

Research Article

SPONSORSHIP EFFECTS ON THE CUSTOMERS'(FANS') INFERENCE FROM THE SPONSOR BRAND

Mohammad Elyasi¹ and *Mostafa Moballeghi²

¹*Department of Management, College of Humanity Science, Shahr-e-Qods Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran*

²*Department of Management and Accounting, Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran*

**Author for Correspondence*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of Sponsorship on the customers' (fans) image with the sponsor brand. The research in terms of objective is practical, in descriptive form within the survey class in which using the method of random sampling, 500 of football enthusiasts were selected, hence the questionnaires consisting 48 items and based on 5 Likert options in order to collect data were codified. The results of this study suggest that being involved in the sport activities is positively related to the Attraction and tendency to the sports activities. In addition, involvement in the sports activities is positively associated with the feeling of team Attachment. The Attraction and tendency to the sports activities is also connected to team Attachment in a positively way, and the team Attachment is also positively associated with having a good mental image of the sponsor products. Finally, it was found that the perceived good mental image of sponsor is associated with the intention of buying the sponsor products positively.

Keywords: *Sponsorship, Team Attachment, Purchase Intention*

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of third millennium, the sport world went through new period. Increasing activity in the field of physical education and sport has led to rising demand for the goods and services. These activities have resulted in appearance of sport industry. In order to success in this industry, "Sport Marketing" is necessary (Pitts and Stotlar, 2002). Sponsorship is considered as one of the marketing components, which as a profitable choice can provide the required tools to meet the companies' special goals beside the other elements like advertisement, sell promotion, personal selling, communication and straight marketing Crompton (2004) and Meenaghan (2001) in particular situations and cause the marketers successful in the turbulent environment (Seguin and Oreilly, 2008).

Also today, the sponsor role as a communication tool and a complementary element for marketing programs has been clearly confirmed, and marketers use it widely in their marketing plans. Research in the domain of support suggests that if sponsorship is properly planned and implemented, it can be a sustainable competitive advantage. Meanwhile, the sport sponsorship is most well known and most common type of support, devoting almost three-quarters of the costs of sponsoring (Funk and James, 2006). Sponsorship is as the means of communication in marketing. In today's market, companies are looking for the new ways to their marketing activities and try to make themselves superior to the competitors, increase their sales and market share, and thus they spend enormous costs to this purpose (Cutler, 2004).

Although, sponsorship seems a modern business activity, but it has long been used. Gilbert believes that the first use of sponsorship is allocated to 65 years B.C. in which the kings took advantage of the advertising impact of gladiators (Gilbert, 1988). Researchers have defined sponsorship in different forms: Meenagha (1983) Sponsorship is preparing the financial and product help to an activity in order to gain the business goals by a business firm. (Shank, 2005) expresses the sport sponsorship as follows: Investment in sports existence (athletes, teams, leagues, or sports program) to support the organizational, commercial general goals, and advanced strategies.

Research Article

Sport sponsorship objectives from different perspectives:

Sport sponsorship has direct and indirect goals. The direct goal is increasing the sale rate, while the indirect purpose examines increasing sale rate through raising the knowledge, communication with the customer and compete with the other companies etc (Shank, 1999).

Believe that the goal of most companies is increasing the sale and promotion of the company image and introduction of sign and social participation is just cared by half companies (Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou, 2004).

Theoretical Model of Research

After evaluation of various available models, Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) model was selected. Of reasons to choose this model is examination of mental involvement variable from two aspects (centrality and Attraction) as forecasting variables affecting on sponsorship successes and enthusiasm for the team.

In this research, we have tried to pay the customers' intention to purchase the sponsor products as a measure of impact of sport teams' sponsorship.

Based on (Beaton *et al.*, 2009), mental involvement in sport is defined as a multi-dimensions concept showing the degree on which participation in a sport activity turns into a central activity in the person's life, creating symbolic and enjoyable values.

Attraction: perceived importance or interest in an activity or product and enjoyment resulting from participation using them. Tisautsu and Alexandris (2009) states that the higher the consumer's interest is the desired event, finds a more positive attitude to the sponsor (Persijus, 2004).

Team Attachment: according to the social identity theory, Madrigal (2001) suggested that if the fans of a sports team have a great sense of belonging to the team, the probability of buying the sponsor's products by them is increased.

Company Image: the set of beliefs and feelings about a company and its products in the customer's mind can be counted as the mental image of a company (Stotlar, 2005).

Purchase intention: have concluded that the tendency to buy the sponsor's products is more for the customers who have positive image of the sponsor (Ko *et al.*, 2008).

Subject Expression

In today's world, sponsorship and sport sponsorship in particular, constitute an important part of marketing campaigns. In Iran also, sport financial support, especially in football is incrementally grown. Therefore, the companies' headquarters should have enough information about this kind of marketing activities so that so they can make decisions such as allocation financial resources to support sport properly. In today's market, the companies are looking for new methods to their marketing activities and trying somehow to distinguish themselves from their competitors as well as increasing their market share and sales. To this end, they spend a lot of money. One of these methods is the sport sponsorship through which the companies are looking for various goals by supporting such sport events or clubs. Nowadays, the most enterprises seek to evaluate their marketing activities so that they can make decision in better way. Unfortunately, in Iran this matter is less cared, and if so, it has been measuring the amount of sales (short term effects) contributed by marketing activities (advertising, sponsorships etc.) and such factors as improving the public image of company or brand and purchase intention has been less considered. In this study, we are to examine these factors and the relationships between them. Given the companies' trend toward sport sponsorship and their success in achieving the proposed objectives, Iran's companies are seeking to sponsor the sport events and clubs; however, the impact of these activities on the target market and type of measuring the effectiveness of them has been less studied.

The Importance and Necessity of Research

The purpose of this study is examination of that although the companies are looking for the property return by high costs, but how to assess the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns is still an issue. In this study, we evaluated the relationship between the sponsor mental image and the fans loyalty in purchasing the brand in professional football league. (Involvement) centrality, (Involvement) Attraction, team Attachment, team sponsor's mental image and purchase intention of fans are the factors by which the effectiveness of sport sponsorship can be measured. Of benefits of this kind of researches is whether the

Research Article

sports sponsors despite spending high costs, can reach to selling the products and profitability by the fans through building a good image for them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

The goal of this study is to examine the factors by which we can measure the effectiveness of sports sponsorship as they can reach to considerable profit through those factors. (Involvement) centrality, (Involvement) Attraction, team Attachment, the sponsors public image, and purchase intention. According to the research objectives and using the theoretical principle and literature review, five hypotheses were stated as follows:

1. Engagement in sport activities as a lifestyle for the fans (customers) is positively related to the attractiveness and tendency to the sports activities.
2. Engagement in sport activities as a lifestyle for the fans (customers) is positively related to the sense of belonging to team.
3. There is appositive relationship between the attractiveness and tendency to the sports activities and the sense of belonging to a team.
4. Sense of belonging to team, is positively related to a good mental image of the sponsor product.
5. Perceived good mental image of the sponsor is positively associated with the intention of buying products.

To examine the research hypotheses, the below conceptual model based on the model of Tisutso and Alexandris. Nevertheless, the variable of suggesting advertisement used Advertise has been removed.

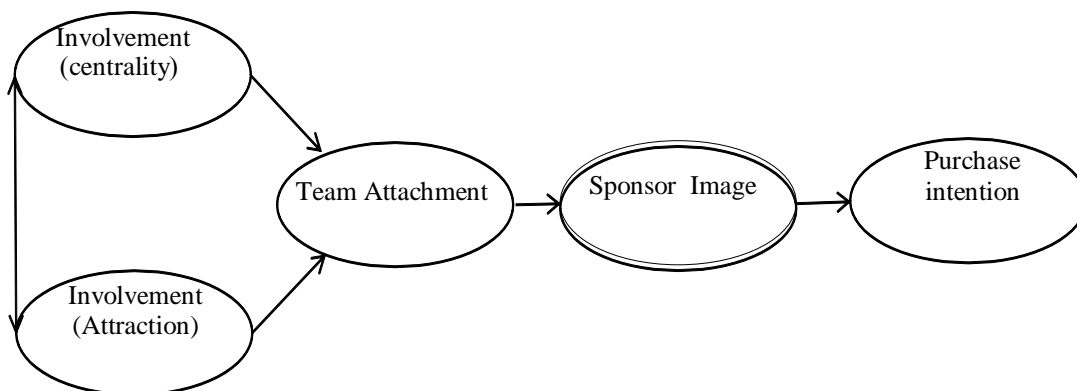


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Pattern

Method and Tool of Collecting Data

Table 1: Dependability (reliability) of variables

Variables	alpha coefficients
(Involvement) centrality	0/871
(Involvement) Attraction	0/732
team Attachment	0/946
Image of Sponsor	0/930
Purchase intention	0/708
Entire questionnaire reliability	0/981

Research Article

In order to collect required data for assessment of the effects of (Involvement) centrality, (Involvement) Attraction, team Attachment, sponsors image and purchase intention of the fans, a questionnaire designed by "Tisutso and Alexandris" was used; with some difference some sectors. In the present questionnaire, the 5 spectral Likert indicator from strongly agree to strongly disagree was utilized. Professors and experts have confirmed the questionnaire and its reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha.

The Statistic Society

The target population to complete the questionnaire was the fans of football teams, that the questionnaires were distributed among them. Sampling methods used in this study, is sampling at random by choosing some of the above-mentioned fans. In order to collect the required data, we used the questionnaire, which is one of the most common ways in marketing researches. Since we are facing with an unlimited community, 384 people were selected by Cochran's formula, and then to gain more accuracy, we increased it to 500 samples.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of sample demographic: Table 1-1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of demographic variables of research.

Table 2: Absolute and relative frequency of respondents' demographic characteristics

Percent	Frequency	Variable	
71.8%	359	Man	Sex
28.2%	141	Woman	
25.2%	126	Married	Marital Status
74.8%	374	Single	
10.6%	53	Under 20 years	Age
48.2%	241	20 to 25 years	
28%	140	26 to 30 years	
13.2%	66	Above 30 years	
0%	0	Diploma	Education
25.2%	126	Diploma	
53.2%	266	Bachelor	
21.6%	108	Masters	

As seen, the majority of the samples were male, single, aged in 20-25 period and undergraduate and after them people with Diploma.

Table 3: Central indices and variables dispersion

	The centrality	Attractiveness	Belongs to team	Sponsor image	Purchase intention
Average	3.6066	3.6805	3.5307	3.7128	3.5896
Middle	3.7143	4	3.6667	3.8462	3.6
Fashion Data	4	4	4	3.31	3.4
Standard deviation	1.00696	0. 83197	0. 80105	0. 78859	0. 78893
Variance	1.014	0. 692	0. 642	0. 622	0. 622

As shown, the mean of all research variables is more than 3, indicating the appropriate variables. In addition, as regards to little difference between front, middle and average, also regarding to the amount of data standard deviation and variance, it got clear that the data does not have a high dispersion.

Research Article

Examination of the Overall Pattern of Research and Hypotheses

Figures 2 and 3, show the outcome of structural equation modeling for both standard and meaningful numbers states. The pattern fitness indices suggest that the pattern is in appropriate status in terms of fitting and fitness indices why the ratio of for K2 towards the degree of freedom is 2.35, which is less than the allowable amount 3. RMSEA value equals to 0.074, which is less than the allowable value 0.1. In addition, comparative fitness index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), increasing fitness index (IFI), the norm of the fitness index (NFI) and non-norm of the fitness index (NNFI), are approximately 0.9 and more, so it has shown an appropriate fitness. The following figures show the meaningful values and standardized estimate of structural equation modeling, for the research conceptual model based on the considered variables.

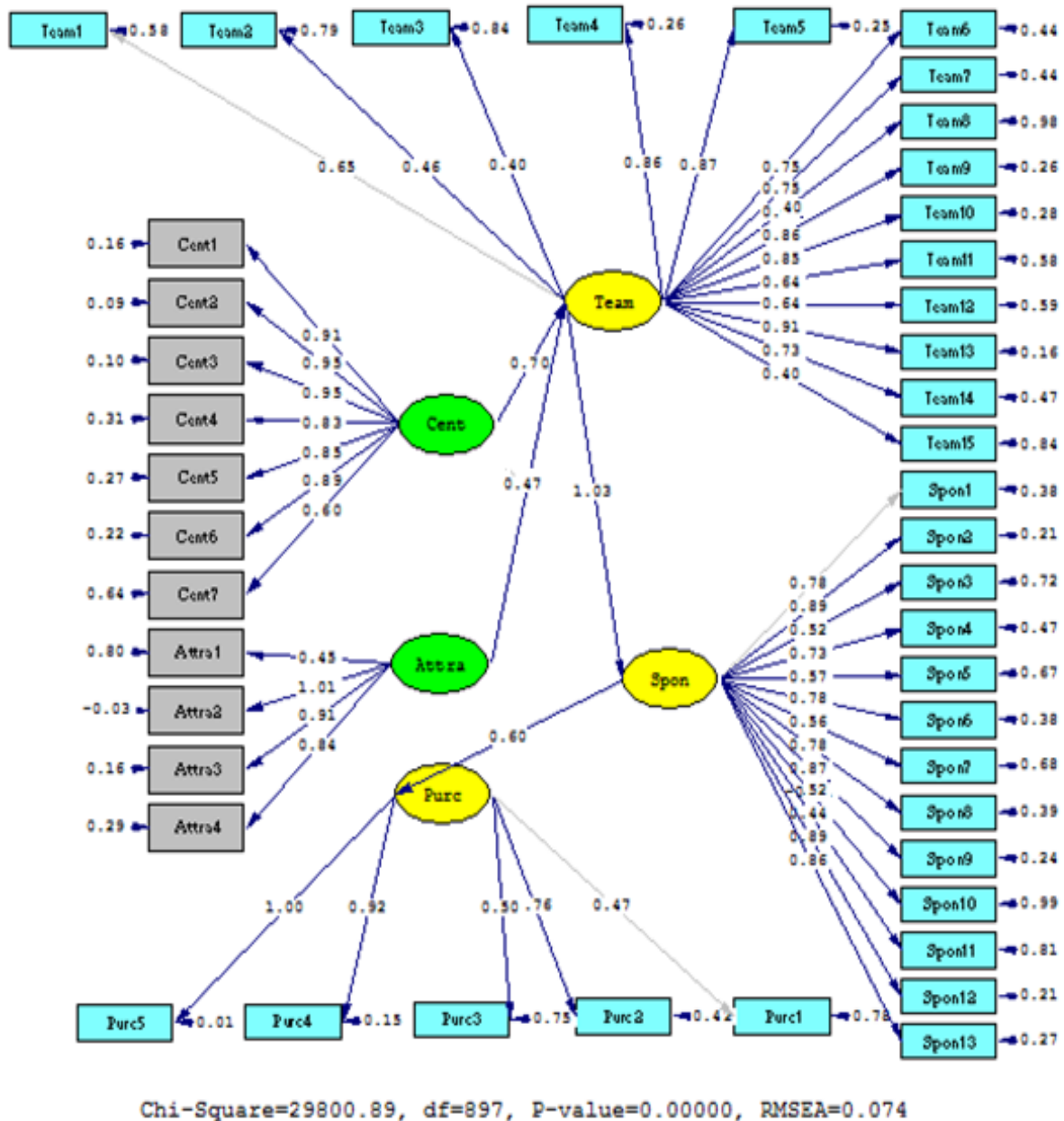
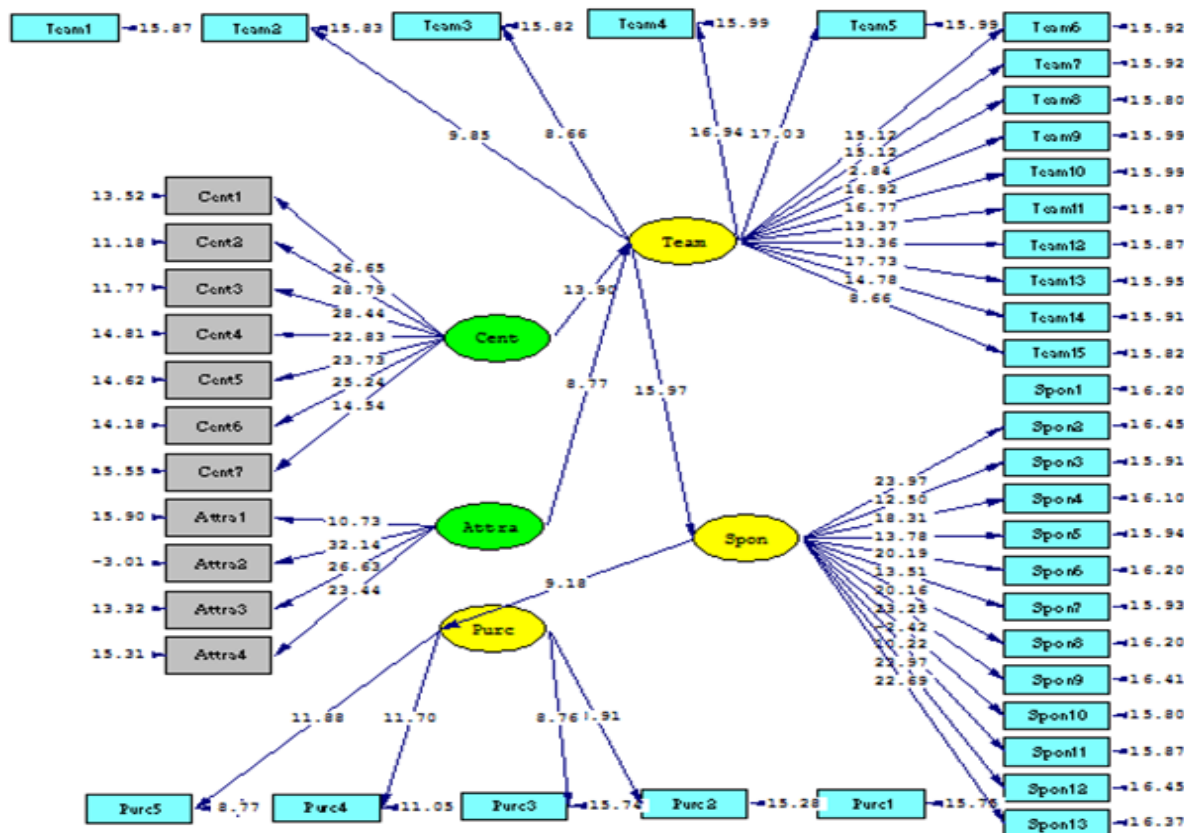


Figure 2: A Structural equation model in standard mode

Research Article



Chi-Square=29800.89, df=897, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.074

Figure 3: A Structural equation model in meaningful mode

Conclusion and Recommendations

Following the theoretical principles, researcher attempted to examine the effects of sponsorship on customers' (fans) image of the sponsor brand. At first, the critical concepts and definitions as to sponsoring, and then the goals of the companies to enter to sponsoring industry was described clearly. Afterwards, the results of sponsoring and influential factors on it were evaluated and the prior researches in this field were discussed as well. In following, regarding to the research objectives, such assumptions were designed on the research conceptual model basis. After analyzing the data, it got clear that there was a positive relationship between the engagement of the fans (customers) in sport activities as formed as a lifestyle and attractiveness and tendency to sport activities. The value of T-value = 18.75 and 0.57 was obtained for this hypothesis. These indices confirm strong correlation between these two variables. To this end, it is suggested that in order to engage the fans upon the sport activities, the clubs gat held the training classes by the popular players or through running some football training schools throughout country by the teams' popular players they cause correlation with the player accompanying with the raising enthusiasm of individuals towards football. For the second hypothesis, the Path coefficient was 0.70 and 13.90 T-value; meaning that to be involved in sports activities as a lifestyle, is positively associated with the sense of belonging to a team. For this hypothesis, it is proposed that the clubs in order to attract people to the sport of football emphasize the fun and enjoyable aspects. This makes the fan not only be a football audience but also encouraged playing football as well as causes the person the sense of team Attachment. To the third hypothesis, the path coefficient T-value = 0.47 and 8, 77 was Obtained. This means that the attractiveness and tendency toward sports activities is positively associated with team Attachment. Therefore this hypothesis is suggested that the football clubs in order to increase the football attractiveness utilize the players and coaches in the team, in a way that the

Research Article

fan notice that its popular team cares about them and this will increase the sense of belonging to the team by fans. To the fourth hypothesis, the path coefficient T-value = 1, 0 and 15, 97 was measured. This means that there is a positive relationship between team Attachment and a good mental image of the sponsor products. Therefore, to this hypothesis, it is proposed that the sponsors of football teams would better not just looking back on their investment in the short term and they should put enough money into the club in order to attract the popular players and even favorite coaches. Therefore, it can increase the sense of belonging to team and then leads to positive image of Sponsor. To the fifth hypothesize the path coefficient was obtained T-value = 0.60 and 9, 18. It means that

Well-conceived image of the sponsor is positively associated with the intention of buying products. To this hypothesis, it is suggested that the sponsors support their team in long-term so that the fans notice the sponsor's not just beneficial goal; also in order to encourage the fans to buy their products they can run such promotional methods as giving bin to the fans or to taking place a draw through SMS Competition.

Suggestions for Following Future Research

- To students who are fond of researching in this field, it is suggested that the loyalty of the fans after purchasing the team sponsor's product would also be examined.

REFERENCES

- Apostolopoulou A and Papadimitriou D (2004)**. Welcome home: Motivations and objectives of the 2004 Grand National Olympic sponsor. *Sport Marketing Quarterly* **13** 180-192.
- Beaton AA, Funk DC and Alexandris K (2009)**. Operationalizing a theory of participation in physically active leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research* **10** Kostas et al., 2007, 136.
- Crompton J (2004)**. Conceptualization and Alternate Operationalizations of the Measurement of Sponsorship Effectiveness in Sport. *Leisure Studies* **23**(3) 267-281.
- Funk DC and James JD (2006)**. Consumer loyalty: the attachment in the development of sport team allegiance. *Journal of Sport Management* **20**(2) 191.
- Gilbert D (1988)**. Sponsorship Strategy is Adrift. *The Quarterly Review of Marketing* **14** 6-9.
- Ko Y, Kim K, Claussen C and Kim T (2008)**. The Effects of Sport Involvement Sponsor Awareness and Corporate Image on Intention to Purchase Sponsors' Products. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* **9** 79-94.
- Madriral R (2001)**. Social Identity Effects on a Beliefs Attitudes intentions Hierarchy. *Psychology and Marketing* **18** 145-165.
- Meenaghan T (1983)**. Commercial sponsorship. *European Journal of Marketing* **17**(7) 5-73.
- Meenaghan T (2001)**. Understanding Sponsorship Effects. *Psychology and Marketing* **18**(2) 95-122.
- Pitts B and Stotlar D (2002)**. *Fundamentals of Sport Marketing*, 2nd edition.
- Pracejus JW (2004)**. Seven Psychological Mechanisms through Which Sponsorship can Influence Consumers. *Sports Marketing and the Psychology of Marketing Communications* (NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates).
- Seguin B and Oreilly N (2008)**. The Olympic brand, ambush marketing, and clutter. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing* **4**(1/2) 62-84 15 (NJ: Prentice Hall).
- Shank DM (1999)**. *Sport Marketing: a Strategic Perspective* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall).
- Stotlar DK (2005)**. *Developing Successful Sport Sponsorship Plans*, 2nd edition (WV: Fitness Information Technology) Morgantown 32.
- Tsiotsou R and Alexandris K (2009)**. Delineating the Outcomes of Sponsorship: Sponsor Image, Word of Mouth, and Purchase Intentions. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* 361.