

# FAN AND CONSUMER: A SPONSOR BRAND CONSUMPTION MODEL

## INTRODUCTION

Within sport management literature, social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) has been used as a theoretical framework for examining sponsorship effects (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2001). Social identity theory, however, focuses on intergroup relationships and not how individuals categorize themselves into particular social groups. Moreover, existing sponsorship frameworks (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Poon & Prendergast, 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000) arguably fail to examine possible behavioral controls or evaluative feedback processes explicitly; postulating in a cross-sectional context.

In recent years, practitioners have become more focused on return-on-investment (ROI)(Maestas, 2009; Pearsall, 2010). Consequently, understanding sponsorship effects on actual brand consumption (purchasing) behavior is growing in importance. Sponsorship effects on brand consumption, however, are difficult to isolate from other marketing and advertising effects (Maestas, 2009). Therefore, identifying stable relationships between consumption behavior and its antecedents is essential—allowing for more accurate projection of sponsor brand consumption when isolation of effects is not possible. Determining potential behavioral controls is also necessary for developing accurate projections.

The proposed model for evaluating individual's consumption behaviors of a team sponsor's brand utilizes a framework that incorporates a social identity approach (Tajfel, 1982; Turner & Oakes, 1986) into the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2002). Combining these theories is necessary to address the triadic relationship within sponsorship (fan-team-sponsor). A social identity approach is necessary for explaining how a fan's relationship with his or her favorite team can encourage them to become a loyal consumer of a sponsor's brand. The theory of planned behavior explicitly considers perceived behavioral controls (Ajzen, 2002), which is another impetus for this model. Within the model, sponsor brand attachment is examined as a perceived behavioral control of sponsorship effects on consumption of the sponsor's brand.

Future testing of the proposed model will address two research questions:

**R1: How do fans categorize consumption of a sponsor's brand into their perceptions of normative fan behavior?**

**R2: Does sponsor brand attachment effectively serve as a perceived behavioral control of sponsorship effects on sponsor brand consumption?**

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## PROPOSED MODEL

Team attachment is defined in the proposed model as the psychological connection to a sports team. This definition—or similar—has been applied to other constructs, such as attraction (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989), involvement (Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997), association (Gladden, Mime, & Sutton, 1998), and team identification (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Previous conceptual sponsorship models employing a social identity theory framework (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2001) propose and support that an individual's level of attachment (identification) has a direct and positive effect on their attitude towards a team's sponsor. That is, a highly identified fan will possess a stronger, positive attitude towards a team's sponsor given its association to the team.

Following the rationale of mere exposure effect (Moreland & Topolinski, 2010; Zajonc, 1968), the frequency with which an individual is exposed to the sponsorship leveraging of a particular sponsor is proposed to serve as a mediator between an individual's team attachment and his or her attitude towards that sponsor. A fan with high levels of team attachment is more likely to be exposed to sponsorship leveraging, and as a sponsor gains sponsorship exposure through leveraging activities, that fan's attitude towards the sponsor is expected to increase favorably.

While the theory of planned behavior typically follows a belief-attitude-intention-behavior progression (Ajzen, 2002), the fan's attitude towards a sponsor represents the sum of evaluative beliefs related to the sponsor (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Keller, 2003). Consequently, a fan's attitude towards a team's sponsor serves as an antecedent for a fan's level of attachment to the sponsor, his or her perceptions of normative fan behavior (involving the sponsor's brand), and his or her attitudinal loyalty toward the sponsor's brand.

Sponsor brand attachment (sponsor identification) is defined in the proposed model as the psychological connection to a sponsor's brand. It serves as a perceived behavioral control in that a fan is more likely to have intentions to purchase the sponsor's brand product(s) if they can identify with the brand. If a fan is unwilling to purchase a sponsor's brand because he or she does not see the sponsor's brand product(s) as useful (self-efficacy), or feels as though he/she has no control in benefitting from the sponsor's brand (controllability), then social assimilation and engagement (e.g. consumption) will be stunted (Ajzen, 2002).

Self-categorization theory states that individuals who are highly associated with a social group are more prone to depersonalize and self-stereotype themselves as an interchangeable member of that group (Turner, 2010). Consequently, their behaviors are intended to reflect the norms of that group. Thus, it is proposed that sponsor brand attachment will strongly influence how a fan will associate a sponsor's brand within his or her perceived norms of the fan base.

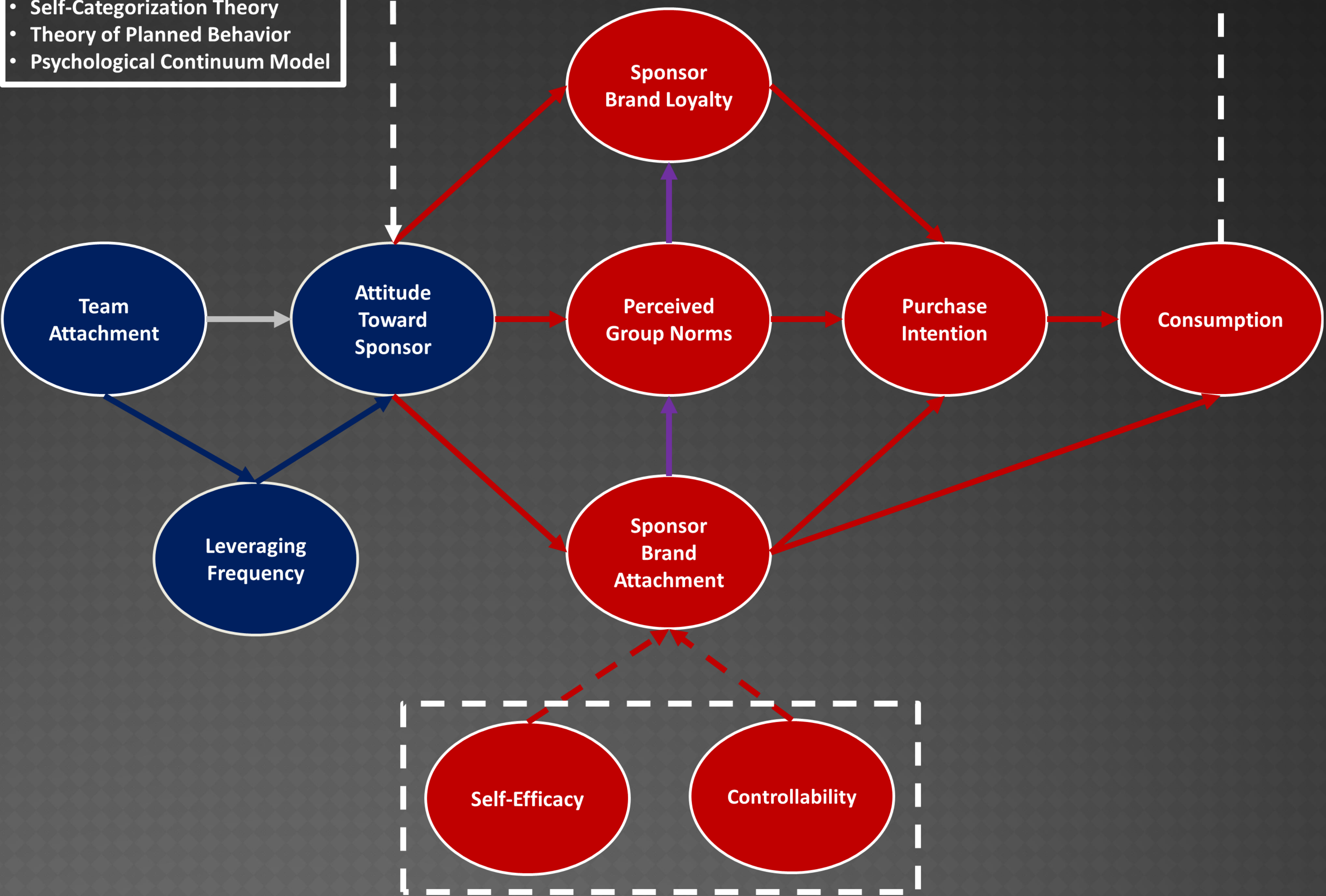
The social pressures a fan perceives to experience are represented through perceived group norms (Ajzen, 1991, 2002). A fan who perceives a sponsor's brand as an integral member of the fan base culture, is more likely to exhibit intentions to purchase the sponsor's brand. Also, over time, from his/her fan base identification, commitment to the sponsor's brand is more likely to occur in the form of loyalty.

Sponsor brand loyalty represents an extension of the fan's attitude toward a team's sponsor to that sponsor's brand. Sponsor brand loyalty is a process that an individual learns through a cognitive, affective, and conative progression (Oliver, 2010); thus, it is inherently longitudinal (Heere & Dickson, 2008). This hierarchical progression has been supported within a sponsorship context by Alexandris and Tsiotsou (2012). A fan with high attitudinal loyalty to a sponsor's brand will exhibit strong levels of commitment to the brand, associated with intentions to purchase the sponsor's brand.

Ultimately, if driven by strong attitudes towards the sponsor, sponsor brand attachment, perceived group norms, and sponsor brand loyalty will influence a fan's intention to purchase the sponsor's brand, and be its consumer. The consumption experience directly and indirectly moderates socialization constructs (sponsor brand attachment, perceived group norms, and sponsor brand loyalty); determining whether behavioral resilience in the fan as a consumer can be established.

## Theories Supported

- Social Identity Theory
- Mere Exposure Theory
- Self-Categorization Theory
- Theory of Planned Behavior
- Psychological Continuum Model



## PROPOSED MEASURES

**Team Attachment.** Eight items developed by James and Ross (2002) to be used. Four of these items focus on the internalization of the team within the individual's self-concept, while the remaining four items measure the individual's affective commitment to the team. A 5-pt Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) to be used to measure team attachment items.

**Perceived Leveraging of Sponsorship.** Two questions to be developed to measure perceived leveraging of sponsorship. The first question asks them how many times they recognized sponsor's leveraging initiatives within the arena during each game. The second question asks participants how much time was spent per game thinking about the sponsor's brand.

**Attitude Towards Sponsor.** Three items used by Alexandris and Tsiotsou (2012) for measuring attitude toward sponsorship to be adapted for use in this study. These items were originally used by Madrigal (2001) and Lee et al. (1997). A 5-pt Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) to be used to measure attitude toward sponsor items.

**Sponsor Brand Attachment.** The eight items developed by James and Ross (2002) for measuring team attachment were adapted to measure sponsor brand attachment. Four of these items focused on the internalization of the sponsor's brand within the individual's self-concept, while the remaining four items measure the individual's affective commitment to the sponsor's brand. A 5-pt Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) to be used to measure sponsor brand attachment items.

**Sponsor Brand Loyalty.** Items used by Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, and Exler (2008) to measure attitudinal loyalty to be adapted to measure sponsor brand loyalty. These items were originally adapted from scales used by Mahony, Madrigal, and Howard (2000), Kwon and Trail (2003), and Gladden and Funk (2001). A 5-pt Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) to be used to measure sponsor brand loyalty items.

**Perceived Group Norms.** Items used by Madrigal (2001) to be adapted to measure perceived group norms. A 5-pt Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) to be used to measure team attachment items.

**Purchase Intentions.** Two items used by Alexandris and Tsiotsou (2012) to be used to measure behavioral intentions. A 5-pt Likert scale, ranging from Highly Unlikely (1) to Highly Likely (5) to be used to measure purchase intention items.

**Consumption.** Actual consumption of sponsor's brand products will be based on units and dollars. These quantities will be obtained from data collected when participants use their universal manufacturer's coupons to buy the sponsor's brand products.

## IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, the proposed sponsorship model is the first known to the author to apply integrate a social identity approach with the theory of planned behavior; examining both the self-categorization process of a fan into a consumer of the sponsor's brand, and the use of sponsor brand attachment as a perceived behavioral control. Additionally, once validated, the proposed model would provide support to the applicability of the Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2006) as an appropriate sponsorship framework—as mechanisms of the model reflect the attachment process towards allegiance.

In a practical context, the model emphasizes the need for the experience external from sponsorship leveraging to be positive in order to generate a possible "halo effect" from sponsor brand loyalty. Thus, sport managers may want to consider "external reinforcement" strategies within their sponsorship leveraging. For example, on game days, staffing retail locations in proximity to a sponsored team's stadium with its best customer service representatives would be one such strategy. Sponsorship effects can be influenced from other company-enacted effects, and these effects should be considered when developing a sponsorship leveraging plan.