

Investigating social media consumption, sports enthusiasm, and gender on sponsorship outcomes in the context of Rio Olympics

Investigating
social media
consumption

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Abstract

Purpose – Using the context of Rio Olympic games, the purpose of this paper is to investigate attitude toward sponsorship outcome as it relates to purchase behavior, gender, sponsor patronage, sports enthusiasm, and social media consumption.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected using an online survey of 265 participants. Questions regarding demographics, viewing habits, sports participation, enthusiasm, attitude toward Olympic events were included in the survey. The four sub-scales were sponsorship attitude, sponsor patronage, social media consumption, and sports enthusiasm.

Findings – The findings of the study showed that social media consumption is positively related to attitude toward event and sports patronage. There was a significant gender difference on attitude toward event, social media consumption, and sports enthusiasm. Predictors for making a purchase as a result of seeing a social media advertisement were gender, playing competitive sport, and social media consumption.

Practical implications – This study will add to the body of academic and practitioner research on sponsorship outcomes, and provides an opportunity for marketers to leverage social media networks for sponsorship communication.

Originality/value – As the use of social media networks has increased over the past few years, no previous study has investigated association of sports enthusiasm, gender, or social media consumption toward sponsor patronage which relates to consumers seeking out sponsors and being influenced to make a purchase as a result of marketing communication of sponsors.

Keywords Marketing communication, Social media consumption, Sponsorship outcomes, Sports enthusiasm

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The role of sponsorship as part of marketing communication mix to create brand awareness, improve brand image, develop goodwill, and position a brand has been steadily increasing over the past decade. Examples of sponsorship can be seen in sports, culture, arts, and entertainment with most prominent sponsorship investment occurring in big-budget sporting events. Nufer (2016) highlighted the use of sponsorship as a marketing tool in international events by companies to create a positive image transfer from the sports event to the brand or the company. The transfer occurs in an attractive sporting environment where high international reach can be achieved thereby utilizing the multiplier effect of mass media. Despite significant financial resources needed for sponsorship rights, especially for big events such as the Super Bowl, World Cup Soccer, and the Olympics, global brands continue to be regular sponsors of sporting events such as tennis tournaments (Volvo, Virginia Slims), Formula One racing (Coca-Cola, Marlboro), and athletic team wear (Nike, Reebok). Fortunato (2013) has described sponsorship as an investment in cash or kind in any event, team or person, in order to secure sponsors access to the commercial potential associated with that event, team, or person. Rifon *et al.* (2004) associated sponsorship to be a relationship between a corporation and an outside event for the purpose of influencing the audience by this connection.



Companies become Olympic sponsors to achieve a variety of strategic objectives that may include corporate, social, or environmental interests (Abeza *et al.*, 2014). Since digital media, Web 2.0, and social media consumption can help spread sponsorship messages to reach a huge audience more quickly than traditional marketing messages (such as print and television advertisements), there is a need to further study sponsorship as its implementation is crucial to achieving business goals and objectives that can change consumer attitudes regarding a product or brand associated with the sponsored event.

Using the context of 2016 Rio Olympic games held in Brazil, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role of social media consumption, sports enthusiasm, and moderating effects of gender toward sponsorship attitude, sponsor patronage, and purchase intention. Findings of this study can help determine if sponsorship stimuli can lead to positive attitude toward a company (or brand), increased brand awareness, or higher behavioral intent. Further, investigating attitudes toward purchase intention as a result of sponsorship stimuli and moderating effects of gender can lead to an understanding of consumer consumption behavior and segmentation strategies. If it is found that gender interaction with sponsorship plays a significant role as a driver for attitude or purchase intention, then recommendations for better sponsorship strategies targeted to specific gender can logically follow. Abeza *et al.* (2015) identified several research streams related to social media. Some of these areas included nature of social media, social media tools, legal and ethical considerations, and impact of social media on marketing practices. Although previous studies have studied consumers' attitude toward sponsorship messages (Cornwell *et al.*, 1997; Walsh *et al.*, 2009; Maxwell and Lough, 2009), the communication media studied in previous studies was primarily of a traditional nature, such as newspaper, radio, and television. Also, despite recent work on sponsorship outcomes and its effects on consumer behavior and purchase intention which have looked at individual events (e.g. Biscaia *et al.*, 2013; Demirel and Erdogmus, 2016), additional research is needed to investigate events that have multiple sports associated with a single event, such as the Olympic Games which take place every four years. How new media technologies can potentially impact sponsorship outcomes remains to be explored further.

The Rio Olympics were held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from August 5-21, 2016 and featured 11,544 athletes from 205 national Olympic committees. The athletes participated in 305 events in 28 sports. NBC paid \$4.4 billion for the broadcast rights to the Olympics through 2020. There were many different categories of sponsors and sponsorships such as Worldwide Olympic Partners, Official Sponsors, Official Supporters, Official Suppliers, and Suppliers. Each category of sponsorship has different expectations on how companies are allowed to use Olympic logos, images, in print and electronic (including social media) channels. Due to high cost associated with being an official sponsor of the games, a new rule, called Rule 40, was implemented by the International Olympic Committee to protect official sponsors and intellectual property associated with the Olympic Games. According to Taylor (2016), previous Olympic Games were undermined by ambush marketing efforts of non-official sponsors. The new rule allowed non-official Olympic sponsor companies to apply for a waiver to advertise using Olympic athletes to endorse products. As companies are increasingly using social media to influence consumer attitudes during the Olympic Games, Mahan (2011) stated that there is a lack of scholarly research on effectiveness of social media as a sport marketing tool. Due to the changing landscape of sponsorship as a marketing channel that uses digital communication as an integral component, additional research is needed to investigate constructs such as social media consumption, sports enthusiasm and its impact on attitude, sponsor patronage, and purchase intention.

Theoretical framework

Since this study addressed attitude and intention, classical theories from social psychology were first explored as underlying theoretical framework for the study. According to the

theory of reasoned action (TRA), behavior is determined by intention, which is jointly determined by attitude and subjective norm (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Further, attitude can also affect behavior based on individual beliefs. Another related theory, the theory of planned behavior (TPB) added perceived behavioral control as a determinant of behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Perceived behavioral control relates to perceptions of ability by an individual to perform a given behavior. Although TRA and TPB have been widely used in various disciplines for explaining cognitive and affective behavior using the belief-attitude-intention-behavior relationship, this study focused on purchase intention reported by respondents. The scope of TRA and TPB is relatively broad and includes additional factors such as subjective norms and behavioral control. Marketing researchers (Keen *et al.*, 2000; Hung *et al.*, 2015) have used TRA and TPB to investigate consumer online purchase intention but the objective of this study was different from the elements included in TRA and TPB models. According to McDaniel (1999), although some conceptual frameworks for sponsorship research appear in the literature, it has been argued that studies in this area should add more to our theoretical understanding of influence on consumer attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral intentions. For exploring impact of social media use on sport consumers (such as in this study), Filo *et al.* (2014) advocated the use of theoretical frameworks addressing consumer psychology.

A more relevant theory that has been used for explaining consumer psychology, attitude, and event sponsorship outcomes is the congruity theory (Jagre *et al.*, 2001; Demirel and Erdogmus, 2016). Congruity theory has been used to determine if sponsor messages that were being evaluated against schemas of events by watching an event would help reinforce the relevance or congruence of new information that adds to the existing schema. As compared to TRA and TPB, the congruity theory was a better fit for this sponsorship study. The congruity theory also has its roots in social psychology where it was first used to explain attitude formation. In the marketing context, congruity theory suggests that consumers are more receptive to achieving harmony among thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and strive to evaluate messages more favorably when the message is congruent with their pre-existing beliefs or activities (such as sports enthusiasm construct used in this study). If there is congruence between the sponsor and sponsored event, this will lead to positive attitude toward the sponsor (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). Repeated exposure to sponsors messages will further influence perceived congruence of the target audience. However, it has also been reported that incongruity will lead consumers to evaluate messages negatively due to confusion and inconsistency with previous thoughts (Mandler, 1982). The congruity theory was used in this study to help determine change in attitude toward sponsorship outcome for individuals who may be enthusiastic about sports and active on social media thereby being exposed to company brand or product sponsor messages during the Rio Olympic Games. Respondents were asked questions related to a sponsor and how the sponsors' marketing messages would influence attitude toward the event and purchase intention. Respondents in this study also provided information related to sports enthusiasm and social media consumption which were investigated in relation to attitude, sponsor patronage, and purchase intention.

Hypothesis development

Biscaia *et al.* (2013) investigated the role of attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of consumer loyalty on sponsorship outcomes. They found that attitudinal loyalty toward a team was significant in predicting purchase intentions for sponsors. It has also been determined that previous behavior, identification, and future behavioral intentions become particularly important when behaviors drive revenue (Shapiro *et al.*, 2013). Sponsorship encompasses a mutually beneficial business-to-business relationship between a sponsor, which offers financial support or other resources, and an event or entity, which offers the

sponsor tangible and intangible benefits as a result of being affiliated with the event (Henseler *et al.*, 2011). There has been debate whether sponsorship can foster new behavior or only reinforces existing brand-related behaviors. Awareness of sponsors can be a necessary but not sufficient condition for purchase intention (Koo *et al.*, 2006). According to Mao and Zhang (2013), sponsorship can contribute to general elements (e.g. corporate image and brand awareness) as well as specific elements (e.g. brand differentiation, perceived quality, and brand loyalty). However, a concern of having multiple sponsors during a single event has been identified by Pryor (1999) as causing “sponsorship clutter” which mitigates the effectiveness of each sponsors’ individual promotion. As a result of previous research, impact of variables such as sports enthusiasm and social media consumption toward sponsorship outcomes such as attitude toward event, purchase intention, and sponsor patronage were used to build the hypotheses in this study.

Sports enthusiasm

Sports enthusiasts can be considered a homogeneous group that share a common interest (sports) but within this large group are segments of sports players, fans, and viewers that can be better segmented to receive the sponsors’ message. According to Guillén and Martínez-Alvarado (2014), engagement in sports is associated with being emotionally linked to the activity or event. Individuals can be considered sports enthusiasts whether they play competitive or recreational sports, or if they also do not play sports but prefer the sport viewing experience. Any engagement creates an enthusiasm where an individual is dedicated, involved, and absorbed in the task. Cornwell and Roy (2001) had found that involvement with a particular sport, enthusiasm for sports in general, and overall exposure to a sport all have a direct, positive influence on recall and recognition of sponsors supporting the event. They further found an individual who is enthusiastic about a sport or an event is more likely to have conversations with others regarding the sport. Today, involving fans with an event is more convenient to do since organizations and teams have online channels (such as Twitter) where comments can be shared instantly, even when a game is in progress. For the audience that may be watching the event live in person or on television or streaming online, there would be a better chance for sponsors to get noticed by being associated with the event. Additional investigation into sports enthusiasm and involvement that explore relationship with new media channels can help contribute to the literature on sports sponsorship.

Based on the above-mentioned review of literature, there is a need to research if sports enthusiasm (as independent variable) impacts attitude toward event, sponsor patronage, and purchase intention of sponsors’ products that are associated with sports enthusiasm. As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a. Sports enthusiasm is positively related to attitude toward event.

H1b. Sports enthusiasm is positively related to sponsor patronage.

H1c. Sports enthusiasm is positively related to purchase intention.

Social media consumption

The internet has played a useful role in commercial sponsorship activity. With the increased option to disseminate marketing communication across newer technology-based channels such as mobile phones, social media networks, and interactive television, sponsorship is being considered as a premier opportunity to reach consumers. Weeks *et al.* (2008) extended their study of traditional (non-digital) related sponsorship effects to online environments by setting up websites that captured audience interest related to brand familiarity, perceived congruence, event experience, and attitude toward sponsor. Results of their study showed

that when the web was used as a moderating medium to promote sponsorship, there were positive differences in attitude based on leverage, congruence, and articulation manipulations. Participants displayed more favorable attitudes toward the sponsor when the website was leveraged to engage visitors in event-specific information by elaborating on the sponsorship. There is a similar study needed that investigates social media use. Engagement and interaction among networked users increases the reach of marketing messages across different platforms, which help improve brand awareness and association (Hazari *et al.*, 2016). Due to high engagement with other users and content, social media consumption has received marketing attention because of “always connected” nature of millennials which include multiple social media accounts, and the affinity toward mobile devices, as well as a willingness to share information on social networks. Abeza *et al.* (2014) also emphasized that audience connection to a brand built on social media can promote a sense of belonging because of engagement opportunities available within social media platforms. Dewan and Ramaprasad (2014) similarly emphasized the importance of user engagement on platforms as a catalyst to improve sales. They reported that product sales are positively related to the volume and valence (e.g. star rating) of user reviews; negative reviews are more influential than positive ones; and consumer word of mouth is more important for niche products and brands.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter attract sports fans who converge around channels, hashtags, and pages, to Like, Pin, Share, and Tweet information about athletes, teams, and events. Social media consumption allows users to participate in online groups (such as Facebook Team Pages) where identity and affinity is formed based on common sports and team-related experiences with other users. With millions of users generating a buzz around conversation, fans are emotionally involved with sporting events and actively participate using official and unofficial social media pages and profiles setup by sports associations, teams, leagues, and fans. The goal for social media outreach with fans is primarily to build a relationship, create awareness, and engage in relationship marketing with consumers of social media (Pedersen *et al.*, 2010; Witkemper *et al.*, 2012). Because of the proliferation of social media use and sponsors’ apps that were used during the Olympics, there is a need to research if social media consumption (as independent variable) helps or hinders how consumers receive marketing messages which can affect attitude toward event, sponsor patronage, and purchase intention. As a result of association of social media consumption with related sponsorship outcomes, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H2a. Social media consumption is positively related to attitude toward event.
- H2b. Social media consumption is positively related to sponsor patronage.
- H2c. Social media consumption is positively related purchase intention.

Gender

Gender can be used for segmentation so that advertisers can tailor marketing communication to a target market based on characteristics such as information processing and decision-making process of individuals within that segment. While gender differences and its role in affecting purchase decisions in a traditional shopping environment (non-online) have been studied by marketing researchers such as Meyers-Levy (1989) and Gentry *et al.* (2003), the role of online consumers segmented by gender needs further investigation. Kim *et al.* (2007) called for research to better understand online users’ attitudes and behaviors from a gender perspective. Sheehan (2013) noted that since female participation in sports and viewership on television has been increasing, marketers are using sporting events to show advertisements in product categories such as financial services, health care, insurance, and automobiles. These advertisements are being targeted to women since they are often primary decision makers in

these categories. Burnett *et al.* (1993) validated the salience of segmenting sports enthusiasts by gender. They found that females were enthusiastic about watching certain types of sports and recommended that marketers should consider gender a primary criterion for creative strategy formulation and media selection. Despite the fact that sports audiences are male dominated, females reported significantly more positive reactions to sport sponsorship advertisements than males. Filo *et al.* (2014) reported on studies that explored motives of social media users examined for gender differences. It was found that female followers were more likely to be motivated to buy the athlete's products, obtain news and information, enjoy the athlete's writing, and express their long-term fanship. In contrast, male followers were more likely to be motivated to follow by the athlete's physical attractiveness. As a result, there needs to be further examination of gender-based response differentials to learn more about implications of using sponsorship to target females. Due to possible gender differences and moderating effects on attitude, purchase intention, sponsor patronage, sports enthusiasm, and social media consumption, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H3a.* There is no difference between males and females on attitude toward event.
- H3b.* Gender does not moderate the relationship between sports enthusiasm and attitude toward event.
- H3c.* Gender does not moderate the relationship between social media consumption and attitude toward event.
- H4a.* There is no difference between males and females on sponsor patronage.
- H4b.* Gender does not moderate the relationship between sports enthusiasm and sponsor patronage.
- H4c.* Gender does not moderate the relationship between social media consumption and sponsor patronage.
- H5a.* There is no difference between males and females on purchase intention.
- H5b.* Gender does not moderate the relationship between sports enthusiasm and purchase intention.
- H5c.* Gender does not moderate the relationship social media consumption and purchase intention.

According to Akinci *et al.* (2007), marketing researchers should be interested in investigating concepts such as consumption patterns, consumer behavior, intention, and attitudes. The models to predict a dichotomous outcome are important to help develop marketing strategies that can answer questions, which can provide information on whether a product will succeed in the marketplace, or if a consumer has a high propensity to purchase a product. Tools such as logistic regression and discriminant analysis are helpful in analyzing and modeling discrimination problems in marketing (Crask and Perreault, 1977; Grover and Vriens, 2006). In this study, consumer attitude as a result of sponsorship stimuli can result in purchase intention. This can provide insights to sponsors on how the marketing budget should be allocated. As a result, to investigate combination of variables that can interact or provide moderating effects to predictor outcomes, the following research questions were also investigated:

- RQ1.* Does gender significantly affects a linear combination of sponsor patronage, social media consumption, and sports enthusiasm?
- RQ2.* What combination of gender, competitive sport, recreational sports, social media consumption, and sports enthusiasm best predicts purchase intention as a result of social media advertisements?

Method

Quantitative data were gathered through a questionnaire-based survey of 265 business students enrolled at a university in the South East USA. All data collection was completed within two weeks after the conclusion of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Respondents were provided information on the purpose of the study and directed to a website to take the survey. The survey was developed with construct measures using a review of literature and was delivered electronically using online survey method. Details of the survey instrument are provided below. Following the introduction section and the user review example, the survey asked for input on how the respondents watched or followed the Olympic Games. Questions related to time spent following the Olympic events, news, scores, and medal counts were asked next. Data were captured regarding the different types of devices (e.g. television, smartphone, tablets, etc.) that were used by participants to follow the Olympic Games. Data on the different types of events followed by participants were also collected. Next, randomized statements of four different sub-scales (attitude, sponsor patronage, social media consumption, and sports enthusiasm) were presented to participants. A five-point Likert response scale for each statement ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The survey then asked for demographic information such as age, gender, previous experience with sports, and social media use. IRB approval was obtained from the university committee to administer the survey to students. Prior to administration of the survey, it was pilot tested with a group of respondents that included faculty and students (not counted in the actual sample). Feedback from the group was incorporated in the final version of the survey that was given to students included in this study. Content validity of survey items was established by two faculty members in the Marketing Department in the College of Business. Additional details about the scale measures are given below.

Scale measures

The survey used multiple scales that were modified for the purpose of this study. The scale used for measuring attitudinal construct toward sponsorship was a modified version of a scale developed by Lee *et al.* (1997) which was considered valid for this study because it had been designed for the purpose of investigating special event sponsorship and had a reported Cronbach's α reliability of 0.75. In the 12-item scale, the researchers had previously identified three consumer-related constructs using the context of sponsorship. The constructs were: attitude toward the event (four items); attitudes toward commercialization (four items); and attitude toward behavioral intent (four items). In the original scale, attitude toward the event was expected to measure favorable or unfavorable response to the event. The measurement of this response was assumed to be an accumulation of individuals' experience over time. Lee *et al.* (1997) also mentioned that attitude relates to enjoyment of an event, support of the event, and the belief of high performance expectation during the event. For this study, the attitude measures toward the event were modified in wording to state the 2016 Rio Olympic Games instead of the Winter Games for which the scale was originally used. For commercialization portion of the attitude scale, in the original scale, one of the items related to commercialization had a lower factor loading and as a result the researchers had recommended rewording that item which was done for this study. To maintain consistency with the previously validated scale, the overall modified scale statements were phrased similar to the original scale. Behavioral intent in the original scale attempted to capture consumers' likelihood of buying from the sponsor, attention to the Olympic logo, and influence of sponsorship vs regular advertising and impact on purchase decision. Other than rewording the statements for 2016 Rio Olympics, the behavioral intent items were retained and reliability of the entire scale was re-calculated and was found to have Cronbach's α reliability of 0.74. A composite score on the 12-item scale was used to determine attitude toward sponsorship. Individual items within each construct were also

used to determine attitude toward sub-constructs such as attitude toward event, attitude toward commercialization, and attitude toward behavioral intent.

Another scale was used to assess sports enthusiasm and engagement among participants. This is because of a need to investigate whether audience characteristics related to enthusiasm about sports can affect recall and attitude toward sponsorship, sponsor patronage, and purchase intention. Two scales were modified for the purpose of measuring sports enthusiasm. Dickerson and Gentry (1983) had earlier proposed a scale that had items related to going beyond actively playing a sport by either reading, discussing, or watching sports as well as trying to gauge interest in following sports news or scores. The scale had a Cronbach's α of 0.825. Questions in the scale were related to psychographic factors of participants. Since the original study was not specific to Olympic Games, the items were modified for the context of this study which related to Olympic events. Specific modifications items related to the type of media that is used to catch up on sports news. While Dickerson and Gentry (1983) had asked about reading sports news to keep updated, the questions used in this study included new media such as television and social media news updates. The other scale used that was modified for use in this study was the Sport Engagement Scale (SES) by Guillén and Martínez-Alvarado (2014). This was a more recent scale that researched engagement, dedication, and absorption in a sports context. The SES scale was reported to have a Cronbach's α reliability of 0.75. Changes that were made to items related to keeping updated on sports news, watching Olympic events regularly, and having conversations about sports events. Since the items were adapted for use in this study, the reliability of the new scale was re-calculated and was found to be 0.79.

The sponsor patronage scale was a modified version of the scale proposed by Gwinner and Swanson (2003). The reliability of the original scale was 0.93. The original scale was developed for the sport of Football. Since items were modified in wording to replace football with Rio Olympic Games, reliability was re-calculated and Cronbach's α was found to be 0.77. The sponsor patronage items were relevant to the study to investigate if purchase intention would be affected by affinity toward a sponsor. In a previous study, Crimmings and Horn (1996) had reported that over 50 percent of consumers exhibited higher purchase probability of a company's product if the company supported the Olympic Games. When conducting exploratory factor analysis, oblique rotation was used. For the attitude scale and sub-scales, the revised scale was cross-validated with the original scale. The revised scale also resulted in three factors (same as original scale). In the attitude toward commercialization scale, one item, "The quality of a company's marketing message during the Olympic games is a good reflection of the quality of its products or services" showed a low factor loading (as well as low reliability) so it was not used in further analysis.

The Social Media Consumption scale was a combination of modified versions of two scales. Shapiro *et al.* (2013) had investigated consumption behavior among college sports fans which can lead to increased attendance, sponsor support, and merchandise purchases. Although the study was conducted using the context of college football, the items developed during the study related to consumption behavior including television viewership, radio listenership, print media consumption, merchandise purchases, tailgating, and social media consumption. Only items related to social media consumption were retained and modified for use. Wording was changed from football to Rio Olympic Games which measured degree of involvement of participants using social media sources. In a recent study, using the context of international soccer, Demirel and Erdogmus (2016) had investigated team attachment, perceived sincerity, and social media consumption on attitudes toward sponsors. They identified Facebook and Twitter as the two most common social media platforms for sport focused social media consumption. Since fans could be using other social media platforms, the modified items for the study addressed social media networks in general without identifying specific platforms. An additional item was added to the modified scale that compared preference in getting news

from social media sites compared to traditional media channels such as radio and television. The modified scaled was subjected to reliability analysis and all modified scales used in this study (sponsorship attitude, sponsor patronage, sports enthusiasm, and social media consumption) exceeded the minimum reliability coefficient of 0.70 recommended by Nunally (1978) which is an acceptable criterion for internally consistent scales.

Data analysis and results

Demographic characteristics of respondents are shown in Table I. There were slightly more females than males in the study. Most respondents ranged in age from 18 to 25 and almost half of the respondents had either played competitive sports or played sports for recreation. A majority of respondents did not follow companies on social media, and almost half of the respondents had made a purchase based on an advertisement shown on mobile devices.

Sports enthusiasm

H1a. Sports enthusiasm is positively related to attitude toward event.

A Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between sports enthusiasm and attitude toward event. A significant moderate correlation was found ($r(262) = 0.457, p < 0.01$) between the two variables. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict attitude toward event based on sports enthusiasm. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1,262) = 69.533, p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.209:

H1b. Sports enthusiasm is positively related to sponsor patronage.

A Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between sponsor patronage and sports enthusiasm. A significant but weak correlation was found ($r(262) = 0.382, p < 0.01$) between the two variables. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict sponsor patronage based on sports enthusiasm. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1,262) = 44.807, p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.143:

H1c. Sports enthusiasm is positively related to purchase intention.

A Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between purchase intention and sports enthusiasm. A significant but weak correlation was found ($r(262) = 0.367, p < 0.01$) between the two variables. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict purchase intention of sponsors' products based on sports enthusiasm. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1,262) = 41.119, p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.132.

Measure	Items	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	114	43.0
	Female	151	57.0
Age	18-25	248	93.6
	26-50	15	5.7
	Over 51	2	0.8
Recreation sport	Yes	139	52.5
	No	126	47.5
Competitive sport	Yes	157	59.2
	No	108	40.8
Social media follow	Yes	102	38.5
	No	163	61.5
Social media ad purchase	Yes	138	52.1
	No	127	47.9

Table I.
Demographic
Information

H2a. Social media consumption is positively related to attitude toward event.

A Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between social media consumption and attitude toward event. A significant but weak correlation was found ($r(262) = 0.201, p < 0.001$) between the two variables. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict social media consumption based on attitude toward event. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1,262) = 11.124, p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.037. With a small effect size, additional research on predictors is needed as social media consumption event cannot be considered a strong predictor of attitude toward event:

H2b. Social media consumption is positively related to sponsor patronage.

A Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between social media consumption and sports enthusiasm. A significant but weak correlation was found ($r(262) = 0.210, p < 0.05$) between the two variables. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict social media consumption based on sports enthusiasm. The regression equation was significant, ($F(1,262) = 4.029, p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.041. Social media consumption can be used to predict sponsor patronage but cannot be considered to be a strong predictor of social media consumption:

H2c. Social media consumption is positively related to purchase intention.

A Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between social media consumption and sponsor patronage. A significant but weak correlation was found ($r(262) = 0.175, p < 0.001$) between the two variables. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict purchase intention based on social media consumption. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1,262) = 8.316, p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.027. With a small effect size, additional research on predictors is needed as social media consumption cannot be considered a strong predictor of purchase intention.

Differences and moderating effects of gender

(The following information was added to explain the differences and moderating effects of gender based on recommendation of Reviewer No. 2):

H3a. There is no difference between males and females on attitude toward event.

An independent samples *t*-test comparing the mean scores of males and females on attitude found no significant difference between the means of two groups ($t(264) = 1.46, p > 0.05$). The mean score of males ($M = 3.99, SD = 0.75$) on attitude toward event was not significantly different than the mean score of females ($M = 3.86, SD = 0.65$):

H3b. Gender does not moderate the relationship between sports enthusiasm and attitude toward event.

Regression coefficients of males and females for the relationship between sports enthusiasm and attitude toward event were checked for significant difference. The *t*-statistics of 0.43, $p > 0.05$ indicates that there does not exist a significant difference between the two regression coefficients, thus confirming no moderating role exists for gender in relation to sports enthusiasm and attitude toward event:

H3c. Gender does not moderate the relationship between social media consumption and attitude towards event.

Regression coefficients of males and females for the relationship between consumption and attitude toward event were checked for significant difference. The *t*-statistics of 1.76,

$p > 0.05$ indicates that there does not exist a significant difference between the two regression coefficients, thus confirming no moderating role exists for gender in relation to sports consumption and attitude toward event:

H4a. There is no difference between males and females on sponsor patronage.

An independent samples *t*-test comparing the mean scores of males and females on sponsor patronage found significant difference between the means of two groups ($t(264) = 1.20$, $p < 0.05$). The mean score of males ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.07$) on sponsor patronage was significantly different than the mean score of females ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.90$):

H4b. Gender does not moderate the relationship between sports enthusiasm and sponsor patronage.

Regression coefficients of males and females for the relationship between sports enthusiasm and sponsor patronage were checked for significant difference. The *t*-statistics of 1.01, $p > 0.05$ indicates that there does not exist a significant difference between the two regression coefficients, thus confirming no moderating role exists for gender in relation to sports enthusiasm and sponsor patronage:

H4c. Gender does not moderate the relationship between social media consumption and sponsor patronage.

Regression coefficients of males and females for the relationship between social media consumption and sponsor patronage were checked for significant difference. The *t*-statistics of 2.76, $p < 0.05$ indicates that there exists a significant difference between the two regression coefficients, thus confirming the moderating role exists for gender in relation to social media consumption and sponsor patronage:

H5a. There is no difference between males and females on purchase intention.

An independent samples *t*-test comparing the mean scores of males and females on purchase intention found significant difference between the means of two groups ($t(264) = 0.822$, $p < 0.05$). The mean score of males ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.08$) on purchase intention was significantly different than the mean score of females ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.89$):

H5b. Gender does not moderate the relationship between sports enthusiasm and purchase intention.

Regression coefficients of males and females for the relationship between sports enthusiasm and purchase intention were checked for significant difference. The *t*-statistics of 1.51, $p > 0.05$ indicates that there does not exist a significant difference between the two regression coefficients, thus confirming no moderating role exists for gender in relation to sports enthusiasm and purchase intention:

H5c. Gender does not moderate the relationship social media consumption and purchase intention.

Regression coefficients of males and females for the relationship between social media consumption and purchase intention were checked for significant difference. The *t*-statistics of 2.95, $p < 0.05$ indicates that there exists a significant difference between the two regression coefficients, thus confirming the moderating role exists for gender in relation to social media consumption and purchase intention:

RQ1. Does gender significantly affect linear combination of sponsor patronage, social media consumption, and sports enthusiasm?

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to assess if there were differences between gender on a linear combination of sponsor patronage, social media consumption,

and sports enthusiasm. A significant difference was found, Pillai's trace $V = 0.100$, $F = 9.624$, $p = 0.000$. Examination of coefficients for the linear combinations distinguishing gender indicated that sponsor patronage and social media consumption were significant contributors to distinguishing between genders. Sports enthusiasm did not contribute significantly to distinguishing between gender groups.

To build a predictive model of group membership based on observed characteristics of each participant, discriminant analysis was used to investigate the following question:

RQ2. What combination of gender, competitive sport, recreational sports, social media consumption, and sports enthusiasm best predicts purchase intention as a result of social media advertisements?

Discriminant analysis was conducted to assess whether gender, playing competitive sport, playing recreational sports, social media consumption, and sports enthusiasm best predict purchase intention as a result of viewing advertisements on social networks. Wilks' λ was significant, $\lambda = 0.84$, $\chi^2 = 45.701$, $p < 0.001$, which indicates that the model including these five variables was able to significantly discriminate the two groups. Table II presents the standardized function coefficients, which suggest that social media consumption, gender, and sports enthusiasm contribute most to distinguishing those who made a purchase as a result of seeing social media advertisements, using these predictors. The classification results show that the model correctly predicts 68.6 percent of those who did make a purchase and 32.3 percent of those who did not make a purchase as a result of social media advertisements. The correlation coefficient in the table indicates the extent to which each variable correlates with the resulting discriminating function. It should be noted that although playing competitive sport did not contribute strongly to the discriminant function, it is moderately correlated with the overall discriminant function.

Logistic regression was conducted to assess whether gender, competitive sports participation, recreational sports participation, sports enthusiasm, and social media consumption significantly predicted whether or not the subject would make a purchase after seeing an advertisement on their social media network. When all the five predictors are considered together, they significantly predict whether or not a purchase would be made as a result of an advertisement on social media network, $\chi^2 = 45.96$, $df = 5$, $N = 264$, $p < 0.001$. Table III presents the odds ratios, which suggest that the odds of estimating correctly who

	Standardized function coefficients	Correlations between variables and discriminant function
Gender	0.35	0.21
Competitive sport	-0.58	0.58
Recreational sport	-0.18	-0.27
Social media consumption	0.65	0.63
Sports enthusiasm	0.30	0.41

Table II. Standardized function coefficients and correlation coefficients

	Variable	β	SE	Odds ratio	p
Table III. Logistic regression predicting purchase as a result of social media advertisement	Gender	-0.63	0.30	0.53	0.034*
	Competitive Sport	-1.00	0.30	0.37	0.001*
	Recreational sport	0.33	0.30	1.40	0.269
	Social media consumption	-0.62	0.15	0.54	0.000*
	Sports enthusiasm	-0.26	0.14	0.77	0.069

Note: * $p < 0.05$

makes a purchase as a result of seeing a social media advertisement. Significant predictors for making a purchase as a result of seeing a social media advertisement were gender, playing competitive sport and social media consumption. It was noted that although playing recreational sports was not significant, the odds of purchase as a result of social media advertisement improve by 40 percent if one plays recreational sports.

Discussion and implications

Abeza *et al.* (2015) proposed the utilization of social media as a powerful marketing tool because of its global reach, ease of networking, and ease of collaboration. The main draw toward using sponsorship as a marketing communication tool is its ability to reach a mass audience which may influence constructs used in this study such as attitude, sports patronage, and purchase intention. Dwyer *et al.* (2011) noted that demographic variables along with motivation and attitude can help with market segmentation in sport consumers. The importance of using demographic variables was underscored by Filo *et al.* (2014) who stated that sports fans use social media for many reasons which can differ by gender, sport context, age, and education. For participants in this study, it was found that sports enthusiasm affects attitude, sponsor patronage, and purchase intention (*H1*). For achieving brand awareness and brand attitude/image objectives, sponsorship is considered to be particularly useful (Hoek *et al.*, 1997; Johnston and Spais, 2016). For sponsorship to be effective, sports marketers must clearly identify their customer by evaluating demographic and psychographic variables, in relation to constructs such as social media consumption, sponsor patronage, and sports enthusiasm.

This study validates use of the congruity theory which provides a good fit for sponsorship-related research in this study. The findings of this study showed that sports enthusiasm is positively related to attitude (*H1*, *H2*). In the congruity theory, the source (Olympic Game events) is connected to attitude object which can lead to positive intention. The theory also stated that retrieval of information is influenced by prior expectation which may include sports enthusiasm (*H1*) that was one of the constructs used in this study. Use of other sources such as social media consumption can reinforce congruency with existing schema (Jagre *et al.*, 2001) to help storage in memory and retrieval for decisions that impact sponsor patronage, attitude, and purchase intention. Practical implications of congruency for advertisers include having social media advertisements that are in harmony with prior experience (such as being enthusiastic about sports) which will result in superior recall and recognition of sponsors' brand or product (Heckler and Childers, 1992). Congruity theory is also relevant to advertising and consumer behavior in relation to attitudes of fans that can be affected when social influencers are linked to an object which may be a brand or a company. Since the findings of this study showed that social media consumption and sports enthusiasm are linked to attitude (*H1*, *H2*) companies can use celebrities in sponsorship messages which can establish congruency and help keep the company product or brand more relevant. By using a multi-platform message across different social media platforms, the sponsorship message can appeal to sports enthusiasts who are either involved with recreational or competitive sport. Further, the network effect can amplify sponsor messages that may not have been possible years ago by using traditional media.

The findings of this study (*RQ1* and *RQ2*) showed that marketing to a target audience of specific gender who play competitive sport and are active on social media would further impact sponsorship outcomes. Sponsorship is more involved with creating goodwill and image transfer. This allows the evoked feelings from the event to potentially transfer to the sponsored company or brand. There has been a debate between similarities and differences between advertising and sponsorship. Meenaghan (2001) categorized advertising as a multistage process with central and peripheral routes to persuasion. As compared to advertising, sponsorship uses a subtler and less dominant approach to reach a large

audience who may be watching the event in a stadium or on television. The differences and similarities between advertising and sponsorship are relevant to the findings of this study because new channels of communication, such as social media, have the potential to amplify sponsors' message (either sponsorship or advertising) due to the network effect of users' sharing content on social networks. The findings of the study (*RQ2*) showed that significant predictors for making a purchase after seeing an advertisement on social media network are high social media consumption users who were also sports enthusiasts.

Pedersen (2014) reported that the scope, penetration, and magnitude of social media reach have transformed global sports. As social media use increases and social media platforms are being used as a "second screen" to augment, or even replace, traditional television viewership, the role of social media consumption and its impact on sponsorship needs further attention. Mahan (2011) had previously cautioned that although social media involvement (similar to social media consumption construct in this study) is a significant predictor of attitude, social network communication may reach only those who are active users of social media not reach a wider audience. However, as social media reach and acceptance becomes more popular among younger demographics today, the findings of this study (*H2*) are more relevant in showing that social media consumption is a predictor of attitude, sports patronage, and purchase intention. Results of this study showed that social media consumption can predict attitude toward event, sports patronage, and purchase intention. As mentioned by Weeks *et al.* (2008), the congruence effect can favor sponsor identification and patronage by increasing positive attitude toward sponsors (Rodgers, 2003). By having consumers follow company brands on social media, congruence effect can be established which impacts attitude toward event as well as sponsor patronage. The findings of social media consumption and sports patronage are consistent with research by Rishika *et al.* (2013) who had reported that customer engagement in a firm's social media effort will lead to an increase in frequency of customer visits (e.g. to a company Facebook or Instagram page). Further, the participation effect was found to be greater for customers who exhibit a strong patronage with the firm. Companies can get a competitive advantage only if their sponsorship messages are relevant digitally and if companies are able to engage the customer on social media sites with incentives for participation and input for ideas to provide input for new products that augment the customer-sponsor interaction.

Social media advertisements showing sponsorship congruence for the event can build a sponsor's image during the event by using social media interactivity (Wang, 2017). Examples of interactivity are contests and promotions that encourage visitors to share the sponsor's message and user-generated content on social media. By using social influencers (such as successful athletes), sponsors can improve brand awareness and association. The findings of this study can fill the void in the academic literature regarding how consumer behavior in the context of sports sponsorship and social media consumption can impact attitude and sponsor patronage. Research in social communication as it affects purchase intention must be a priority for researchers because of changes in communication and emerging technologies such as virtual reality can impact marketing including streams such as ecommerce, social commerce, and mobile commerce, which are creating new opportunities for businesses to create brand awareness by using sporting events (such as the Olympic Games) as marketing channels. The findings of the study (*H1*) confirmed that attitude toward event, sponsor patronage, and purchase intention can be predicted by sports enthusiasm. Along with social media consumption, enthusiasm toward a sporting event or activity can transfer through social media channels in real time as the events take place. By having a presence on social media while the event is in progress (e.g. live stream on Facebook), sponsors can create a second screen experience for a homogenous group that will result in recall and recognition of sponsors' products as a result of leveraging sports fans who are emotionally linked with the sports activity. The findings of this study extend the results of previous studies

(e.g. Cornwell and Roy, 2001) that were done prior to when social media was popular. This study also adds to the findings of Popp *et al.* (2017) who had found that social media is useful, but in contrast social media growth was not found to be a significant predictor of any of the marketing outcome variables. Social media channels now provide an opportunity for sponsors to market to a receptive group of enthusiastic sports fans.

Otoni *et al.* (2013) have observed that marketing on social media networks needs a better understanding of demographics and target audience. With females forming a larger group of social media users, and females showing an increasing role in affecting purchase decisions, as well as females taking an active role in playing and viewing sports events, marketing to females online and on social media can be considered an effective strategy if research findings show that users' attitudes and behaviors can be segmented from a gender perspective. In this study, the findings from a gender perspective showed that there was a significant difference in social media consumption in favor of females who reported more social media use. The findings of this study (*H3, H4, H5*) also showed significant differences between males and females on sports patronage and purchase intention. Results of the study also showed that gender moderates the relationship between social media consumption and sponsor patronage, as well as the relationship between social media consumption and purchase intention. In this study, it was also found by examination of coefficients for the linear combinations (*RQ1*), sponsor patronage and social media consumption were significant contributors to distinguishing between genders. This finding once again highlights the importance of encouraging social media use related to the brand among female consumers as it relates to sponsors' messages that can impact sponsor patronage. Sponsored messages can improve attitude toward event by featuring successful female athletes as social influencers which can impact purchase intention and sponsor patronage among female consumers. On popular female dominated social media platforms such as Facebook and Pinterest, females interact more by liking and sharing content. Therefore, by encouraging users to share a sponsors' content, the communication becomes self-propagating which can result in more exposure to the business, sponsor patronage as well as purchase of the product (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). When investigating gender along with type of sports played, sports enthusiasm, and social media consumption (*RQ2*), it was found that gender was the second strongest discriminant function next only to social media consumption. In light of previous findings regarding social media use by females, the combination of social media consumption and gender can be considered a major factor in predicting purchase intention as a result of seeing social media advertisements. As a result of specific findings in this study, marketers should target sponsorship communication messages to an audience of females on social media who take part in either recreational or competitive sports.

Limitations and directions for future research

Abeza *et al.* (2015) recommended further research into sponsorship and social media because of the ever changing nature of sporting landscape, that is impacted by social media, can inform marketing scholars and practitioners. Despite the useful findings of this study related to sponsorship and social media, a limitation of this study is that it used a convenience sample of students to collect data. While using student samples provided convenience in terms of respondent availability, convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique which may have led to under-representation or over-representation of particular groups within the sample. As a result, the study can only be generalized to a larger population with similar demographics of subjects used in the study. Males and females were well represented in the study, and over 90 percent of respondents were between 18 and 25 years old. Another limitation is that the questions in this study asked respondents about purchase intention rather than measuring actual purchases made as a result of sponsorship stimuli. This may have introduced a source of measurement error

because it is possible that purchase intention may not translate to actual purchase behavior in the future based on other criteria not included in the study.

A limitation of the study relates to the multiple corporate sponsorship levels that exist in current Olympic Games. Compared to previous Olympics, there are now new categories of sponsorships such as Worldwide Olympic Partners, Official Sponsors, Official Supporters, Official Suppliers, and Suppliers. These multiple categories are blurring the lines between advertising messages and sponsorship partly due to Rule 40 which allows non-official Olympic sponsor companies to apply for a waiver to advertise using Olympic athletes to endorse products. Since there is overlap between categories from a business and technical perspective (such as the use of logos by companies associated with Olympic Games), for an end-user, in this study it was assumed that the different categories of sponsorship stimuli would not make a difference in attitude, sponsor patronage, social media consumption, or purchase intention. For future studies that specifically investigate the corporate sponsorship perspective, differences in sponsorship categories should be included in the study. For example, it would be helpful to research and compare differences between sponsorship outcomes using different categories of sponsors and advertisers, and investigate if consumers' purchase intention would be different based on type of sponsorship or among the various levels of sponsorship.

Westberg and Pope (2014) recommended that since sponsorship contributes to a brand's overall equity and sales, marketers would be wise to use sponsorship as part of the overall brand strategy. In addition to using the regular Olympic Games for sponsorship, companies can use sponsorship in Olympics for cause marketing. The effect of cause marketing in sports event can be investigated using constructs used in this study. Although most research presented in this paper deals with the impact of sponsorship on consumer behavior, studies such as Patterson and Spreng (1997) have also investigated the impact of perceived value of sponsorship in conjunction with satisfaction and repeat purchase intentions in a business-to-business services. Whether business-to-business services are impacted by social media consumption similar to business-to-consumer model should also be explored. Regarding sponsorship communication preferences, researchers can also investigate which demographic group is most influenced by specific types of multimedia sponsorship messages (e.g. video, audio, text, or images) in regards to changes in attitude and purchase intention.

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