sponsorship and consider it as a tool for internal marketing (Khan & Stanto, 2010). Crowley (1991), found that senior marketing managers consider employees at least a secondary concern. He points out that sponsorship has the potential capability to present a good and positive corporate image to its workforce. Khan and Stanton (2010) argued that employees emerged as a lesser, but still nominated, reason for sponsorship support in two ways: employee involvement in an event; and

improving employee morale, consistent with a motivational perspective. Tripodi (2001) states that motivation and enhancing employees' relationships is one of the most important internal goals of sponsorship. Grimes and Meenaghan (1998) indicated that sponsorship can be used to effectively communicate specific brand values to internal audiences. Hickman, Lawrence and Ward (2005) and Khan and Stanton (2010) in their research indicated that sport sponsorship can influence employees' perception, attitudes and behavior. How company's sponsorship efforts can influence employees' attitudes and behavior is a matter that this research intends to deal with. The popular press suggests that sponsorship can function as a tool for internal marketing (Quester & Kelly, 1999; Hickman et al., 2005; Khan & Stanton, 2010), which is defined as a managerial strategy designed to motivate and enable organizational members to adopt a customer orientation, or to meet the needs of external customers (Hickman et al., 2005). Mitchell (2002) argues that internal marketing is an effective technique that can be helpful in developing emotional relationship with employees and other functional units (e.g., human resources) often lack the marketing skills necessary for successful communications.

Definitions of internal marketing view and treat employees as internal customers who must be participants in the maintenance and development of the corporate brand. The purpose of internal marketing is to positively influence the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of the employees through the use of certain processes and activities (Khan & Stanton, 2010). If we consider sponsorship as a part of these processes, it could be claimed that sponsorship can influence customers' beliefs and attitude. Then, Employees as the internal customers of organization could be also influenced by companies' sponsorship efforts. Because of the lack of research in sponsorship field and the ambiguity of its internal results, this research aims to represent a model in which sponsorship is considered as an internal marketing tool. It also tries to explain employees' behavior with regard to employer's sponsorship efforts.

Conceptual model and hypotheses

The role of team identification in forming sponsorship effects

Various terms have been used in the sponsorship literature to describe the psychological connection of a person to a sport team, such as Team identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann et al., 2001; Sutton et al., 1997), attractiveness (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989), psychological attachment (Funk et al., 2000; Kwon & Armstrong, 2004; Tsiotsou & Alexander, 2009), team loyalty (Wakefield & Sloan, 1995) and association (Gladden et al., 1998). Sport team identification has been claimed as an important index that influences people's perception of sponsorship (Wang et al., 2012). Identification is an experience that occurs in people's life and creates an opportunity for self-expression and communication with others. Identification is defined as a perceived oneness with or belongingness to a group of which the person is a member (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). Moreover, team identification refers to one level of attachment to, or concern about, a particular sport team (Wang et al., 2012). In other words, identification is a dynamic process in which a sport object can be used by an individual to develop strong attitude and self-expression (Funk & James, 2006). Sport team identification differs among people. Fans with a less team identification have passive relationships with team and usually are attracted to a team for fun or communication with others. While fans with high team identification are so loyal that consider the team to have a very important role in their life. They consider team's successes and failures as their own successes and failures. This loyalty is a long lasting behavior and the person demonstrates patronage behavior to sponsor (Gwinner and Swanson 2003). Although team identification variable has been more used in consumer research, we can use this concept in clarifying employees' reaction to sponsorship through applying social identification theory and psychological contract theory.

Social identification theory proposes that people classify into various social categories in order to in order to facilitate self-definition within their own social environment (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). When one considers himself as a member of a specific group, some kind of feeling to the group is generated that makes him behave in a manner that is congruent with his personal and group identity (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). This is because group norms control person's expected behavior in different situations (Madrigal., 2000). An individual's relationship with a sport object has been found to provide a sense of attachment through a connection with various facets of that object (Filo, Funk and O'Brain 2010). According to Turner (1984), when people have the same social identification they think in the same way and subsequently become loyal citizens or fans. So when employees be aware that the company, customers and coworkers all possess a same social identification (all are the fans of sponsored team or sport event), they will be motivated to increase their commitment toward company. Applied to corporate sports sponsorship, this concept suggests that if employees perceive that the company, the customers, and the coworkers share the identity of being a fan of a sponsored sport, then employees will be motivated to increase their commitment to the firm (Hickman et al., 2005). Employees' response to company's sponsorship efforts could be also clarified by using psychological contract theory. Psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1989) refers to employees' perception of mutual obligations that exist between themselves and the employing organization (Chen & Chiu, 2009). In other words, this theory expresses an unwritten contract between company and employees that specifies both sides' duties in relation to each other (Rousseau, 1995). The expectations in this contract consist in only those expectations that emanate from perceived explicit or implicit commitments by the employer (Chen & Chiu, 2009). In other phrase, employees define their own duties and promises on the basis of employer's efforts. Psychological contracts are key determinants of employees' attitude and behavior in the workplace that is not necessarily indicated in formal contract (Schein, 1980). Employees develop their psychological contracts based on their perceptions of the policies and practices, culture and procedures of the organization and the promises made by its representatives. When employees perceive that the organization has fulfilled effectively its obligations and kept its promises they become more satisfied with their jobs and become more committed to their in-roles and extra roles (Shen, 2010). According to Russo (1995), organizations form the psychological contract with employees through transmitting different signals to them. Consequently, companies by sponsoring employees' favorite team, transfer the message of

their support from employees to them. According to organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and social exchange theories (Blau, 1964), if employees feel that the organization pays enough attention to their needs and wants, they will try to compensate this support and attention in a way (Cheung & Law., 2008; Zagenczyk et al., 2011). Hickman et al, (2005) state that sponsorship could make this mutual feeling happen. These researchers in their research indicated that when the company sponsors employees' favorite team, they become motivated to improve their performance and pay more attention to customers' needs and wants. So we can claim that:

H1. Team identification is positively related to organizational identification

Team identification and organizational identification

Organizational identification represents individual's psychological attachment to his organization. According to Mael and Ashforth (1992), organizational identification is a perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization's success and failures as one's own. Companies use different communicative tools like sponsorship to not only improve their organization image among customers, but also to increase prestige of organization among employees (Khan & Stanton, 2010). Therefore, if employees feel that company's sponsorship efforts in sponsoring their favorite team is effective, their organizational identification will increase. Employees, who are interested in sponsored event or have the opportunity to participate in it, may have higher organizational identification and commitment (Khan & Stanton, 2010). In other words, when firms support teams popular with employees, they merge the identity and success of the team with that of the corporation and team identification leads to organizational identification (Hickman et al., 2005). Madrigal (2001), states that the more be one's team identification, the more will be his support of the sponsor. Consequently, the more be the employees' team identification, the more will be their organizational identification. This relationship has been also approved in Hickman, Lawrence and Ward (2005) research. Moreover if employees have a positive attitude toward companies sponsorship efforts, their organizational identification will increase (Khan & Stanton, 2010), that team identification can result in such attitudes in employees. So we can say that:

H2. Team identification is positively related to organizational identification

Team identification and the company's perceived external prestige

According to Khan and Stanton (2010) Sponsorship can impact employees directly and indirectly. Direct impact occurs when employees become aware of their organization's sponsorship activities, or hear about that employees may also be influenced indirectly by corporate sponsorship. This effect stems from person's interactions with other people (like friends, family members, customers and general public) and receiving feedback from them (perceived external prestige). According to Acito and Ford (1980), boundary-spanning employees have a greater chance of obtaining feedback on their organization's proportional program. However, even employees in a back-office role may still be influenced by other people's views on the company's sponsorship program as such feedback may be provided by the employees' family members and friends (Khan & Stanton, 2010). Khan and Stanton (2010) state that employees' positive perception of company's sponsorship activities could positively influence Company's perceived external prestige, so:

H3. Team identification is positively related to sponsor perceived external prestige

Team external prestige and team identification

Team identification as an antecedent of sport sponsorship is influenced by different factors. Team prestige (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Kim et al., 2010), sport involvement (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009) and personality traits (Donavan., 2005), are all factors that determine the degree of team identification in people. Team external prestige is one of the sport sponsorship antecedents (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) that have entered to this field from the organizational psychology literature. Organization perceived external prestige, indicates the individual's perception of the quality of outsiders viewpoint toward the organization (Kim et al., 2010; Witting, 2006; Smidts et al., 2001). Based on this concept, we can claim that team external prestige is also the individual's perception of the quality of outsiders viewpoint toward his favorite team. Perceived external prestige is generally treated as an individual-level variable in that it concerns individual's interpretations and assessments of organization's prestige based on their own exposure to information about the organization, therefore, fan's of the same team may have different perceptions of its external prestige (Kim et al, 2010). Perceived external prestige may result from various sources of information, such as the opinions of reference groups, word of mouth, publicity, external company controlled information, and even internal communication about how the company is perceived by outsiders (Witting, 2006). According to Hickman et al (2005), identifying with a specific social group, can influence individuals in two ways. First it reduces uncertainty about the social environment and guides peoples' perceptions and behaviors with respect to their relations with others. The second role of social identification is to enhance self-esteem. Self-esteem enhancement can occur when social group members strive together for a valuable goal (for instance, the company's or sport team's success). The more prestigious the team, the greater the potential boost to self-esteem (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and as a result, team identification will be also increased. In organization psychology literature, the relationship between perceived external prestige and organizational identification has been clearly confirmed (for example: Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Smidts et al., 2001; Cornwell & Coote, 2005). The results of these researches represent that perceived external prestige has a significant effect on organizational identification. Similarly, perceived external prestige could also have an important role in team identification. The main idea of this relationship inspired by Gwinner's and Swanson's (2003) research. The authors showed that team

identification with a university football team will be stronger when the associated university is perceived to be prestigious. Moreover, Kim et al (2010) in their research on 300 students of different universities, indicated that students' perceptions of external prestige of athletic programs in the university had a positive effect on identification with athletic programs. If the person feels his favorite team has a positive image in community, his team identification will increase and vice versa. So it can be stated that:

H4. Team prestige is positively related to team identification

External image of an organization can also influence organizational identification and commitment. In support of this claim, it could be stated that most people desire to belong to an organization that is believed to have socially valued characteristics (Kang et al., 2011). As previously mentioned, the relationship between perceived external prestige and organizational identification has been confirmed in different researches (Fuller et al., 2006; Smid et al., 2001). Similarly, the relationship between organizational identification and organizational commitment has been analyzed in numerous researches (DeConinck, 2011; Bedian & Arthur, 2007; Bergami et al., 2000). In line with these studies and those on commitment, which suggest that commitment can be conceptualized as an individual's identification, involvement, and loyalty to the belonging organization or career, it is logical to expect commitment to be related to perceived external prestige (Kang et al., 2011). Herrbach, Mignonac and Gatignon (2004) and Kang, Stewart and Kim (2011) found out there is a positive relationship between perceived external prestige and organizational commitment. In a like manner, we hypothesize that the employees who have an appropriate perception of company's external prestige get more interested to organization and become more committed to it. So:

H5. Organizational identification is positively related to organizational commitment

H6. Sponsor perceived external prestige is positively related to Organizational identification

H7. Sponsor perceived external prestige is positively related to organizational commitment

According to social identity theory, individuals from the same social group (e.g., fans of the same team) will treat each other more favorably than they would if they were from different groups (Hickman et al., 2005). Wann and Branscomb (1993) found that people with a strong fan identity feel that it is important that friends also have a strong identification with the team, and they are more willing to share resources with fans of the same team. Coworkers and other employees can be classified as the fan group of a specific team. According to Hickman, Lawrence and Ward (2005) employees who perceive that the company, the customers and the coworkers share the identity of being a fan of sponsored team, will be motivated to increase their identification and commitment. Moreover, if the person feels that his favorite team is popular in society, and when he sees his employer sponsors this popular team, company's perceived external prestige also increases in him. Worchel et al (1998) indicated that social contagion can result in increasing individual's productivity within the group. So it could be said that sponsorship outcomes can be moderated based on the degree of social contagion among employees and other members of society. In other words, intensity of the relationship between team identification and its outcomes is influenced by employees' perception of the degree of team popularity among other employees and community members. So it can be stated that:

H8. Social contagion has a positive moderation effect on the relationship between team identification and PEP

H9. Social contagion has a positive moderation effect on the relationship between team identification and Organizational identification

H10. Social contagion has a positive moderation effect on the relationship between team identification and organizational commitment

All hypotheses were presented in the following proposed model (figure 1).

Methodology

Questionnaires were collected from employees of two major sponsors of a professional football team in Iran in the fall of 2012. A convenience sampling method was used to distribute the questionnaires. The sponsors (two private bank) have been working as an official sponsor of this premier league of football team for 2 years. Of the 400 Questionnaires distributed, complete data were obtained from 362. The majority of respondents have been working in this organization over 3 years (51%). About 86 percent of respondents were fans of the sponsored team for at least 5 years and the majority of them were 30 to 35 (49%) years old and male (72%).

Measurement

The measurement model of the study that includes the endogenous and the exogenous variables is presented in Table I. The six constructs used were measured as follows: *Team prestige*: Team prestige was measured by three-item five point Likert Scale with anchors of "strongly disagree" (1) to "Strongly agree" (5). The items used in the scale are subset of scale used by Mael and Ashforth (1992). These items have been successfully used by Gwiner and Swanson (2003) and Kim et al (2010) to assess perceived prestige of a university sport team. *Organizational prestige*: Organizational prestige was measured by Mael and Ashforth's (1992) organizational prestige scale and operation analyzed by means of four items. A five point Likert scale with anchors of

“strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (5) was utilized. Organizational identification and team identification: Employee identification towards sport team and Sponsor was measured by a six-item scale adapted from the research of Mael and Ashforth's (1992), and Gwinner and Swanson (2003). But one item of each construct was dropped due to low factor loadings. Five point Likert scales anchored by strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) were used to measure both constructs. Organizational commitment: Six-items were initially used to measure affective organizational commitment but one of them was dropped due to low factor loadings. The items were originally proposed and tested by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993). A five point Likert scale with anchors of “strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (5) was utilized. Social contagion: Social contagion was measured by two-item scale adapted from the research of Hickman, Lawrence and Ward (2005). Respondents responded to the items using a five point Likert scale, anchored by strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

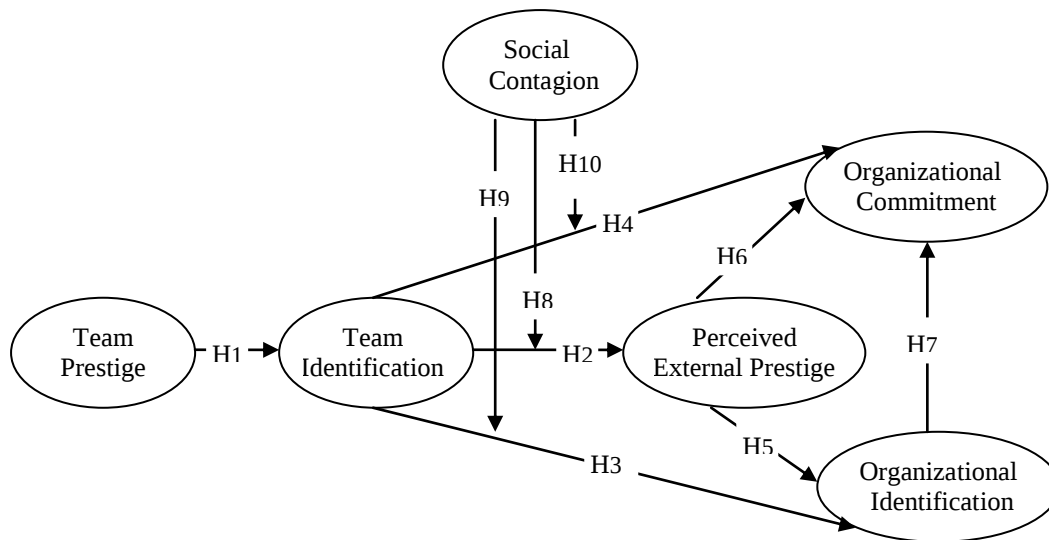


Figure1. Proposed conceptual model.

Table 1. Measurement model and confirmatory factor results.

endogenous and the exogenous variables	Factor loadings
Team Prestige ($\alpha=0.83$)	
People in my community think highly of Football team	0.79
It is considered prestigious in my community to be a fan of	0.82
...has an outstanding reputation in my community	0.78
organizational prestige ($\alpha=0.92$)	
People in my community think highly of my organization	0.88
My organization is considered one of the best	0.90
Employees of other organizations would be proud to work in my organization	0.86
It is considered prestigious in my community to be an employee of	0.81
My organization have a good reputation in my community	0.75
Organizational identification ($\alpha=0.89$)	
When someone criticizes (name of school), it feels like a personal insult.	0.78
I am very interested in what others think about my organization	0.88
When I talk about this organization, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'	0.86
this organization successes are my successes	0.81
When someone praises this organization, it feels like a personal compliment	0.62
Fan identification ($\alpha=0.92$)	
Being a fan of the ... football team is very important to me	0.89
I consider myself to be a real fan of the ... football team	0.90
I am very interested in what others think about ... football	0.83
When someone criticize ... football, I take it personally	0.75
It is important to me to be a ... football fan	0.81

Affective commitment($\alpha=0.91$)	
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization	0.82
I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own	0.88
I feel "emotionally attached" to this organization	0.81
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me	0.82
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization	0.82
Social contagion($\alpha=0.62$)	
The people I work with are excited about football team my primary employer sponsors	0.62
The customers I meet are interested in football team sponsored by my primary employer	0.86
$\chi^2=455.82$ ($p=0.00$), $df=260$, $RMSEA=0.04$, $NFI=0.98$, $CFI=0.99$, $GFI=0.90$, $AGFI=0.88$	

Results

The data were analyzed using LISREL 8.54 in to stage. First, Confirmatory Factor Analysis were used to test data fit in hypothesized measurement model. Then Structural Equation Modeling was used to test the entire model and hypothesis. Prior to testing the research hypotheses, the dimensionality and validity for the measures were tested by a confirmatory factor analysis. The 25 items used to measure the six latent constructs were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis. The results of CFA indicated that the latent constructs examined in this study have an acceptable level of validity. All of the standardized factor loadings exceed 0.60 and are significant (Kline, 1994) providing evidence of convergent validity ($P<0.001$). Although the χ^2 goodness of fit index was statistically significant ($\chi^2=455.82$ with the 260 degree of freedom $P=0.00$). The non-normed fit index (NNFI) is 0.99 and the comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.98. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) are 0.90 and 0.88, respectively. Internal consistency was evaluated by using Cronbach α . The discriminant validity for each construct was determined by comparing the average variance extracted with the square of the correlation (ϕ^2) between the factor and each of the other constructs. In this measurement model, the average variance extracted for each construct was greater than the squared correlations between it and each of the other constructs. Thus, the conditions for convergent and discriminant validity were satisfied indicating that the constructs are measured reliably and can be discriminated.

The structural model

Table 2 presents the correlation between constructs. Based on the acceptable fit of the CFA model, the next step was to test the hypothesized model. To test the hypothesized relationships, a structural model was estimated. The final path model with standardized. Path coefficients and t -values are shown in Table 3. The model has a χ^2 value of 268, $df=114$, and $p<0.0001$. An examination of the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and RMSEA provide evidence of model fit. To test the hypothesis of 9, 10 and 11, the modified structural equation modeling (MSEM) was used. For this purpose, first the R change test was administered to determine whether the social contagion is a moderated variable or not, as seen in table 4. After adding the interaction term to the regression model, the F changes for the all three variables were significant. Therefore, the assumption of equality of coefficients is rejected. This means that social alliance has a moderator effect on the outcomes of sponsorship. When we compute the interaction terms, if variables simply multiplied together, Multicollinearity problem may occur using regression. To address this problem the standard values of variables were used.

Table 2. Correlation between constructs.

	MEAN	SD	TP	FI	OP	OI	AC	SC
TP	4.1	0.75	1					
FI	4.0	0.90	0.19	1				
OP	3.6	0.93	0.23	0.53	1			
OI	3.6	0.86	0.12	0.64	0.77	1		
AC	4.0	0.92	0.16	0.60	0.72	0.72	1	
SC	3.2	0.89	-0.01	0.36	0.36	0.42	0.46	1

Table 3. Summary of causal effects in the final model.

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient	t-value
H1	Team Prestige $\rightarrow$ Team Identification	0.20	3.23
H2	Team Identification $\rightarrow$ Organizational Prestige	0.59	10.89
H3	Team Identification $\rightarrow$ Organizational Identification	0.30	6.65
H4	Team Identification $\rightarrow$ Affective Commitment	0.24	4.14
H5	Organizational Prestige $\rightarrow$ Organizational Identification	0.67	12.24
H6	Organizational Prestige $\rightarrow$ Affective Commitment	0.37	4.30
H7	Organizational Identification $\rightarrow$ Affective Commitment	0.31	3.07

$\chi^2 = 349.36$ (p=0.000), df=223, RMSEA=0.04, NFI=0.98, NNFI=0.99 CFI= 0.99, GFI=0.92, AGFI=0.90			
H8	ZFI*ZSC → OP	0.21	4.06
H9	ZFI*ZSC → OI	0.21	4.93
H10	ZFI*ZSC → AC	0.34	7.70

Table.4 R square change test.

		R	R square	Adjusted R square	R square change	F change	Sig. F change
OP	Model 1	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	67.47	0.000
	Model 2	0.33	0.33	0.32	0.04	20.01	0.000
OI	Model 1	0.64	0.41	0.40	0.41	115.57	0.000
	Model 2	0.67	0.45	0.44	0.04	25.61	0.000
AC	Model 1	0.60	0.36	0.43	0.36	97.11	0.000
	Model 2	0.69	0.47	0.51	0.10	67.59	0.000

Discussion and Conclusion

The study aimed to test an integrated model of sport sponsorship, in which employees' team identification was proposed to influence organizational identification and affective commitment. First, essential definitions and concepts of sport sponsorship were reviewed and sponsorship effects on employees and its antecedent were analyzed based on previous researches. Results of data analysis clarified that team identification as a basis for employees' response to sport sponsorship, exhibited fairly strong total effects on organizational perceived external prestige. This relationship for the first time was analyzed in this research and the high degree of resulting path coefficient and t-value indicates that when a person notices that his employer supports his favorite team, he feels that all of his efforts are along with supporting his favorite team. So the employees (fans) as a part of Sponsor Company feel involved in team's failures and successes. This interest and commitment to the team result in person's positive attitudes toward his favorite team to be transferred to the sponsor. So sponsor's image improves before employees. Moreover, company's sponsorship efforts can be reported to the person through friends, family members and other fans (customers etc.), and this also in turn, results in improvement in company's prestige before employees. Drawing on key tenets of social identity theory, we present evidence demonstrating that employee's perception, attitude and behavior are positively affected by sport sponsorship by means of affinity with the sport team.

Employees with high team identification usually are influenced by company's sponsorship efforts more. Since the fans love their favorite team, they want to be a part of it and form their social identity accordingly. In other words, fans become the members of a reference group named "supporters". On the other hand, the fans notice that Sponsor Company sponsors the player or the team they support. Therefore, group norms create positive attitude in fans toward the sponsor and this positive attitude shows itself in the shape of behavioral and attitudinal outcomes like organizational identification and commitment. Team identification can also influence employees' organizational identification and commitment through company's perceived external prestige. The relationship between perceived external prestige and organizational identification and organizational commitment has been confirmed in previous researches. In this research, the results of structural model also showed that perceived external prestige as a mediator variable influences the relationship between team identification and organizational identification and commitment. Regardless of sponsorship matters, results of this research showed that organizational identification can also result in organizational commitment in employees. Organizational identification makes employees do their tasks with more energy and motivation. Only in this situation managers of organization can ensure employees' presence and commitment and they will be able to design long term plans for the organization. As mentioned before, team identification influences sponsorship outcomes intensively.

For the employees who are not interested in a team, the employer's sponsorship activities will not be important. Therefore, the main challenge for the managers before entering sponsorship plans and efforts is to determine the degree of team identification in employees. Team identification as one of the sponsorship antecedents, is influenced by different factors. One factor for determining the degree of team identification in individuals is team prestige that was analyzed for the first time in this research. The results of structural model showed that the more the team prestige be, the more team identification will be. In other words, people prefer to be the fans of a team which has a proper place and prestige in community so that they can be proud of it. So companies should consider some specific methods and procedures in their sponsorship efforts to improve team prestige among employees and other members of the community. This can be achieved through team participation in social activities and charities, because team presence in these fields can influence public opinion intensively. Managers can also increase team identification by providing opportunities for employees to attend team's events through strategies like granting free tickets.

In this research, the moderator role of social contagion in forming sponsorship outcomes was also analyzed. The results of path analysis showed that social contagion has a positive moderator effect on the relationship between team identification, perceived external prestige and organizational identification and organizational commitment. In other words, if colleagues, customers and employees' friends and relatives are also interested in sponsored team, team identification will have more effect on employees. This is because when the person notices that people around him are also interested in the given team, not only the degree of team identification and organizational identification increases in him, but also he feels proud for working in a company that sponsors his

and people's around him favorite team. Therefore, the person will try very hard to help the organization so that the team can achieve its goals. In this way he feels that he has done an important service to satisfy people around him.

Limitations and future research

Every research may face some limitations. So generalization of the results should be done carefully. These limitations can be a guide for future research. The first limitation of the research is that it relates to a specific sport (football), a specific sport team and the main sponsors of it. So the results of this research project only the viewpoints of employees of these companies. Future research should make the results more generalizable by developing this research. This research can also be conducted on the teams' secondary sponsors to determine whether being the main or secondary sponsor has a significant effect on the quality of sponsorship outcomes. The second limitation is that in this research, only a limited number of sponsorship outcomes were analyzed and sponsorship effect on other factors like internal brand, social identity and organizational citizenship behavior is still ambiguous. Future research can investigate these cases too. Investigating different factors that may have significant effect on team identification is another case that should be considered in future research. In this research, only the prestige variable was considered as an antecedent of team identification.

So the role of other factors in making team identification can be investigated. Some of these factors are psychological and demographic variables, sport involvement and team brand personality. Moreover the match-up between sponsor and sponsored case that has been intensively concentrated in research related to sponsorship effect on consumers, should be investigated too. Employment status is another factor that was not considered in this research. Investigating whether being full time or part time employee can influence sponsorship outcomes is essential. Finally, in this research it was not clear whether organizational identification and commitment influence company's tangible outputs like service improvement and consumer satisfaction. Future research can investigate this area too.

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