

Consumer Perception of Sport Event Sponsors

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CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF SPORT EVENT SPONSORS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore sport consumer's perceptions of sport event sponsors, specifically concerning the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. This quantitative research surveyed 119 participants, employing a 24-questions survey instrument composed of Likert type and demographic questions. The data was analyzed to answer three specific research questions. The analysis of the data indicated although respondents fully supported the Olympics and believed athletes are using the product they endorsed, they believed the products must be beneficial to athletes. The findings also indicated respondents felt it was necessary for companies to support the Olympics, however they did not find it essential to research the Games or felt they were influenced by sponsorship. Respondents found it appropriate for sponsors and sport events to have a good sponsorship fit to achieve their objectives. Limitations of the study and future recommendations are also provided.

Keywords: sponsorship, Olympics, sport consumer

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The use of sponsorship by corporations at sport events has become very popular over the years. Organizations globally invest in large sport events through sponsorship programming in an effort to achieve corporate objectives. Studies claim sponsoring sport events provides organizations with the opportunity to increase sales through product awareness, as well as projecting sponsoring brands as a good corporate citizen, showing corporate social responsibility (Farrell & Frame, 2007; Gwinner, 1997; Pappu, & Cornwell, 2014). Furthermore, industries used sponsorship as a marketing tool by providing funding, products or personnel to sport events in exchange for recognition. The objective of corporations is to receive the intended recognition from the sponsorship arrangement by associating the organization with a sport event. These corporate objectives are made possible by creating relationships with sponsors, which grant them access to naming rights, the use of logos, images and other brand trademarks (Kelly, Ireland, Mangan, & Williamson, 2016).

Like corporations, sport events benefit tremendously through sponsorship arrangements. Most sport events are exclusively dependent on corporate sponsorship to achieve their core objectives. Through the exchange theoretical perspective, many studies have examined the various benefits sport events received through sponsorship (McCarville & Copeland, 1994; Tyrie & Ferguson 2013). According to Yang, Sparks, and Li (2008) sport events benefited through sponsorship by building brand equity of the event, improving relationships among the stakeholders, along with creating business networks and alliances. Other benefits sport events obtained through sponsorships

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included the ability to build brand awareness and generate revenue for the event, as well as creating a positive legacy for the community.

Other benefits sponsors received from supporting sport events include the ability to raise brand awareness of the organization, opportunity to engage in personal interaction with the target market, and the chance to showcase organization products. They also receive the opportunity of becoming one of the official sponsors, as well as access to hospitality areas. Furthermore, sponsors may have the opportunity to receive early access to tickets, discounted merchandises, and accommodations.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is one of the sport organizations extremely dependent on corporate sponsorship for financial support (Giannoulakis, Stotlar, & Chatziefstathiou, 2008). Some of the major sponsors of the IOC includes Coca Cola, Samsung, Toyota, and General Electric. The IOC is dependent on these corporations for revenue, as well as for products, services, technologies, expertise and personnel which are necessary for the staging of their Games (Giannoulakis et al., 2008). The IOC collected \$456 million through sponsorship for the 2012 London Olympic Games (Mickle, 2013). These financial dependencies have coerced sport event organizers into sponsorship agreements with corporations producing products that are not always or entirely aligned with the principles of sport (Morgan, Adair, Taylor, & Hermens, 2014; Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006).

Sport events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup are sponsored by corporations with a history of producing foods with limited nutritional value (Danylchuk & MacIntosh, 2009). Coca Cola Corporation, which is one of the official sponsors of the Olympic Games, offers products in their product-line containing high sugar content and

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low nutritional value. These corporations strategically connect to specific sport events through sponsorship and athlete endorsements with minimal consideration given to the impact products have on consumers. This type of sponsorship agreement can lead corporations and sport events into a condition known as low-fit sponsorship (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). While studies have examined the dynamics of sponsorships, sport events and sport consumers, it appears minimal attention has been given to sport consumers' perceptions of low-fit sponsors.

Investigations have revealed low-fit sponsorship programs negatively influence brand identity (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). These low-fit sponsorship relationships can convey misconstrued message to sport consumers. For these reasons, this research will aim to explore consumer perceptions regarding Olympic participants' personal use of endorsed products. This research will additionally investigate sport consumer perceptions of sport event sponsors and the influence of low-fit sponsors on lifestyle.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is to explore sport consumers' perceptions, more specifically, to determine if sport consumers perceive athletes participating in sport events personally use the endorsed products. In addition, the study will aim at exploring sport consumer perceptions of sponsorship and the effect of low-fit sponsorship on lifestyle. The signaling theory will be utilized as the conceptual framework to examine consumer perception of low-fit sponsors (Walker, Hall, Todd, & Kent, 2011). According to Walker et al. (2011), this theory is mostly used in studies to assess consumer perception of quality, examining the perceptual connection between the sport events and event sponsors.

The research will significantly extend knowledge to the existing body of research and provide clarity on sport consumer's perception of sponsorships, which can be utilized in other industries. For example, the information acquired will be of tremendous benefit to academic institutions, consumers, and corporations. Specifically, academic institutions will have a broader knowledge regarding the relationship between sport consumers, sport events, and sponsorship. Corporations will benefit by developing deeper knowledge of what consumers perceive from sponsorship, enabling them to direct resources more effectively to achieve intended objectives. Furthermore, it will improve society's understanding of consumer's perceptions as it relates to low-fit sponsorships, as well as reveal the impact of sponsors and athletes on sport consumers.

Statement of the Research Problem

The partnership between sporting events and low-fit sponsors can convey misleading information to sport consumers. According to Walker et al. (2011),

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corporations carefully associate with specific sport events with the goal of image enhancement. However, minimal consideration is given to the impact sponsors and their products have on sport consumers when the sponsorship relationship is more ambiguous. For example, the relationship between a tobacco company and a sport event can communicate incorrect messages to sport consumers regarding smoking. As evidenced by Shopland, Eyre, Peachacek, (1991), smoking is one of the main causes of lung cancer, which has resulted in approximately 67% fatality rates across both genders in United States. In addition, companies may employ athletes as endorsers which may have steered sport consumers to believe athletes were utilizing the product they endorsed. Eventually, through effective marketing, consumers may be persuaded to utilize the products. These products may cause harm to consumers when utilized or consumed excessively. For instance, associating alcoholic beverages with football has accounted for the most hazardous alcohol consumption in the USA (Roger & Greenfield, 1999). These issues have led to the formation of three important questions.

Research Question

Do consumers perceive Olympic participants use the product they endorse?

What are common sport consumer perceptions of a sport event sponsor?

What influence do low-fit sponsors have on sport consumer's lifestyle?

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Consumers believe Olympic athletes are using the sponsor's product.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive perception of a sport event sponsor by sport consumers.

Hypothesis 3: Sport consumers are influenced to purchase low fit sponsor products based on a company's sponsorship of the sport event.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

To provide a framework for the investigation, a literature review was conducted on selective topics. (a) sponsorship of sport events; (b) sponsorship fit, (c) low-fit sponsorships; (d) sport consumers; (e) signaling theory as the conceptual framework and (f) constructs development. The literature review will provide a detailed historical understanding of sporting event sponsorships and sport consumers.

Sponsorship of Sport Events

Over the years, sponsorship has become a significant revenue source for global sport properties. It appears there has been a vast amount of research exploring different aspects of sponsorship. Meenaghan (1983) defined *sponsorship* as a “provision of assistance either financial or in kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objective” (p. 9). The Olympic Games is one of the notable sporting events attracting tremendous sponsorship arrangements. The foremost reason sponsors invest in the Olympics Games is the property’s ability to attract global attention from both media and consumers. It is estimated sponsors invested more than \$2 billion dollars promoting their product in the recent 2016 Rio Olympic Games (Becker, 2016).

Sport events are not the only entity benefiting from sponsorship relationships. The sponsors invest in sport events because it attracts millions of viewers with an objective to increase revenues, by increasing brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty (Mazodier & Merunka, 2012). Specifically, Soderman and Dolles (2010) reported sponsors have an ability to generate revenue when receiving an exclusive association

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with these sport events and the rights to use their image for marketing purposes. Sport consumers are inclined to purchase sponsor's products because of their association with the events. A study on sponsorship influence index revealed an increase from 2012 to 2015 in the number of National Football League (NFL) fans who indicated sport sponsorship was extremely influential on their decision to purchase sponsor's product ("Football-NFL", nd).

Sponsorship Fit

The relationship between sport events and corporations can only have success when there is a sponsorship fit. Speed and Thompson (2000), defined *sponsorship fit* as "the degree to which the pairing of an event and sponsor is perceived as well matched or a good fit, without any restriction on the basis used to establish fit" (p. 230). The concept of sponsorship fit has been known to forecast the outcome of different types of sponsorship relationships. For instance, sponsorship fit has the capability to increase brand awareness of the sponsor or to create a positive perception of the sponsorship and corporation. There are extensive studies exploring the sponsorship fit between corporate sponsors and sport events. Mazodier and Merunka (2012) revealed sponsorship fit between sport events and a corporation has a positive effect on a brand, while influencing brand loyalty, because of consumer perceptions towards sponsorship and brand trust.

Mazodier and Quester (2014) found sponsorship fit related positively to the level of brand effectiveness. One of the qualities spurring a successful sponsorship fit is interaction between sponsors and the parties receiving the sponsorship. Pappu and Cornwell (2014) revealed "interaction is particularly important when the sponsor seeks to develop its image by association with a cause, and is also of consequence for the cause in

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terms of its branding” (p.490). This finding is similar to Woisetschläger, Eiting, Haselhoff, and Michaelis (2010) which revealed clear communication can be used by sponsors to increase sponsorship fit. Additionally, there are other studies revealing corporate sponsorship fit can be improved when there are perceived benefits of sponsorship, local identification of sponsors, positive brand attraction, and optimistic word of mouth (Woisetschläger et al., 2010). Olson and Thjomoe, (2011) claimed perceptions of the overall fit between sponsors and sport events are based on logical thoughts related to the sponsor’s products. Specifically, investigators claimed the sponsor’s product must appeal to both the sport event audiences and participants (Olson & Thjomoe, 2011).

Low-fit Sponsorship

Organizations should avoid low-fit sponsorship relationships to increase the probability of success. If companies form a low-fit sponsorship relationship, it is most likely they will experience undesirable results. There are limited studies revealing the negative impact of corporations and sport events when there is a low fit sponsorship relationship. Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006), stated “low-fit sponsorship program is likely to hinder nonprofit brand management strategies by negatively affecting brand identity, brand meaning, brand response, and brand relationship” (p.73). Other research speculated low-fit sponsorship requires more extensive cognitive evaluation and elaboration, which may result in greater resistance to the message provided by sponsorship (Menon & Kahn, 2003). A low sponsorship fit will negatively affect consumer evaluation of a brand because they may find the sponsorship relationship confusing (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006).

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On the other hand, fit refers to “the sense or logic of a particular brand sponsoring a particular object, organization, cause, or event” (Olson & Thjomoe 2011, p. 57). For example, a bank sponsoring a local football team would be considered poor fitting compared to an oil company sponsoring a motor racing event. Studies have identified several reasons corporations might wish to sponsor poor fitted events. Some reasons include the desire to radically change an existing brand attitude or image, a wish to continue with a sponsorship that was started before knowledge of poor fit or the desire to use sponsoring to support a worthy but poor fitting cause (Becker-Olsen, 2006; Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). However, low-fit sponsorship relationships can be partially overcome through effective communication between the corporation and the sport event (Olson & Thjomoe, 2011).

The Sport Consumer

Defining sport consumer is challenging because of the multitude of interdependent values, attitudes and behavior to consider (Holt, 1995). Despite this level of difficulty, sport consumers can be described as persons who display passion towards sports by either playing the sport, lending their time and effort through officiating, watching, listening, and or reading about the sports, as well as using, purchasing, predicting, and/or collecting sport-related items (Grossman, Nicholson, & Farese, 2004).

Various studies have been conducted for deeper understanding of sport consumer behavior. The term sport consumer is applied to a bewildering array of individuals involved in sports at different levels. They tend to experience sports in different ways and for dissimilar reasons. Research has shown some sport consumers may attend games frequently, while others attend only on special occasions (Stewart, Smith, & Nicholson,

2003). Stewart et al. (2003) stated some sport consumers will engage in sport internet chat forums, while others enjoy watching pay television sport networks.

Traditional vs New Sport Consumers

Sport consumers are categorized as traditional and new sport consumers (The New Sports Consumer, 2003). Traditional sport consumers include sport fanatics and club/team loyalists (The New Sports Consumer, 2003). Sport fanatics are loyal to their respective sports because of persistent interest and significant spending. Consumer involvement in sport activities includes viewing televised sport, reading sport magazines/newspaper, attending sporting events, and participating in sports (Shank & Beasley, 1998).

The advancement of technology has expanded the number of people interested in sport. Modern technological advancements like live streaming and social media have provided new experiences to sports enthusiasts. These types of sport fans are referred to as new sport consumers. These individuals are categorized as social viewers, opportunistic viewers, star-struck spectators, and sport indifferent consumers (The New Sports Consumer, 2003). Social viewers utilize sport events as a tool to interact with corporate consumers, friends, and clients. This type of consumer creates considerable revenue for the sport events through corporate suite, food and technology. The opportunistic viewer typically views sport through the traditional mediums and will only attend a sport event if an opportunity presents itself. Star-struck spectators are fascinated by the ability of star players, instead of the interest of the sport or team. Finally, a sport indifferent consumer has no interest in sport teams, sport events, or sport programming. They are only interested because sport is creating headlines news.

Sport Consumer's Motivation

People tend to watch sport or attend sporting events for a variety of reasons. There appears to be limited investigations exploring the motivational factors influencing sport consumer behavior. A study performed by Funk, Bean, and Alexandris (2012) used self-determination theory in understanding sport consumer motivation. The investigation claims sport consumer's motivation is regulated by self-determined intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Funk et al., 2012). As it relates to this study, both intrinsic motivational factors played an important role in consumer perception to sport sponsors. The investigators noted the intrinsic motivation factors influencing sport consumer behavior involves self-endorsed values, ego enhancement and self-interests. Consumers who are intrinsically motivated will perceive sports as an end in itself (Funk et al., 2012). They often attend sport events for entertainment, as well as to gain new experiences.

In contrast, the extrinsic motivations of sport consumer's behavior are regulated based on stress, tension and public interaction (Funk et al., 2012). Extrinsically motivated consumers engage in sport events for reasons other than the activity itself. This form of motivation is driven towards receiving benefits from the sport event. Consumers who are extrinsically driven may utilize sporting events as a platform for social interaction with other spectators, family, friends, coworkers as well as breaking daily work or personal routine (Funk et al., 2012). The motives behind these interactions may promote business and personal activities; or any other interest other than the sporting event. Other motivational factors showing significant impact on consumer's involvement in sports include fan identification, involvement opportunity, and reference groups (Choi, Martin, Park, & Yoh, 2009). These motivational factors are very important because they provides

clarity to the different dynamics involved in sponsorship. If sponsors understand the underlying factors motivating consumers, sponsorship packages can be tailored to attract the target market.

Signaling Theory as a Conceptual Framework

The signaling theory has been used in numerous studies to explore consumer's perception of products (Walker, Hall, Todd, & Kent, 2011). "*Signaling theory* revolves around the judicious use of signals which are consistent with the attainment of a particular and valued attribute that, in the absence of the signal, would be very difficult to unambiguously convey" (Clark, Corwell, & Pruitt, 2009, p. 173). Sponsors use signaling to activate their sponsorship. For instance, they will take the necessary steps to highlight their position as an official sponsor of the event. They may use methods such as commercials, product packaging, contest/promotions or an athlete as an endorser. For the 2016 Olympic Games, Gillette created a commercial featuring their top endorsers, Neymar Jr, Ning Zetao, and Ashton Eaton to promote their new Gillette Fusion razors (Walker, 2016). The commercial depicted the athletes training in unfavorable conditions. However, while training was not easy, they never started their day without a shave by Gillette Fusion razors. The signaling theory was utilized by Gillette through associating the product with famous athletes to promote usability. The signal message pushed by Gillette demonstrates the benefit of looking good through the help of the Fusion razor, although the day ahead is challenging.

Signaling theory is often employed by sponsors to make the products more attractive to their target by creating an association between themselves and the sport event. This is referred to as activation of sponsorship which is defined as a "collateral

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communication of a brand's relationship with a property" (Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005, p. 36). Sponsors normally take the necessary steps to ensure consumers are aware they are one of the sponsors of the event. Most sport consumers will depend on signals related to a sport event to aid in the perception of a product. Companies may utilize athletes for product endorsements which may influence the sport consumer's perception of a product. Athletes are paid to endorse products; however, their expertise of the products can be more than questionable. Athletes may not have full information about the products they are endorsing. For example, they may not be informed or know the dangers accompanying some of the endorsed products. Consumers are therefore forced to interpret these messages from advertisement and endorsements without complete information regarding the products.

According to Walker et al. (2011), consumers can be forced to decide about the product based on previous experiences. For instance, they may interpret the usability of the product based on associating it with previous sport events or endorsers. Sport event sponsors utilized signaling theory as a means of communicating the benefits to be gained through a product by utilization or consumption. Walker et al. (2011) noted sport marketers are attempting to make a product more appealing to the desired audience by pushing signal messages promoting usability or consumption.

Signaling has been generally applied to evaluate consumer perceptions of the overall quality of a product. Also, studies have shown it is useful for describing behavior when two parties have access to different information (Connelly, Certo, & Ireland, 2011). Normally, corporations have complete information regarding the product, however, its entirety is not disclosed to consumers (Walker et al., 2011). Therefore, consumers are

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forced to make decisions regarding products based on signal messages received through sponsorships or advertisements. Because of the importance of signaling to the sponsorship industry, this theory will be employed as a conceptual framework to better understand sport consumer's perceptions of sponsors.

Constructs Development

Research has revealed there are dissimilarities between advertisement and sponsorship (Hastings, 1984). "An advertisement is a single message that's a part of an advertising campaign, while an advertising campaign is part of a company's integrated brand promotion" (Kokemuller, nd, para. 2). Advertisements are normally presented to the target market through television, radio, newspaper, billboard or some other form of advertisement medium. As alluded earlier, *sponsorship* is the "provision of assistance either financial or in kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objective" (Meenehan, 1983, p. 9). The major difference between sponsorship and advertisement is the strong and ongoing commitment sponsorship has between the sponsor and the event. As for advertisement, it tells the stories of a brand over a series of integrated and consistent ad placement (Kokemuller, nd, para. 2).

There is limited research aimed at explaining consumer perception to sponsorship. Advertisement models cannot be utilized to rationalize sponsorship. Therefore, it was necessary to develop a distinct model for explaining consumer's reaction to sponsorship (Lee, Sandler, & Shani, 1997).

To develop a model explaining the relationship between sport consumers and sport event sponsors, there needs to be a development of distinctive attitudinal constructs. Developing a model includes creating the appropriate constructs and a survey instrument

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to measure those consumer-related constructs in the context of sponsorship. The conceptual relationship model below was used in a sport sponsorship study and is modified to fit this research study (Lee et al., 1997). The original study conducted by Lee et al. (1997), developed attitudinal constructs to explore consumer perception of three global sport events. The original constructs in the study are attitude towards the event, attitude towards commercialization and attitude towards behavioral intent. Three modified attitudinal constructs were created to fit the context of this study: attitude towards sport event, attitude towards sponsors and attitude towards athletes.

Attitude towards sport event. Based on the characteristics of a sponsorship agreement, attitude involves some form of direct link to the sport event. According to Lee et al. (1997), sport consumers might have different perceptions towards sport events, which can jeopardize the effectiveness of the sponsorship objective. The perception of a sport event by consumers can fall in a favorable or unfavorable category. If consumers perceive sport events as favorable, they will view the event as enjoyable, fulfilling and be more likely to support it. As a result, sponsors are more likely to attach products to the event. On the other hand, an unfavorable perception would suggest boredom, instability, and the event may appear as not of high quality.

Attitude towards sponsors. One of the popular objectives of sponsorship includes increasing sponsor brand awareness. To achieve this objective, there must be positive perception by sport consumers toward sponsors. By definition, sponsorship fit is the degree to which the pairing of an event and sponsor is perceived as well matched or a good fit (Speed & Thompson, 2000). This can be achieved through leveraging the sponsorship between the sponsors and the sport event, so the specific objectives can be

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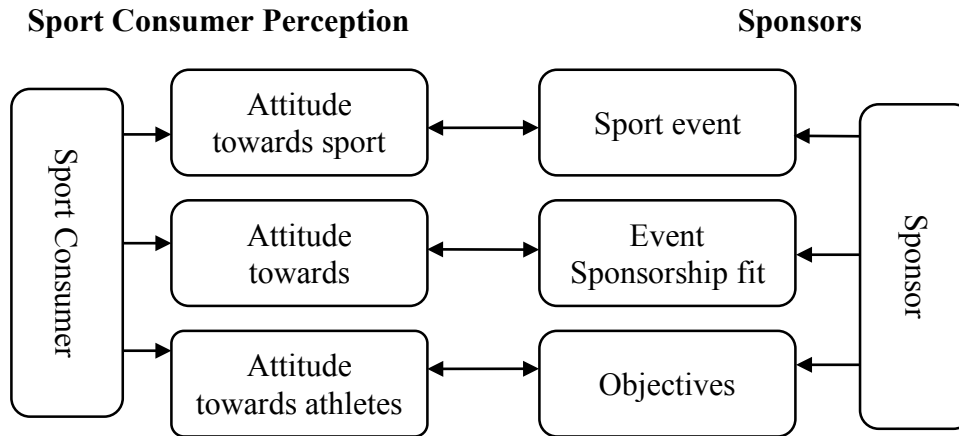
attained. As a result, sponsors are very concerned whether their brand or products are aligned with the objectives of the sport events.

Attitude towards athletes. Some of the objectives sponsors are trying to achieve will be channeled using athletes. In the context of highlighting the usability of a product, sponsors may opt for athletes to endorse their products. By associating the product with an athlete, this can be translated to consumer willingness to purchase the product and increased awareness (Speed & Thompson, 2000). In order for the sponsor to achieve their objective utilizing an athlete, athletes must use their status and reputation to increase awareness to the product or service. Sport consumers will have to view the endorser as credible regarding the benefits of the product or service.

Given the importance of sport consumer perception regarding achieving successful sponsorship objectives, it is significant for this study to understand relationships between the consumer and sponsor constructs. The items listed in the figure below will be measured through survey instruments to gather data from the participants. The model also illustrates the conceptual relationship between the sport consumers and sponsors.

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Figure 1. Conceptual Relationships



Conceptual relationship between sport consumer perception and sponsor (Model adapted from Lee, Sandler & Shani, 1997).

Summary

In summary, the literature review provided a framework for understanding historical detail of the different topics involved in sporting event sponsorship and sport consumers. The literature review was conducted on selective topics to further expand our understanding of the following: (a) sponsorship of sport events; (b) sponsorship fit, (c) low-fit sponsorships; (d) sport consumers; (e) signaling theory as the conceptual framework, and (f) constructs development.

The literature review showed how sponsorships can be beneficial to global sport events and to corporations. For sponsorship to achieve its intended objective, there should be a sponsorship fit between sponsors and sport events. However, the literature review outlined low-fit sponsorship can negatively impact the objective of sponsorship. Since the study will explore the perception of sport consumers, there must be general understanding of the different type of consumers and their motivational factors. The study will employ signaling theory as the conceptual framework to provide a strong

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scientific base, and to provide justification of the findings. To understand the relationship between sport consumers and sponsors, a conceptual relationship model was created highlighting the connection between three constructs: attitude towards sport event, attitude towards sponsors and attitude towards athletes.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The quantitative research method is the most appropriate research tool for this study. It involves the study of samples and populations through the generation of numerical data transformable to useable statistical analysis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). This research approach allows the use of an online survey instrument to collect data regarding participant beliefs, attitudes, interests and behavior using standardized questionnaires (Gall et al., 2010). Subsequently, the data was carefully analyzed utilizing statistical methods.

Quantitative Research Design

This investigator selected quantitative research design which required the collection of consumer data through surveying a sample population. To understand sport consumer's perception of sponsors, an online survey instrument was administered to participants from the Liberty University Department of Sport Management. The online survey instrument was derived from a previous investigation exploring consumer attitude towards sponsorships (Lee, Sandler, & Shani, 1997). The purpose of the former study was to investigate consumer attitude constructs towards sponsorship and develop a scale to measure these constructs. The investigators developed questionnaires to survey consumers following the 1992 Winter Olympic Games, 1992 summer Olympic Games, and the 1994 World Cup soccer. Some of the survey questions used by Lee et al. (1997) were adapted and modified for this research study, which included questions 6 to 19 on the survey (Appendix A).

Similar to Lee et al. (1997), a major world class sport event was selected to study consumer perception because of its ability to attract sponsors and consumer attention.

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Specifically, the sport event chosen was the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Over the years, The Olympic Games has emerged as one of the largest global sporting events due to its ability to reach billions of people in over 200 countries (IOC, 2008). Because of the global audience of the Olympic Games, it provides corporate sponsors with worldwide promotional benefits for their products (Lee et al., 1997). The recent 2016 Rio Olympic Games was no different since sponsors invested more than \$2 billion to promote their products (Becker, 2016). This event was selected due to its recency and the memories remaining vivid in people's mind.

Considering the objectives of this study, a Likert Scale was utilized comprising of series of related Likert-type questions, focused on measuring the attitude of respondents. According to Willits, Theodori, and Luloff (2016), the Likert scale was developed by Rensis Likert in 1932 for measuring psychological attitudes of respondents. The objective of Rensis's study was to assess personal attitudes of respondents scientifically by providing them with a 5-point scale questions. In the original study, individuals indicated their feelings concerning each question on a 5-point scale: strongly approve (1), approve (2), undecided (3), disapprove (4), and strongly disapprove (5). Responses for each question were scored from one (1) to five (5) and analyzed separately as well as summed with other related questions. Alternatively, the mean scores were used so the scale score falls in the same 1 to 5 range as the individual questions (Willits et al., 2016).

This study applied similar methods found in Rensis's research, however the answers to the questions were as followed: Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree. The measurement scale used in this study was adapted from Lee et al. (1997). Their study measured consumer attitudinal constructs

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using a seven-point Likert scale with answer choices ranging from disagree to agree. Similar to Lee et al. (1997), the Likert scale was adapted to this research; however, a five-point scale was implemented with response options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reasons for adapting a five-point Likert scale was for a simplicity of data analysis, as well as allowing respondents to focus on the questionnaires and to provide honest answers.

The online survey instrument (Appendix A) was 24 total questions, comprised of 14 Likert-type questions and 10 non-Likert-type questions. The Likert-type questions measured the opinions of sport consumers, all previously derived from the Lee et al. (1997) study (questions 6-19). The Likert-type questions were analyzed using SPSS to quantify and assess the data. The remaining 10 non-Likert questions were analyzed independently utilizing other methods which will be discussed in the Data Analysis section. Questions 1-5 were categorical descriptives regarding sport consumers support for sport and spending habits. Questions 20-24 were demographic descriptives consisting of gender, age, education, ethnicity, and income.

To reiterate the research questions:

1. Do consumers perceive Olympic participants use the product they endorse?
2. What are common sport consumer perceptions of a sport event sponsor?
3. What influence do low-fit sponsors have on sport consumer's lifestyle?

The survey instrument was suitable to answer the three previous research questions because they contained questionnaires/answer choices to extract the required information from participants. The questions were designed to retrieve a wide spectrum of information necessary for the success of the study. The Likert questions were suitable

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because they provided an array of answer choices, required participants to adapt to a particular issue, as well as allowed them to respond in a degree of agreement. In addition, this survey instrument was good at measuring attitudes, opinions or beliefs anonymously, along with allowing large quantities of data easily analyzed in a short time.

Research Participants and Sampling

The target population for this study was students attending Liberty University who possessed strong interest in sport. Specifically, participants were students studying Sport Management either at the graduate or undergraduate level. The sample represented a diverse age group, gender, ethnicity, and social status, which allowed the sample to represent a larger population. The rationale for selecting Liberty University Sport Management students included those individuals' recent familiarity with the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Furthermore, college students were found to be in a demographic category more valued by marketers (Bowden, 2011).

Access to the participants was gained through permission from the Chair of Sport Management Undergraduate Studies and the Chair of Sport Management Graduate Studies. Participants were enrolled in Sport Management courses and the Registrar identified 1,209 individuals enrolled in Sport Management education at the graduate and undergraduate level for the Spring of 2017. This population was represented by 784 undergraduate students and 425 graduate students who study either residentially or through online programming and are either full-time or part-time students (P. E. Blosser, personal communication, April 20, 2017).

A request to participate email was crafted as a Consent Form (Appendix B) which included a link to the Online Survey Instrument. The consent form emphasized the

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purpose of the study, described procedures of the study, and assured participants all responses would remain confidential in accordance to the guideline from Liberty University Institutional Review Board. The participants who consented gained access to the survey, which ordinarily required 10-15 minutes to complete.

Using the Non-Probability method of sampling, the request to participate email was sent via the course instructors through Blackboard to the LU email account of the 1,209 identified students. Students were asked to participate by completing the online survey instrument within one week. According to Lavrakas (2008), nonprobability sampling involves selecting a portion of the population to be studied using subjective methods. This type of sampling method was appropriate for this research, because it allowed access to participants who were willing to volunteer their effort (Field, Pruchno, Bewley, Lemay, & Levinsky, 2006).

Once a student agreed to participation, the student selected the link which would open and begin the survey. Participants completed the online survey instrument voluntarily with no external incentives. The decision to participate did not affect the relationship between the student and the university.

The online survey instrument (Appendix A) was created by and made available through Google forms. The original plan was to make the survey available for one week, but due to a low response rate of only 2%, an additional week was agreed to by the researcher and his advisors. The initial low response rate may result from posting the survey at the beginning of the spring break holidays.

The following week, the same instructors promoted the research study in the exact same manner, through their courses to the same 1,209 enrolled students. The

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supplemental promotions and added online accessibility appears to have ensured an adequate survey return rate (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004). By the end of the grace-period 119 students completed the online survey instrument (N=119) producing a response rate of 9.8%. Acquiring an appropriate sampling was important for the research because the researcher wanted a proper representation of the population. Although a higher sample might provide a clearer picture, the researcher was pleased with the sample size achieved, based on the time restraint and the resources available at the time

Ethical Consideration

With any research, it is important to protect subjects of the study by following the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Since the study involves human subjects, approval must be granted by the appropriate Review Board. This research was approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (Appendix C) and their proposed guidelines were followed to protect the privacy of the subjects.

To protect the privacy of the participants, the following guidelines were followed based on the Liberty Institutional Review Board (Appendix C)

1. The privacy practices were disclosed on the introductory page of the survey (Appendix B)
2. Participants were not asked for any direct identifiers such as names, address, date of birth, social security number, and email address. In addition, participants were not asked for any indirect identifiers.
3. Secure Socket Layer (SSL) was utilized through the web survey provider, Google forms to protect data transmission over the internet.
4. Only the researcher had access to the participant's data.

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5. Data was stored on one strong password protected computer.
6. The data will be deleted from the computer hard drive and any external backup device after the three-year retention period.

Data Analysis

Likert Questions. The difficulty in measuring perceptions lies in the procedure of converting these qualities into a quantitative measure for data analysis purposes (Boone & Boone, 2012). The solution to this difficulty was solved in 1932 when Likert developed a procedure for measuring perceptions. As alluded earlier, the Likert scale was utilized as a tool to quantify the data collected from sport consumers. One of the reasons Likert scales were chosen is because it provides data facilitating the use of descriptive statistical analysis (Ashill, Davis, & Joe, 2001). The Likert questions capturing the perception of sport consumers are 6-19. To quantify the data using the Likert scale, numerical value was assigned to the different alternatives. “Strongly agree” was scored as 5, “agree” was scored as 4, “neither agree nor disagree” was scored as 3, “disagree” was scored as 2, and “strongly disagree” was scored as 1. The categorical descriptives used to measure sport consumer perceptions are: “Attitude towards Olympic movement”, “attitude towards Olympic sponsors”, “attitude towards athletes”, and “attitude towards sponsor’s products”. These attitudinal constructs will be measured using sets of Likert items each utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (Willits, Theodori, & Luloff, 2016).

Attitude towards Sport Event. There are three Likert items of “attitude towards sport event.”

6. I have enjoyed the addition of new sports to the Olympic Games over the years, which

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demonstrates their effort to capture new audience members.

7. I consider myself a strong supporter of the Olympic sport movement.
8. Olympic Sport symbolizes the competitiveness of our society.

Attitude towards Olympic sponsors. There are five items for “attitude towards Olympic sponsors.”

9. Sponsors should invest their money elsewhere instead of on the Olympic movement.
10. When I purchase products, I research if the company sponsors an Olympic sport event.
11. I am more influenced by the fact that a company sponsored the Olympics than if the company is advertising through another medium.
12. The company sponsoring an Olympic event has no impact on my purchase decision.
13. I am more likely to purchase a company's product when there is sponsorship fit between the sport event and the company.

Attitude towards athletes. There are three items for “attitude towards athletes.”

14. Athletes endorsing a company's product influences my purchase decision.
15. I believe that Olympic athletes utilize the products they are endorsing.
16. I believe that athletes use the equipment, apparel and performance product that they endorse.

Attitude towards Sponsor’s products. There are three items for “attitude towards sponsor’s products.”

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17. I believe that athletes use products they endorse, even if those are not healthy.

18. I am more likely to purchase non-healthy products of companies if they sponsor the Olympic Games.

19. I am more likely to invest in equipment and apparel from companies if they sponsor the Olympic Games.

Participants were given questions; however, the categorical constructs were not revealed (Ashill et al., 2001). They were requested to indicate on the 5-point scale whether they “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neither agree or disagree”, “disagree” or “strongly disagree.”

To analyze the Likert scales, mean and standard deviation statistical measurement must be implemented (Boone & Boone, 2012). These measurements provided information on the variability of individual responses. Specifically, the standard deviation will provide how concentrated or varied sport consumer’s perceptions are around the mean. For instance, the standard deviation of .8 and a mean of 2.5 revealed on average, sport consumer’s responses were less than 1 point away from the mean regarding sponsors investing their money elsewhere instead of on the Olympic movement.

The remaining categorical descriptives of demography, sport support, and spending habits were analyzed independently. The frequency and valid percentage were calculated for the demography descriptives. Frequency allows the researcher to glance at the data conveniently to show whether it is concentrated in one area or spread across the entire scale (Manikandan, 2011). The frequency was calculated by counting the number of respondents who selected the answer of choice for each question. The percentage was only necessary for the sport support and spending habits descriptives based on the answer choices provided. To determine the valid percentage, the frequencies were divided by the

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total number of responses to the questions.

Demographic Descriptives. The demography descriptive consisted of 5 questions provide detail characteristics of the sample. The questions are:

20. Gender
21. Age
22. Education
23. Ethnicity
24. Household Income

Sport Support Descriptives. The questions in the sport support descriptives provided information on respondent's lifestyles as it relates to event attendance. The results of sport support descriptives were determined by calculating the percentage of respondents based on their selected answers. There are three questions for the sport support descriptive:

1. How many professional sporting events did you attend in the past year?
2. How many college sporting events did you attend in the past year?
3. How many high school sporting events did you attend in the past year?

Spending Habits Descriptives. The spending habits descriptives provide information regarding the amount of money spent on sport related and non-sport related products. There are two questions listed in the spending habit descriptives:

4. How much money did you spend annually on sports equipment and apparel?
5. How much money did you spend on non-healthy food/drinks per month?

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will report the results of 119 participants who took part in the survey regarding the perception of sport event sponsors. To present clarity and organization to the findings, the questions provided on the survey will be repeated along with the corresponding responses. It is important to note the Likert type and non-Likert type questions were grouped to form categorical descriptives. The results of these categorical descriptive will present the findings as it relates to the research questions.

Of the 119 participants who completed the survey, it is important to highlight only one person chose not to answer any of the questions. The non-respondent was tossed- out from the total sample. As a result, the sample size is 118 participants who answered all the questions except for question 12 and 13. For question 12, only 116 participants responded to the question. Likewise, 117 participants responded to question 13. The non-respondents were tossed out from those specific questions was well.

Demography

Questions #20 - #24 focused on participant's demography (Table 1): gender, age, education, ethnicity and income. Seventy of the participants were male and 48 were female. Their ages ranged from as young 18 years old, to as mature as over 65 years old. Fifty-four percent of the respondents are pursuing their graduate degree, while 45% are undergraduate students. White ethnicity accounted for 65.8% of respondents followed by African American at 26.5%, Asian 3.4%, Hispanic 2.6% and non-Hispanic at 1.7 %. It is important to note only 117 participants responded to the ethnicity question. The participants indicated their household income: 24.6% had income falling in the range of 0 - 24,999 per year, 21.2% ranged from \$25,000 to \$49,999, 13.6% ranged from \$50,000 to

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\$74,999, 14.4 % ranged from \$75,000 to \$99,999, 5.1% ranged from \$100,000 to \$149,999 and 5.1 % ranged from \$150,000 and more. The percentage of respondents selected the option “prefer not to answer” were 16.1%. The below chart indicated the frequency and valid percent of the demography questions.

Table 1 Demographic Descriptives

Question		Frequency	Valid Percent
Sex	Male	70	59.3%
	Female	48	40.7%
Age	18-24	66	55.9%
	25-34	24	20.3%
	35-44	14	11.9%
	45-54	10	8.5%
	55-64	3	2.5%
	65 or more	1	0.8%
Education	Bachelor Degree	53	45.3%
	Master Degree	65	54.7%
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino	3	2.6%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%
	Asian	4	3.4%
	African American	31	26.5%
	White	77	65.8%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0
	Non- Hispanic	2	1.7%
Income	\$0 - \$24,999	29	24.6%
	\$25,00 - \$49,999	25	21.2%
	\$50,000 - \$74,999	16	13.6%
	\$75,000 - \$99,999	17	14.4%
	\$100,000 - \$149,999	6	5.1%
	\$150,000 or more	6	5.1%
	Prefer not to answer	19	16.1%

Sport Support

The next categorical descriptives focused on determining the respondents' support

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for sports. On the survey (Appendix A), the questions are number one to three. Table 2 below indicated the participant's responses. Question #1 measured the number of professional sport events participants attended in the past year. The results showed 67.8% of respondents indicated attending 0 to 3 professional sport events. Question #2 measured how many college sport events they attended in the past year. The data revealed 44.1% of respondents indicated they attended college sport events 12 or more times per year. Question #3 measured the number of high school events they attended in the year. The findings indicated 54.2% of respondents attended high school sport events 0 to 3 times per year.

Table 2 Sports Support Descriptives

Question	0-3	4-7	8-11	12 or more
How many professional sporting events did you attend in the past year?	67.8%	18.6%	2.6%	11%
How many college sporting events did you attend in the past year?	30.5%	16.9%	8.5%	44.1%
How many high school sporting events did you attend in the past year?	54.2%	18.6%	4.2%	22.9%

Spending Habits

The next categorical descriptives focused on the spending habits of the participants (question #4 and #5). The complete results are displayed below in Table 3. Question #4 measured the amount of money participants spent annually on sport equipment and apparel. Results indicated 73.7% spent \$0 to \$50 a year on sports equipment and apparel. Question #5 measured the amount of money they spent on non-healthy food/drinks per month. The responses indicated 42.4% spent \$0 to \$50 a year on non-healthy food/drinks, in comparison with 29.7% who spent more than \$101 per year.

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Table 3 Spending Habits Descriptives

Question	\$0-50	\$51-100	\$101-150	\$151 or more
How much money did you spend annually on sports equipment and apparel?	73.7%	16.1%	3.4%	6.8%
How much money did you spend on non-healthy food/drinks per month?	42.4%	28%	16.1%	13.6%

Table 4 Likert Questions Analysis

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M	SD
*6	33.1%	44.9%	19.5%	2.5%	0%	4.08	0.79
*7	38.8%	36.4%	21.2%	2.5%	0%	4.12	0.84
*8	34.7%	49.2%	10.2%	5.1%	0.8%	4.11	0.84
*9	2.5%	8.5%	39.8%	39.8%	9.3%	2.55	0.87
*10	7.1%	5.1%	26.3%	33.1%	33.9%	2.04	0.94
*11	2.5%	12.7%	47.5%	22%	12.7%	2.72	0.95
*12	18.1%	46.6%	25.9%	7.8%	1.7%	3.71	0.91
*13	3.4%	39.3%	39.3%	15.4%	2.6%	3.25	0.85
*14	4.2%	36.4%	34.7%	18.6%	5.9%	3.14	0.97
*15	5.1%	45.8%	33.1%	14.4%	1.7%	3.38	0.83
*16	14.4%	55.1%	21.2%	8.5%	0.8%	3.73	0.84
*17	4.2%	11%	39%	39.8%	5.9%	2.67	0.90
*18	0.8%	5.1%	30.5%	43.2%	20.3%	2.22	0.86
*19	3.4%	14.4%	45.8%	24.6%	22.9%	2.67	0.95

Note. The total number responses were 118 (N = 118). Reference to questions are found in appendix A. *indicate questions are included in Likert Scale.

Likert type questions

The Likert questions on the survey are question #6 - #19. To obtain the response frequency, the researcher counted number of respondents who selected each response choice for a question. The percentages were then computed by dividing the frequencies by the total number of responses to the question. For instance, of the 118 participants, 44.9% (53) of respondents agreed with question #1. The complete frequency analysis along with the mean score (M) and standard deviation (SD) are shown above in Table 4.

Likert Scale Descriptives.

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The categorical descriptives utilized the Likert scale to measure participant's attitude towards the Olympic movement. The questions in the survey are #6 - #8. These Likert questions offered a choice of 5 options: strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree or strongly disagree. To analyze the result, each option was assigned a numeric value. Strongly agree was assigned 5, agree was assigned 4, neither agree nor disagree was assigned 3, disagree was assigned 2 and strongly disagree was assigned 1. It is important to note the similarities in value between mean score and standard deviation for three questions. The results show on average, respondents' attitude towards the Olympic movement had a range between agree and neither agree nor disagree.

The Likert scale below in Table 5 contained questions regarding respondent attitudes towards sport events (question #6 - #8). The results indicated respondent's perception on average ranged from strongly agree to neutral. On average, respondents enjoyed the addition of new sports to the Olympics, showed strong support for the Olympic movement, and believed strongly that Olympic sports represent our competitive culture

Table 5 Attitude Towards Sport Event Descriptives

Question	n	M	SD
I have enjoyed the addition of new sports to the Olympic Games over the years	118	4.08	0.79
I consider myself a strong supporter of the Olympic sport movement	118	4.12	0.84
Olympic Sport symbolizes the competitiveness of our society	118	4.11	0.84

The below Likert scale in Table 6 contained questions to assess participants attitude towards Olympic sponsors. The reference number to the below questions are **Question # 9 - #13** on the survey. The mean score ranged from 2.04 to 3.7 and the standard deviation ranged from 0.87 to 0.97. The results showed on average the respondents' attitudes toward Olympic sponsors

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ranged from neither agree nor disagree to strongly disagree.

Table 6 Attitude towards Sponsors Descriptive

Question	n	M	SD
Sponsors should invest their money elsewhere instead of on the Olympic movement.	118	2.55	0.87
When I purchase products, I research if the company sponsors an Olympic sport event.	118	2.04	0.94
I am more influenced by the fact that a company sponsored the Olympics than if the company is advertising through another medium.	118	2.72	0.95
The company sponsoring an Olympic event has no impact on my purchase decision.	116	3.71	0.91
I am more likely to purchase a company's product when there is sponsorship fit between the sport event and the company.	117	3.25	0.85

The Likert scale below in table 7 displays the results of respondent's attitude toward athletes. The questions below are #14 - #16 on the survey (appendix A). The responses to the questions revealed a mean score ranging from 3.14 to 3.73 and a standard deviation ranging from 0.83 to 0.97. The results indicated on average the respondents' attitudes toward athletes ranged from agree to disagree.

Table 7 Attitude Towards Athletes Descriptives

Question	n	M	SD
Athletes endorsing a company's product influences my purchase decision.	118	3.14	0.97
I believe that Olympic athletes utilize the products they are endorsing.	118	3.38	0.83
I believe that athletes use the equipment, apparel and performance product that they endorse	118	3.73	0.84

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The Likert scale in Table 8 displays the results regarding respondents' perceptions towards sponsor's product. The questions below are #17 - #19 on the survey (Appendix A) and were about perceptions of sponsors in general, and not about specific Olympic sponsors. The results showed a mean score ranging from 2.22 to 2.67 and a standard deviation ranging from 0.86 to 0.95. The results indicated on average the respondents' attitude toward sponsor's product ranged from neither agree nor disagree to strongly disagree.

Table 8 Attitude towards Sponsor's Product Descriptives

Question	n	M	SD
I believe that athletes use products they endorse, even if those are not healthy.	118	2.67	0.90
I am more likely to purchase non-healthy products of companies if they sponsor the Olympic Games.	118	2.22	0.86
I am more likely to invest in equipment and apparel from companies if they sponsor the Olympic Games.	118	2.67	0.95

Summary

The results presented in this section complete this portion of the research study. To understand the attitude of the respondents, the demographic, sport support, and spending habits descriptives provide results to facilitate further discussion regarding sport consumer perception of sport event sponsors. The use of Likert questions and Likert scales provide data on frequencies, valid percentages, mean and standard deviation of respondents which will be used for analysis within the discussion section.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Research Benefits, Future Research, and Conclusion

The goal of this research study has been to analyze sport consumer's perception of event sponsors. Specifically, the focus was to examine sport consumer views on Olympic sponsors. After an extensive literature review on the topic, the research was influenced by the limited knowledge as it relates to perception of Olympic sponsors. The research utilized a quantitative method comprised of 24 survey questions. The survey had 14 Likert and 10 non-Likert question. These questions were further categorized in descriptives: demographic, sport support, spending habits, attitude towards Olympic movement, attitude towards Olympic sponsors, attitude towards athletes and attitude toward sponsor's products.

Discussion

Before the exploration of the research questions and hypothesis, the results for questions #6 to #8 must be highlighted. These questions explored the respondent's attitude of the Olympics by asking the following questions:

Question #6 asked if participants enjoyed the addition of new sports to the Olympic Games over the years.

Question #7 asked if they considered themselves a strong supporter of the Olympic sport movement.

Question #8 explored if Olympic Sport symbolizes the competitiveness of our society. The results indicated the respondents are extremely supportive of adding new sport to the games, and believed the games represent our competitive society. These results are important because respondents' positive view of the Olympics could influence their view of sponsors and could possibly provide explanation to findings later in the study.

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Other questions which need to be highlighted are questions #1 and #3. Question #1 measured the number of professional sport events participants attended in the past year, and question #3 measured the number of high school events they attended in the past year. A significant number of participants attended less than three professional or high school events per year. The motivation for this low attendance is unknown, however based on the results there are other indicators of sport interest such as participation, purchase patterns, and interest in the Olympics. Even the fact that respondents are Sport Management students show some interest in sport.

Research Question One. *Do consumers perceive Olympic participants use the product they endorse?*

Hypothesis One. *Consumers believe Olympic athletes are using the sponsor's product.*

To answer research question one and test hypothesis one, Likert questions #15, #16 and #17 were examined. Question #15 asked if participants believe Olympic athletes utilize the products they are endorsing. Question #16 asked participants if they believe athletes use the equipment, apparel and performance product they are endorsing. Finally, question #17 asked if participants believe athletes use the endorsed products, even if those products are not healthy.

The responses to question #15 indicated 50.9% of respondents strongly agreed, and agreed athletes utilized the products they endorsed. Since athletes are endorsing a product, participants are convinced they are utilizing it. It would be difficult for the respondents to think otherwise, since athletes choose to associate themselves with a product to help achieve the company's objectives.

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Similar results were revealed for question #16, indicating 69.5% of the respondents strongly agreeing and agreeing they believe athletes are using the equipment, apparel and performance products they are endorsing. Again, question 16 results indicated respondents are strongly convinced athletes must use the products they are endorsing. Athletes may choose to endorse a product because they believe it can be beneficial to their performance. Or, they are endorsing the product for financial reasons, however, the agreement with the sponsor may restrict them from utilizing similar products.

The results for question #17 indicated 45.7% of the respondents strongly disagree and disagree athletes will use the product they endorse, even if the product is unhealthy. In addition, the results showed 39 % of the respondents are neutral towards the question. One of the goals of an athlete is to perform at their best consistently. To accomplish those goals, it is important to consume food containing good nutritional value. Therefore, respondents may not believe athletes will jeopardize their performance because of their endorsements. Also, respondents may believe athletes are endorsing the product for financial reasons if the products are not related to their sports of play. Although Olympic sponsors may use athletes to endorse their products, sometimes they will just opt to sponsor the event.

Based on the findings, respondents strongly believed athletes are utilizing the product they endorse; however, health benefits appear to be important. Therefore, the hypothesis is partially confirmed. The questions supporting the hypothesis are question #15 and #16, however question #17 did not support it. As it relates to questions 15 and 16, it is important to consider respondents may be thinking of a particular athlete or

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sponsor. If respondents are considering an athlete that is endorsing a sport performance product, such as a shoe, then they may be relying on their knowledge of that athlete actually using the brand. For example, they may remember the athlete performing in that brand.

Research Question Two. *What are common sport consumer perceptions of a sport event sponsor?*

Hypothesis Two. *There is a positive perception of a sport event sponsor by sport consumers.*

According to Ashill, Davis, and Joe (2001), sponsoring a sport event provides resources in exchange for direct association to the event with an objective to attract consumers. Therefore, it is very important to understand consumer's perceptions as it relates to event sponsors. The research aimed at understanding respondent's perception of Olympic sponsors through questions #9, #10, #11, #12, #14, and #19.

Question #9 asked if sponsors should invest their money elsewhere instead of in the Olympic movement. Question #10 asked the participants when purchasing products, if they research whether the company sponsors an Olympic sport event. Question #11 asked whether they are more influenced by the fact a company sponsors the Olympics than if they are advertising through another medium. Question #12 asked if the company sponsoring an Olympic event has no impact on their purchase decision. Question #14 inquires if athletes endorsing a company's product influences purchase decision. Finally, question #19 explored the possibility of participants investing in equipment and apparel from companies if they sponsor the Olympic Games.

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Upon analyzing the results for the questions, on average, the responses indicated consumer perception of a sport event sponsor falls between “strongly agree” and “neither agree nor disagree.”

The responses to question #9 indicated participants felt sponsors should support the Olympic Games. The mean and standard deviation for question #9 are 2.55 and 0.87 respectively. The results showed 39% of respondent “disagree” or “neither agree nor disagree” with sponsors investing elsewhere instead of the Olympic Games. Respondents may find it necessary for sponsors to support sport events because of the benefits sports provide to the society. The result to question #9 is confirmed based on the respondent’s answers to questions six to eight. As alluded earlier, respondents are extremely supportive of adding new sport to the games, and they believed the Olympic Games represent a competitive society. However, the results for question #10 indicated 39% of respondents do not find it necessary to research a company’s involvement in the Olympic Games before purchasing a product. Consumers may view products differently based on the type of industry. They may view this approach necessary for a credit card company but not in the sports apparel industry.

Question #11 and #12 explored whether companies sponsoring the Olympic Games influence consumer’s purchase decision. Question #11 explored whether a company sponsoring the Olympic Games influenced consumer purchased decision, as opposed to if the company is advertising through another medium. The results indicated 47.5% of responses are neutral of a company sponsoring the Olympics, instead of through other advertising medium; which indicates that sponsorship has no influence on purchase decision. These findings are similar for question #12 which indicated 64.7% of

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the responses strongly agreed and agreed company sponsoring the Olympic Games has no impact on their purchase decision.

Based on the responses above, we can conclude whether a company chooses to sponsor or not to sponsor the Olympic Games does not influence consumer behavior. The results may be accurate because if consumers have brand loyalty, companies sponsoring a sport event may not influence their purchase behavior (Yun-Tsan, 2017). However, it is important to highlight the dissimilarity in the findings of this study compared to the study done on sponsorship influence index. That study discovered an increase from 2012 to 2015 in the number of NFL supporters who identified sport sponsorship as extremely influential on their purchase decision (“Football-NFL”, nd). The results from the two studies may vary because supporters of the NFL are exposed to weekly sponsorship marketing, compared to supporters of Olympic Games, who may experience marketing materials from sponsors every four years. The exposure to frequent marketing material may have an influence on consumer’s purchase decision.

Question #14 asked participants if athletes endorsing a company's product influences their purchase decision. While question #19 asked if they are more likely to invest in equipment and apparel from companies if they sponsor the Olympic Games. Of the total respondents, 36.4% agreed and 36.4% were neutral to question #14. For question #19, 17.8% strongly agreed and agreed, 45.8% were neutral and 24.6% disagreed. Based on question #14 results, the respondents found it necessary for athletes to endorse a sponsor’s product because it influenced their purchase decision. Respondents may perceive the product as more valuable and credible because it is endorsed by an athlete. However, most of the respondents are neutral about investing in equipment and apparel

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from companies sponsoring the Olympic Games. They may believe companies are sponsoring the Olympic Games to achieve corporate objectives.

Based on the findings, respondents felt it was appropriate for companies to sponsor the Olympic Games, however, they did not find it necessary to research it, or feel they were influenced by sponsorship. In addition, they felt athletes endorsing a product have more influence on their purchase decision. Perhaps they find the company's product more attractive when endorsed by athletes. In addition, they may believe athlete's association with the product brings more value and credibility to the company. Although not all the results indicate respondents will purchase based on sponsorship, sponsors will take the necessary steps to encourage it. The signal theory is one of the tools sponsors use to activate their sponsorship. For instance, sponsors will take necessary steps to make it clear in the minds of consumers they are in fact one of the major sponsors of the event. They can accomplish this through commercials during the event, customized product packaging for the event, contest/promotions as well as contracting an athlete who may be participating at the event as an endorser. For example, for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, Samsung provided all the athletes the latest Galaxy s7 smart phone (Walker, 2016). This action reaffirmed Samsung's position as an official sponsor and provided a hands-on experience to the product.

Based on the results above, hypothesis 2 is partially supported: there is a positive perception of sport event sponsor by sport consumers. The questions supporting hypothesis 2 are question #9, #11 and #14; however, question #10 and #19 partially supported it. Question #10 and #19 indicated it is not necessary to research the company

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relationship with the Olympics' before purchasing a product, however, they are neutral about investing in the products of companies sponsoring the Olympics.

Research Question Three. *What influence do low-fit sponsors have on sport consumer's lifestyle?*

Hypothesis Three. *Sport consumers are influenced to purchase low fit sponsor products based on a company's sponsorship of the sport event.*

To answer research question #3 and test hypothesis #3, questions #13 and #18 were examined. Question #13 asked participants if they are more likely to purchase a company's product when there is a sponsorship fit between the sporting event and the company. Question #18 asked them if they are more likely to purchase non-healthy products from companies if they sponsor the Olympic Games.

This last proposed research question is very important because it explored whether a low-fit sponsor has any influence on consumer lifestyle. This question may appear insignificant, but in fact it is vital to the study because it explored perceptions of the consumer when a sponsor's product does not relate to a sport event. A low-fit sponsorship can have negative outcomes in consumer's lives. For example, a tobacco company sponsoring a sport event may influence smoking. To address this relationship, question #18 helped to reveal the opinions of respondents. The results for question #18 indicated 63.5% of responses disagreed and strongly disagreed with purchasing non-healthy products from companies because of their relationship with the Olympic Games. Interestingly, of the 118 responses, only eight participants agreed with question #18. This result could be attributed to the fact consumers are becoming more health conscious, and they are very selective of the products they choose to consume; especially if it can have a negative influence on their lifestyle.

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Based on the results of question #13, sponsorship fit is an important factor influencing consumer behavior. Specifically, question #13 asked respondents whether the sponsorship fit between the sporting event and the company influenced their purchase decision. The results indicated 39.3% of responses agreed and 39.9 % were neutral with the question above. The results indicate consumers are more influenced to purchase a product when there is a positive association between the sponsor's product and the sporting event.

Hypothesis #3 which stated sport consumers are influenced to purchase low fit sponsor products based on if the company is sponsoring the sport event is not confirmed. The results indicated it is appropriate for respondents to be more likely to purchase products that are linked to a good sponsorship fit. This appears to indicate they can be influenced by a sponsorship, and would have to know something about the event and sponsor's product to determine a good fit. In addition, the results showed respondents are not enthused about jeopardizing their health by consuming unhealthy products from a company sponsoring a sport event. Sport consumers may have some interest in physical activities either through participation or some other form of involvement. Also, they may be experiencing some form of health condition which requires healthy eating habits. Therefore, it is concluded a healthy lifestyle is of great importance and they will not allow a low-fit sponsorship to negatively influence it.

Research Benefits

Fully understanding the perception of consumers can be beneficial to companies and sport events. Consumers are vital to the success of a company and sport event. Therefore, necessary steps must be taken to deeply comprehend the attitude of

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consumers. This study is a closer step toward understanding the perception of consumers towards sponsorship, which can benefit companies and sport events if implemented appropriately. The value of this research can provide companies a deeper knowledge of what consumers are looking for within sponsorship, so they can direct their resources more effectively to achieve the intended objective. For instance, if a company objective is to increase their product usage at an event, the research can help them decide if sponsoring a sport event, and or utilizing an endorser will allow them to achieve such objective. Companies are investing large amounts of their resources into sponsorship, therefore research like this will help them understand consumer response and reaction to sponsorship programs.

For sponsorship to be successful, consumers must have positive perception of the sponsor and there must be a good fit between the event and the sponsor. This research can provide companies with information to choose the most efficient marketing strategy based on the attitude and lifestyle of the target market, as well as determine if there is a sponsorship fit. The research will also assist companies with adjustments to their marketing strategies or advise them to choose a different event if they are sponsoring a low-fit event with health-conscious consumers.

Recommendation for Future Research

The goal of the study was to explore sport consumer perceptions of event sponsors. It is important to explore the limitation of this research so future researchers can have a deeper understanding of the findings and create their own study along a path to produce broader knowledge on the topic.

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The study was limited to students of the Liberty University Department of Sport Management due to time constraints and lack of accessibility to a more diverse target market. Also, the participants were asked about an event occurring more than seven months prior. This may lead to subjects not remembering certain aspect of the event due to time lapse. However, question #6, #7 and #8 results indicated even though there was a time gap, respondents had positive perceptions of the Olympics and considered themselves knowledgeable and supportive of the games. A more effective method for future study would be selecting subjects during the occurrence of the sport event. This may provide more current data since they will be experiencing the event at the time.

Another recommendation for future research is based on the results for question #11. The results suggested 34.7 % of responses disagree or strongly disagree they are more influenced if a company advertised through another medium rather than sponsoring the Olympic Games. Future study could involve questions pertaining to what other advertising medium would influence consumer purchase decision. This data would be of great importance to companies regarding the most effective advertising tools to attract their target market.

The third recommendation for future study centers on the respondent's attitude towards athletes. The results indicated more than 70% of the responses believed athletes endorsing a company's product influenced their purchase decision. This is a significant number of participants who are influenced by athletes. Therefore, future research can explore the different characteristics or personalities of athletes and how they utilized their unique abilities to influence consumer's purchase decision. This knowledge will allow companies to select suitable endorsers capable of attracting consumers to their products.

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The scale of this research was based on questions and constructs developed in several other studies, but in this format, the scale has not been analyzed statistically to make sure all the questions are suitable. This study represents a first step in the development of this scale/survey instrument.

Concluding Remarks

This study was made possible through hard work, determination along with the assistance of faculty, staff and students of the Department of Sport Management at Liberty University. The primary purposes of the research project were to determine if sport consumers think athletes participating in sport events are utilizing the products of sponsors, to explore the perception of sport event sponsors, and to determine the influence low-fit sponsors have on sport consumer lifestyle. By achieving the purpose of the study, the body of knowledge regarding sport consumer perception will be extended.

The results found in this study can benefit sports academic institutions, consumers and corporations. Sport academic institutions can use the data to better educate students in the classroom about the relationship between sport consumer sponsors and sport events. Also, consumers can benefit from the study by understanding the different variables involved in sponsorship. And corporations can use the data to better develop their marketing plan to attract their intended target market. Furthermore, the research will allow corporations to have a better understanding of sport events and the athletes they need to affiliate with their products.

The author is proud to present this thesis through the Department of Sport Management. The process has been very memorable and having the opportunity to expand the breadth of knowledge to the scholarly community is an honor.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY

1. How many professional sporting events did you attend in the past year?
 - 0 - 3
 - 4 - 7
 - 8 - 11
 - 12 or more

2. How many college sporting events did you attend in the past year?
 - 0 - 3
 - 4 - 7
 - 8 - 11
 - 12 or more

3. How many high school sporting events did you attend in the past year?
 - 0 - 3
 - 4 - 7
 - 8 - 11
 - 12 or more

4. How much money did you spend annually on sports equipment and apparel?
 - \$0 - \$499
 - \$500- \$999
 - \$1000 - \$1499
 - \$1500 or more

5. How much money did you spend on non-healthy food/drinks per month?
 - \$0 - \$50
 - \$51 - \$100
 - \$101 - \$150
 - 151 or more

6. I have enjoyed the addition of new sports to the Olympic Games over the years, which demonstrates their effort to capture new audience members.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

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7. I consider myself a strong supporter of the Olympic sport movement.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. Olympic Sports symbolize the competitiveness of our society.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

9. Sponsors should invest their money elsewhere instead of in the Olympic movement.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. When I purchase products, I research if the company sponsors an Olympic sport event.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

11. I am more influenced by the fact that a company sponsors the Olympics than if the company is advertising through another medium.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. The company sponsoring an Olympic event has no impact on my purchase decision.

- Strongly agree
- Agree

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- Neither Agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

13. I am more likely to purchase a company's product when there is a sponsorship fit between the sporting event and the company.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. Athletes endorsing a company's product influence my purchase decision.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15. I believe that Olympic athletes utilize the products they are endorsing.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

16. I believe that athletes use the equipment, apparel and performance product that they endorse.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

17. I believe that athletes use the products they endorse, even if those products are not healthy.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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18. I am more likely to purchase non-healthy products from companies if they sponsor the Olympic Games.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

19. I am more likely to invest in equipment and apparel from companies if they sponsor the Olympic Games.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

20. Gender

- Male
- Female

21. Age

- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 or more

22. What degree are you pursuing?

- Bachelor Degree
- Master Degree
- Doctorate Degree

23. Ethnicity

- Hispanic / Latino
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- African American
- White
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Non-Hispanic
- Non-Hispanic

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24. Household Income

- Prefer not to Answer
- \$0 - \$24,999
- \$25,00 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$74,999
- \$75,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000 - \$149,999
- \$15,000 or more

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Consumers' Perceptions of Sporting Event Sponsors
Omar Brown
Liberty University
Department of Sports Management

You are invited to be in a research study to explore sport consumers' perception of sponsors. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older, are a student of the Liberty University Sport Management program, and you have a strong interest in sports. I ask that you read this form and feel free to ask any questions before agreeing to be in the study.

Omar Brown, a graduate student in the Department of Sports Management at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to explore sport consumer's perceptions of sponsors. The research questions I am hoping to answer are:
Do consumers believe that athletes participating in the event are using the products?
What perception do sport consumers have of sponsors?
What influence do low-fit sponsors have on sport consumer's lifestyle?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:

1. Complete a 10-15-minute anonymous online survey.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits to participate in this survey.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will not be asked for any direct or indirect identifiers such as name, address, date of birth, social security number email address, etc. Data transmission will be protected through the use of SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) by the web survey provider.
- Participant's data will be stored on one strong password protected computer and is only accessible by the researcher.

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- The data will be deleted from the computer's hard drive and any external backup device after the three year retention period.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision about whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Omar Brown. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at obrown13@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Phillip Blosser, at pblosser@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

APPENDIX C

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 26, 2016

Omar Brown IRB Exemption 2714.122616: Consumers' Perceptions of Sporting Event Sponsors

Dear Omar Brown,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether

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possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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