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To Name it or not Name it: Consumer Perspectives on Facility Naming Rights Sponsorship in Collegiate Athletics

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Collegiate athletics have become increasingly attractive for sponsorship investments, a trend that has also created some potentially negative side effects. How university stakeholders, such as students, perceive and respond to stadium naming rights sponsorship is a major concern to administrators of both athletic programs and business corporations. This study investigates students' beliefs about naming rights sponsorship, their attitudes toward commercialization, team and stadium identification, and perception of financial status, as well as how these factors affect naming rights sponsorship outcomes regarding attitude toward sponsor, purchase intention of sponsor's product, and willingness to attend sporting events. A theoretical model was proposed and tested, where the hierarchical paradigm of belief-attitude-behavior intention was confirmed to be relevant and applicable. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed significant (p < .05) influences of beliefs about naming rights, attitude toward commercialization, stadium identification, and perception of financial status on attitudes toward sponsor; attitudes toward sponsor and team identification on purchase intention of sponsor's product; and team identification, stadium identification, attitudes toward sponsor, and beliefs about naming rights sponsorships on willingness to attend sporting events. Stadium identification was identified as playing an important role in evaluating the effectiveness of a naming rights sponsorship. The study provides preliminary insight into the potential viability of naming rights sponsorships for intercollegiate athletics.

Introduction

Got $50 million? It could be (Your Name Here) Field at Husky Stadium. This was the title of an article in the *Seattle Times*, in which the authors reported that the University of Washington was selling naming rights to help pay for the renovation of Husky Stadium (Condotta, 2011). The school first looked for individuals or families before opening the opportunity to corporations. While putting names of donors on academic buildings has been a widely adopted fundraising approach for universities to fund construction projects, selling facility naming rights sponsorship in collegiate sports is a relatively new venture in recent years. In June 2011, Rutgers University engraved a new name on its football stadium, the High Point

Solutions Stadium, and became the 11th university to sell naming rights to its football stadium (Caldwell, 2011).

As a consistent and long-term source of income for professional sport franchises and a legitimate sponsorship opportunity for corporations, facility naming rights sponsorship has become an indispensable part of contemporary facility construction projects (Clark, Cornwell, & Pruitt, 2002; McCarthy & Irwin, 1998, Thornburg, 2003). In professional sports, the number of naming rights deals and their prices has continued to increase in recent years. In 2006, forty-four naming rights deals of sport facilities were signed, accumulatively accounting for $1.1 billion (Show, 2006). The record for the highest amount paid for naming rights was broken in 2010 by Citi Field and Barclays Center – each garnered $20 million per year for 20 years and a total of $400 million (Horrow & Swatek, 2010). By 2002, over 70% of the home stadia or arenas in the four major league professional sports (MLB, NBA, NFL, and NHL) had been named after corporate sponsors (Crompton & Howard, 2003). The expensive price illustrates how scarce and valuable these naming rights opportunities are. Nevertheless, limited opportunities and high cost of facility naming rights in major league professional sports have also led corporations to shift their targets toward collegiate sports in recent years.

College sports today are not merely intercollegiate athletic competitions; they are also multi-billion dollar enterprises (Fulks, 2000, Zhang, Won, & Pastore, 2005). Athletic directors must actively seek multi-million dollar licensing deals, corporate sponsorships, premium seating programs, and television contracts to keep their programs operating and sustainable (Greenberg, 2008). The soaring financial demands of facility expansion projects, coaches' salaries, and Title IX requirements have made it increasingly difficult for schools to support their program operations. In fact, more than 80% of institutions in the NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS, formerly Division I-A) reported a budget deficit in 2010 (Fulks, 2011).

Athletic facilities are a key factor in recruiting student athletes and promoting an institution's image. Facility capacities, modern construction structure, and installations of state-of-the-art equipment are also directly related to revenue generation (Zhang et al., 2005). Of the various expenditures in collegiate athletics, building or renovating sport facilities is one of the major costs and also the one that is most difficult to keep under control. For these reasons, U.S. colleges spent $15.2 billion on sport facility renovations between 1995 and 2004 (King, 2005). Many institutions had to take on long-term debt to construct new, brighter, and bigger facilities, a decision that placed potentially serious financial stress on their athletic programs and institutions (Eichelberger, 2008; Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010). Looking for corporate sponsorships to support such facility improvement has thus become a practicable option. For example, the University of Washington took a loan to pay for $200 million of the $250 million stadium renovation cost, relying on naming rights to raise the remaining $50 million (Condotta, 2011). Noticeably, of the 11 universities that have sold their football stadium naming rights, five were signed in just the past few years and at a price of over $20 million. Likely, more dramatic changes will occur in the collegiate naming rights sponsorship over the next 10 to 15 years (Wolf, 2007).

A contrasting perspective claims that collegiate athletics is widely regarded as one of the last amateur sport venues in the United States. There has always been skepticism and resistance against the increasing number of sponsorship agreements and the commercialism among the various stakeholders both within and outside many higher education institutions (Benford, 2007; Jensen & Butler, 2007). There are many issues about stadium naming rights sponsorship that have been debated since the early 1990s (Boyd, 2000; Chen & Stone, 2002; McCarthy & Irwin, 1998; Moorman, 2002). Boyd (2000) explained that stadium names in the United States usually conveyed a sense of the institution's history, recognition, and nostalgia. When a corporation places its name on a stadium, however, the only message sent is that the firm spent a lot of money on it. Several cases provide instances in which a stadium naming rights agreement created a public relations liability. For example, in San Francisco, fans protested against the city government and the professional football franchise after the name of the historic Candlestick Park was sold to 3Com (Crompton & Howard, 2003). Although these types of concerns do not always stop the trend of naming rights sponsorships, they may still have negative impacts for both sponsors and properties.

Although intercollegiate facility naming rights agreements could generate immense financial benefits for both sponsors and universities, they can also cause negative impacts for all parties involved due to concerns of over-commercialization and psychological attachment to the stadium. For those sponsors who are going to invest millions of dollars in naming rights in collegiate sport facilities, it would be meaningful to know how these concerns can possibly impact the effectiveness of sponsorship. On the other hand, for higher-education institutions that are often scrutinized closely for high moral standards, a decision on a naming rights contract could impact the institutional public image for a long period of time, possibly more than 20 years. Any negative perceptions in the minds of the public caused by the deal could lead to reduced donations from alumni and friends, fewer student applications, and even reduced community and consumer identification with the facility. Apparently, whether or not to name a collegiate sport facility remains a dilemma for institutions, reflecting the challenges and difficulties in balancing the advantages and disadvantages of naming rights sponsorships. Thus, it is very important to understand how stakeholders, such as college students, perceive corporate naming rights deals and how they respond to this type of sponsorship.

Intercollegiate athletics has been considered as a good sponsorship avenue for building and enhancing brand image of sponsors (Madrigal, 2000); however, this relatively new venture has been laden with potentially negative side effects (Zhang et al., 2005). A number of studies have been conducted to measure sponsorship effectiveness in collegiate athletic settings (e.g., Dees, Bennett, & Villegas, 2008; Gray, 1996; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Kuzma et al., 2003; Madrigal, 2000, 2001; Zhang et al., 2005). While many of these studies reported the positive effect of collegiate sport sponsorships on attitude towards product brands (Dees et al., 2008; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) and purchase intentions (Dees et al., 2008; Madrigal, 2001), some have noticed that negative impacts could also exist due to negative corporate sponsor information (Kuzma et al., 2003) and attitude toward commercialization (Zhang et al., 2005). Of those studies related to sponsorship effectiveness, only two have focused on facility naming rights sponsorships, and both assessed professional sport stadiums, not collegiate facilities. Clark, Cornwell, and Pruitt (2003) found a significant increase in stock price due to the facility naming rights, while Becker-Olsen (2003) found mixed responses to different types of promotional programs. To date, no similar study has been found that examined collegiate facility naming rights sponsorship and its ramifications for college sport consumers.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how college students form perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions toward corporate naming rights sponsorship of a collegiate athletic facility. As the students are major stakeholders of a university and its sport fan base, they are usually the first to react to institutional policy changes. Considering the exploratory nature of this study, it was deemed essential and constructive to first investigate the opinions of a student sample, which could later be expanded to include other key university stakeholders, such as alumni, donors, and the general public. Through a comprehensive literature review, five possible explanatory factors were proposed in this study, including beliefs about the nature of facility naming rights sponsorship, attitudes toward commercialization and amateurism, team identification, stadium identification, and perceptions of financial status. Their effects on sponsorship outcomes were then examined. This investigation provides a comprehensive analysis and understanding of collegiate stadium naming rights as a valuable form of sponsorship in an effort to detect possible negative attributes of stadium naming rights sponsorship and formulate effective strategies to avoid unfavorable consequences in the partnership before executing a proposed facility naming rights plan.

Review of Literature

Mechanism and Trends of Naming Rights

‘Stadium naming rights’ is defined as a "transaction in which money or consideration changes hands in order to secure the right to name a sports facility" (Thornburg, 2003, p. 2). With the financial magnitude and long-term contract of naming rights, this form of sponsorship has already been recognized as an excellent source of contractually obligated income and a critical element of the funding process for many facility construction projects (Crompton & Howard, 2003; McCarthy & Irwin, 1998). In such a partnership between two entities, the sport organization earns ongoing payment to fund stadium construction and to keep pace with escalating operation cost. The sponsoring businesses, of course, obtain desired exposure and marketing opportunities (Clark, Cornwell, & Pruitt, 2002; Thornburg, 2003). Empirical studies have generally acknowledged the ability of such sponsorship endeavors to achieve various marketing objectives, such as increasing brand awareness and recognition, developing goodwill and building brand image, positioning the brand within target audiences, increasing sales, building a positive relationship with communities, and being part of an integrated marketing communication plan (Becker-Olsen, 2003; Clark et al., 2002; McCarthy & Irwin, 1998). For example, it cost Ford $40 million to purchase the naming rights for the Ford Field for over 20 years. The company received an estimated $19.2 million of broadcast media value during the 2006 Super Bowl that was broadcasted on ABC. Ford received an estimated three minutes and 42 seconds of exposure, and the cost for a 30-second broadcast commercial spot in the game was $2.6 million (Front Row Marketing, 2006).

Different from other forms of sponsorship, naming rights sponsorships are usually contracted for a longer period of time. This long-term nature makes it easier for all parties involved to build stronger business connections with each other, leading this kind of marketing avenue to be more effective than short-term event sponsorships (Becker-Olsen, 2003; Clark et al., 2002). The length of stadium naming rights contracts, however, also reduces the availability of these unique marketing opportunities that were relatively few from the start. By 2012, 84 of 121 teams in the four major professional sport leagues had reached venue sponsorship agreements with corporations (Munsey & Suppes, 2012). Since naming rights opportunities are limited and costs are so high in major league sports, a natural trend of growth would involve expanding beyond major league facilities into middle-tier markets, such as minor league and intercollegiate sports (McCarthy & Irwin, 1998).

Historically, due to the NCAA’s commitment to stay in amateurism, no commercial activity was allowed in NCAA events. After finding ways to make intercollegiate athletes into indirect endorsers in recent years, college sports have showed a superb ability to garner sponsorships. Together, they made a total of $515 million in 2007 solely from sponsorship deals (Miller & Associates, 2008). The sponsorships are largely contributed to the phenomenon that major NCAA events are widely broadcasted on network television, cable television, radio, satellite radio, and the Internet. The high exposure of current college sports, especially football and men's basketball, has made corporations to be willing to pay multiple millions of dollars and chase the sponsorship opportunities.

By 2000, college athletics had become a $4.0 billion enterprise (Fulks, 2000), and it has continued to grow rapidly in recent years. According to the NCAA financial report, the median total revenue for athletic programs in the Football Bowl Subdivision was $28.2 million in 2004. This number increased to $41.1 million in 2008 at an average annual rate of 10% (Fulks, 2008, 2009); however, although the growth of revenue has continued steadily, expenses have grown even faster. Athletic directors continue to devote more and more dollars to acquiring better facilities, coaches, and players in the pursuit of greater athletic success and thus greater revenues (Greenberg, 2008). Such an endless, competitive cycle is the prevalent image of big-time intercollegiate athletics today. In such a circumstance, most athletic directors struggle to find the needed fiscal resources to balance the spending for their programs and remain competitive. In fact, only 22 of the 120 programs in the FBS were able to generate enough revenue to finish in the black for the 2010 fiscal year (Fulks, 2011).

When financial burdens make institutions feel hindered from maintaining their competitive edge, seeking corporate support for facility improvement has become a considerable option (Shelton, 2006). The first corporate-named stadium in college sports was the Carrier Dome at Syracuse University in 1980, the only such agreement in college sports before the 1990s. The number of deals then increased to 38 by 2006, implying a trend that corporate focus on facility naming rights was transferring into collegiate sports (Show, 2006). Big-time college athletic programs are increasingly following the lead of professional franchises, raising significant revenues by selling the corporate naming rights of athletic facilities for specific terms (Wolf, 2007). Rutgers University is the 10th university in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS; 11th in college sports) to sell the name of its football stadium to a corporation. Besides the aforementioned Carrier Dome, the other eight are Jones AT&T Stadium of Texas Tech University, Papa John's Cardinal Stadium of the University of Louisville, BB&T Field of Wake Forest University, Chevy Chase Bank Field at Byrd Stadium of the University of Maryland, Movie Gallery Veterans Stadium of Troy University, Bright House Networks Stadium of the University of Central Florida, InfoCision Stadium of the University of Akron, and TCF Bank Stadium of the University of Minnesota (Dosh, 2011). Five of these deals were signed in just the past five years with an average price higher than $20 million, and the price still seems to be rising (Eichelberger, 2008).

As corporations are enthusiastic to search out new sport sponsorship avenues, college athletic facilities provide this outlet. Intercollegiate athletics, which are a relatively new area for naming rights, have become an increasingly attractive avenue of sponsorship because of their potential for tremendous product exposure to a unique market environment. In ESPN's 2006 poll of 26,000 consumers, 58% indicated that they were fans of college football, while 48.5% indicated that they were fans of college basketball (Miller & Associates, 2008). Decades ago, corporate sponsorship in college sports was still a rare phenomenon; now, it has become a vital revenue source for many colleges and its significance continues to increase. As shown in NCAA financial reports, the average percentage of signage/sponsorship in generated revenue increased from 4% in 2003 to 8% in 2010 (Fulks, 2005, 2011). Considering the financial stress of intercollegiate athletic programs and the fiscal magnitude of stadium naming rights, it is expected that this specific form of sponsorship has tremendous potential to grow further in college sports.

Concerns over Naming Rights

Andersen (1995) noted that professional sport is probably the most commercialized sector of popular entertainment in American society because of the invasion of corporate sponsorships. After experiencing financial cuts in federal grants, intercollegiate athletics have traced the professional sport experience by relying on broadcasting rights and corporate sponsorships as vital revenue sources. As a matter of fact, college sports have now become one of the most visible and influential segments of commercialized sports (McAllister, 1998). The impact of this phenomenon continues to grow as the costs of competing in big-time intercollegiate sports continues to soar in high growth rates over the past decade. The growing emphasis on winning games and increasing television market share has caused an endless, vicious cycle where athletic departments have to pursue more profits from television contracts and corporate sponsorship to fuel their pursuit of more victories. Nevertheless, the pressure to win slots in football bowl games or championship tournaments in basketball actually stems from the need for more revenues to feed the spending escalation. As a result, this financial arms race has raised tensions between the core mission of universities and commercial values, and potentially threatens the continued viability of athletics programs and the integrity of higher-education institutions (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010). This growing phenomenon of commercialism has been criticized by some scholars in a way similar to institutional cheating incidences and financial scandals associated with college sports (e.g., Zimbalist, 1999).

Although corporate sponsorships primarily benefit an athletic department, they can also have a negative impact on the reputation of the entire university (Benford, 2007; Gray, 1996). Many institutions have expressed their concerns about this problem (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010). Stanford University reacted to criticism of growing commercialism by removing all large corporate signs and banners from its sports venues. This corporate “cleansing” cost the athletic department approximately $2.5 million per year (Workman, 1998). Ivy League institutions chose not to offer any athletic-related scholarship and to stay away from sponsorship and corporate involvement in order to maintain a non-profit, community-based image (Covell, 2001).

Besides the over-commercialization issue, another concern that could have slowed down the naming rights sponsorship in college sports is the potential negative impact caused by putting a corporate name on a facility shared by the community (Welch & Calabro, 1997). Traditionally, sports stadiums were usually named after a local trait or person in a community to highlight the connection between the team, the facility, and the place (Boyd, 2000; Chacar & Hesterly, 2004). For example, the famous Fenway Park opened in 1912 and was named after the Fenway section of Boston. Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati was named for its location on the banks of the Ohio River. These names are not only labels of buildings but also refer to identities that declare the relationships between cities, teams, fans, and buildings via the legends instilled in the public memory. Replacing these commemorative names with corporate names could threaten the community relationships that the athletic programs have established. When a corporation places its name on a stadium, it reminds the people who attend a sporting event that the event is actually a business, and that fans are actually paying customers who are helping to market a corporate entity (Boyd, 2000). Concerns about stadium naming rights exist among key stakeholders of university campuses. College sports, especially football and basketball, contribute in important ways to an institution's culture by providing the campus with a distinct identity and connection to the student body, alumni, and fans within and beyond the community (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010; Toma, 2003). Identifying with the athletic program can be a source of civic pride. Bonds developed between students and an institution through athletic programs can extend for years beyond their time on campus (Lee et al., 2008). Oftentimes, the identification and connection established by students, faculty, alumni, and community members with the athletic program and the sport facilities can even be stronger than those occurring in professional sport settings. These stakeholders of the university community share certain beliefs, a sense of affiliation, and some relationships with the university that are potentially the most influential components in building institutional image and reputation, financial support, and fan identification (Sutton et al., 1997). It remains a question whether corporate naming of a sport stadium would taint the image of the university and hamper the level of fan identifications.

A temporarily sold name has its timetable; at some point, the contract will expire. Thus, when the name is replaced, the new name has to rebuild the community connection and fan identity. DeSchriver and Jensen (2003) noted that corporate sponsors would rather pay to have their name on a new sport facility than to invest in a stadium that has previously carried another corporate name. It can be a challenging task for a new name to be accepted in the shadow of an old one. The original relationship was built on promoting fan commitment to connect with what they have experienced. Fans are less likely to remember and connect themselves with a temporary corporation's name, particularly when they may be confused about the terms of the name rights (Boyd, 2000).

The name of the stadium represents a connection between the sport program and the fans, and also between the sponsor and the property. If a sport program chooses a wrong corporate naming partner, the consequences can be worse than just a dropped deal. Once in 2002, the Houston Astros were connected with an accounting firm (i.e., Enron Corporation) that was filled with scandals, bringing negative public perceptions and media scrutiny about their partnership and integrity. The Astros eventually paid $2.1 million to buy the naming rights back when the company filed for bankruptcy and several of their executives were charged with fraud (Crompton & Howard, 2003). No organization wants any connection with a bad name that could tarnish its image, and this is especially true for academic institutions. Similar situations also happened on campuses; for instance, Villanova University received $5 million from John E. Du Pont to build a recreation center named the Du Pont Pavilion; however, a few years later, Du Pont was convicted in a murder charge. Fortunately, there was no formal contract for the deal and the university was able to simply call the center The Pavilion (Crompton & Howard, 2003).

Sports facilities in colleges are commonly named after major donors who may have contributed 30-50% of their construction fees (Cohen, 1999). Different from the annual corporate naming rights fees, which are given to schools and teams in exchange for naming rights for a limited duration of time, the traditional naming process does not involve commercial activities, the donation is made by a one-time gift, and the name is given in perpetuity (Crompton & Howard, 2003). Corporate naming rights sponsorship in college sports is still in an early stage that has not grown as quickly as in professional sports (Eichelberger, 2008). Academic institutions have a tendency to be more conservative as they worry about the possibility of controversy arising around the action of placing a commercial name on their university assets.

Even so, there are a growing number of people within the university community who are convinced that corporate support is essential to making a stadium a reality, especially when the athletic programs are facing tight budgets (Blocher, 2007). For example, The Ohio State University raised $200 million to upgrade Ohio Stadium without selling any naming rights. The Buckeyes' basketball arena was actually named after a local department store and its chairman – Value City Arena at The Jerome Schottenstein Center. The university has set forth a policy to mitigate contention while selling the concept of corporate naming rights by not putting the corporate name on an actual building, but instead on the space inside. When a premiere athletic program has to rely on corporate support, it is not difficult to imagine why colleges want naming rights sponsorship deals (Wolf, 2007). Instead of creating a new way to hide these corporate names, it may be better to investigate how the key stakeholders perceive and respond to the concept of corporate naming sponsorships.

Theoretical Framework

To explain how consumers respond to sponsorship activities, Madrigal (2001) employed a hierarchy of belief-attitude-behavior intentions, which was an application of the theory of planned behavior, developed by Ajzen (1985). This hierarchy serves as a theoretical foundation of the current study, in which a person's beliefs about an object and the implicit evaluative importance of those beliefs construct his/her attitude toward the object. An individual's attitude can then influence his/her behavior intentions, which in turn predict that person's behavioral response to the object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Madrigal, 2001). Accordingly, the expected outcomes from a sponsorship investment, including attitude transfer and increased sales, are considerably influenced by consumers' beliefs about the advantages and disadvantages of the sponsorship and the perceived importance of those beliefs.

Affective and Conative Responses. Consumer attitudes toward sponsorship and purchase intentions of a sponsor's products appear to be good indicators for studying the effectiveness of facility naming rights sponsorship in college sports (Pope & Voges, 2000). Crompton (2004) indicated that consumer attitude toward a sponsor was more meaningful than simply pure awareness in predicting sales. Gwinner and Swanson (2003) reported that understanding a fan's attitude toward a sponsor would help understand consumer purchase behaviors. Speed and Thompson (2000) reported that positive attitudes toward a sponsor relate to higher favorability and a willingness to consider that sponsor's products. In the meantime, purchase intention is an indicator of an individual's conscious plan to exert focused effort or carry out a certain behavior. Although purchase intentions are not the same as actual purchase behaviors, a person's intentions do have a strong influence on his/her future behavior (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Crompton (2004) indicated that purchase intentions are perhaps the most useful indicators of a sponsorship's impact on future sales. Similarly, Madrigal (2001) suggested that a behavior is often predicted by behavior intentions.

Willingness to attend sporting events held in that stadium would be another conative response to any facility naming rights agreement. Previous studies in the area of measuring sponsorship effectiveness have focused on how sponsorship benefits the sponsor or how sponsorship achieves its marketing objectives; however, in a corporate naming sponsorship agreement between businesses and college institutions, any potential negative response could be directed toward both parties. These potential effects can be major concerns for the corporations, as well as the college administrators. Thus, a student's willingness to attend the sporting events of athletic programs involved in the naming rights sponsorship agreement deserves particular research attention when studying the functions and outcomes of this type of sponsorship.

In brief, for the purpose of this study, three dependent measures were chosen to assess the effectiveness of a college facility naming rights sponsorship. They included attitude toward the sponsor (ATS), purchase intention of the sponsor's product (PIP), and willingness to attend sporting events (WAS). Among these outcome variables, ATS would have a direct and positive impact on PIP. This construct could also play as a mediating role in the relationship between consumer belief about naming rights and PIP, which was derived from Madrigal's (2001) suggestion in the hierarchy of belief-attitude-behavior intentions. ATS could also be related to WAS; however, it might not have a strong mediating effect on the relationships between WAS and other predicting variables as the object has changed from the sponsor to the university in these two constructs.

Naming Rights Sponsorship Belief. Consumer perceptions of goodwill are not only the major difference between sponsorship and advertising (Meenaghan, 1991; McDonald, 1991), they are also the major factor that contributes to sponsorship success (Alexandris, Tsaousi, & James, 2007; Bennett, 1999). Such perceptions about goodwill derive from the appreciation of individuals who believe that sponsorship can be a benefit to the event (or organization) with which it is involved (Meenaghan, 1991). Madrigal (2001) found that consumers who hold positive beliefs about sponsorship form a more positive attitude toward the sponsor than consumers who do not. It was also observed that consumers might simultaneously hold positive and negative beliefs toward commercial sponsorship activities. Lee, Sandler, and Shani (1997) reported that sponsorship outcomes were influenced by both positive and negative beliefs in the minds of consumers of the Olympic Games.

In a college stadium naming rights sponsorship, an individual may believe that the corporate money is an important revenue source for building a strong athletic program. This belief associates the sponsor (i.e., attitude object) with a favorable attribute. Conversely, a person may hold the negative belief that the corporate naming would lead to over-commercialization, which would then associate the sponsor with an unfavorable attribute. When a person perceives that the overall importance of positive beliefs is greater than the combined importance of negative beliefs, that person will have a more positive attitude toward the sponsor. Otherwise, this individual will be likely to form a negative attitude toward the corporation, which in turn will influence his/her behavior intentions to support that sponsor. Therefore, the first two hypotheses for this study were as follows:

H_1: *College students' beliefs about naming rights sponsorship would be predictive of their attitudes toward the sponsor, purchase intention, and willingness to attend sporting events.*

H_2*: A hierarchy would exist, in which college students' attitudes toward the sponsor would mediate the relationship between their beliefs about naming rights sponsorship and purchase intention of sponsor's product.*

Attitude toward Commercialization. Although commercial support is necessary in order for sports to be successful ventures, it should be noted that there is growing concern about the over-commercialization of sports (Zhang et al., 2005). Lee et al. (1997) indicated that increased marketing activities in the Atlanta Olympic Games caused considerable discussions about over-commercialization and the loss of the Games' amateur nature. Consumer attitudes toward commercialization reflect their reactions to these excessive marketing activities, which may also affect their attitudes toward both the events and the sponsors. Zhang et al. (2005) measured the impact of college students' attitudes toward commercialization of an intercollegiate athletic program and found that attitudes toward commercialization significantly explained 12% of the variance in purchase intentions.

Consumers who hold a positive or neutral attitude toward commercialization could lessen the influence of the negative belief that corporate naming leads to over-commercialization; hence, those consumers would be more likely to possess an overall positive attitude toward the sponsor. In contrast, a negative attitude toward commercialization would strengthen the effect of the aforementioned belief and further increase the likelihood of having an overall negative attitude toward the sponsor. These diverse possibilities lead to the third hypothesis for this study:

> H_3: *College students' attitude toward commercialization would be predictive of their attitudes toward the sponsor, purchase intention, and willingness to attend sporting events.*

Psychological Attachment. Communicating with target audiences through the vehicle of sports instead of direct communications (e.g., advertising) is the other difference between sport sponsorship and other types of business promotional activities (Meenaghan, 1996). The audience is drawn to the sponsored sport property and builds a relationship with the sponsors based on their connection to the sport property. When fans have a stronger attachment toward a sport team or an athlete, their attitudes toward any sponsors would strengthen (Madrigal, 2001). The uniqueness of stadium naming rights raises the issues of the importance of psychological attachment between the consumer and the sport venue (Zhang et al., 2005).

'Team identification', one of the well-documented forms of psychological attachment in sponsorship studies, is defined as one's level of attachment to or concern about a particular sports team (Wann & Barnscombe, 1993). Gwinner and Swanson (2003) demonstrated the positive effects of identification with sponsorship. Fans with strong team identification are more likely to attend sporting events (Pease & Zhang, 2001; Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003), identify sponsors (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003), and purchase sponsors' products (Madrigal, 2001). Also, fans who highly identify often view the success and failure of their favored team as personal success and failures (Williamson et al., 2003), whereas low-identifying fans likely decrease their association with a team if that team performs poorly (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Zhang et al., 2001).

It is expected that team identification also plays an important role in naming rights sponsorship effectiveness. For example, highly identified fans have a stronger emotional attachment to the performance of their teams. Consequently, they are more likely to view financial support from a corporate naming partner as an advantage for their team's success, which would generate favorable attitudes toward the sponsor. On the other hand, fans that have low identification with their teams are less likely to care about a team's revenue, but rather view naming rights sponsorship as simply a commercial activity. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis of this study was:

> H_4: *College student team identification would be predictive of their attitudes toward the sponsor, purchase intention, and willingness to attend sporting events.*

In a study on the role of identification in sport sponsorship, Trail, Anderson, and Fink (2000) defined 'identification' as "an orientation of the self in regard to other objects, which results in feelings or sentiments of close attachment" (p. 161). The object with which fans identify can be extended to a stadium in a corporate naming sponsorship. Using a stadium as a marketing medium is the major component of corporate naming rights sponsorship, which distinguishes this kind of sponsorship from other forms. Although this concept has not been examined in any previous sponsorship studies, it could be important because team identification relates to team sponsorship. The difference is that stadium identification might work in reverse proportion to its influence on sponsorship outcomes. Fans that highly identify with the stadium could be more likely to generate or strengthen their negative attitudes toward corporate naming rights sponsorship because of their strong emotional attachment to the old stadium name. Conversely, fans with low stadium identification are expected to view corporate naming rights sponsorship in a more neutral manner. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis of this study was:

H_5: *College student stadium identification would be negatively related to their attitudes toward the sponsor, purchase intention, and willingness to attend sporting events.*

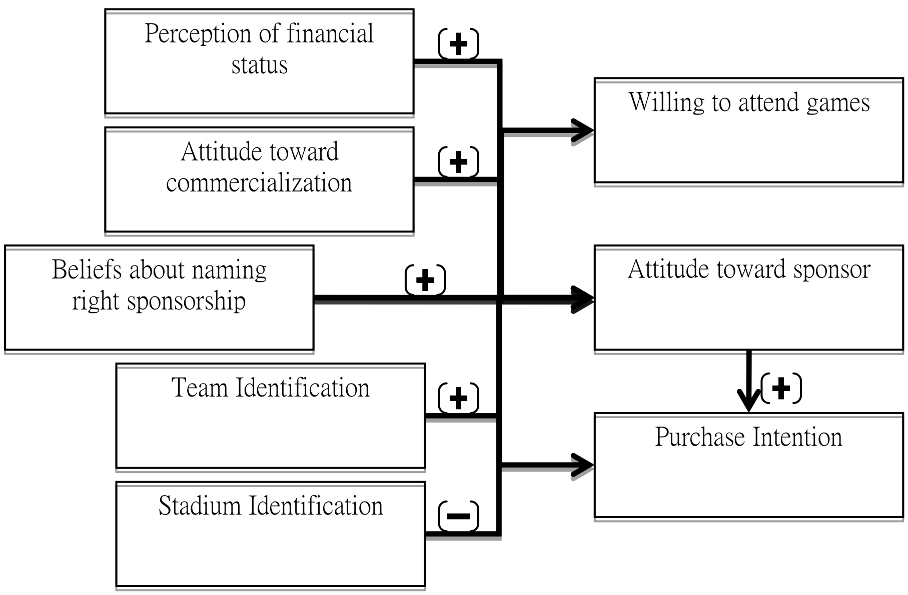
Perception of Financial Status. Financial difficulty has forced athletic directors to seek corporate support and sell more sponsorship, including facilities naming rights. Although commercial sponsorship on campuses has been regarded by many people as tainting the purity of intercollegiate athletics, college administrators would argue that it is indeed a necessary support for the soaring costs of running a successful athletic program and meeting community expectations. When all factors are considered, corporate sponsorship may be viewed by some institutions and their fans as an acceptable compromise (Shelton, 2006); however, according to the Knight Commission Report on Intercollegiate Athletics (2010), standardized reports on athletics spending used by the NCAA are rarely seen by the general public. Most of the fans do not understand that a lot of athletic programs must rely on allocations from general university funds, fees imposed on the entire student body, and state appropriations to meet funding gaps simply because sports revenues often fall short of meeting the needs for operating the athletic programs. It would not be difficult to imagine that students would have a more favorable attitude toward naming rights if they could see that the sponsorship frees them from having to pay for the athletic programs out of their own pockets.

Athletic programs might be able to overcome most of the resistance toward corporate naming sponsorships when people are convinced that corporate support is essential, especially when fans consider that their favorite athletic program is losing its impact because of a budget shortage (Wolf, 2007). Therefore, how fans perceive the financial status of their favored athletic programs could have an important influence on the effectiveness of any corporate naming rights sponsorship. Corporate sponsorship might be more easily embraced by fans who perceive their athletic programs as facing a major financial issue. Instead of holding a negative attitude caused by the idea of commercialization, fans may regard the sponsor as providing important support for their teams, and thus may form a positive attitude as a result. Conversely, fans who perceive that their athletic programs are making a profit may consider corporate naming rights sponsorship as unnecessary and may thus develop a more negative view of the appropriateness of putting any university assets on a commercial footing. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis of this study was:

H_6: *College student perceptions of financial status would be positively related to their attitudes toward the sponsor, purchase intention, and willingness to attend sporting events.*

The theoretical framework of this study and the relationships among these variables are illustrated in Figure 1. Following Madrigal's (2001) concept of belief-attitude-behavior intentions, it was necessary to test the hierarchical relationship proposed in H_2. As an exploratory study, the primary intention of this study was to address concerns associated with a naming rights sponsorship in college sports and to conduct a preliminary investigation into the effectiveness of this specific form of sponsorship from the perspectives of college students.

Figure 1. *Theoretical Model - Relationships of Beliefs, Attitudes, Psychological Attachments, and Sponsorship Effectiveness.*



Method

Participants

A survey study was carried out to address the research questions and test the hypotheses. Research participants were students (*N* = 548) attending a FBS university in Florida, who voluntarily participated in this study. A student sample was chosen because their responses to the naming rights sponsorship were the primary interest of the current study. While students will eventually become a part of the alumni and general public, it was not the intention of the current study to generalize the research finding to populations other than students. As the current study is guided by well-defined theories with sophisticated predictions, adoption of a student sample was considered legitimate under the first condition specified by Bello et al. (2009). Of the respondents, 310 were males (56.6%) and 238 females (43.4%). In terms of age, 54% were 18-21, 28.1% were 22-25, 11.9% were 26-30, and 6% were 31 years or older. From a total of 77 different academic majors, these participants were 0.9 % freshmen, 14.2% sophomores, 23%

juniors, 33.9% seniors, and 27.7% graduate school or professional program students. Ethnic composition of the participants included 48.7% Caucasian, 13.9% Hispanic, 20.8% Asian, 10.9% African-American, 0.2% Native American, and 5.5% mixed ethnicity or other. A chi-square analysis was carried out to compare the demographic characteristics of the sample to those of the general student body in the university (University of Florida, 2009). Findings revealed that the sample was not statistically different from the student population (^{2} = 7.77, p = 0.10), indicating that the sample was representative of the university's student body.

Instrument

At the beginning of the questionnaire, a fictional naming rights sponsorship deal was described in detail. The paragraph was intended to convince respondents that their familiar football stadium would soon be renamed 'Info Tech Stadium' for an annual naming fee of $5 million. The money would be used to renovate the stadium and maintain a high-quality athletic program. We chose to use a fictional scenario to avoid pre-existing attitude bias toward the stadium naming rights and to minimize the influence of existing sponsorships of the athletic program. As scenario manipulation is a widely adopted method in sponsorship studies, it could be designed in such a way so as to better serve the specific purpose of a study (Dean, 2002; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). The price and content of the naming rights sponsorship were approved by a panel of experts. Participants were asked to read and comprehend the sponsorship announcement before proceeding to answer the questions.

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, the questionnaire was formulated to include the following eight sections: (a) beliefs about facility naming rights (BFN), (b) attitude toward commercialization (ATC), (c) team identification (TID), (d) stadium identification (SID), (e) perception of financial status (PFS), (f) attitude toward sponsorship (ATS), (g) purchase intentions of sponsor's products (PIP), and (h) willingness to attend sporting events (WAS). For BFN, five items were selected and modified to measure different attributes of a respondent's belief about facility naming rights sponsorship. Four of these items were modified from the items used by Alexandris et al. (2007) to measure beliefs about an event sponsorship. One item was modified from the scale used by Dees et al. (2008) to measure goodwill in sponsorship. For ATC, three items were derived from a modified application of those adopted by Lee et al. (1997) and Zhang et al. (2005) to assess attitudinal constructs towards commercialization in the intercollegiate athletics setting. Additionally, following the suggestions made by these researchers, three items measuring perceptions of amateurism in intercollegiate athletics and two items measuring evaluative responses to the extent of commercialization were included in the ATC section. For TID, five items in the modified version of the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Madrigal, 2001) were adapted. While the original scale was developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993) to study spectator behaviors, the modified version was made to study sport sponsorships. For the purpose of this study, each item in the TID section was phrased into the setting of an intercollegiate facility naming rights sponsorship.

Although the concept of stadium identification could be as important as team identification for a stadium sponsorship, it has not been examined in previous studies. Since the concept of stadium identification was extended mostly from the concept of sport identification and no scale has been developed for this research purpose, items in this study for the SID section were generated from a review of literature related to the concept of sport identification and different points of attachment. A total of five items were designed to measure respondents' feelings, sentiments, memories, and overall psychological attachment toward the stadium, including the following: “There is no better place than ‘original name of the stadium’ in college football,” “I have a lot of memories of ‘original name of the stadium’,” “‘original name of the stadium’ cannot be replaced by any name in my mind,” “When the players run into ‘original name of the stadium’, it is the best moment in college football,” and “‘original name of the stadium’ represents the home of ‘team name’ football team.”

To assess how respondents think about the financial situation of their athletic program, a 5-item PFS scale was formed that include items modified from previous studies, mainly Shelton (2006) and Wolf (2007). These items included “I know that a majority of intercollegiate athletic departments in the U.S. operate with a budget deficit,” “Without the stadium naming rights sponsorship, the ‘university name’ athletic department does not have enough funds to renovate the stadium,” “I think that the ‘university name’ athletic department needs the income from the stadium naming rights sponsorship to run its programs,” “Due to enormous growth in the costs of facilities, coaches’ salaries, and athletic scholarships, university athletics have struggled to find needed resources to fund their programs,” and “The ‘university name’ athletic department is financially challenged to run competitive sport programs.” A number of studies have been conducted to measure how sport sponsorship affects consumer attitude in collegiate athletic settings (e.g., Cianfrone et al., 2008; Cianfrone & Zhang, 2006; Dees et al., 2008; Gray, 1996; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Kuzma et al., 2003; Madrigal, 2000, 2001; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Zhang et al., 2005). From these studies, five common items were selected and modified to suit the specific purpose of this study. Finally, five items in PIP section were selected and modified from Dees et al. (2008), Lee et al. (1997), Madrigal (2001), and Zhang et al. (2005); meanwhile, five items for the WAS section were generated from Williamson et al. (2003). Each of the items in the questionnaire was phrased into a Likert 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strong agree), and the items were arranged in a random sequence. A demographic variable section was included at the end of the questionnaire for sample description purposes. Additionally, to ensure that the influence of the announcement script was fully considered by respondents, a question at the end of the questionnaire asked in bold type “When answering questions above, have you kept in mind the ANNOUNCEMENT about changing the name of football stadium?”

Content validity of the questionnaire was examined by a panel of six experts, including three university professors in sports management and three athletic administrators. These panel members were asked to examine the relevance, clarity, and representativeness of each item and rate each of these three aspects on a 5-point scale (1 = low, 5 = high). The average scores of each item for these three aspects were then calculated and evaluated using a criterion of 3.0 (i.e., the neutral point on a Likert 5-point scale). All 40 items in the questionnaire were scored above 3.0 in all three aspects of content validity by the panel members, suggesting overall high ratings for relevance, representativeness, and clarity of items as well as general acceptability of content validity of the questionnaire.

Procedures

Data collection took place at various campus locations, including cafeterias, student lounges, libraries, recreation facilities, and classrooms when an instructor agreed to cooperate with the test administration process. Each participant was first asked to read the fictional naming rights sponsorship announcement. After the respondent had fully comprehended the script, which took different amounts of time for different individuals, the questionnaire was administered. After respondents were asked, at the end of the survey, whether they had kept the 'announcement' in mind when responding to the questionnaire items, only those with a positive answer were included for data analyses to address the research questions. Although the test administrators were not fully certain whether that participants would be completely convinced by a single screening item, its inclusion was an effort to ensure that participants at least paid attention to the announcement. Since most of the items asked participants' opinion about objects listed in the announcement, it would be logical to assume that, to a great extent, their responses were affected by the information in the announcement.

A total of 599 students completed the survey. Of these, 51 participants did not keep the sponsorship announcement in mind when answering the survey questions; consequently, they were excluded from further analyses, leaving a total of 548 viable participants. To ensure that the manipulation of a mental context through the announcement was successful, at least to a certain extent, t-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of the eight conceptual areas between the retained sample and the excluded group of respondents. Findings revealed that the two groups were significantly ($p < .05$) different in seven of the eight factors, with the exception of perceived financial status. Presumably, the announcement was effective and necessary to streamline the attention and focus of the respondents on the matter of stadium naming rights sponsorships.

Data Analyses

Procedures in the SPSS 17.0 program (SPSS, 2008) were used to conduct the data analyses. Because a well-established measure for the context of naming rights sponsorship does not exist, items in this study were adopted from multiple studies; consequently, an exploratory factor analysis with principal component extraction and oblimin rotation was first conducted to examine the factor validity of variables within the eight conceptual areas, followed by calculating alpha reliability coefficients of the factors. Zero-order correlations were then computed to examine basic interrelationships among the factors. Multiple regression analyses were carried out to test the stated research hypotheses. In the first regression analysis, attitude toward sponsor was designated as the dependent variable and regressed on independent variables, including beliefs about naming rights sponsorship, perceptions of financial status, attitude toward commercialization, team identification, and stadium identification. In the second analysis, in order to test the sequential relationships in the belief-attitude-purchase intention model, a hierarchical regression was conducted. Attitude toward sponsor was entered in the first block with belief about naming rights sponsorship in the second block to predict purchase intentions of sponsor's product. After we established the belief-attitude-purchase intention hierarchy, two hierarchical regression analyses were further conducted, with purchase intentions of sponsor's product and willingness to attend sporting events being the dependent variables. Independent variables included perceptions of financial status, attitude toward commercialization, team identification, stadium identification, and attitude toward sponsor in the first block. In both of these analyses, beliefs about naming rights sponsorship were included in the second block, following the research hypotheses where beliefs about naming rights sponsorship would be mediated by attitudinal factors. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted following the principles of ordinary least square (OLS). According to Baron and Kenny (1986), to establish mediation, four elements are required: (1) the predicting variable is correlated with the criterion variable; (2) the predicting variable is correlated with the mediating variable; (3) the mediating variable is correlated with the criterion variables after controlling for the effect of the predicting variable; and (4) the correlation between the predicting and the criterion variables is equal to zero after controlling for the effect of the mediating.

Results

Based on the scree plot and the criteria of an eigenvalue equal to 1.0 and a factor loading equal to .40 without double loading (Kaiser, 1970; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), an eight-factor solution containing 35 variables resulted in the factor analysis, with a total of 72.5% variance explained. A total of five items were deleted due to low or double loading (Table 1). In conjunction with these criteria, a model that produced the most readily interpretable and theoretically relevant pattern of factor structure was chosen. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .72 to .92, indicating good internal consistencies for the constructs (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Included in Table 1 are also descriptive statistics for the retained factors. Overall, participants in this study showed high TID, SID, and WAS; conversely, mean scores for PFS, ATC, ATS, and PIP were comparatively lower, where PIP was the lowest (i.e., $M = 2.93$ on a 7-point Likert scale). Essentially, these descriptive statistics show that students had strong identification with the football program and the stadium but did not think the financial gain from the naming rights sponsorship was necessary or helpful. They also displayed a negative attitude toward the naming rights sponsor and showed low intention to purchase the sponsor's products.

Table 1. *Factor Analysis and Descriptive Statistics for Variables Associated with Consumer Perspectives*

	BFN	ATC	TID	SID	PFS	ATS	PIP	WAS
BFN1	**.744**	-.034	.066	-.035	.016	.276	.116	-.080
BFN3	**.743**	.009	-.062	.065	-.021	-.197	-.078	-.025
BFN4	**.694**	.030	-.002	-.035	.117	-.149	-.087	.057
BFN5	**.732**	.103	.074	-.054	.065	-.051	.041	-.050
ATC1	.230	**.596**	-.068	.125	.060	-.255	-.050	.017
ATC4	.280	**.515**	.011	-.048	.168	-.241	-.037	-.001
ATC5	-.124	**.894**	.011	-.113	-.014	.145	.085	-.028
TID1	-.043	.040	**.465**	.282	-.012	-.080	-.050	-.299
TID2	-.003	.121	**.750**	.162	.070	.030	-.037	-.075
TID3	-.025	.010	**.812**	.093	.042	.011	-.007	-.031

TID4	.002	.046	**.862**	.041	-.002	.019	.015	-.026
TID5	.083	-.122	**.849**	-.090	-.051	-.009	.080	.025
SID1	-.060	.012	.284	**.653**	-.015	.000	.067	-.035
SID2	-.124	-.006	.186	**.554**	-.029	-.002	.046	-.231
SID3	.005	-.070	-.016	**.886**	.005	.063	.061	-.048
SID4	-.027	.010	.284	**.682**	.031	.018	.026	-.022
SID5	.053	-.033	-.095	**.923**	-.021	.013	.022	-.017
PFS1	-.159	-.070	.085	.031	**.625**	-.092	-.166	-.084
PFS2	.099	-.008	-.002	-.123	**.731**	-.007	.065	.025
PFS3	.212	.130	.013	-.053	**.652**	-.070	.084	.079
PFS4	.159	.013	-.123	.106	**.799**	.101	.112	.076
PFS5	.026	.158	-.012	-.044	**.723**	.051	.126	.021
ATS1	-.002	.015	-.067	.024	.092	**-.779**	.118	-.047
ATS3	.046	.057	.005	-.103	.003	**-.655**	.308	-.027
ATS4	.148	.044	-.006	-.195	.047	**-.584**	.272	-.010
ATS5	.116	.053	.128	-.132	.031	**-.493**	.378	.035
PIP1	.022	.079	-.085	.065	.014	-.224	**.668**	-.201
PIP2	.023	.013	.066	.026	.051	-.183	**.778**	-.037
PIP4	.016	.017	.077	.079	.008	-.077	**.855**	.033
PIP5	-.045	.063	.030	.029	.027	.008	**.900**	.003
WAS1	-.031	.031	.069	.003	.028	.016	-.042	**-.837**
WAS2	.001	.029	.065	.098	-.048	-.027	-.072	**-.848**
WAS3	.048	-.073	-.066	-.105	.121	.010	.282	**-.584**
WAS4	.020	.014	-.016	.058	-.050	-.021	-.054	**-.923**
WAS5	.080	.020	.037	.078	-.076	.009	-.017	**-.883**
Eigenvalue	8.445	8.325	2.359	1.776	1.365	1.138	1.067	.891

% of variance explained	24.1	47.9	54.7	59.7	63.6	66.9	69.9	72.5
Mean	3.97	3.62	4.68	5.78	3.61	3.15	2.93	6.65
SD	1.25	1.32	1.55	1.35	1.11	1.30	1.35	1.77
α	.78	.72	.90	.91	.82	.89	.92	.90

Utilizing an individual's mean score for each retained factor, zero-order correlation coefficients were tested (Table 2). As expected, BFN was positively related to ATS (r =. 48, p < .01), PIP (r = .36, p < .01), and WAS (r = .10, p < .01), respectively. ATC was positively related to ATS (r = .52, p < .01) and PIP (r = .36, p < .01); however, the relationship between ATC and WAS was not statistically significant (r = .05, p > .05). TID was found to be positively related to PIP (r = .19, p < .01) and WAS (r = .53, p < .01). Similarly, SID was significantly related to WAS (r = .57, p < .01). As anticipated for H_5, adopting a stadium name did present a negative relationship between SID and ATS (r = -.19, p < .01). Similar to ATC, PFS was positively related to ATS (r = .44, p < .01) and PIP (r = .33, p < .01) but not WAS. Predictably, PFS was also found to be positively related to ATC (r = .49, p < .01).

Table 2. *Zero-order Correlation among the Factors Associated with Consumer Perspectives*

Factor	BFN	ATC	TID	SID	PFS	ATS	PIP	WAS
Beliefs about Naming Rights Sponsorship (BFN)		.52**	-.02	-.17**	.48**	.48**	.36**	.10*
Attitude toward Commercialization (ATC)			-.03	-.18**	.49**	.52**	.40**	.05
Team Identification (TID)				.70**	-.01	-.02	.19**	.53**
Stadium Identification (SID)					-.16**	-.19**	.05	.57**
Perception of Financial Status (PFS)						.44**	.33**	.02
Attitude toward Naming Rights Sponsor (ATS)							.69**	.12*
Purchase Intentions of Sponsor's Products (PIP)								.33**
Willingness to Attend Sporting Events (WAS)								

* Significant at .05 level
** Significant at .01 level

To examine how BFN, ATC, TID, SID, and PFS could influence ATS, a multiple regression analysis was conducted (Table 3). BFN, ATC, SID, and PFS were significant predictors of ATS, with a total of 35% variance explained. As hypothesized, BFN (β = .22, p < .01), ATC (β = .31, p < .01), and PFS (β = .16, p < .01) were positively predictive of ATS, while SID had a negative impact (β = -.13, p < .05). Thus, the stated hypotheses on ATS were again supported, with the exception of TID's influence on ATS. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values were all smaller than 5, therefore, the concern of multicollinearity is dismissed. A significant interactional impact of PFS and TID on ATS was also identified (β = .49, p < .01).

Table 3. *Multiple Regression Analyses Examining the Influences of Belief and Cognitive Constructs on Attitude toward Naming Rights Sponsor*

Factor	*B*	*SEB*	β	*t*	*VIF*
ATC	.31	.04	.31	7.32**	1.54
TID	.07	.04	.08	1.70	2.04
SID	-.12	.05	-.13	-2.50*	2.13
PFS	.19	.05	.16	3.81**	1.47
BFN	.23	.04	.22	5.16**	1.51

* Significant at .05 level
** Significant at .01 level

Madrigal's (2001) concept of belief-attitude-behavior intention was utilized to guide the analyses of hierarchical relationships among the BFN, ATS, and PIP. To test for mediation effect of ATS, a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted following the procedures suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). The mediation was confirmed as (a) the purported predictor (BFN) was related to the mediator (ATS) (r =. 48, p < .01), (b) the predictor was related to the criterion variable (PIP) (r =. 36, p < .01) in the absence of the mediator, (c) the mediator had a significant unique effect on the criterion (β = .67, p < .01), and (d) the effect of the predictor on the criterion was minimized with the existence of the mediator in the model. Hence, H_2 was supported by these research findings. Based on these findings, a second set of hierarchical regression analyses was conducted to examine the influence of BFN, ATC, TID, SID, PFS, and ATS on PIP. ATS was found to be a major predictor of PIP, with a total of 52% variance explained (F = 118.34, p < .01). In this model, ATS was the most contributing factor (β = .67, p < .01), followed by TID (β = .15, p < .01). Contrary to the zero-order correlation, ATC and PFS were no longer found to be significant predictors, indicating the presence of a mediating effect of ATS. BFN was entered in next step of the analyses but did not significantly contribute to predicting PIP (ΔF = 0.53, p > .05), further indicating the presence of a mediating effect of ATS. VIF values were not statistically significant (p > .05) in the regression model, again dismissing the concern of multicollinearity (Table 4).

Table 4. *Hierarchical Regression Analyses Examining the Influences on Purchase Intention of Sponsor's Products*

Factor	R	R^2_{adj}	ΔR^2	ΔF	F	B	SEB	β	t	VIF
					BFN-ATS-PIP Hierarchical Analysis					
Step 1	.69	.47	.47	494.12**	494.82**					
ATS						.72	.03	.69	22.23**	-
Step 2	.69	.48	.00	1.69	248.21**					
ATS						.69	.04	.67	18.95**	1.29
BFN						.05	.04	.05	1.298	1.29
					All Model					
Step 1	.72	.52	.05	118.34**	118.34**					
ATS						.69	.04	.67	18.46**	1.49
ATC						.05	.04	.05	1.37	1.57
TID						.13	.04	.15	3.46**	2.05
SID						.08	.04	.08	1.88	2.14
PFS						.04	.04	.03	.81	1.42
Step 2	.72	.52	.00	.90	98.75**					
ATS						.69	.04	.66	17.82**	1.56
ATC						.04	.04	.04	1.07	1.69
TID						.13	.04	.15	3.42**	2.05
SID						.08	.04	.09	1.94	2.15
PFS						.02	.04	.02	.55	1.51
BFN						.04	.04	.04	.95	1.59

* Significant at .05 level
** Significant at .01 level

The third set of regression analyses was performed by having WAS as the dependent variable, where ATC, TID, SID, PFS, and ATS were entered in the first step of the regression analysis, followed by BFN in the second step. SID (β = .47, p < .01) and TID (β = .21, p < .01) became influential predictors of WAS. Together with ATS (β = .20, p < .01), they explained a total of 40% variance in WAS (F = 74.14, p < .01).When BFN was entered in step 2, it was found to be statistically significant in the model (β = .12, p < .01), and the total variance explained was increased to 41% (ΔF = 13.85, p < .01). Thus, a mediating effect of ATS was not detected here.

Table 5. *Hierarchical Regression Analyses Examining the Influences on Willingness to Attend Sport Events*

Factor	R	R^2_{adj}	ΔR^2	ΔF	F	B	SEB	β	t	VIF
Step 1	.64	.40	.40	74.14**	74.14**					
ATS						.27	.06	.20	4.94**	1.49
ATC						.04	.06	.03	.79	1.57
TID						.24	.05	.21	4.46**	2.05
SID						.61	.06	.47	9.62**	2.14
PFS						-.01	.06	-.00	-.10	1.42
Step 2	.64	.41	.01	8.18**	63.96**					
ATS						.24	.06	.17	4.24**	1.559
ATC						.00	.06	.00	.013	1.690
TID						.24	.05	.21	4.37**	2.051
SID						.62	.06	.48	9.85**	2.153
PFS						-.05	.06	-.03	-.81	1.513
BFN						.17	.06	.12	2.86**	1.589

* Significant at .05 level
** Significant at .01 level

Discussion

A review of the literature for this study revealed that the number of facility naming rights sponsorships in college sports has been growing in recent years; however, little empirical evidence was available to provide support for athletic department to adopt this form of sponsorship. This study attempted to fill the void by developing and examining a conceptual framework of related constructs for this specific form of sponsorship in a collegiate setting. Findings of this study supported the belief that general event sponsorship effectiveness measurements could be extended into facility naming rights sponsorship in collegiate sport settings. Findings derived from testing the zero-order correlations and conducting regression analyses supported the hierarchical relationships in college students' beliefs about sponsorship, attitude toward sponsorship, and purchase intentions for sponsor's products.

Noticeably, Madrigal's (2001) hierarchical model, as the theoretical foundation of this study, was effective in explaining the relationships among the constructs. This finding could imply that naming rights sponsorships have a similar mechanism and marketing function as other forms of sport sponsorship although the difference here is that sponsored avenues are involved in college sports. A similar effect might exist when the sponsored event is changed from athletic teams or competition events to sport facilities. The finding implies that sponsors' entering stadium naming rights agreements have similar objectives as those of sport events sponsors (Becker-Olsen, 2003; Clark et al., 2002; McCarthy & Irwin, 1998); however, as it was not the primary interest of this study to compare the possible effectiveness of stadium naming rights contracts that usually cover a long period of time with other forms of sponsorship, the advantage of stadium naming rights in collegiate athletics could not be confirmed in this study. Future research endeavors in this regard are highly recommended.

In this study's data collection process, a fictional scenario was designed to help reduce the influence from pre-existing bias toward a sponsor and bring the attention of respondents to focus on issues related to stadium naming rights in collegiate athletics. Also, because this study was conducted on a university campus that was ranked among the leading financial producers among the FBS institutions and had faced financial challenges for many years in recent history, installing the fictional scenario was intended to enhance the generalizability of this study's research findings to other institutions with financial challenges in their athletic programs. Nevertheless, the $5 million figure was above the average price for the existing naming rights deals in college sports and was somewhat arbitrary. Because the university involved in the study was one of the highest revenue producers in college sports, the intention was that a proportionally higher figure would garner the attention of respondents. To what extent this excessive dollar figure affects the research findings is unknown and thus serves as a parameter in interpreting the research findings. In future studies, it would be interesting to provide two scenarios – one expressing little financial need and one expressing great financial need – and to examine their differential effect; in essence, testing the role of perceived financial status would be accomplished through an experimental study.

In this study, the effectiveness of a naming rights sponsorship was evaluated using three different dependent measures – attitude toward sponsor, purchase intention of sponsor's product, and willingness to attend sporting events. The findings revealed that students overall had a less favorable attitude toward naming rights sponsorship (M = 3.02 on a 7-point Likert scale) and low purchase intention of the sponsor's product (M = 2.34 on a 7-point Likert scale). The low mean scores did not necessarily indicate that stadium naming rights would not be effective. This could be partially due to the lack of knowledge of the sponsor and its products, which could have been one of the limitations of the design as this study selected one company, which might or might not be familiar to the respondents. Nevertheless, research findings derived from the correlation and regression analyses did provide unbiased information on how the belief and attitudinal constructs could affect the outcomes of a naming rights sponsorship for college sports. Positive attitudes toward commercialization, beliefs about naming rights sponsorships, and perception of financial status were found to be constructive in forming positive attitudes toward the naming rights sponsor. Parties entering into a naming rights sponsorship agreement should make efforts to educate consumers about positive aspects of the sponsorship, inform them about financial needs of the athletic program, and possibly nurture changes in their perceptions toward being more supportive. Considering that stadium identification was found to have a negative impact on attitudes toward the naming rights sponsorship, newly constructed stadiums or stadiums with low consumer identification would be in a better position and thus would be an advantageous target for a naming right sponsorship deal. An athletic program with strong base of fan identification would also be a better target for naming rights sponsorship when taking into consideration consumer purchase intention of the sponsor's products. In addition to team identification and stadium identification, attitudes toward the sponsorship showed a positive impact on willingness to attend sporting events in this study, implying that a corporation with good brand image would be a good choice for athletic programs to consider when entering into stadium naming rights sponsorship agreements.

Students' beliefs about naming rights sponsorships were found to be positively related to all three dependent variables, particularly attitudes toward a sponsor. Those who believed that a facility naming rights sponsorship was beneficial to an athletic program were more likely to consider and act positively toward the sponsor and the athletic program; conversely, negative concerns could impact the effectiveness of the specific sponsorship. In this study, students overall thought somewhat less favorably of the naming rights sponsorship as the mean factor score (i.e., $M = 3.75$) was lower than 4.0 on a 7-point Likert scale. Apparently, favorability and relevance were two different issues here. Although average score was not high in beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions, stronger beliefs did lead to a better attitude and, in turn, to higher purchase intentions. These findings indicate the need to alter and elevate the level of beliefs of the respondents so as to gain needed support from them before initiating a facility naming rights agreement.

Students also showed strong stadium identification ($M = 5.78$) and less favorable attitude toward commercialization ($M = 3.60$), which confirmed the hypotheses that attitude toward commercialization would be positively related to attitude toward sponsor ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) and stadium identification would be negatively related to attitude toward sponsor ($r = -.19$, $p < .01$). Findings from the regression analyses further indicated that both constructs were significant predictors of attitude toward sponsorship, confirming that students' attitude toward sponsorship were strongly associated with their attitude toward commercialization and stadium identification. Athletic administrators may consider seeking ways to inform and educate students about the need for stadium naming rights, and nurture their overall attitude toward commercial activities on campus, through which a local business or existing corporate partner of the university may be perceived by students as being favorable for the naming rights sponsorship. While more empirical studies are needed to identify ways to handle the negative impact of stadium identification, findings associated with stadium identification in this study have provided an important element and direction for consideration during the decision-making process for initiating a stadium naming rights sponsorship. As identified in the literature review, attitude toward commercialization was one of the major concerns for college facility naming rights sponsorship; this speculation was confirmed in the current study. A number of previous studies revealed that this construct would be a major factor influencing the effectiveness of sport sponsorships (e.g., Alexandris et al., 2007; Lee et al., 1997; Zhang et al., 2005). Generally, consumers respond favorably to a sponsorship when they perceive it to be beneficial for the sponsored venue (Meenaghan, 2001). When a sponsorship is considered to be over-commercializing the sport competition, these perceived benefits may no longer exist (Alexandris et al., 2007). This concern can be especially true in collegiate sports (Speed & Thomson, 2000).

It was evident in this investigation that students who thought less favorably about commercialization in college sports were more likely to possess negative attitudes toward the sponsor and its products. These findings were consistent with those of Lee et al. (1997) and Zhang et al. (2005), from which the construct of attitude toward commercialization was derived. Zhang et al. (2005), in their examination of the effect of attitude toward commercialization, revealed that students' attitudes toward commercialization positively explained 12% of the variance in purchase intentions. In the current study, attitude toward commercialization was found to be significantly predictive of attitude toward sponsor and, in turn, of purchase intention of sponsor's product, where students' attitude toward sponsorship mediated the relationship between attitude toward commercialization and purchase intention of sponsor's product. The same mediating effect of attitude toward sponsor was also found in the relationships between beliefs about naming rights sponsorships and purchase intention of sponsor's product, as well as between perception of financial status and purchase intention of sponsor's product. The hierarchical relationships among belief, attitude, and behavior intentions (Madrigal, 2001) were again supported. In contrast, no mediating effect of ATS was detected in the relationships between beliefs about naming rights sponsorships and willingness to attend sporting events. These findings showed that individual responses to naming rights sponsorship in terms of behavior intentions were formed differently when the object was changed from the sponsor to the university.

While the concern of over-commercialization on college campuses did have a negative influence on attitude toward sponsorship and purchase intention of sponsor's product, it was not found to have a significant influence on willingness to attend sporting events in this study. It appears that the negative impact was primarily associated with the sponsor's side. One possible explanation could be that the negative effect was not strong enough to shake the already developed connections between students and the athletic program. Importantly, this study was conducted on a campus with a highly profitable football program that had just won the BCS national title a couple of years earlier. As students of this university showed extremely high team identification, stadium identification, and also willingness to attend sporting events, to influence their opinions with just a fictional announcement might be not an effective procedure. Also, due to the limitation of the research design, negative effects of stadium naming rights over a longer term were not examined in this study. Some of these concerns might take effect when more people sense the changing climate of opinions, i.e., peer influence. Nevertheless, the presence of highly negative attitude toward commercialization could always lead to concerns for athletic programs, particularly when that negative attitude toward commercialization is not properly channeled and controlled. Precautious actions would be constructive and necessary for athletic programs to undertake.

Researchers usually agree that team identification plays a significant role in sponsorship effectiveness (Dees et al., 2008; Madrigal, 2001; Zhang et al., 2005). Consistent with previous findings, in this study, students who had stronger team identification were found to be more likely to attend sporting events. In particular, team identification was found to play a significant role in predicting purchase intention of sponsor's product. When combined with attitude toward sponsorship, these two constructs accounted for 52% of the variance in purchase intention of sponsor's product. For a corporation that is seeking a naming rights partnership, an athletic program with good fan identification may bring advantages to materialize the effectiveness of a naming rights sponsorship. Thus, choosing a suitable athletic program and its stadium could be very important for corporations. Further, the new concept of stadium identification was introduced into this study not only because this construct helped distinguish facility naming rights from other forms of sport sponsorship but also because this type of identification could be another major source of negative concern for consumers. This speculation was partially supported by the research findings of this study, where stadium identification was found to be negatively related to attitude toward sponsorship when calculating zero-order correlations although not in the multiple regression analyses.

The concerns of psychological attachments to the old name of a stadium appeared to have less influence on sponsorship effectiveness than the concern of over-commercialization. It is necessary to note that the long-term effect of stadium identification was not examined in this study, and future studies are needed in order to alleviate this concern. Nevertheless, the negative relationship between stadium identification and attitude toward sponsorship may not necessarily lead to negative consequences for a naming rights sponsorship. Such would be the case if a stadium is extremely outdated and unable to provide a good environment for hosting sporting events, regardless of whether consumers hold high stadium identification toward the old stadium. In this situation, instead of displaying negative concerns, consumers may appreciate the naming rights sponsorship as being capable of making the new stadium a reality, and thus may express a positive attitude toward the sponsor.

Another new factor introduced in this study that has received little attention in previous sponsorship studies was the perception of financial status. Since the pressure to build a winning team comes partially from the expectations of fans, communicating that financial shortage is one of the major obstacles for higher achievement would make encourage fans to embrace a corporate naming rights sponsorship. Instead of worrying about commercialization, students may regard the sponsorship as being an important support for their athletic program, and thus present positive attitudes and supportive behavior toward the naming rights sponsorship. It makes practical sense that perceptions of a difficult financial status had a reverse effect on the negative concern of commercialization in the regression analysis of attitude toward sponsorship. Students in this study showed low mean scores in perception of financial status (M = 3.61), indicating that they generally did not recognize the financial difficulty of the athletic program and consider financial support from a sponsorship necessary. This finding supported the request for higher transparency of the financial report of intercollegiate athletics (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010) and can provide athletic administrators with a solution to help moderate the negative concerns of commercialization by educating their communities and stakeholders about the financial reality of the athletic program. Future studies may want to focus on the interaction between perception of financial status and attitude toward commercialization to see how much perception of financial status can actually conciliate or change negative attitude.

It is highly possible that consumer perception of financial status may be a moderating factor in the hierarchy of belief-attitude-behavior. Specifically, when financial need is perceived to be great, people could be more likely to be accepting of a sponsorship, despite their beliefs about naming rights or commercialization. This speculation deserves further investigation. When studying this issue, one should not neglect the moderating role of team identification. As mentioned in the literature review, perception of financial status could have a strong influence on sponsorship effectiveness when students have stronger team identification and also on the presence of interactive effect between these two constructs.

From an administrative perspective, this study identified certain potential negative concerns that need to be examined fully before entering into a naming rights sponsorship. One major concern relates to over-commercialization on college campuses and within intercollegiate sports. Consistent with the research findings of Alexandris et al. (2007) and Zhang et al. (2005), in this study, attitude toward commercialization was found to affect sponsorship outcomes, especially for attitude toward sponsorship. Perception of financial status could have a counter-effect on attitude toward commercialization, which might be utilized by athletic administrators in their marketing campaigns. Administrators need to pay careful attention when dealing with stadiums that have a rich history and are highly identified with by the fans. Although the findings of this study did not show that these negative concerns would have an immediate impact on student willingness to attend sporting events, they did not indicate that such willingness would not deteriorate over time. Monitoring stakeholders' beliefs and attitudes toward facility naming rights sponsorships is necessary at every stage of an agreement between the corporate and the athletic program.

Without a doubt, facility naming rights sponsorship has enormous potential in terms of value and ability. It can partially relieve the financial pressure on intercollegiate athletic programs. To have a comprehensive understanding of its mechanisms and functions is urgent and definitely constructive. In addition to the aforementioned limitations that are due in part to the research design of using a fictitious naming rights sponsorship scenario, this study had two other potential limitations that might hamper its internal and external validity. First, data collection was conducted within only one specific university, which might not fully represent all institutions in diverse market environments. This study was also limited to a FBS institution and its student body, limiting the research findings to only applicable settings of similar FBS institutions. Second, each conceptual construct in this study was measured using a uni-dimensional scale, which might not have captured compound aspects of the concept that may have existed. Future studies should consider including multiple institutions with diverse characteristics and possibly multidimensional measures. Future studies might also consider studying stakeholders that lie beyond the range of a student population.

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