

# SLEEPING BAG SPONSORSHIP MODEL: WARMING UP TO CORPORATE SPONSORS

## Introduction

The Sleeping Bag Sponsorship Model (SBSM) builds upon existing research to sequentially and holistically explain the mechanisms within a well-leveraged, consumer-focused event sponsorship. The SBSM transforms high-affinity relationships that individuals possess with properties to include consumer allegiance toward sponsors. Similar to Poon and Prendergast's (2006) sponsorship framework, SBSM follows Lavidge and Steiner's (1961) hierarchy of effects. Utilizing this hierarchy of effects, we assert that a fan also becomes a sponsor allegiant consumer through a three-stage, cognitive-affective-conative progression. In the SBSM, fans who become sponsor allegiant consumers, psychologically move from a cognitive catalyst in the Activation Awareness stage to an affective catalyst in the Affinity Development stage, ultimately exhibiting Consumer-Based Identification (CBI) (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010) with the sponsor's brand(s) through nonrecursive, behavioral outcomes in the Affinity Resilience stage.

Unlike the framework proposed by Poon and Prendergast (2006), SBSM employs theoretical processes influenced by Funk and James' (2001, 2006) Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) and image transference (Gwinner, 1997; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999) to sequentially transition between the three hierarchies. The original PCM uses a four-level framework—awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance—to describe an individual's progress from a state of awareness to one of allegiance (Funk & James, 2001). Later revisions to PCM introduced mechanisms based on the attachment process within and between the four outcome-based stages of allegiance (Funk & James, 2006). Given that SBSM is borrowing the attraction and centrality (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004)—or the involvement—individuals possess with a sponsored property, elements of image transference are incorporated within and between the four levels of PCM. That is, image transference serves as the mechanism and indicator for image change over time within the SBSM; reflecting attitudinal change as well. Moreover, there is a cyclical process in the Affinity Development stage of the model that explains the need for individuals to reassess their fit perceptions between the property and sponsor as more information is obtained about the sponsor through the attachment process (i.e., its sponsorship portfolio and concurrent sponsors).

The manner in which transitional mechanisms are used within SBSM align with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982), which would contextually suggest that a successful sponsorship would lead fans to associate the sponsoring corporation as a property supporter (similar to the fan); positioning the sponsoring corporation as part of the in-group. The more congruent the images of the sponsor and property are to one another, the more receptive the property's fans will be to the sponsor.

As fans progress into later stages of SBSM, their level of involvement, and consequently, identification with the property sponsor increases. Thus, as a sleeping bag obtains warmth from the individual it surrounds, a corporation can utilize the sponsorship activation of a high-affinity property it sponsors to share in the allegiance the property receives from individuals.

## Stage 3: Affinity Resilience

SMSB defines image congruence as a sponsor's image being nearly identical to that of the property in the mind of the fan. Therefore, the fan will have both a positive team image and a positive sponsor brand image. Following the affinity development stage, affective intensity for the sponsor in conjunction with image congruence will move the fan into a mindset of image synergy between the sponsor and property. Image synergy will encourage a conative engagement with the sponsor from the fan, exemplifying brand loyalty (Funk & Pastore, 2000).

Fans within this stage of SBSM will exhibit strong sponsor consumption intentions, through positive word-of-mouth (WOM) and perceived fan base encouragement; purchasing the sponsor's products more than its competitor's (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). This consumption behavior process these behaviors aligns with TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Consumption then, is expected to strengthen brand loyalty.

It is proposed within SBSM that the relationships between brand loyalty, intentions, and consumption strengthen as behaviors continue over time; growing in resilience to change. Eventually, the fan/consumer identification with the brand becomes strong, and he or she moves from a state of brand loyalty to one of CBI. As loyalty is longitudinal in nature (Heere & Dickson, 2008), the following propositions are made:

**P9:** The longer a fan maintains image congruence between a property and sponsor, the more loyalty resilience the fan will exhibit toward the sponsor.

**P10:** A fan habitually consuming the sponsor's brands/products will eventually transition from a state of brand loyalty to a state of CBI through an increase in personal brand identification.

**P11:** Fans who reach a state of CBI are more resilient to change than fans that are brand loyal.

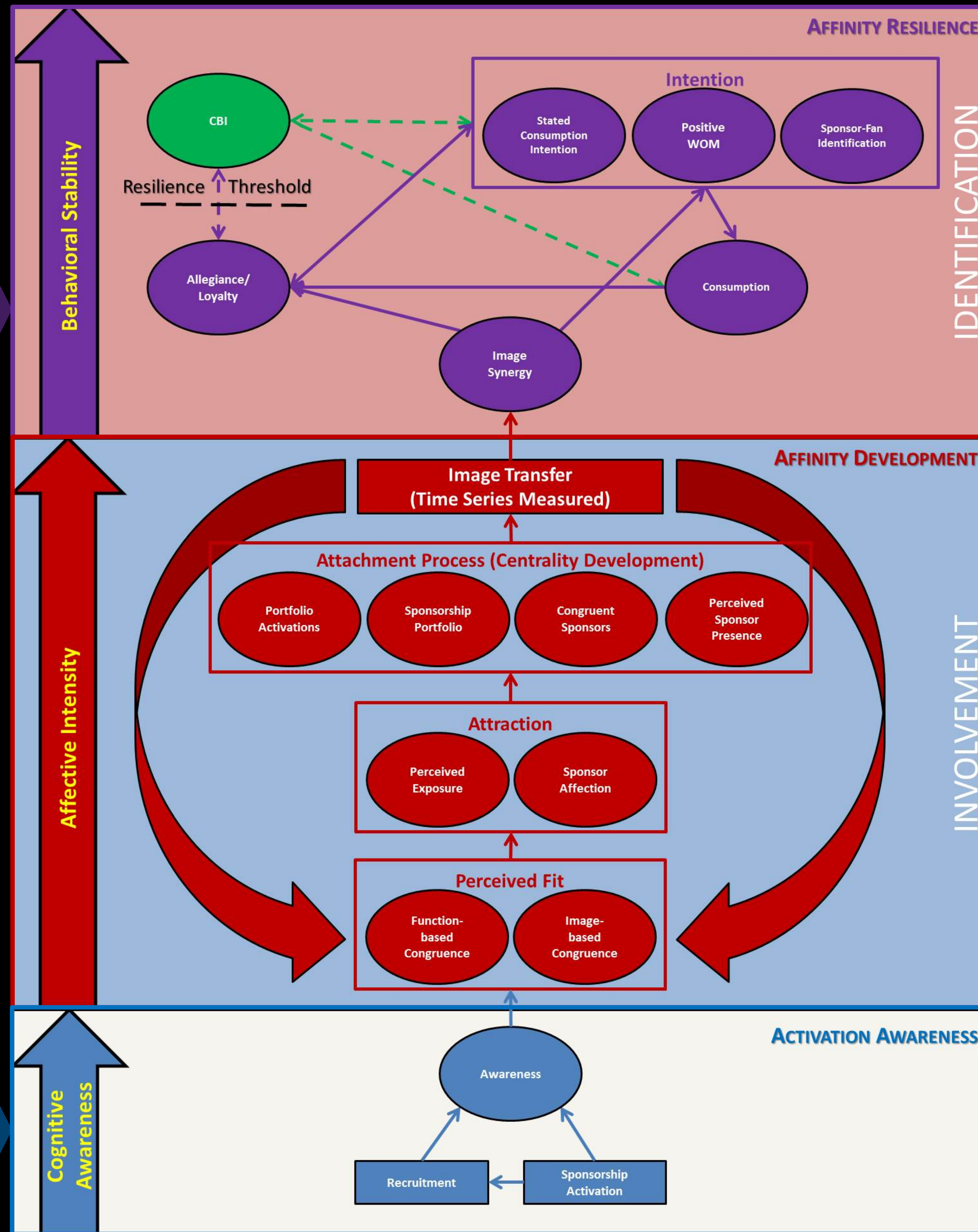
## Stage 1: Activation Awareness

Awareness as explained within PCM is cognitive, and refers to when a fan knows that a corporation is a sponsor of his or her team. With greater proliferation of sponsorships, comes clutter, and sponsor leveraging must break through the clutter to reach the attention of fans (Cornwell et al., 2005; DeGaris, West, & Dodds, 2009). Leveraging may engage the fan directly, or other members of the fan base may communicate knowledge of sponsor leveraging or the sponsor-property relationship to the fan as a form of social recruitment. Therefore, the following propositions are made:

**P1:** Sponsorship leveraging has a positive and direct relationship with fan sponsorship awareness.

**P2:** Leveraging has a positive and direct relationship with recruitment.

**P3:** Recruitment has a positive and direct relationship with fan sponsorship awareness.



## Testing Recommendations

- As effects are to be peripheral and over time, a growth modeling approach should be implemented
- The operationalization of constructs should be a collaborative effort between scholars and practitioners; benefiting from both theoretical knowledge and conventional wisdom (Henderson et al., 2004; Weick, 1989)
- Conduct field testing. Sponsorships are not leveraged in a vacuum; therefore, we assert that studies should be conducted in "real-life" scenarios to best capture sponsorship effects.

- Sample season ticket holders from a professional sport franchise, as universities would include another point of attachment, complicating an already complex model.
- Working with the team, incorporate intermittent online surveying of season ticket holders over a period of years. Season ticket holders would agree to participate in the study, receiving perks from participating sponsors
- Track consumption through discount cards that work like unlimited-manufacturer's coupons
- Include sponsors from various sponsor categories

## Stage 2: Affinity Development

Perceived fit between a property and sponsor influences fans attitudes toward the sponsor, and their intentions to purchase the sponsor's product (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Once fans become aware of a sponsor, SBSM proposes that they will attempt to find a "fit" between the property and the sponsor. Literature suggests that fit can be assessed through either function-based or image-based relevance (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999), or prominence (Johar & Pham, 1999). The better the fan perceives the fit between a sponsor and property, the greater the likelihood that the fan will try the sponsor's product (Speed & Thompson, 2000). Hence, the following proposition is made:

**P4:** The closer fans' perceived fit between a property and sponsor, the greater the level of attraction the fan will have for the sponsor.

Following attraction, motivated through increased affective intensity toward the sponsor (Wakefield & Bennett, 2010), the fan is expected to "close the gap" in perceived fit through image transference, and will seek more information to justify this improved fit perception. Research conducted with Mere Exposure Theory (Moreland & Beach, 1992; Zajonc, 1968, 1980) supports this transition from attraction to attachment. Increasing affection (liking) through mere exposure effects, positively affects both familiarity (presence) and similarity (congruence/fit); referring to the process as the development of affinity (Moreland & Beach, 1992). The process identified within Moreland and Beach (1992) is highly representative of SBSM's attachment process.

Fans will seek external but sponsor-related sources to accomplish this—examining the sponsor's portfolio of properties (Chien, Cornwell, & Pappu, 2011) and concurrent sponsors (Carrillat et al., 2010). Moreover, the perceived presence of the sponsor through leveraging with the property and its portfolio of properties is expected to influence the magnitude of image transfer to the sponsor. With new information, further assessment of fit can occur. Thus, the following propositions are made:

**P5:** Fans' perceptions of a sponsor's portfolio being prominent and relevant will lead to greater involvement with the sponsor through achieved image congruence with the property.

**P6:** Fans' perceptions of concurrent sponsors for a given sponsor's property being prominent and relevant will lead to greater involvement with the sponsor through achieved image congruence with the property.

**P7:** Fans' perceptions of the sponsor's presence through leveraging of its sponsorship with the property being prominent and relevant will lead to greater involvement with the sponsor through achieved image congruence with the property.

**P8:** Fans' perceptions of the sponsor's leveraging with its other sponsorships being prominent and relevant will lead to greater involvement with the sponsor through achieved image congruence with the property.

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