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Influential Factors in Customer's Brand Image of the Sponsor

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of sponsorship on customer's brand image of the sponsor company while considering involvement (attraction), involvement (centrality) and team attachment as a predictor on sponsoring outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach: The statistical population of this study was Tracktorsazi fans of Tabriz and Tehran. Using sampling method of simple random, the questionnaire of this study were distributed among the fans (N=434). Factor analysis, structural analysis, spearman correlation test, binominal test and kolmogro -smimrnov test was employed in order to test the model.

Findings: Data reveal that highly attached fans are more likely to develop positive image about the sponsor and also involvement (centrality) is an important predictor in being attached to specific team.

Research limitation/implications: The results of this research can be used by team sport marketer and sponsors, which needed to have a complete comprehension of the effectiveness of sport sponsorship.

Key words: Sponsorship; Involvement-attraction; Involvement-centrality; Team attachment

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INTRODUCTION

While aspects of what today pass for sponsorship can be traced back to ancient Greek and Roman civilization, modern commercially driven sponsorship is a much more recent phenomenon. Commercial sponsorship, as it is known today, has merely been with us since middle to late 1960 s (Meenaghan, 1991, p.5).

There are numerous events which companies can sponsor including arts, music, education, broadcasts and cause-related activities. However, empirical studies have found that sports is the most popular sponsorship medium (Tripodi, 2001, p.2) The meaning of sponsorship as an integral element of the marketing mix has been conceptualized by Sandler and Shani (1993) with the following definition: "[Sponsorship is] the provision of resources (money, people, or equipment) by an organization directly to an event or activity in exchange for a direct association to the event or activity" (Papadimitriou, 2008).

Commercial sponsorship represents one of the most rapidly growing sectors of marketing communication activity (Meenaghan, 1991, p.328) Worldwide corporate investment in the sponsorship market grew from approximately US$2 billion in 1984 to US$23 billion in 1999 to $28 billion in 2004 (Jae ko, 2008)and 37 US$ billion for 2007 representing an 11.9% increase from 2006 and a 75-fold increase since 1982 (Bashiri, 2010, p.58) and approximately two thirds of all sponsorship spending is directed at sporting events, leagues, teams and players (Olson, 2010, p.181).

The factors explaining this increasingly important role of sponsorship are: Concerns about the effectiveness of mass media advertising (Meenaghan, 1991, p.5; Kitchen, 2004, p.96) Increasing rate of media cost (Olson, 2010, p.181; Arens *et al.*, 2009, p.603), Increased media coverage of events, Changing role of governments, New sponsorship opportunities, Positive attitude change towards sponsorship by senior management, Awareness

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and drive towards integrated marketing communications, Relationship orientation between sponsorship participants, Positive effects towards various stakeholder groups, Need to reach niche audiences and specific target groups, Need to develop softer brand associations (Kitchen, 2004, p.96).

Companies seek to achieve different types of objective by investing in sport sponsorship; several researchers agree that the companies that integrate sponsorship in their mix of communication pursue two main goals: first, increasing awareness and second, improving (corporate) image (Dekhil, 2010, p.161). Indeed the essential key to successful sponsorship lies ultimately in having clearly defined sponsorship objectives. The most widely recognized group of objectives is focused around brand building from creating brand awareness through to promoting brand advocacy (Collet & Fenton, 2011, p.11)

Most commentators imply that there are two levels of objectives for sponsorship, these being corporate and product related (Clow & Baack, 2004; Mullin *et al.*, 2000; Pitts & Stotlar, 2002; Shank, 2005; Skinner & Rukavina, 2003; Irwin *et al*. (2002) use the terms "corporation-related objectives" and "product-or brand-related objectives". Another school of thought proposes three levels of objectives, corporate, marketing and media (Pope, 1998a: Sandler & Shani, 1993). A fourth area that of personal objectives has also been identified (Abbratt and Grobler, 1989; Stotlar, 1993) .This is where management's interests might be perceived as reason enough to undertake sponsorship (Masterman, 2007, p.32).

One of the most frequent criticisms of the sponsorship industry has been the lack of attention paid to measuring sponsorship effects relative to the investments made (Olson, 2010, p.181)many researchers have attempted to asses sponsorship effectiveness (Jea Ko, 2008; Dekhil, 2010; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2008; Olson, 2010; Kostas *et al.*, 2007). However most of them t have concentrated largely on the use of a single variable such as consumer awareness or effect of sponsor image as a predictor of sponsorship effectiveness (Jea Ko, 2008).

One reason for the limited attention to evaluation may be a lack of direction for effectively evaluating sponsorship outcomes. Attitudinal constructs such as media exposure, recognition and recall rates, attitude toward sponsors and consumer interest as well as behavioral constructs such as purchase intentions, WOM and sales figures have all been proposed as important sponsorship outcomes (Alexandris, 2007).

While previous research has advanced our understanding of effective variables of sponsorship effectiveness the current study was conducted in the context of professional sport sponsorship, aiming at investigating attitudinal factors as sponsorship outcomes. Specifically, the objectives of the present study were set as follows:

To measure sponsorship effectiveness by examining the role of sport involvement and team attachment on attitudinal outcomes of sponsorship.

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Limited research on sponsorship and specially sports sponsorship has been conducted in Iran compared to foreign countries. Some of the conducted researches are as follows:

- Strategic evaluation of sports sponsorship as a marketing tool in Iranian electronics industry by Alireza Faed in 2007 at Tarbiat Moddaress university. The research objective was better understanding of whys and hows of electronic companies' participation in sports sponsorship and examination of the goals sport selection process for sponsorship and ultimately assesses the effectiveness of sponsorship costs. The results suggest that creating positive brand image, public awareness of the brand, greater exposure of the brand and access to a special target market were among the most important goals of sports sponsorship.
- Describing the factors that effect on corporate sponsors of Irans' professional football in sponsorship attractionby Alireza Izadi in 2004 at Tarbiat Modarress University. The researcher believes that one way for providing adequate budget for doing sports activities, especially in championships, is attracting sponsors from companies and organizations. The purpose of this research is to describe sponsorship goals of corporate sponsors of Irans' professional football. The results show that football sponsorship has helped companies get access to desired target market and achieve competitive advantage over competitors.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of sports sponsorship among football fans (both Steghlal and Persepolis teams) by Kamran Eshgi in 2009 at Tehran University. In this study the effect of sports sponsorship on five important variables in the process was examined. The variables include brand awareness, company's image, interest in company and its brand, purchase intention and loyalty toward the company and its products. The results show that sponsorship improves the company's image, increases purchase intention and loyalty among fans, and however it has little impact on brand awareness and interest in company and its brand.
- The role of Iranol Petroleum Company's sponsorship of national football team in advancement of Iranol and football federation by Farnam inn 2007 at Islamic republic of Iran broadcasting collage. The results show that the majority of car drivers and in other words potential engine oil consumers are familiar with Iranol brand and this shows that at the time of

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introducing Iranol products to market significant efforts have been made to familiarize the consumers with its brand.

Numerous researches on sponsorship and specially on sports sponsorship have been carried out outside of Iran. One of the most famous researchers in this field is Tony Meenaghan, who has published a lot of articles in the context of sponsorship (Gilaninia & Abbaszadeh, 2011, p. 608). A number of his articles are as follows:

- Commercial sponsorship (1983)
- Sponsorship-legitimizing the media (1991)
- The role of sponsorship in communication marketing mix (1991)
- The role of media on commercial sponsorship (1991)
- Understanding the effects of sponsorship (2000)
- The influence of types of audience, involvement, interest and social-demographical variables on recalling the sponsorship at 2010 African national cup by Fawzi Dakhil in Tunisia. The objective of this research includes the examination of types of audience, involvement, interest in football in general, interest in African national team in particular , social and demographical impact on recalling the sponsor. The results show that recalling the brand name (aided or unaided) among the direct audience (due to more involvement with the sport event) is higher than those who follow the event through the media.
- The effect of sport involvement, awareness of the sports and image of the sponsoring company on purchase intention of sponsors' products by Jae Ko in 2008. The present study examines the impact of involvement on the effectiveness of sponsorship and develops a structural model based on the relationship among involvement, image awareness and purchase intention of sponsor's products. The results show that when purchase intention of consumers is considered as the final variable, then the image of the sponsor is the best predicator of consumer behavior compared to awareness of the sponsor's brand.
- The objective of this study was to test the degree to which three sponsorship outcomes-sponsor's image, word-of-mouth, and purchase intentions-may be predicted by three attitudinal constructs: attitude toward the event, sport activity involvement (centrality and attraction), and beliefs about The results indicated that purchase intentions were significantly predicted by beliefs about sponsorship, attitudes toward the event, and the centrality dimension of involvement. The word-of-mouth and image outcomes were significantly predicted by beliefs about sponsorship and the centrality dimension of involvement.
- The impact of sports sponsorship activities, Corporate Image, prior use on consumer purchase intention is an article by Nigel Pope *et al.* in 2000. Consumer's intention to purchase derives from two main influences, a positive attitude towards the brand itself and brand familiarity obtained from brand exposure and prior use. This shows that there is a relationship between sponsorship activities, exposure and attitude toward the brand name.

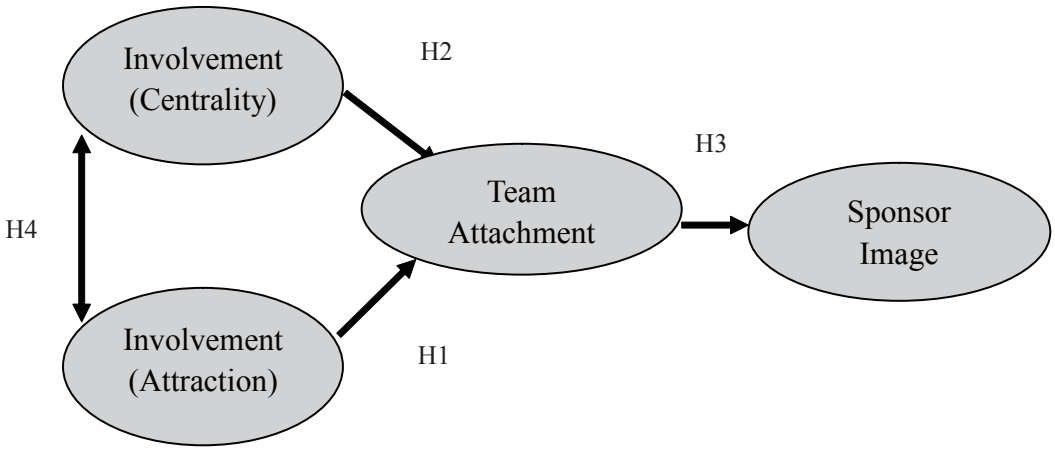

Figure 1
Sport Sponsorship Model (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2008)

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2. RESEARCH MODEL

Numerous researches have been conducted in order to measure the effectiveness of sponsorship activities. Many of these have focused on a variable like consumer awareness brand image, as a predicator of sponsorship effectiveness (Alexandris *et al.*, 2007; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Alexandris & Tsaousi, 2008; Pope & Voges, 2000; Smith, Gratez & westerbeek, 2008; Pope, 1998; Jae Ko, Kim & Claussen, 2008). Despite these efforts, research on sponsorship evaluation is still not well established (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2008, p.359) consequently to more understand how sponsorship works in the mind of sport fans. In this research based on the model of (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2008), the role of Involvement and team attachment as a predicator on attitudinal sponsorship outcomes has been examined.

2.1 Sport Activity Involvement

The construct of activity involvement has received limited attention in sponsorship research (Alexandris *et al*., 2007). Instead, fan involvement and team identification are constructs that have been widely suggested to be related to sponsorship outcomes (Bennett, 1999; Alexandris, *et al.*, 2007).

Sport activity involvement has been proposed as a central tenet in understanding how sponsorship works (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2008, p.361) while a number of definition have been proposed, most have conceptualized involvement in terms of personal relevance. In this sense, involvement is said to reflect the degree to which people devote themselves to an activity or associated product (Kyle, Absher, Norman, Hammaitt & Jodice, 2007; Kyle & Chick, 2002) According to Jae Ko (2008), consumer involvement has been understood as motivation to process information regarding the target object, and motivation state is governed by the perceived relevance of the target object (Jea Ko *et al*., 2008).

Current sponsorship literature supports the idea that highly involved fans/consumers, being most aware of the sponsor's investment and the benefit arising, are most favorably disposed toward that sponsor (Meenaghan, 2001, p.110; Jea Ko *et al.*, 2008). High Involvement is generally viewed in positive terms in the leisure literature although negative terminology such as "addicted "to running and negative consequence, including excessive participation and spending, have been identified (Havitz & Mannell, 2005, p.153).

2.2 The Dimensionality of Involvement

It is well documented that involvement is a multi-dimensional construct (Alexandris, 2007) Attraction and centrality are two dimensions of involvement that have consistently been examined in previous studies and are applicable to the context of the present study (Alexandris, 2007; Kyle *et al*., 2007). According to Kyle *et al*. (2004), attraction refers to the perceived importance that an activity holds for an individual and the interest, pleasure, and enjoyment derived from the activity (Kyle *et al*., 2002; Kyle *et al.*, 2007). Centrality refers to the position that an activity has in an individual's lifestyle. According to McIntyre and Pigram (1992), centrality refer to the degree to which an individual's involvement with a leisure activity is socially derived (e.g., "Most of my friends are in some way connected with football") (Kyle *et al.*, 2007)

The importance of sport activity involvement in predicting sponsorship outcomes was supported in Alexandris *et al.*'s (2007) study, Gwinner and Swanson (2003) and also (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2008, p.361)

Therefore, using both dimensions of involvement we propose that attachment to a team will be stronger when consumers are highly involved with the sport activity:

H1. Involvement-attraction is positively related to team attachment.

H2. Involvement-centrality is positively related to team attachment.

H4.There is positive relationship between involvement-attraction and involvement-centrality.

2.3 Team Attachment

Attachment is considered a universal human experience that occurs throughout the lifecycle. This provides an opportunity for both self-expression as well as connection to others. (Filo, Funk, O'Brien, Danny, 2010, p.623) and refers to the degree to which physical and psychological features (i.e., attributes and benefits associated with a team such as success, star player, and stadium, identification, and community pride) take on internal psychological meaning (Funk & James, 2001) At the level of attachment, an individual has developed an emotional connection to a sport or team (Funk & James, 2001).

The attachment process represents an individual assigning emotional, functional, and symbolic meaning to an activity (Beaton, *et al.*, 2010; Funk, 2008, p.151) Emotional meaning represents a person's perception of the psychological significance and value of the sport object. Emotion represents the type of affective reaction or potency of feeling that an individual has toward a particular sport object (Funk, 2008, p.151).

Symbolism has been defined as the process of representing things by means of symbols or ascribing significance to objects, events, and relationships. This definition implies that symbolic meaning relates to both the importance and representation of the object. The current research suggests that symbolic meaning be defined as intangible feeling toward a sport object embodied in the object's overall importance derived from its capacity to allow for self-expression and the pursuit of a greater goal, as well as to inspire (Funk, 2008, p.151).

Funk and James (2006) have assessed functional meaning using knowledge of the sport object the current research advances the following definition of functional meaning: intangible feeling toward a sport object

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embodied in the extrinsic benefits that can be provided by the object such as knowledge and skill acquisition, health and fitness (Filo, Funk & O'Brien, 2009, p.377)

It was hypothesized that team attachment would positively influence consumers' brand image:

H3. Team attachment is positively related to sponsor image

2.4 Sponsor Image

Only a limited number of studies focus on image effects of sponsorship. More frequently, image transfer is investigated in conjunction with awareness and/or purchase objectives.

An image of a sponsoring company exists in individuals' minds, and a single company does not have a universal corporate image. A company faces a variety of audiences (e.g., consumers, the media, employees). The current research focuses on the consumer audience (Filo, *et al.*, 2010, p.628).

Corporate image is defined as "the impressions of a particular company held by some segment of the public) Jea Ko, 2008, p.83)

According to Walliser (2003), image transfer can be influenced positively by the number of common perceptions of the sponsor and the activity, the attitude of the spectators towards the association of the sponsor and the activity and by the spectator involvement with sponsorship process and occurred only for sponsors having high visibility during the event.

In this study, six items were used to measure the sponsor's image based on the six dimensions by Javalgi *et al.* (1994)., has good products/services, is well managed, only wants to make money, is involved in the community, responds to consumer needs, and is good company to work for (Pope & Voges, 2000, p.98) and also positive attitudes to company .Responses to the items were made using seven point Likert scales anchored by strongly disagree (1) - strongly agree (7).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The present research is considered applied research and its method is descriptive-survey. The population of this study consists of Tracktorsazi fans in Tehran and Tabriz. The sampling for achieving the research objectives and answering research questions was done through simple random sampling. Since the population size was unlimited and data scales were qualitative, colorant formula was used for determining the sample size. The output of this formula was 385 and in order of achieving this sample size 500 questionnaires were distributed. For ensuring of content validity in addition of professors and expert opinions, structural and confirmatory factor analyses were performed. The Cronbach alpha of the questionnaire was 0.927; therefore its reliability was confirmed. The questionnaire consisted of 56 questiona and each question was evaluated on five score Likert spectrum ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree".

For data analysis, confirmatory factor analysis for structural validity and for testing the research hypothesis structural equation model (SEM) and path analysis were performed. A structural equation modeling is a powerful multivariate analysis from multivariate regression family. This method enables researchers to simultaneously test a set of regression equations (Human, 1384, p.11). Besides in order of examining the correlation between involvement (attractiveness) and involvement (centrality), due to abnormality of involvement indices, spearman correlation test was performed.

The determination coefficient of the model was 71% which means that 71% of the variability observed among the variables due to brand image was explained by research variables including involvement-attraction, involvement-centrality and team attachment. Therefore the approval of Cronbach alpha, reliability and validity tests determination coefficient enables us to claim that structural model of assessment tool has relative utility for relying on research findings.

4. RESEARCH FINGINGS

The results from demographic variables show that 92.6 percent of the respondents were male and more than half of them were single (66.8%). The 18-25 age groups with 48.4% score had the highest frequency and 26-35 age groups were in the second place. The majority of the respondents held bachelors degree (44%) and (20.07%) of them held masters degree.

In this section using standard equation analysis we examined the relationship between dependent and independent variables. The results hypothesis tests and research pattern are presented in Table 1. Besides in order of clarifying the relationship between research variables, Figure 2 presents the T test statistics and standardized factor loadings (standardized regression coefficients).

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Table 1
Research Results

Variables	Factor loading	T-Value
Involvement-attraction		
The enjoyment of football	0.75	17.43
Satisfying	0.77	0.77
Amusing	0.79	0.79
The importance of football	0.82	0.82
Being interested in football	0.65	0.65
Involvement-centrality		
Allocating time	0.6	811.88
Central role in life	0.73	14.28
Discussing with friends	0.68	13.38
Being with friend and family	0.63	12.52
Team attachment		
Emotional meaning		
Amusing	0.59	12.97
Pleasurable	0.82	20.06
Sense of friendship	0.77	18.54
Affection to team and fans	0.85	21.26
Symbolic meaning		
Self-expression	0.8	19.3
The importance of team to individuals	0.88	22.08
Functional meaning		
Information about the team	0.69	20.34
Sponsor's brand image		
Is involved in the community	0.56	
is well managed	0.72	11.13
Is a good company	0.81	11.79
I like the company and its product	0.78	11.57
Responds to consumer needs	0.77	11.47
Positive attitudes toward sponsor	0.73	11.11
Has good products/services	0.73	11.16

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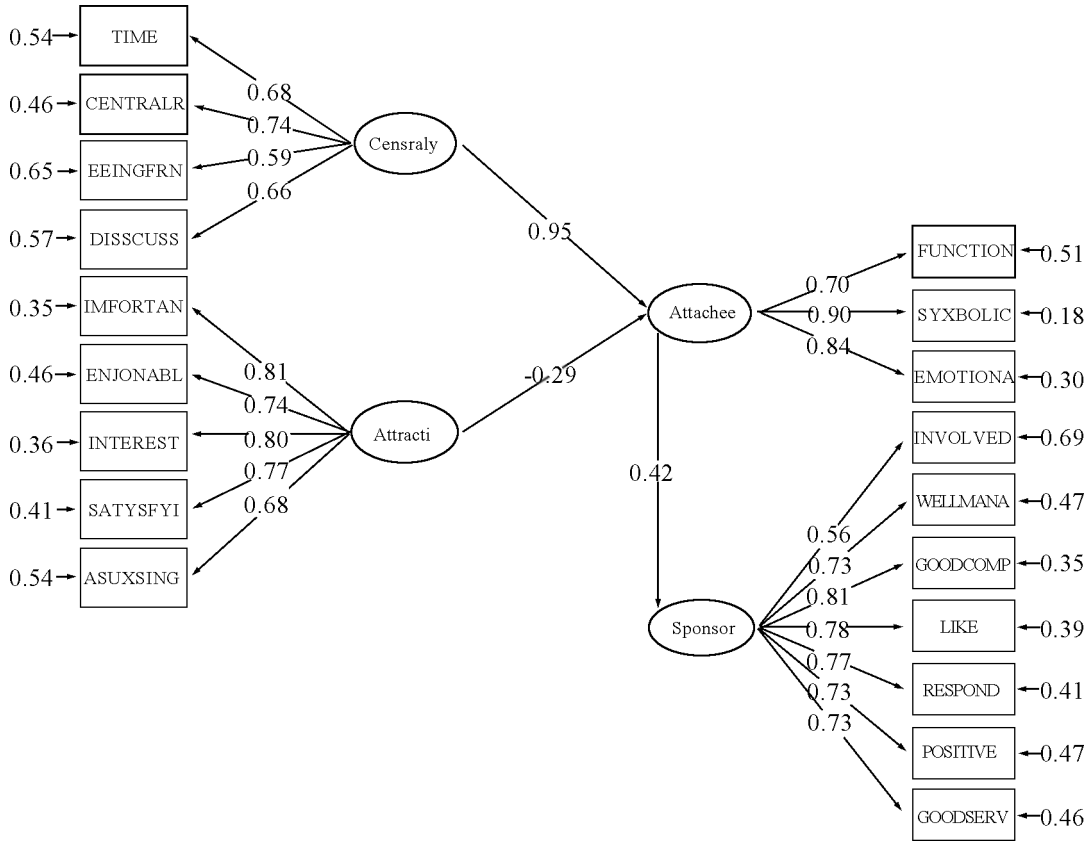

Figure 2
Analysis Results

In order to assess the relationship between the two involvement variables namely attractiveness and centrality, spearman correlation coefficient was used. The data analysis results show that the researcher's theoretical model gives a satisfactory explanation of the relationship between variables. Although x_2 is goodness fitting 148 with degree of freedom df = 440.97. Besides the examination of fitness indices show that, according to the criteria for each predictor, the overall model has satisfactory fitness. Therefore we can say that the final model gives an appropriate explanation of the relationship between research variables (NFI = 0.9, RMSEA = 0.039, GFI = 0.9, CFI = 0.9).

The following Table 2 displays all direct and indirect relationships among research variables.

Table 2

Sponsor brand image	Team attachment	Dependent variable independent and mediator variable
-0.29*0.42=-0.12	-0.29	Involvement-attraction
0.95*0.42=0.40	0.95	Involvement-Centrality
0.42	1	Team attachment

The results show that involvement-centrality has the strongest positive relationship with team attachment (0.95). Team attachment with a positive and direct relation score of 0.42 is in the second place. Involvement-centrality has an indirect positive relationship of 0.04 with brand image, and involvement-attraction has a negative and weak relationship with team attachment.

The results of examining the correlation between two involvement variables are in Table 3:

Table 3

Result of the test	Level of significance	Statistic value KS	Variables
Null hypothesis is rejected	0.00	2.126	Involvement-Attraction
Null hypothesis is rejected	0.00	2.057	Involvement-Centrality

Statistical hypothesis tests can be expressed as follows:

There is no correlation between involvement-centrality and involvement-attraction.

$$\begin{cases} H_0 : \rho = 0 \\ H_1 : \rho \neq 0 \end{cases} \Leftrightarrow \begin{cases} H_0 : \\ H_1 : \end{cases}$$

The test results can be seen in the following table.

Since the significance level in the table is lower than

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the error value of 0.05, we can say that the null hypothesis at significance level of 0.05 is rejected and therefore research hypothesis based on the existing correlation between involvement-attraction and involvement-centrality is accepted. Of course the correlation exists even in significance level of 0.01.

This correlation equals 0.722, which indicates that the correlation is direct and strong.

Table 4
The Results of Spearman Correlation Coefficient for Involvement-Attraction and Involvement-Centrality

Involvement-Centrality		
0.722	correlation coefficient Spearman	Involvement-Attraction
0.00	Significance Level-two sided	
343	Total	

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was examining an integrated model of sports sponsorship in which team attachment is examined as an influential factor on attitudinal outcomes (brand image). The results show that team attachment has a direct and relatively strong impact on brand image of sponsors. This indicates that hardcore fans are more likely to have a positive brand image of sponsors. The role of team attachment has been confirmed by Gwinner and Swanson (2003), McDonold (1991) and Alexandris and Tsaousi (2008). Therefore we recommend that sponsors and club managers prepare information packages about the team and its achievements, games, coaches, sponsors and club history. This way they can facilitate information acquisition for fans and boost their team attachment. Allocating a space on club website for introducing the main sponsors can heighten the fan's awareness of the sponsors. Besides since a lot of people believe sponsors are only after their own economic interests, marketers by employing special strategies, holding charitable events, religious ceremonies on national holidays and humanitarian efforts can endeavor toward improving their attitude towards sponsors.

Moreover in order of determining the effectiveness of sponsorship, involvement as an influential was examined from two dimensions of attractiveness and centrality. The results show that there is a direct and strong relationship between involvement-centrality and team attachment, in other words the related hypothesis was confirmed. The findings from Gwinner and Swanson (2003) study also confirm the findings of the present study. Therefore people for whom football plays a pivotal role in their lives, enjoy being around friends & family and discuss the sport with them. And since they devote a lot of their time to their favorite sport, they get attached to a team that in addition to providing emotional meaning and excitement provides possibility of expressing their identity. Therefore we advise the managers to develop programs and activities to attract people with high involvement (centrality) to their team. For example selling a share of club to fans and providing a set of incentives and stimulates in meetings can increase their dependence to the team and club. And also distributing membership cards for the club and providing special treats like discounted tickets for games, lotteries or membership in club website can be parts promotional programs of the club.

Despite the predictions made in the second sub-hypothesis about existing a relationship between involvement-attraction and team attachment, the sub-hypothesis was not confirmed. This was the only unexpected result in the present study. As mentioned earlier attraction refers to importance and derived pleasure from an activity. Therefore the results indicate that considering research population and its sample which is consisted of Tracktosazi Tabriz fans, entertainment and excitement derived from football games were not a factor in attracting people to this team. This relationship can be examined in future studies with different samples.

The forth hypothesis showed that there is a direct and strong relationship between the two dimensions of involvement (attractiveness and centrality). Sports and club marketers endeavor to focus on people who have a high mantel involvement with football and follow this sport because it is pleasurable and are not interested in a particular team. In fact the real chance for improving awareness and interest in a particular team resides in this group. In this stage sports marketers can use children sports marketing as one of the fastest tools to increase numbers of fans, fill the stadiums and create a future for the club.

In fact children sports marketing is one of the most suitable tools in football market, because children have a lot of power in convicting their parents to go shopping, to stadiums, … and they can get what they want faster than adults.

FUTURE RESEARCH / LIMITATIONS

Research opportunities on sponsorship are numerous. Therefore we recommend to future researchers to:

According to the presented results and sponsor's power in influencing consumers and also lake of research & study about this topic, we advice researchers to examine sponsorship in arts, music and cultural contexts.

(1) Other consequences of sponsorship including purchase intention, certain purchase, word of mouth, satisfaction with sponsor, brand personality and familiarity with the brand can be examined separately.

(2) The impact of demographical variables on involvement and their impact on recalling the brand and

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brand image of the sponsor can be examined. And also, the impact of types of the audience (direct and indirect audience) can be considered as a mediating variable, since the majority of academic studies don't consider the impact of types of audience in sponsorship studies.

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