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### **Sponsor-and Team-Related Intentions of Salient Market Segments in a Naming-Rights Sponsorship Scenario**

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*While facility naming-rights agreements are becoming more prevalent in intercollegiate athletics, both administrators and fans are still somewhat hesitant toward this type of sponsorship. Previous research explored college sport fans' attitudes and their role in predicting behavioral intentions, but other non-attitudinal factors have yet to receive attention. The purpose of this study was to examine differences between fans' future team- and sponsor-related intentions (i.e., purchase intentions) based on aspects of behavioral involvement (i.e., donations, event attendance) and demographic characteristics. Seven pertinent characteristics (age, gender, donor level, favorite team, game attendance, alumni status, and number of years as a fan) were identified from the literature, and differences between fan segments were assessed on both future sponsor- and team-related intentions in a hypothetical naming-rights scenario. Results of the MANOVA analyses revealed that higher level donors (in terms of their donation amount) were more likely to respond favorably to a naming-rights scenario than lower level donors. Significant differences were also found on gender and favorite team. The authors present additional theoretical and practical implications.*

*Keywords: sport sponsorship; sport marketing; consumer behavior; college sports; target marketing*

The emphasis on revenue generation in sport has never been more pronounced, so it is unsurprising that global spending on corporate sponsorship continues to increase, having recently surpassed \$50 billion worldwide (IEG, 2015). Intercollegiate athletics is an especially interesting microcosm for this revenue-focused philosophy, given its non-profit status, with some reports indicating that median athletic revenues in NCAA Division I climbed 83.6% from 2004-2013 (“Revenues”, 2014). While this ‘arms race’ (e.g., facilities, coaching salaries, recruiting, budgets, etc.) has received much attention in itself (Toma, 2003), the fact is that institutions continue to explore new and improved revenue streams to remain competitive, and seeking new sponsorships is an important part of this process.

One area of sponsorship that may be considered underdeveloped in college sport is facility naming-rights. Although eight-figure annual agreements are becoming the norm for professional sport facilities (“Naming rights deals”, 2011), naming-rights deals in college sports only average approximately \$800,000 per year for football stadiums and \$900,000 for basketball arenas (Dosh, 2014). Currently, the largest naming-rights deals for college basketball arenas are the \$2 million per year agreements at the University of Illinois and Fresno State University, and the largest football deal is the \$1.5 million annual agreement for the University of Houston’s new Texas Dow Employees Credit Union Stadium (Duarte, 2014; Popp, Eddy, & McEvoy, 2015). While these totals are substantially less than average for professional sport facilities, they are still significant; for example, the TDECU deal represented a nearly 5% growth to UH’s annual athletic revenues (“NCAA Finances”, 2014).

Despite being a potentially lucrative revenue stream, many institutions have been hesitant to explore naming-rights. Although the proposed naming-rights agreement between Florida Atlantic University (FAU) and GEO group fell through due to stakeholder outrage over the potential sponsor’s business practices (Patterson, 2013), issues with sponsor fit/reputation do not appear to be the primary constraint to naming-rights sponsorships expanding in college sports. Instead, some administrators expressed concerns that a naming-rights agreement, even with a reputable sponsor, would affect the tradition associated with their football program (Bentubo, 2007). The University of Washington’s recent naming-rights agreement for Husky Stadium with Alaska Airlines generated at least one letter expressing disappointment to the editor of the *Seattle Times* (Johnson, 2015) and one angry editorial on ESPN Seattle Radio (Moore, 2015); yet, it is unclear how the UW fans in general feel about this deal. Similar feelings of disappointment and anger have also been observed among some professional sport fan bases concerning naming-rights rumors, including fans of the San Francisco 49ers and Chicago Cubs (Lieberman, 2003; Muret, 2010). Examples of fan discontent with naming-rights also extend internationally – prominent German soccer club Borussia Dortmund’s Signal Iduna Park has held the name of a locally-based insurance company since 2005, but significant numbers of fans (possibly as high as 70%) still refuse to use the corporate name when referring to the sponsor (Woisetschläger, Haselhoff, & Backhaus, 2014). Thus, some college sport administrators believe that a naming-rights sponsorship could be met with resistance from fans who are concerned about the increasing commercialism in college sports (Bentubo, 2007; Zhang, Won, & Pastore, 2005).

In light of these highly publicized situations, the effects of naming-rights sponsorships on fans’ attitudes and behaviors have recently become the focus of academic research. Past work on naming-rights in college sport has focused primarily on attitudinal models that examine how

team identification, attitudes toward sponsorship, and attitudes toward commercialism affect stakeholders' emotional and conative responses (Chen & Zhang, 2012; Delia, 2014; Eddy, 2014; Reysen, Snider, & Branscombe, 2012). Administrators' concerns about fan resistance are partially supported by these studies, as Reysen et al. (2012) found that fans saw corporate stadium names as an attack on the team's distinctiveness. However, it has been suggested that highly identified fans may not retaliate with their purchasing power if an athletic department secured a naming-rights sponsor for the football stadium (Chen & Zhang, 2012; Eddy, 2014).

Although fans' future behaviors toward their favorite teams may not be negatively affected by a naming-rights agreement, the same may not be true for sponsors themselves. Several researchers have found that fans have indicated potential anger and negativity toward hypothetical naming-rights sponsors, and subsequently indicated negative future intentions (i.e. not purchasing products, speaking/feeling negatively about the sponsor) toward those brands (Chen & Zhang, 2012; Eddy, 2014; Reysen et al., 2012). More specifically, fans who feel emotionally attached to the stadium (Chen & Zhang, 2012) and/or feel strongly connected to athletic tradition in college sports (Eddy, 2014) indicate having more negative attitudes and intentions toward a potential sponsor. To date, however, this is the extent of what is known about fan responses to potential naming-rights sponsors, so further investigation is warranted.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether sponsor- and team-related intentions would differ among key market segments defined by non-attitudinal factors (namely demographic characteristics [i.e., age, gender] and involvement through salient behaviors [i.e., game attendance, athletic donation habits]). Demographic and behavioral factors have received less attention in the literature than attitudinal factors, despite differences having been found in a number of sponsorship studies (see below) that compare outcomes between salient market segments. Naming-rights sponsorship is also considered by some to be a unique sponsorship context (Eddy, 2014; Fullerton & Merz, 2008); thus, it is important to understand how market segments may differ in their perceptions and future intentions in this unique setting.

## Theoretical Background

### *Naming-Rights Sponsorship and Commercialism*

It has been argued that college athletics has transitioned from an amateur model to a more commercialized model of operation (Eddy, 2014; Sack, 2009; Zimbalist, 1999), and during this transition there has been a widening disparity of revenues across athletic departments (Cheslock & Knight, 2015). Often referred to as a "financial chasm" (McEvoy, Morse, & Shapiro, 2014; Seifried & Smith, 2011), this divide is most apparent between power five and non-power five athletic departments (Brady, Berkowitz, & Schnaars, 2015). The current disparity in revenue is attributed to the prevalence for the demand and retention of non-traditional revenue streams like naming-rights sponsorships and television contracts (Chen & Zhang, 2012; McEvoy et al., 2014).

Although naming-rights deals can increase revenue and close this gap, there is also potential for fan backlash as naming-rights are sometimes viewed as a more commercialized activity compared to other forms of sponsorship (Eddy, 2014; Woisetschläger et al., 2014). Zhang et al. (2005) identified a subgroup of college sport fans that are highly identified, but appear to be concerned with the increasing commercialism in college sports to the point of having an adverse effect on purchase intentions. Woisetschläger et al. (2014), through the lens of social identity theory, reported that fans can perceive naming-rights sponsorships as the out-

group "encroaching on the ritual place" of the in-group (p. 1504). Thus, when examining hostility or non-conformance towards sponsors and teams that have entered into a naming-rights relationship, it is important to remember how some fans view these activities as overly commercial.

### *Construal Level Theory and Involvement*

Construal level theory (CLT) proposes a link between psychological distance and level of evaluative abstraction to an event (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). Trope et al. (2007) conceptualized the framework as either low-level or high-level construals pursuant to the perceived distance of an event. Low-level construals are concrete thoughts focused on specific detail, and high-level construals are decontextualized abstract or less detailed representations of the event/brand. The four dimensions that are commonly used to comprise psychological distance are temporal distance (time until the event), spatial distance (geographic distance from the event), social distance (similarity between individuals or groups of people), and hypothetical distance (the probability that an event will actually occur in reality).

CLT has been used to explain differences in consumer behavior due to the influence of construal levels and distance dimensions (Hernandez, Wright, & Rodrigues, 2015; Liberman, Trope, and Wakslak, 2007). It has been suggested that higher construals appeal to the benefits of a product, while low-level construals benefit from messages appealing to a product's attributes (Hernandez et al., 2015; Kardes, Cronley, & Kim, 2006). However, purchase intention has not been linked to construal in either the traditional or sport marketing literature.

In sport marketing research, the concept of involvement has been used as an alternative means of examining social distance. Cognitive, affective, and behavioral involvement are the three most consistently operationalized dimensions of involvement (Alexandris, Douka, Bakaloumi, & Tsasousi, 2008; Jensen, Carlson, Tripp, 1998). Behavioral involvement, defined as "the time and/or intensity of effort expended in pursuing a particular activity" (Stone, 1984, p. 210), has received arguably the least attention in sponsorship research, despite an acknowledged need for more investigation (Cornwell, Relyea, Irwin, & Maignan, 2000; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Walraven, Koning, & van Bottenburg, 2012). Behavioral involvement covers many types of relevant sport consumer behaviors, such as length of participation in an activity, donation intention, and frequency of event attendance (Bee & Havitz, 2010; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997; Lee & Trail, 2011; Tsiotsou, 2007). As outcome variables, activities classified as behavioral involvement have been reported as having positive relationships with intention to purchase sponsor products, as well as recall and recognition of sponsors (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Kinney, McDaniel, & DeGaris, 2008; Ko, Kim, Claussen, & Kim, 2008).

### *Segmentation by Types of Behavioral Involvement*

Considering that sponsorship is an investment of capital that allows for the exploitation of possible commercial return (Meenaghan, 1991), it is important to discern which fan behaviors toward the organization may predict desirable sponsor-related behaviors. Several researchers proposed the segmentation of consumers by types of behavioral involvement (Dekhil, 2010; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). In college athletics, one such prominent consumer segment is athletic donors, as donors tend to be highly involved with an athletic department in a number of ways (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011; Tsiotsou, 2007). Tsiotsou (2004) proposed a method for

dichotomizing donation behavior, with the high involvement group exceeding \$1000 donated to the athletic department, and the low involvement group containing donation amounts below \$1000. In sponsorship settings, however, differences between levels of athletic donors have not been examined, so the following research question was constructed:

*RQ1: Do major donors (\$1000 or more annually), minor donors (less than \$1000 annually), and non-donors differ in terms of their sponsor-related intentions and team-related conative loyalty?*

A second group of important stakeholders for college athletic departments is alumni, who have been found to be a homogenous group in their feelings toward various issues in college athletics (Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008; Putler & Wolfe, 1999). Previous research examining differences between alumni and non-alumni focused primarily on donation behaviors (Stinson & Howard, 2004; 2007); however, little is known about attitudinal and behavioral differences between alumni and non-alumni (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Putler & Wolfe, 1999; Roy et al., 2008). In a study of divisional reclassification, Roy et al. (2008) found that alumni believe more strongly (than non-alumni) that Division I-A football can create a positive image for the university and enhance school spirit. Conversely, the general public (non-alumni) believe more strongly that the university image is influenced by football overall, in part because event attendance is their only connection to the university (Roy et al., 2008). However, given that there are both differences and similarities between the groups in the contexts discussed, it is unclear how each may respond to a hypothetical naming-rights scenario. Thus, the following research question is posed:

*RQ2: Do alumni differ from non-alumni on sponsor-related intentions and team-related conative loyalty?*

As previously mentioned, event attendance is a common factor for market segmentation in sponsorship contexts, as frequent attendees often indicate better recall/recognition (Pitts & Slattery, 2004) and more positive purchase intentions of sponsoring brands (Bennett, Ferreira, Lee, & Polite, 2009; Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross, & Maroco, 2013; Kinney et al., 2008; Ko et al., 2008; Walliser, 2003). It should be noted that Pitts and Slattery (2004) found that a homogenous sample of college football season ticket holders was not inclined to purchase sponsor products overall. While this finding might suggest that mean scores of sponsor-related intentions could be low, it does not shed additional light on whether group differences would exist between more/less frequent game attendees. As such, the following question was constructed:

*RQ3: Do individuals who attend more of their favorite team's games differ from those who attend fewer games on sponsor-related intentions and team-related conative loyalty?*

Finally, two aspects of behavioral involvement that received little attention in the literature are the team with which a fan identifies, and the length of time fans supported those teams. In past studies on naming-rights in college sports, settings consisting of single institutions have been the norm (Chen & Zhang, 2012; Delia, 2014; Reysen et al., 2012), and these researchers have acknowledged that single-institution samples may limit findings because fan

behaviors can differ across sport contexts (Pan & Baker, 2005). Additionally, while studies in this area used team identification to measure the strength of fans' connections to their favorite team (Chen & Zhang, 2012; Eddy, 2014), a direct investigation of longevity of fandom has not occurred. Pitts and Slattery (2004) reported that longer-term fans had more negative purchase intentions toward sponsor products, but this proposition was only tested within a single season. In terms of conative loyalty, from their findings, it seems reasonable to suggest that long-term fans could be more resistant to change and, consequently, their future behavior may differ from someone who has not been a fan of the team for as long. As such, the following research questions were posed:

*RQ4:* Do fans of different teams differ on sponsor-related intentions and team-related conative loyalty?

*RQ5:* Will sponsor-related intentions and team-related conative loyalty differ based on the number of years an individual has been a fan of the team?

### *Age and Gender Segmentation*

Demographic characteristics are another key category of market segmentation criteria (Kotler & Armstrong, 2003), and have been included in other sport sponsorship studies where involvement was the primary focus (Bennett et al., 2009). In general, younger subjects exhibited better cognitive sponsorship processing than older subjects (Kinney et al., 2008; Walraven et al., 2012), though it should be noted that Dekhil (2010) found no differences in sponsor recall between age groups. The findings of Bennett et al. (2009) suggested that younger fans are also more likely to purchase sponsor products. Since the context of this study more closely aligns with Bennett et al. (2009) and Kinney et al. (2008), the following question will be addressed:

*RQ6:* Do younger fan groups differ from older fan groups on sponsor-related intentions and team-related conative loyalty?

In terms of gender, several differences on the consumption behaviors of males and females have been reported. Females have been found to possess stronger emotional/affective connections to their favorite teams in college sport contexts than men (James & Ridinger, 2002; Ridinger & Funk, 2006), though males exhibited stronger behavioral involvement patterns (Bahk, 2000; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). Bennett et al. (2009) reported males had more positive purchase intention of sponsored products (Dodds, DeGaris, Perricone, 2014; Kinney et al., 2008), while females (Dekhil, 2010) have better sponsor recall and recognition. Dodds et al. (2014), on the other hand, found no gender differences for Major League Baseball fan purchase intention regarding promotional sales. Since past findings are somewhat inconsistent, the following research question was posed:

*RQ7:* Do males differ from females on sponsor-related intentions and team-related conative loyalty?

## Method

### *Sample*

Data collection took place at seven universities that compete at the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level. The institutions spanned four major conferences (i.e., Big 12, Big Ten, Pac 12, and Southeastern) across the Western, Midwestern, and Southern regions of the United States. The institutions were chosen based on rough similarities in enrollment and athletic revenues/expenses, and differences in terms of conference affiliation and location. The football teams of interest had also been competing at the highest level of college football since the mid-twentieth century, with six of the seven having won or shared at least one national championship. Additionally, the average stadium age among the seven programs was approximately 80 years, though all but one had been substantially renovated since 2000.

Respondents for the study were tailgaters and/or game attendees that were present around the seven selected college football stadiums during the hours leading up to a game. Data collection occurred before one game at each stadium, for a total of seven games. Individuals were approached using a non-probability intercept method in nearby parking lots and asked if they were willing to participate in the study. Participants completed the paper and pencil survey and returned them to the research team after completion. This method has been used in past studies of consumer behavior and sponsorship with college sport fan samples (Katz & Heere, 2013; Madrigal, 2000).

In total, 800 surveys were collected from an estimated 2,000 fans that were approached (an exact running count of solicited fans was not recorded). Sixty-nine surveys were omitted from the final analyses due to missing data, leaving 731 surveys for analysis. The respondents covered a wide range of ages ( $M = 37.31$  years,  $SD = 13.08$ , min = 18, max = 80) that were highly educated (77.6% had earned a Bachelor's degree). Most of the respondents classified themselves as White/Caucasian (91.5%), and 58.8% identified themselves as males. In terms of favorite college football teams, 78.5% of the respondents indicated that the home team in each contest was their favorite. 320 (55.7%) of the respondents were also season ticket holders. The total number of surveys collected at each site varied widely (from approximately 50-200), as some sites had sparse, later arriving crowds in comparison to other games in the sample (presumably due to unseasonably cold weather). The group sizes for each of the demographic and involvement variables (to be used in the data analysis) are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

*Frequency table (group sizes)*

<b>Involvement and demographic variables</b>					
<b>Favorite team</b>	<i>n</i>	%	<b>Alumni status</b>	<i>n</i>	%
Team #1	145	19.8	Never attended	338	46.2
Team #2	98	13.4	Some attendance	80	10.9
Team #3	91	12.4	Graduate	310	42.4
Team #4	87	11.9	Total	728	99.6
Team #5	63	8.6			
Team #6	45	6.2	<b>Attendance</b>	<i>n</i>	%
Team #7	45	6.2	0-2 games	243	33.8
Others	157	21.5	3-5 games	195	27.1
Total	731	100	6 or more games	282	39.2
			Total	720	98.5
<b>Years as a fan</b>	<i>n</i>	%	<b>Donations</b>	<i>n</i>	%
0-19 years	209	28.9	Non donor	461	63.1
20-29 years	245	33.8	Minor donor (< \$1000/yr)	122	16.7
30+ years	270	37.3	Major donor (\$1000+/yr)	105	14.4
Total	724	99.0	Total	688	94.1
<b>Age</b>	<i>n</i>	%	<b>Gender</b>	<i>n</i>	%
18-28 years	214	31.9	Male	430	58.8
29-41 years	231	34.4	Female	215	29.4
42+ years	226	33.7	Total	645	88.2
Total	671	91.8			

*Note: Instances where  $n < 731$  are due to missing data for those items*

### *Instrumentation*

The survey contained a total of 20 items, divided into two sections. The first section was focused on current behavior and demographics of the participants. The first question prompted participants to identify their favorite college football team, and instructed them to use that team as the context for the remainder of the survey. The favorite team question was followed by 11 single-item measures corresponding to the variables in Table 1, which is considered appropriate for certain conative and demographic variables (Kwon & Trail, 2005). Previous sport management research has supported the transformation of a continuous variable to a dichotomous categorization (Dwyer, 2011; Mahony & Moorman, 1999; Tsiotsou, 2007), as was done in this study for donor status, attendance, years as a fan, and age. While the statistical irregularities that can occur from dichotomizing a variable are well documented (c.f. MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002; Maxwell & Delaney, 1992), if continuous data present a non-normal distribution (i.e. extreme skewness) and the researcher(s) believe that the



construct could have an underlying categorical separation then dichotomizing can be appropriate (DeCoster, Iselin, & Gallucci, 2009; MacCallum et al., 2002). Since the use of categorical segments is common in sport marketing, and an extreme positive skew was observed for the donation amount variable, the continuous variables were converted to categorical data.

The second section of the survey contained eight items corresponding to the dependent variables, namely the multi-item measures of Sponsor-related Intentions (SI) and Conative Loyalty (CON) from Eddy (2014), which were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The CON scale was adapted by Eddy (2014) from the four-item Intentions for Sport Consumption Behavior Scale (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005), and the four-item SI scale was adapted by Eddy (2014) from Zhang et al. (2005) and Alexandris, Tsaousi, and James (2007). These items can be found in Table 2.

Future intentions toward both the sponsor and team (operationalized here as conative loyalty) have been examined together as dependent variables in attitudinal models within naming-rights sponsorship scenarios (Chen & Zhang, 2012; Eddy, 2014). Behavioral intentions are often employed as an outcome variable in both sponsorship and consumer behavior research because they are generally found to be a good indicator of future behaviors (Ajzen, Czasch, & Flood, 2009). Eddy (2014), as well as Chen and Zhang (2012), integrated aspects of sponsor image into their examination of fans' future intentions, as positive image transfer is among the desired outcomes from sponsorship agreements (Walraven et al., 2012).

In order to set up the hypothetical naming-rights scenario, the following statement preceded the measurement items: "Please assume that your favorite team has just sold the name of their stadium to a corporation when responding to the following questions (i.e., your team's stadium becomes Acme Stadium)". Other studies in this area used scenarios with names of actual corporations (Reysen et al., 2012), or more detailed fictional scenarios including pricing information (Chen & Zhang, 2012). In order to reduce potential biases that could arise from these types of scenarios (Speed & Thompson, 2000), a more simplistic, hypothetical situation was chosen for this study, with the assumed risk of potentially inflating Type-II error.

## Results

Since the dependent variable scales were adapted from several sources, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using maximum-likelihood estimation in *AMOS 22*. One modification was necessary, during which two items that loaded poorly were deleted to improve model fit, which left three items to measure each factor. The 2-factor CFA with SI and CON exhibited acceptable to good fit on the common fit indices ( $\chi^2 / df = 6.429$ , CFI = .972, GFI = .978, SRMR = .0552, RMSEA = .086). Both three item versions of SI and CON showed good internal consistency based on the standard .70 threshold for Cronbach's alpha (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Additionally, average variance extracted (AVE) values indicated acceptable convergent validity using the standard .50 threshold. The final set of items, factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and AVE values, can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Confirmatory factor analysis*

Factors/Items	Factor Loading ( $\beta$ )	$\alpha$	AVE
<b>Conative Loyalty (CON) (<math>M = 4.974</math>, <math>SD = 1.609</math>)</b>		.834	.644
I would likely purchase as much merchandise as I do now if the stadium were to be re-named after a corporation	.774		
I would be as likely to wear the team's clothing as often as I do now if the stadium were re-named after a corporation	.923		
If the stadium were re-named after a corporation, I would be likely to attend as many games as I do now.	.693		
<b>Sponsor-related Intentions (SI) (<math>M = 3.0778</math>, <math>SD = 1.433</math>)</b>		.737	.515
I think that a company paying to re-name our team's stadium would be a great help to our football program.	.550		
I would feel better about a company than I do now if it purchased the name of the football stadium.	.731		
If a company were to pay to re-name my team's football stadium, I would be likely to buy their products.	.842		

*Research Questions*

To address the research questions, seven one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) models were examined with SI and CON as the dependent variables in each case. Age, gender, favorite college football team, donor status, alumni status, number of years spent as a fan of the team, and the number of games attended each year acted as the lone independent variables in each of the MANOVAs. This approach was chosen over a single main-effects MANOVA (with all seven IVs included in the design) to preserve the largest possible sample sizes and best represent the full sample of participants, as missing data would have led to 172 data points being removed from the analysis (see Table 1). Additionally, either a main-effects or full factorial model would have created 3,888 cells in the design, making the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices untestable, and would have had a severe negative effect on the power of the analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Stevens, 2009). Groups of multiple one-way MANOVA models with adjusted significance levels have been used in other sport studies with large numbers of independent variables (Mahony, Riemer, Breeding, and Hums, 2006). Since using multiple MANOVAs with the same DVs would inflate Type I error, a Bonferroni-adjusted significance alpha of  $.05/7 = .007$  was used. Finally, in order to (partially) balance the group sizes, tertiary splits were used for the age, number of years spent as a fan, and the number of games attended each year variables (see Table 1 for the exact distributions and split values). Binary and tertiary splits have been used in other involvement and sponsorship research to allow for different patterns to emerge (Bennett et al., 2009). Since there were also a

large number of groups in the design (particularly for favorite teams), the Tukey HSD post-hoc test was used in all cases where Levene's test was not significant.

Prior to conducting the MANOVA tests, assumptions of normality, independence, and linearity were considered. SI and CON exhibited normal distributions via descriptive statistics and histograms, so there were no apparent assumption violations. The homogeneity of variance/co-variance matrices assumption was assessed in each case using Box's  $M$  test, which can be found in the analysis of each research question below. All MANOVA analyses were performed using *SPSS Statistics 22*.

**Research question 1 (Donor status).** The Box's  $M$  test was not significant ( $F = .982$ ;  $p = .435$ ) and Wilk's Lambda was significant ( $F = 4.052$ ;  $p = .003$ ). Post-hoc ANOVAs indicated differences between the groups on SI ( $p = .001$ ), but not for CON ( $p = .033$ ) using the adjusted .007 significance threshold. A Tukey-HSD test confirmed that the SI mean score for major donors ( $M = 3.502$ ) was significantly higher ( $p = .001$ ) than that of non-donors ( $M = 2.943$ ; see Table 3). Consequently, the difference suggested in RQ1 was observed.

**Research question 2 (Alumni status).** The Box's  $M$  test was not significant ( $F = .519$ ;  $p = .794$ ). Wilk's Lambda was not significant ( $F = .682$ ;  $p = .604$ ), suggesting no significant differences between those who never attended the university, attended the university but did not graduate, or were alumni of the university.

**Research question 3 (Attendance).** The Box's  $M$  test was not significant ( $F = 1.490$ ;  $p = .177$ ). Wilk's Lambda was slightly greater than the adjusted .007 threshold for significance ( $F = 3.564$ ;  $p = .0072$ ), suggesting no significant differences between those attending different numbers of games. A post-hoc Tukey-HSD test (not shown) confirmed that there were no significant differences between attendance groups.

**Research question 4 (Favorite team).** The Box's  $M$  test was not significant ( $F = .956$ ;  $p = .516$ ) and Wilk's Lambda was significant ( $F = 4.340$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Post-hoc ANOVAs indicated differences between groups on SI ( $p < .001$ ) but not for CON ( $p = .103$ ). This time, Levene's test was significant ( $p = .025$ ), likely due to the variation in sample sizes between groups, so a non-parametric post-hoc test was selected. A Games-Howell test identified three pairs of fan groups (out of 21 total combinations) that differed significantly on SI (see Table 3). It should be noted that fans who indicated a favorite team other than the seven home teams in the sample were not examined in this test, since they represented a wide range of institutions with only small numbers of fans for each.

**Research question 5 (Years as a fan).** The Box's  $M$  test was not significant once again ( $F = 1.699$ ;  $p = .117$ ). Wilk's Lambda was not significant ( $F = .673$ ;  $p = .611$ ), suggesting no significant differences between the groups.

**Research question 6 (Age).** The Box's  $M$  test was significant at the .05 level ( $F = 2.782$ ;  $p = .010$ ), so homogeneity of variance/co-variance matrices was not assumed. Although it has been suggested that Box's  $M$  test should be considered significant only at the .001 level (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), Pillai's Trace criterion was still used. Pillai's Trace indicated that the one-way MANOVA was not significant ( $F = 1.621$ ;  $p = .166$ ), suggesting that there were no differences between the age groups.

**Research question 7 (Gender).** The Box's  $M$  test was not significant ( $F = .845$ ;  $p = .469$ ). This time, Wilk's Lambda was significant ( $F = 8.568$ ;  $p < .001$ ), indicating differences between the genders. A test of between-subjects effects (Levene's test not significant) suggested that the SI mean score for males ( $M = 3.249$ ) was significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) than that of

females ( $M = 2.759$ ; see Table 3). The CON mean scores did not differ significantly for males and females ( $p = .198$ ).

Table 3

*Significant differences from post-hoc tests*

DV	Main-effect factor	Larger group mean	Smaller group mean	<i>p</i> -value
SI	Gender	Males ( $M = 3.249$ )	Females ( $M = 2.759$ )	<.001
	Donor level	Major donor ( $M = 3.502$ )	Non-donor ( $M = 2.943$ )	<.001
	Fav. Team	Inst. #1 ( $M = 3.274$ )	Inst. #3 ( $M = 2.264$ )	<.001
		Inst. #2 ( $M = 3.612$ )	Inst. #3 ( $M = 2.264$ )	<.001
		Inst. #2 ( $M = 3.612$ )	Inst. #4 ( $M = 2.865$ )	.006

*Note: Bonferroni-adjusted significance alpha level of .007*

## Discussion

Measuring sponsor-related intentions is of clear value to a prospective naming-rights sponsor (and corresponding athletic department) in determining the potential viability of an agreement. It was also considered important to investigate conative loyalty toward the team (after the hypothetical sponsorship agreement) across different fan groups. Administrators expressed concerns about fan bases potentially being ‘turned off’ by the introduction of a naming-rights sponsor on a college football stadium (Bentubo, 2007), thereby affecting conative loyalty (i.e., attendance). It should also be noted that much of the evidence of fan discontent mentioned above in the introduction is anecdotal, and may only reflect the perceptions of a small, vocal minority. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, no significant differences on conative loyalty were observed between any of the market segments tested in this study. Further, the respondents indicated that they were at least somewhat likely, as a group, to continue their previous consumption habits regardless of a naming-rights deal being introduced (see Table 2). This is quite a positive finding for athletic administrators, as the suspected negative effect on athletic revenue (i.e., from decreased ticket sales) may not actually take place. Although fan discontent could still occur (Reysen et al., 2012; Woisetschlager et al., 2014), the results of this study suggest that any negative emotion/perception may not result in changes to behavior.

The ability to identify differences (or similarities) between market segments could also assist administrators in generating strategies to target groups that might be most willing to purchase a sponsor’s products, or conversely to employ retention strategies toward the fan groups that are most at-risk to decrease their conative loyalty with the team. Furthermore, the use of single-items (as in this study) to measure aspects of behavioral involvement is acceptable (Kwon & Trail, 2005), which can simplify data collection and analysis for professionals in the sport industry.

### *Significant Findings*

Sponsor-related intentions differed only by donor status, favorite team, and gender, and no significant group differences were found on conative loyalty. Perhaps the most important finding was for RQ1, as major donors indicated significantly more positive SI than non-donors. Additionally, the 105 participants that were classified in the major donor group actually had the highest mean score of any unidimensional subgroup in the study, besides the subgroup of 98 participants that self-identified Institution #2's football team as their favorite (see Table 3). While past research strongly indicates that higher-level donors tend to be more highly involved with athletic departments (Tsiotsou, 2004), it was unclear a priori if major donors would be upset by the idea of a naming-rights agreement. Though sponsorship tends to be accepted more readily by stakeholders in sport contexts than for arts or other causes (Walliser, 2003), there is some evidence from the general non-profit literature that corporate sponsorship could have a negative impact on personal donations to a cause (Bennett, Kim, & Loken, 2013).

The findings in this study provide some evidence that the opposite may be true in college athletic settings. This difference could be due to the fact that college athletic donors are generally well informed (by fundraising professionals) as to how their gifts are used by the athletic department, and perhaps major donors have been better able to see direct positive outcomes and impact from past contributions. Thus, it could be possible that major donors are more accepting of revenue being generated from a variety of sources because they have a better understanding of what that money can mean for the future of their favorite athletic program.

Through the lens of construal level theory, one could argue that major donors are among the most spatially and socially connected to their favorite football team, above all the other subgroups of fans in this study. Major donors often have strong attendance habits, attend special events with other major donors, and have also chosen a greater financial commitment to their team, so it seems likely that major donors are working at lower construal levels than other groups of fans. As such, it would appear that individuals with lower levels of construal may have more positive purchase intentions for relevant products than individuals at higher levels of construal. However, it should be noted that other groups from this study having low spatial and social distances, such as frequent game attendees and longer term fans, did not exhibit significant differences in purchase intentions from other groups. Thus, future study is required to determine whether construal level has a significant effect on purchase intentions in sport contexts.

The finding regarding donors should be encouraging for practitioners, as it appears that their (arguably) most important group of fans would be least likely to respond negatively to a potential football stadium naming-rights agreement. If an influential subgroup of fans (major donors) became supportive of a naming-rights sponsorship, then positive sentiment could spread more broadly across the in-group. Said differently, with early communication about a naming-rights agreement, development professionals may be able to use support from major donors to generate positive initial perceptions among other fans through a trickle-down effect. Further, although major donors were more likely to be accepting of a football stadium naming partner, whether or not such a sponsorship would cause them to alter/decrease their annual donation (as was observed in non-sport settings by Bennett et al. [2013]) was beyond the scope of this study.

Age and gender were the two demographic variables of interest, and there is precedent in the sport sponsorship literature for examining age and gender in combination with behavioral involvement-related predictors (Bennett et al., 2009). In this study, significant differences were only found on gender. Males indicated higher scores for SI than females, though both groups

had negative mean scores when compared to the neutral score of 4. Females ( $M = 2.759$ ) indicated being between 'somewhat unlikely' and 'unlikely' to purchase a future naming sponsor's products, or adopt the sponsor's brand. This is an important practical finding, as it is often assumed that females are frequently in control of most purchase decisions within a household.

In other studies of sponsorship, it has been suggested that females are generally not targeted effectively and are less aware of sponsorship campaigns, but show a general propensity for sales promotions in general (Dodds et al., 2014). Women have also been found to have stronger connections to their favorite teams than men (James & Ridinger, 2002), and female fans' loyalty may be less sensitive to team performance than for males (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002). Considering the positive relationship between team identification and sponsor outcomes (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Walraven et al., 2012), there would seem to be an opportunity for sponsors to connect with highly-identified female fans; however, females also indicated higher levels of university pride as part of their college athletic fandom (Ridinger & Funk, 2006). As such, more effective female targeting may help, but it could be the case that these highly-identified females are more sensitive to tradition in college sports. Zhang et al. (2005) reported no differences between males' and females' attitudes toward commercialism, though it was unclear what methods they used to reach that conclusion. Future research, perhaps employing qualitative methods, should focus on the reasons why females have indicated weaker sponsor-related intentions.

It should be said that differences between demographic groups should always be interpreted with caution, however, as individual differences are not captured when looking at demographic groups. This is by no means a new argument - Galen Trail was famously quoted as saying "you can do all the demographic research in the world and you aren't learning diddly" (as quoted in King, 2004, para. 9). The work of Hansen and Gauthier (1989) supports this position, as they found that demographics have less influence on attendance than factors like game attractiveness and residual preferences. More directly relevant to the current study, Reysen et al. (2012) found that demographics accounted for only 8% of the variance predicting fan anger towards naming-rights sponsorships. Thus, it is worth reminding scholars and practitioners that while demographic characteristics represent an important 'first step' in the market segmentation process, we must continue to move away from attempting to use demographic factors alone to tell the story of consumption behavior.

RQ4 was the last research question where between-group differences were found. The purpose for including this variable was to provide preliminary empirical support for the commonly accepted limitation associated with generalizing results of college sport studies that focus on single-institution samples. Through the lens of social identity theory, the findings for RQ4 could be explained by the fact that social groups seek distinctiveness from salient out-groups. In this context, it appears that fans' perceptions toward naming-rights sponsorships tend to be relatively consistent with those of the fan groups with which they identify. Differences in perceptions and attitudes between fan groups on the same phenomena have also been observed in studies of rivalry in college sport settings (Havard, 2016; Havard & Reams, 2016). The actual drivers of this group-think (i.e., differences between fan group traditions) are beyond the scope of this study, but future research should examine the process by which fans adopt similar perceptions about sponsorship across the in-group.

Of the 21 total combinations of team pairings, three pairs of significant differences were found between fans' SI across different institutions in the sample (see Table 3). Actual

institution names were not revealed (to preserve anonymity), but the researchers agreed a priori that Institution #3 was the most 'tradition-conscious' in the sample, so it was not surprising when their fans indicated the most negative mean scores on SI and CON of any of the favorite team-based fan segments. Additionally, Institution #2 was considered to be struggling the most, both competitively and financially, among the seven universities at the time of data collection. Hence, it might be reasonable to suggest that those fans are willing to accept "any help they can get" to return the program to more successful times from decades past.

Situation-specific elements aside, there are clearly differences between fans of different institutions that need additional exploration in future research. As mentioned above, there is a need to determine exactly what is driving these differences in fan perceptions between institutions, when other factors are essentially held equal. For example, the fans of Institution #2 had significantly more positive intentions than fans of Institution #3, and at the time of data collection the athletic revenues generated by Institution #2 were almost half of those generated by Institution #3. On the other hand, Institution #1 generated revenues that were less, but substantially closer, to those of Institution #3; yet a significant difference was also found between those two institutions. In any case, these findings highlight the value of replicating sponsorship studies in multiple settings involving heterogeneous samples (i.e., multiple favorite teams, cross-cultural studies) to lend stronger support to existing theories about sponsorship effectiveness. This finding also reinforces the importance for administrators to fully understand the attitudes and intentions of their own fan bases before adopting sponsorship strategies that were successful at other institutions, as the results in this study suggest that their fans may not react the same way.

To be clear, the sample of institutions was as homogeneous as possible in terms of competitive success and size, but considering the vast range of relevant institutional and athletic characteristics, there were still many differences in terms of tradition, location, etc. It has been previously suggested that sport and non-sport sponsorship contexts yield similar results in models of sponsorship effects (Olson, 2010); however, from the data in this study, it does not appear that effects are even consistent within sports themselves. While the sample in this study is perhaps more generalizable than a single-institution sample, the differences between fan groups found again amplifies the difficulty inherent in generalizing findings across settings in sponsorship studies.

### *Future Research*

This study adds to the growing body of literature, within sponsorship research, examining stadium naming-rights agreements in intercollegiate athletics. Future research will continue to help administrators understand fan perceptions about naming-rights sponsorships, and advance theory on sponsorship processing and attitudes. Given the size and scope of these agreements, and the magnitude of both positive and negative effects that can follow, understanding fans' reactions is critically important so athletic administrators can make informed decisions on how to capitalize on the commercial potential of their facilities. In order to achieve these goals, other types of research designs are necessary in future studies. Most of the studies in the literature, in addition to the current study, rely on hypothetical scenarios to gauge fan perceptions. Future studies should focus on fans of organizations that have naming partners, preferably between different time periods. Longitudinal studies or pre/post designs to measure actual perceptual change within subjects would also be helpful in advancing the knowledge in this area.

In terms of the research design in this study, the means by which the hypothetical scenario was defined on the survey instrument came with the risk of inflating Type-II error, as mentioned previously. Thus, some of the non-significant results from this study may warrant additional examination in future research. For example, attendance fell just short of significance at the adjusted alpha level of .007 in the MANOVA design with both dependent variables. However, a univariate one-way ANOVA with CON as the dependent variable was significant at the .004 level, with those in the high attendance group ( $M = 5.22$ ) indicating better future conative loyalty than the medium ( $M = 4.82$ ) and low ( $M = 4.81$ ) groups. The operationalization of the attendance variable could have played a role in muting the expected relationship, as respondents were asked to indicate the number of games that they *normally* attend in a given year. The authors of this study were more interested in a long-term view of attendance; however, this may or may not have been an accurate representation of their current/recent frequency of attendance. Additionally, major donors indicated more positive SI than minor donors at a .1 significance level, and significantly more positive CON than minor and non-donors at the .05 level. As such, future studies using different designs may find the expected positive relationships with increased attendance (Bennett et al., 2009), and perhaps find more significant relationships between donor groups.

It should also be noted that the authors chose the simplified hypothetical scenario to reduce various biases, but this approach could have also affected fans' responses to the sponsor-related intention items. According to CLT, when hypothetical distance is high (meaning the event is highly improbable to occur in reality), the event is processed at high construal levels; when hypothetical distance is low (meaning the event is likely to occur), processing occurs at low construal levels. Thus, fan responses to the scenario could have been affected by whether or not they believed that their favorite team was likely to strike a naming-rights agreement in the near future. However, the interaction between distance dimensions within CLT is not well understood (Lieberman et al., 2007), so it is unclear whether hypothetical distance would affect a situation where other distance dimensions (in this case, spatial and social distances) are arguably more salient to the situation. Further, a limitation that is always present in this type of study design is whether these same fans' behaviors would actually change in a real-life situation. Although the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen et al., 2009) suggests that behavioral intentions are a reliable indicator of future behavior, we cannot measure true behavioral change without a pre/post-test design. Future research could generate best practices for gauging fans' intentions in settings where sponsor/property relationships of interest to the researchers do not currently exist, as mentioned previously, and attempt to control for perceived hypothetical distance of the event.

Finally, there was no significant difference between alumni and non-alumni on SI or CON (RQ2). It was perhaps more interesting that no differences were found, because this suggests that the idea of 'being part of the campus community' may have little influence on individuals' connection to the university as football fans. As a corollary to the argument about the usefulness of segmentation by demographic characteristics, Stinson and Howard (2004) suggested that the alumni/non-alumni dichotomy may not be a suitable predictor of donor behavior – the results in this study would support a similar argument in terms of behavioral reactions to sponsorship. Further, although alumni are certainly an extremely important stakeholder group in college sports, it is worth noting that individuals who had never enrolled at their favorite football team's university comprised almost half of the sample. Consequently, marketers must not ignore individuals from outside the immediate campus community as these individuals appear to represent a significant amount of purchasing power, and may feel just as



connected to the athletic program as students and alumni. Future studies should pay increased attention to the perceptions and behaviors of non-alumni fan groups in college sport settings.

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