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A path analysis re-examining the intercollegiate naming right sponsorship effectiveness model

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Intercollegiate naming right sponsorship has a great potential in its market value, but it is usually accompanied with a potential risk of generating negative outcomes. With such a dilemma, a structural model that can help in assessing the effectiveness of the sponsorship become extremely important. The current study was designed to reexamine the theoretical framework of a model that was developed for evaluating the effectiveness of naming right sponsorships. Through a comprehensive literature review, the current study identified specific relationships among eight proposed factors, proposed and tested a new structural model through a path analysis. The proposed model fit the data well ($\chi^2(1, N = 548) = 42.03, p = .000$), where root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .072 with the 90% confidence interval from .050 to .095, comparative fit index (CFI) = .974, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .025. Most of the hypothesized paths in the model were confirmed, in which attitudes toward commercialization (ATS) are fully mediating the relationship between beliefs about naming rights sponsorship (BFN) and two outcome variables (purchase intention of sponsor's product (PIP) and willingness to attend sporting events (WAS)). The moderating effects of the two proposed moderators were also confirmed.

Key words: Collegiate Athletics, Facility, Perception, Attitude, Behavioral Intentions

INTRODUCTION

Of various expenditures in collegiate athletics, building or renovating sport facilities is one of the major costs and also the one that is especially difficult to be kept under control (Greenberg, 2008; King, 2005). Many institutions had to take on long-term debt to construct new, brighter, and bigger facilities, a decision that could place 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 and meanwhile relied on the naming rights to raise the remaining \$50 million (Condotta, 2011). Wolf (2007) predicted that more dramatic changes would occur in the collegiate naming rights sponsorship over the next 10-15 years. At that time in 2007, there were only 11 universities that have their football stadium naming rights sold. Today, in 2016, it is reported that including basketball arenas,

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there are at least 58 collegiate naming rights deals could be found in public record (EXSS IMPACT, 2016). It might not be difficult foreseeing that this number continues to grow in the coming future, as costs in running college athletics departments is rapidly increasing and administrators are eager for new revenue streams to cover escalating expenses.

However, various stakeholders within and outside higher education institutions have raised significant amount of suspicion about and opposition against the increasing number of sponsorship agreements and the commercialism on university campus (Benford, 2007; Jensen and Butler, 2007). In the United States, stadium names usually carried a sense of the institution's history, recognition, and nostalgia (Boyd, 2000). A corporation name on a stadium, however, does not have the same meaning and function. Instead, the only message to fans might be that the firm paid a lot of money for the rights. No doubt intercollegiate facility naming rights agreements can generate immense financial benefits to both sponsors and sponsees, but the potential negative impacts could not be overlooked either. It has always been a tough decision to make when selling a facility naming right for institutions. Thus, Chen and Zhang (2011) proposed a conceptual model for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness and potential impacts of this type of sponsorship. These authors followed up their study by examining the model through investigating students' response to a fictional naming right deal, in which college students' perceptions, attitude, and behavioral intentions toward corporate naming rights sponsorship were measured (Chen and Zhang, 2012). Five explanatory factors were examined in the study, including beliefs about the nature of facility naming rights sponsorship (BFN), attitudes toward commercialization (ATC), team and stadium identifications (TID, SID), and perceptions of financial status (PFS). Their relationships with sponsorship outcomes regarding attitude toward sponsor (ATS), purchase intention of sponsor's product (PIP), and willingness to attend sporting events (WAS) were then examined using hierarchical regression analyses. However, due to the exploratory nature of both studies, authors were unable to hypothesize or test more specific direct, indirect, and interactional effects that could potentially exist among these factors. Chen and Zhang (2011) was basically a review study that did not involve any empirical data; where Chen and Zhang (2012) used only regressions to test how the two dependent variables (PIP and WAS) was affected by all independent variables (BFN, ATC, TID, SID and ATS) together. There was no structural model been proposed in either studies. Therefore, the current study was designed to re-examine the relationships among aforementioned factors through a comprehensive literature review. We aimed to identify specific indications for correlations among factors, to propose a structural model, and to conduct a path analysis examining the proposed model.

Chen and Zhang (2011) adopted the hierarchy of belief-attitude-behavior intentions proposed by Madrigal (2001) to serve as a theoretical foundation of their model. It was suggested that 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 behavior intentions, which in turn predicts that person's behavioral response to the object (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Madrigal, 2001). Accordingly, consumers' attitude toward the naming right sponsor (ATS) would have a direct and positive impact on their purchase intention of sponsor's product (PIP). Consumers' attitude toward sponsor could also play as a mediating role in the relationship between their belief about the nature of facility naming rights sponsorship (BFN) and PIP. Such a relationship was derived from Madrigal's (2001) suggestion in the hierarchy of belief-attitude-behavior intentions. Chen and Zhang (2012) tested such a hierarchy relationship among BFN, ATS and PIP. However, they did not further examine how ATS related to other variables in the model, and how BFN can have an impact on these variables through the mediating effect of ATS. In a naming right sponsorship, sponsor tries to build a connection with the stadium and events through putting their names on the stadium. ATS could then have a direct and positive impact on WAS since the name of the stadium has changed to be named after the sponsor. One with lower ATS is less likely to attend events in the stadium with the sponsor's name when comparing to those who have higher ATS. Thus, we propose:

H₁: Beliefs about naming rights sponsorship (BFN) has a positively effect on attitudes toward sponsor (ATS).

H₂: Attitudes toward the sponsor (ATS) has a positively effect on purchase intention of sponsor's product (PIP) and willingness to attend sporting events (WAS); ATS would mediate the relationship between BFN and PIP.

For a modern sport competition to be successful, obtaining sufficient commercial support has become a necessary and critical element. However, the growing concern about the over-commercialization of sports cannot be overlooked (Zhang et al., 2005). For example, it was reported that considerable discussions were raised during the Atlanta Olympic Games worrying about increased marketing activities in caused over-commercialization and the loss of the amateur nature of the Games (Lee et al., 1997). Consumers' attitude toward commercialization (ATC) reveals their responses to excessive marketing activities, which may also affect their attitudes toward both the events and the sponsors. Consumers who hold a positive or neutral attitude toward commercialization is more likely to be immune to the influence of the negative belief that corporate naming leads to over-commercialization (BFN); hence, those consumers would be more likely to possess an overall

positive attitude toward the sponsor (ATS). These diverse possibilities lead to the third hypothesis for this study:

H₃: Attitude toward commercialization (ATC) would have a positively effect on beliefs about naming rights sponsorship (BFN), and a positively effect on attitudes toward the sponsor (ATS).

Team identification (TID), one of the most important determinants in sponsorship effectiveness, could be defined as one's level of attachment to or concern about a particular sport team (Wann and Barnscombe, 1993). It is frequently reported that fans with stronger team identification are more likely to attend sporting events (Pease and Zhang, 2001; Trail et al., 2003), to identify sponsors (Gwinner and Swanson, 2003), and to purchase sponsors' products (Madrigal, 2001). It is expected that highly identified fans would have a stronger emotional attachment to the performance of their teams. Consequently, they are more likely to view the financial support from anyone (including a corporate naming partner) as a fuel to their team's success, which in turn generate more favorable attitudes toward the sponsor (ATS) and more positive behavior intentions toward both sponsor (PIP) and the event (WAS). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis of this study was:

H₄: Team identification (TID) would have a positively effect on attitudes toward the sponsor (ATS) and willingness to attend sporting events (WAS).

Different from other types of sport sponsorships that use sport events, teams or individual athletes as marketing mediums, the medium in a naming rights sponsorship is a sport facility. Thus, the role and concept of team identification (TID) can be extended and applied to fans' identification with a stadium in a corporate naming sponsorship. This concept was first proposed in Chen and Zhang (2011) and examined in Chen and Zhang (2012), in which its important role in determining the effectiveness of this particular type of sponsorship was emphasized. Although, the role of SID still has not been well investigated and documented in sponsorship literature, it could be as important as team identification in team and event sponsorships. Noticeably, stadium identification (SID) usually works in a reverse function to its influence on sponsorship outcomes. Fans that highly identify with the old stadium could be more likely to generate or strengthen their negative attitudes toward corporate naming rights sponsor (ATS) because of their strong emotional attachment to the old stadium name. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis of this study was:

H₅: Stadium identification (SID) would have a negatively effect on beliefs about naming rights sponsorship (BFN), attitudes toward the sponsor (ATS) and willingness to attend sporting events (WAS).

Although, commercial sponsorship on campuses could be perceived as contaminating the transparency of inter-collegiate athletics in many people's minds, administrators would argue that such a financial support is necessary for the soaring expenses of building a strong athletic program of fans' expectations. When everything is taken into account, facility naming rights may be viewed as an acceptable compromise (Shelton, 2006). However, most of the fans were not aware of that many of the elite athletic programs in the country are running under deficit and must rely on allocations from general university funds, student fees, and state subsidies to meet funding gaps between escalating expenses and limited revenues. It is reasonable that students would think more favorably toward a naming right deal if they perceive the sponsorship would stop them from paying for the athletic programs out of their own pockets. Therefore, how fans perceive the financial status of their favored athletic programs (PFS) could have an important influence on the effectiveness of any corporate naming rights sponsorship. Corporate sponsorship might be more easily embraced by fans who recognize that their athletic programs facing a major financial issue. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis of this study was:

H₆: Perceptions of financial status (PFS) would have a positively effect on beliefs about naming rights sponsorship (BFN).

Moreover, how much facility naming rights would have effect on sponsorship outcomes would also depend on how much a fan identifies with the team. Perception of financial status (PFS) could have a stronger influence on sponsorship effectiveness when students have higher team identification (TID), which would imply the presence of interaction effect between these two constructs. Therefore, the seventh hypothesis of this study was:

H₇: Perceptions of financial status (PFS) would have an interaction with Team identification (TID) on the effect on attitudes toward the sponsor (ATS), purchase intention of sponsor's product (PIP).

The theoretical framework of this study and the relationships among these variables are summarized and illustrated in Figure 1.

METHODS

A survey study was carried out to address the research questions and test the hypotheses. Research participants were students ($N = 441$) attending a FBS university in the Southeast, 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. 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). A total of 465 returned questionnaires

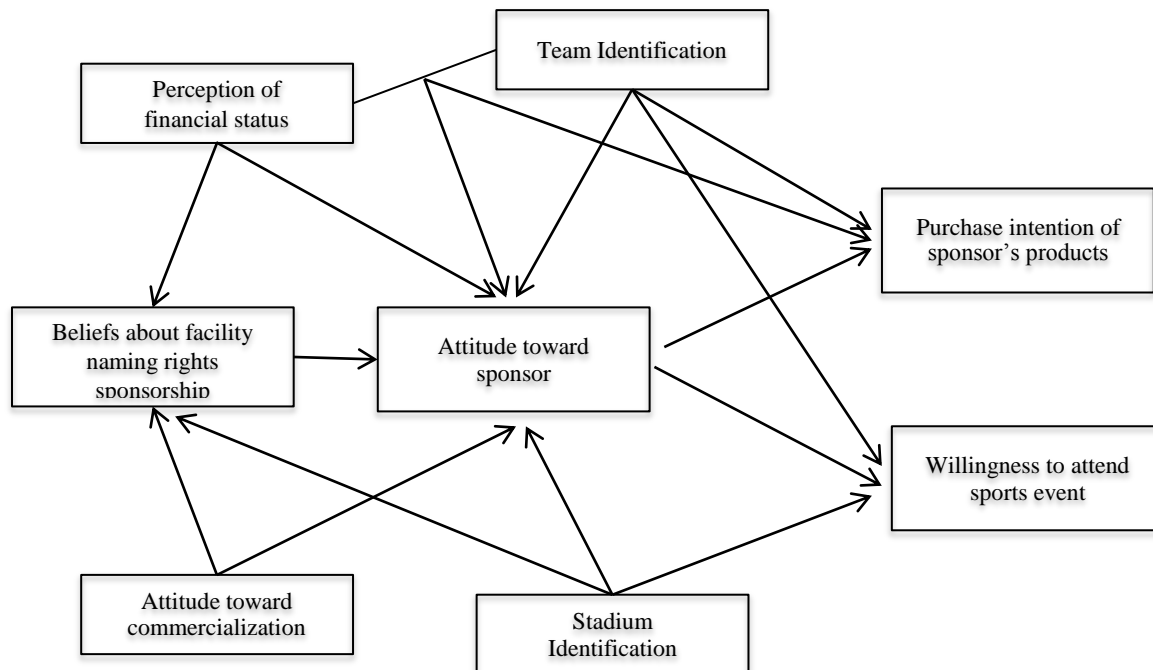


Figure 1. Theoretical Model--Relationships of Beliefs, Attitudes, Psychological attachments, and Sponsorship Effectiveness.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables.

Variables	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	228	51.7
	Female	213	48.3
Age	18-21	293	66.4
	22-25	148	33.6
Ethnicity	Caucasian	230	52.2
	Hispanic	66	15.0
	Asian	63	14.3
	African-American	56	12.7
	American Indian	1	.2
	Mixed ethnicity or other	25	5.7

were collected, of which 24 were excluded from further analysis due to large amount of missing values. Of the respondents, 228 were males (51.7%) and 213 females (48.3%). In terms of age, 66.4% were 18-21, and 33.6% were 22-25. Ethnic composition of the participants included 52.2% Caucasian, 15.0% Hispanic, 14.3% Asian, 12.7% African-American, and 5.7% mixed ethnicity or other. Descriptive data of demographic variables were illustrated in table 1.

Data were then analyzed in two steps following procedures outlined by James et al. (1982): (a) to confirm the proposed paths to be significantly different from zero (OLS regressions), OLS regressions were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 23.0) and a confirmatory analysis on the path

model was conducted using Mplus 6.0; (b) to confirm the non-hypothesized paths are not different from zero, we conducted disturbance term regression using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 23.0); and (c) The interaction (moderating) effects were tested using the residual centering method in Lance (1988).

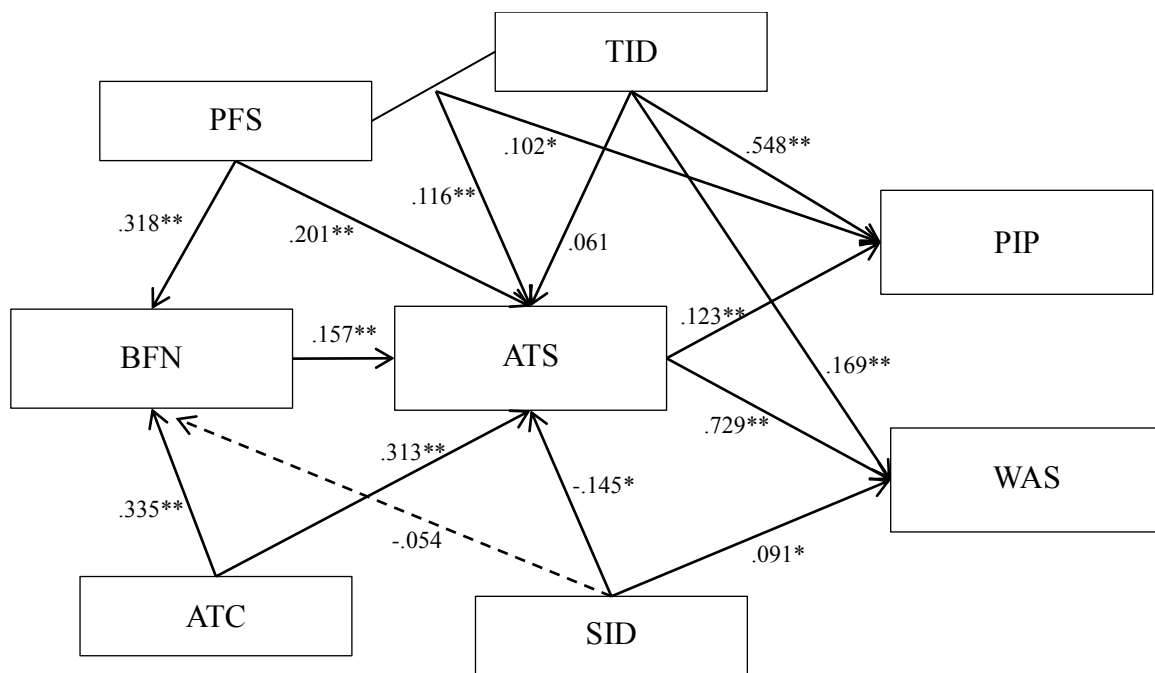
RESULTS

The proposed model consisted of four exogenous variables (ATC, TID, SID, PFS) and four endogenous

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)		.50**	-.07	-.20**	.49**	.44**	.07	.34**
Attitude toward Commercialization (ATC)			-.10*	-.24**	.49**	.53**	.03	.40**
Team Identification (TID)				.70**	-.06	-.10*	.54**	.16**
Stadium Identification (SID)					-.19**	-.24**	.59**	.04
Perception of Financial Status (PFS)						.46**	.04	.36**
Attitude toward Naming Rights Sponsor (ATS)							.08	.69**
Purchase Intentions of Sponsor's Products (PIP)								.32**
Willingness to Attend Sporting Events (WAS)								

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

**Figure 2.** Summarized results of path analysis examining proposed paths by OLS regressions.

variables (BFN, ATS, PIP, WAS), with the BFN and ATS as mediating constructs. Utilizing an individual's mean score for each variable, zero-order correlation coefficients were first tested (Table 2). As hypothesized, two of the exogenous variables (ATC, PFS) were significantly correlated to BFN, while all four exogenous variables were all significantly related to ATS. BFN was also significantly correlated with ATS, and ATS was significantly correlated with WAS. The first assumption of the mediating role of BFN and ATS was then supported. However, a surprising result was found as the relationship between ATS and PIP which was not significant (although it was close, $p = .08$).

Based on Hu and Bentler's (1999) and Kline's (2011) discussion on model fit evaluation, the proposed model fit

the data well ($\chi^2(1, N = 441) = 42.03, p = .000$), where root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .072 with the 90% confidence interval from .050 to .095, comparative fit index (CFI) = .974, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .025. There were totally 15 paths proposed in the current model, and 14 of them were confirmed by the results of OLS regressions (Figure 2). The only disconfirmed path was the proposed negative effect between SID and BFN ($\beta = -.054, p = .099$). Hypothesis 5 was then partially rejected. The interaction between TID and PFS was confirmed both on the prediction of ATS ($\beta = .116, p < .01$) and PIP ($\beta = .102, p < .05$) as proposed in Hypothesis 7. This finding suggests that TID was a moderator the relationship between PFS and ATS and the relationship between PFS and PIP.

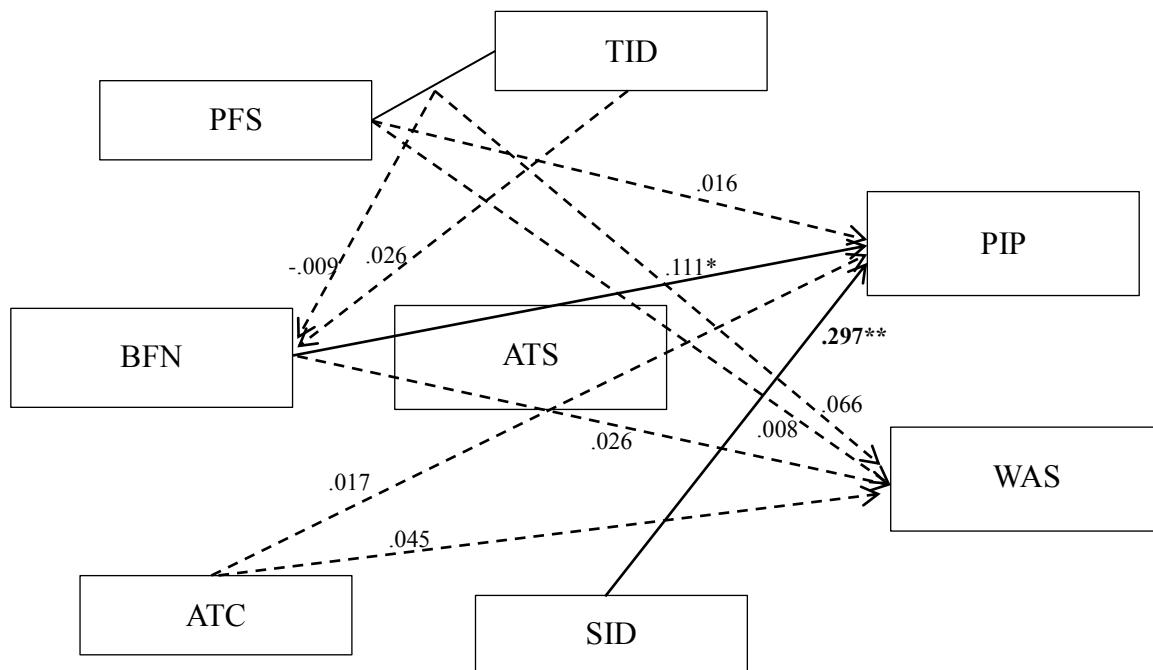


Figure 3. Summarized results of path analysis examining non-proposed paths by OLS regressions.

Except for Hypothesis 5 that was only partially supported, all of the hypotheses were fully supported including the mediating effects of ATS and BFN. The precise role of these two mediators could be concluded when we combine findings in the following section.

For paths that were not proposed in the model, insignificant results were expected to further support our hypotheses. However, out of the ten non-proposed paths, two of them were found to be significantly different from zero (Figure 3). One is the significant relationship between BFN and PIP ($\beta = .111$, $p < .05$), indicating that ATS is only partially (instead of fully) mediating the effect of BFN on PIP. Similarly, the significant relationship between SID and PIP ($\beta = .297$, $p < .01$), indicating that ATS is only partially (instead of fully) mediating the effect of SID on PIP. SID has a direct impact on PIP. Conclusively, most of the hypothesized paths in the model were confirmed, in which ATS are partially or fully mediating the relationship between BFN and two outcome variables (PIP and WAS). The mediating role of BFN was also confirmed, as well as the interaction effects of TID and PFS.

DISCUSSION

Before becoming widely adopted as a commercial approach in marketing strategies, sponsorship was lack of apparent borderline with philanthropy donations (Meenaghan, 2001). Corporations that sponsor sporting

events are generally motivated by personal interest rather than profitable business objectives (Crompton, 2004). Today, sponsorship has become a widely-adopted approach for sport marketing and continues to grow dramatically in its importance within a corporation's overall marketing strategies. Kolah (2005) forecasted that the investment in sports sponsorship would grow at an even faster pace considering that sports are reaching ever larger audiences. Along with the growth of sport sponsorship, there are two notable trends that have grown dramatically fast: (a) investment in facility naming rights and (b) investment in intercollegiate athletics. Selling facilities naming rights is fast occurring on a global scale after major sport facilities were identified as a consistent source of long-term income for a professional sport franchise (McCarthy and Irwin, 1998). A record of 44 companies committed more than \$1.1 billion in naming rights in 2006 (Show, 2006). In such a partnership, the venue can earn the payment to keep up pace with escalating player salaries and in the meantime, the businesses can obtain the needed exposure and marketing opportunity (Clark et al., 2002; Thornburg, 2003).

Crompton and Howard (2003) predicted that naming rights sponsorship of sport facilities would become more widespread. By 2006, over 70% of the 122 major league professional sport franchises had their home stadia or arenas named after corporate sponsors, which accumulatively accounted for \$5 billion in annual revenue. However, only 38 higher education institutions had their

facilities named after corporations at the same time period, with accumulative \$306 million revenue among the institutions (Show, 2006). Apparently, a potential exists and is also needed for this number to grow when considering the increase rate of expenses in collegiate athletics has been approximately three times the rate of growth of general university budget in the past decade (Wolverton, 2007; Greenberg, 2008). Many internal and external factors, such as facility expansion projects, winning pressures from alumni, and compliance of Title IX, have significantly increased financial demands within college athletic departments. In fact, many collegiate athletics programs are facing financial difficulties; for instance, 84% of institutions in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) reported budget deficit in 2006. Collegiate athletic directors constantly face challenges in finding the necessary fiscal resources to adequately support their programs (Fulks, 2011). These financial needs have forced athletic directors to look for corporate supports and seek more sponsorship, possibly including sales of facility naming rights.

However, collegiate athletics is widely viewed as one of the last amateur sport competition in the United States. Although, the number and value of sponsorship agreements have increased, there has always been resistance among various stakeholders within institutions, such as faculty and students, worrying about over commercialization on university campuses (Benford, 2007; Jensen and Butler, 2007). There are also many issues about stadium naming rights sponsorship that have been debated since early 1990s (Boyd, 2000; Chen and Stone, 2002; McCarthy and 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 sent message is that the firm paid a lot of money for the right. 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 football franchise after the name of the historic Candlestick Park was sold to 3Com (Crompton and Howard, 2003; Siebert and Brovsky, 2001). Although, these types of concerns do not always stop the trend of naming rights sponsorships, they may still cause certain negative impact for both sponsors and sponsees. Thus, it is extremely important for corporations and college administrators to comprehensively understand how stakeholders perceive corporate naming deals and how they respond to these sponsorships. Furthermore, although the effectiveness of sponsorship is generally acknowledged, academic research in the area of facility naming rights is still lacking. There is an inadequate understanding about the theoretical and practical mechanism of sponsorship effectiveness (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Speed and Thompson, 2000). Sponsors need more empirical evidence to guide their decisions

about whether and how facility naming rights as a form of sponsorship is functioning in meeting the marketing objectives of the corporations.

The goal of the current study was to re-examine the relationships among factors in the naming right sponsorship effectiveness model proposed by Chen and Zhang (2011, 2012). Through a comprehensive literature review, we identify a structural model that indicates specific relationships with clear directions among all the factors. More importantly, the proposed relationships that were confirmed in the current study include two mediating effects (from BFN and ATS) and one moderating effect (from PFS). These are very specific effects that were not addressed in previous studies in related fields. While some of the proposed variables and their relationships were discussed in previous studies (See Chen and Zhang (2011) for more discussions), most of them actually have never been examined together before. Thus, the current study contributes to the sponsorship literature by proposing and examining a new structural model related to the effectiveness of naming right sponsorship. By conducting a path analysis to test the proposed model, findings in this study greatly improve our understanding of more specific relationships among critical variables in predicting effectiveness of naming right sponsorship.

When providing sponsorship through facility naming rights, corporations usually attempt to establish marketing connections with fans of collegiate sports. They certainly hope that the favorable associations held by fans toward the athletic programs would be transferred to their brands, which in turn increase their product sales (Madrigal, 2001; Dees, Bennett, and Villegas, 2008). On the other hand, athletic departments need corporate financial support for the rising costs in running a strong program. A facility naming rights can have a huge potential of benefiting both sides of sponsor and sponsee, and can also cause concerns that may potentially generate negative impacts for both sides of the entities in the areas of commercialization, amateurism, and psychological attachment with the stadium. For sponsors who invest millions of dollars on a stadium, it is meaningful to know how these possible negative attitudes of key stakeholders could impact the effectiveness of sponsorship. As higher education institutions are often scrutinized elaborately with highest moral standards, negative perceptions in the minds of the public could lead to reduced donations, endowments, student applications, and student and alumnus identifications. Apparently, to name or not name a collegiate sport facility is a dilemma for corporations and also collegiate athletic programs. Investigating consumer reactions before executing a proposed facility naming plan can help identify the possible negative attributes and formulate strategies to avoid unfavorable consequences for both sides of the entities (Dean, 2002).

Intercollegiate athletics has been considered as a good sponsorship avenue to build and enhance brand image of sponsors (Madrigal, 2000). However, this relatively new

sponsorship venture, intercollegiate athletics, 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 (Dees et al., 2008; Gray, 1996; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003; Kuzma et al., 2003; Madrigal, 2000, 2001; Zhang et al., 2005). While many of these studies reported positive effect of collegiate sport sponsorships on attitude towards product brands (Dees et al., 2008; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003) and purchase intentions (Dees et al., 2008; Madrigal, 2001), some have noticed negative impacts (Kuzma et al., 2003; Zhang et al., 2005). Of studies related to sponsorship effectiveness, only two focused on facility naming rights sponsorships and both of these studies focused on professional sport stadiums. Different findings were revealed in these studies: Clark et al. (2003) found a significant increase in stock price due to the facility naming rights and Becker-Olsen (2003) did not. No similar study has been found that examined collegiate facility naming rights sponsorship. Because of the unique market environment associated with higher education institutions, it is necessary to study corporate naming rights in collegiate settings. One of the major differences between sponsorship and advertising in consumers' perceptions is the existence of goodwill associated with sport sponsorship (Meenaghan, 1991; McDonald, 1991). Even so, consumers may still hold some negative beliefs and attitudes toward commercial sponsorship activities at times (Alexandris et al., 2007). In the situation of college stadium naming rights sponsorship, a student may hold the belief that financial gain from the naming rights of a facility is an important revenue source for building a strong athletic program and support the mission of a higher education institution. This belief would associate the sponsorship with a favorable attribute. Conversely, a negative belief may exist, leading to unfavorable disposition. How these beliefs construct the person's attitude toward the naming rights partnership and how these attitudes further influence consumers' behavior intention should be examined. Conducting a study in the intercollegiate athletic setting, Zhang et al. (2005) examined the effects of college students' attitudes toward commercialization and the sequential influence on their purchasing intentions of products supplied by the sponsors. Findings of the study revealed that students' attitudes toward commercialization positively explained 12% of the variance in purchasing intentions. The researchers indicated the need of conducting further studies that would include various types of sponsorship activities and also address concerns related to amateurism in intercollegiate athletics.

Communicating with target audiences through the vehicle of sports instead of direct communication is another difference between sponsorship and other commercial advertisement activities (Meenaghan, 1996). When fans have stronger attachment toward a sport team or athlete, the effect of balanced tendency on the change

of their attitudes toward sponsorships would be strengthened (Dalakas and Levin, 2005; Madrigal, 2001). One of the most well documented forms of psychological attachments in sponsorship studies is team identification (Cornwell et al., 2005; Dees et al., 2008; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2001; Zhang et al., 2005). Team identification was defined as one's level of attachment to a particular sport team (Wann and Barnscombe, 1993). Researchers usually agree that team identification plays a significant role in consumers' relationship with sports (Laverie and Arnett, 2000; Pease and Zhang, 2001; Sutton et al., 1997; Trail et al., 2003; Trail and James, 2001; Wann and Branscombe, 1993; Wann and Robinson, 2002). The object with which fans identify could be extended from a team to a stadium, is under a corporate naming sponsorship. Fans that are highly identified with the tradition of a stadium, including its existing name, would be more likely to generate or strengthen negative attitudes towards corporate naming rights sponsorship because of their strong emotional attachment with the old name. Conversely, low identification fans are expected to evaluate the corporate naming rights sponsorship more neutrally. Using a stadium as a marketing medium is the major component of corporate naming rights sponsorship, which also distinguishes it from other forms of sponsorship. This concept could be as important as team identification in the team sponsorship. Fans with different identification level with a team often display distinct responses to sponsorship activities; nonetheless, how team identification affects naming rights sponsorship effectiveness is yet to be tested in the setting of collegiate athletics.

Finally, how fans perceive about the financial status of their favorite athletic programs could have an important influence in their affective orientation toward corporate sponsorships, which in turn would affect the overall effectiveness of naming rights sponsorship. Corporate sponsorship would be easier to be embraced by those fans who perceive their favorite athletic programs are facing financial shortage. Instead of negative attitude caused by commercialization, fans may regard the sponsorship as an important support to athletic teams and in turn show positive attitude. Conversely, fans who perceive that an athletic program is making profit may not consider the corporate naming rights sponsorship necessary. These recognized differences in perceived goodwill, team identification, and perceived financial status between sport sponsorship and conventional advertising have been investigated in various sponsorship forms (Alexandris et al., 2007; Cianfrone and Zhang, 2006; Meenaghan, 1996). Yet, only a few studies have been found to address issues associated facility naming rights sponsorship in the intercollegiate athletic setting; thus, it is necessary to examine the association of corporations with collegiate athletics through facility naming rights sponsorship by measuring its influence on consumers' attitude and consumption behaviors. As mentioned before,

the current study investigate students' beliefs about facility naming rights sponsorship, attitudes toward commercialization, team and stadium identification, perceptions of financial status, and how they affect naming rights sponsorship outcomes in the areas of attitudes toward the sponsor and purchase intention of products and services offered by the sponsor. Whether these variables affect students' willingness to attend sporting events was also investigated to see if any negative effect exists toward the athletic program engaging in a corporate naming rights agreement. A structural model that indicates specific relationships among all variables were proposed and examined. Corporations and college administrators may take into consideration the findings of this study as a reference when planning to enter into a naming rights agreement.

For administrators in collegiate athletic programs, findings in this study could also provide some important implications. For instance, the mediating roles of BFN and ATS confirmed in this study could imply the importance of selecting a favorable sponsor if their program decides to go for a naming right sponsorship. A favorable sponsor could naturally generate a more positive ATS that could become an excellent buffer for many potential negative perception or concerns related to changing the name of the stadium to a corporate name. The strong relationship between ATS and WAS also suggests that such an attitude is not only critical to the sponsor but also extremely important to the event organizer. The mediating effect of BFN suggests administrators to come up with more marketing tactics to change consumers' perception of a naming right sponsorship. If the athletic department can make more students and fans believe such a sponsorship is necessary and beneficial, the effectiveness of this partnership would be significantly improved.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

Abbreviations

BFN, Beliefs about the nature of facility naming rights sponsorship; **ATC**, attitudes toward commercialization; **TID**, team identifications; **SID**, stadium identifications; **PFS**, perceptions of financial status; **ATS**, regarding attitude toward sponsor; **PIP**, purchase intention of sponsor's product; **WAS**, willingness to attend sporting events.

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