

# An Investigation of the Impact of Team Jersey Sponsorship: Examining the Moderating Role of Team Identification on Brand Attitude and Buying Intention

Young Ik Suh, University of West Georgia  
Zack Pedersen, Indiana University – Bloomington  
Sanghak Lee, Korea Aerospace University  
Antonio S. Williams, Indiana University - Bloomington  
Paul M. Pedersen, Indiana University – Bloomington

## **Abstract**

*With the arrival in 2017 of jersey sponsorship at the highest level of professional basketball in the United States (i.e., National Basketball Association [NBA]), this study sought to identify how the various levels of team identification influence brand attitude and buying intention in terms of team jersey sponsorship. The focus was on examining the effect of team identification on fans' attitudes toward a particular brand and their buying intentions when the jersey did and did not exhibit advertising. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare scores on the attitude toward the brand between highly, moderate, and low-identified fans across the jersey advertisement options. The results of the study, which found no significant interactions between the level of team identification and the advertisements, extend the research in this area by providing sport marketing scholars and practitioners a more nuanced understanding of fans' perceptions of jersey sponsorship.*

## **Introduction**

Teams in the National Basketball Association (NBA) are now allowed to have corporate sponsors on their jerseys, commencing with the league's 2017-18 season. Examples of teams with jersey sponsorship deals include the Brooklyn Nets (Infor), Sacramento Kings (Blue Diamond), and Boston Celtics (General Electric). Baysinger (2017) cited media outlets in stating that a sponsorship deal involving a corporate logo on a jersey can generate for the NBA team around \$5 million per season. Teams such as the Nets, Kings, and Celtics have followed the actions of the Philadelphia 76ers, the first mover in this area of jersey sponsorships. Back in 2016 the 76ers announced that StubHub, a ticket resale company, would be advertising on the team's jerseys. In announcing the deal, the 76ers noted that they now had "the first jersey patch sponsorship among major sports leagues in American history" ("Philadelphia," 2016, para. 1).

Throughout the rest of the 2017-18 season, 14 teams signed deals with corporate sponsors (Glover, 2017). As detailed in the work by Bassam (2019) and Lowe (2019), the remaining 16 teams decided to follow suit in acquiring a deal for a jersey patch in the 2018-19 season (see Table 1), with the Oklahoma City Thunder signing the latest deal with Love's, a travel stop company, in March of 2019. Bassam and Lowe also note, that while a majority of the deals were estimated to be around \$5 million per season, the Golden State Warriors made the largest deal,

agreeing to terms with Japanese company Rakuten for \$20 million per season. Interestingly, 20 of the 30 jersey patch sponsors were not previously affiliated with the league or its franchises. Even though many professional teams and leagues in Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America have widely embraced jersey sponsorship opportunities, this phenomenon is quite novel for many teams and leagues in the United States. Adam Silver, the commissioner of the NBA, estimated that the small patch advertisements on jerseys would be worth about \$100 million annually (Rovell, 2016). Such an expectation is not unreasonable because of the example provided by other leagues. The teams in the English Premier League (EPL) earned \$373 million in the 2015-16 season from sponsors' advertisements and logos on their jerseys (Marcin, 2016). The NBA reportedly saw \$150 million in new revenue in the 2018-19 season, surpassing Silver's expectations (Lefton & Lombardo, 2019). In addition to this, the NBA expects the next round of jersey patch negotiations to yield 20-30 percent higher returns.

While jersey sponsorships provide economic gains for professional leagues and their affiliated franchises, the fans of the teams may have different points of view regarding a league's or team's adoption of a jersey sponsorship. This may be the case for the NBA considering that 20 of the 30 jersey sponsors

Table 1  
Current NBA Jersey Sponsorship Deals

NBA Team	Sponsor	Value (millions)	Term		New
			Start	End	
Atlanta Hawks	Sharecare	2.5 - 10	2017	2022	x
Boston Celtics	General Electric	7	2017	2020	
Brooklyn Nets	Infor	8	2017	2020	x
Charlotte Hornets	LendingTree	4 - 4.5	2017	2020	x
Chicago Bulls	Zenni Optical	N/A	2018	2023	x
Cleveland Cavaliers	Goodyear	10	2017	2020	
Dallas Mavericks*	5mile	< 4	2017	2019	x
Denver Nuggets	Western Union	N/A	2017	2020	x
Detroit Pistons	Flagstar Bank	5 - 10	2017	2020	x
Golden State Warriors	Rakuten	20	N/A	N/A	
Houston Rockets	Rokit Phones	N/A	2018	2020	x
Indiana Pacers	Motorola	8 - 10	2018	2020	
LA Clippers	Bumble	< 20	2018	2020	x
Los Angeles Lakers	Wish	12 - 14	N/A	N/A	x
Memphis Grizzlies	FedEx	N/A	2018	2020	
Miami Heat	Ultimate Software	N/A	2017	2020	x
Milwaukee Bucks	Harley-Davidson	N/A	2017	N/A	x
Minnesota Timberwolves	Fitbit	N/A	2017	2020	
New Orleans Pelicans	Zatarain	N/A	2017	2020	x
New York Knicks	Squarespace	4 - 12	2017	2020	x
Oklahoma City Thunder	Love's Travel Stops	10	2019	2023	x
Orlando Magic	Walt Disney World	N/A	2017	2020	x
Philadelphia 76ers**	StubHub	>5	2016	2020	
Phoenix Suns	PayPal	N/A	2018	N/A	
Portland Trail Blazers	Biofreeze	N/A	2018	2020	x
Sacramento Kings**	Blue Diamond	>5	2016	2020	x
San Antonio Spurs	Frost Bank	N/A	2018	2020	x
Toronto Raptors	Sun Life Financial	5	2017	2020	
Utah Jazz	Qualtrics	4	2017	2020	x
Washington Wizards	Geico	N/A	2018	N/A	

Note. Data for table derived from the work of Bassam (2019). \*The Dallas Mavericks ended their deal with 5mile one year early. \*\*The Sacramento Kings and Philadelphia 76ers signed deals in 2016, but the deals were only activated at the start of the 2017-18 season.

were not previously affiliated with the teams they now have their corporate logo on (Lefton & Lombardo, 2019). In addition, because many sport fans in the United States are not familiar with advertisements on jerseys, any movement in this direction might cause a negative reaction with the fans, resulting in actions such as a decrease in tickets purchased and team merchandise sold (Madden, 2012).

Therefore, an assumption undergirding this study was that sport fans' reactions to jersey sponsorships might be different, especially based on the fans' different levels of team identification and on the various sizes of the ads on the jerseys. Unlike general sponsorship in the sport industry (e.g., Martinez, Dixon, & Montgomery, 2019; Wagner, Hansen, Kristensen, & Josty, 2019), jersey sponsorship has received little attention regarding its potential impact on sport fans' attitudes and buying intentions. Few empirical studies have examined the impact of team identification on sport fans' attitudes toward a team's brand related to jersey sponsorship. Additionally, no empirical research has been found to have studied the influence of jersey sponsorship on sport fans' attitudes and buying intentions in the four leagues – NBA, National Football League (NFL), National Hockey League (NHL), and Major League Baseball (MLB) – that many refer to as the “major leagues” in the United States. Thus, this study examined the effect of team identification on attitude toward brand and buying intention when there are no ads on a jersey and when there is a small size ad on a jersey. To identify how the various levels of team identification influence attitude toward brand and buying intention in terms of jersey sponsorship, the jersey of the Philadelphia 76ers was selected.

## Literature Review

### *Jersey Sponsorship in Sport Franchises*

Sponsorship of jerseys was initiated in the 1950s by Penarol, a soccer club based in Uruguay. Since this initial jersey sponsorship several teams from France, Denmark and Austria have also posted advertisements on their uniforms. But most of the European leagues were not familiar with jersey sponsorships (Allen, 2014). In 1973, the German Bundesliga team Eintracht Braunschweig put advertisements on their uniforms, and finally the Bundesliga endorsed the sponsorship of jerseys. Soon after, the English Premier League also accepted jersey sponsorship deals, and now all European football teams are generating revenue through jersey sponsorships (Heinrich, 2014). European soccer teams receive huge money from jersey sponsors, with an average of 4.2 million euros (about \$4.7 million). And for the best football teams in Europe, jersey sponsorship is the most important source of income (Gillis, 2010). Jersey sponsorship is common in many parts of the world, including India, Africa, South America, and Asia, and is also widespread in a variety of sports such as ice hockey, rugby, basketball and cricket (Jensen, Bowman, Larson, & Wang, 2013).

In the United States, the Major League Soccer (MLS) team, Real Salt Lake, became the first team to receive a uniform sponsorship when the team added a uniform logo for Xango, a nutritional supplement brand (Allen, 2014). Since the introduction of uniform sponsorship in MLS, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has also allowed sponsorship logos to be attached to the uniforms in the league. The Phoenix Mercury and Los Angeles Sparks became the first teams to introduce uniform sponsorships in the league (Butcher, 2014). Since then, 11 of the 12 WNBA teams have added at least one additional sponsor to their jerseys, and seven of those 11 have added two corporate sponsorship patches to accompany the official league sponsors (e.g., AT&T) logo (Glass, 2019). In the NBA's developmental league, known as the G League, the Capital City Go-Go signed a deal with Geico, making

Geico the first and only company to sign a deal with an NBA (Washington Wizards), WNBA (Washington Mystics), and G League team (Allen, 2018).

In a limited capacity (e.g., advertisements on uniforms during practice sessions) jersey sponsorships started to become embraced by other sports leagues. For example, both the NFL and the NBA have worked out deals pertaining to the sponsorship contracts for the uniforms the teams in each league wear during practice, with several teams having utilized jersey sponsorships during their training camp (Lombardo, 2009). It wasn't until 2009 that NFL teams were allowed to sell sponsorship space on their practice jerseys, excluding the Tennessee Titans, who first started utilizing practice jersey sponsorship in 1999 (Burns, 2019). This was the same year that the WNBA and NBA allowed sponsorship on their official and practice jerseys respectively (Allen, 2014). In professional baseball (i.e., MLB), jerseys began to have sponsors during international competitions. As for the NHL, the league has resisted putting sponsorship patches on their regular on-ice uniforms (Jessiman, 2019).

In recent years, the NBA's position on jersey sponsorships has changed. In 2016, the NBA announced that teams could sell jersey sponsorships as part of a three-year pilot program and the 76ers partnered with StubHub and thus became the first team in the league to sign a sponsorship agreement ("Philadelphia," 2016). Also in October of 2016, the Sacramento Kings signed a jersey sponsorship deal with the Blue Diamond Growers (Herbert, 2016). With the addition of the partnership between Love's and the Oklahoma City Thunder, every team in the NBA is partnered with a jersey patch sponsor.

### ***Effect of Team Identification on Jersey Sponsorship***

Team identification can be defined as personal and emotional involvement in sports organizations, including psychological and behavioral aspects (Milne & McDonald, 1999). Many scholars have studied team identification to explain the consumption behavior of sports fans (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Madrigal, 1995; Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997). For example, Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw (1999) differentiated sports fans into temporary, local, devoted, fanatical and dysfunctional fans and explained that the various categories of fans showed different behaviors to the team. In similar concepts, Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) explained team identification by dividing sports fans into three segments (e.g., high, medium, low).

Funk and James (2001) also suggested a Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) related to loyalty to the team. The PCM includes four psychological processes (e.g., awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance). The authors described awareness is the lowest level of psychological involvement, is not necessarily durable or stable. The final stage is allegiance, which shows persistence and resistance to change. Therefore, highly identified sports fans are often tied to their teams and its brand attributes (e.g., traditions, stadiums, athletes, coaches) and generally dislike change (Wann et al., 2001). Along this line, a team's jersey is also important for highly identified fans to distinguish their teams and strengthen their ties with the team. Consequently, those fans may not be inclined to accept the idea of attaching an advertisement to the team's jersey by a sponsor, especially considering the lack of an existing relationship with some of the new sponsors (Lefton & Lombardo, 2019). Conversely, sports fans who are less loyal to the team may react differently. In previous studies, low-identified sports fans showed positive responses to changes in team-related attributes (Ahn, Suh, Pedersen, & Lee, 2012; Funk & James, 2001). Therefore, in the current study, we assumed that the



response to advertisements attached to team jersey will vary according to the different level of team identification. Based on the above argument, the following hypothesis was proposed.

Table 2  
Frequencies of Respondents' Characteristics

Characteristics	n	%
<b>Age</b>		
Under 18	8	3.0
19-22	152	57.1
23-29	65	24.4
30-39	27	10.2
40-49	9	3.4
50-59	4	1.5
60 and over	1	.4
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	216	81.2
Female	50	18.8
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	225	84.6
Married	28	10.5
Divorced	3	1.1
Widowed	3	1.1
Partner	5	1.9
Separated	1	.4
Other	1	.4
<b>Race</b>		
Black/African American	44	16.5
Native American	4	1.5
Latino/Latina	27	10.2
White/Caucasian	164	61.7
Asian or Pacific Islander	14	5.3
Other	13	4.9
<b>Education</b>		
Less than a high school diploma	6	2.3
High school graduate/GED	8	3.0
Currently in college	146	54.9
Community college graduate	10	3.8
Bachelor's degree	43	16.2
Graduate/Post-Baccalaureate work	23	8.6
Graduate/Post-Baccalaureate degree	27	10.2
Other	3	1.1
<b>Household Income</b>		
Under \$15,000	64	24.1
\$15,000-\$24,999	29	10.9
\$25,000-\$49,999	25	9.4
\$50,000-\$74,999	47	17.7
\$75,000-\$99,999	17	6.4
\$100,000-\$149,999	34	12.8
\$150,000 and higher	50	18.8

H1: Team identification will be a moderating factor between jersey sponsorship and attitude toward brand. Sport fans with high levels of team identification will show more negative attitude toward the 76ers' jersey including an advertisement, whereas sport fans with low levels of team identification will show more positive attitude toward the 76ers' jersey including an advertisement.

Furthermore, based on previous findings from team identification studies, various sports fans' behaviors including buying intention (Ahn et al., 2012; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; Madrigal, 2000; Wann & Branscombe, 1993) and game attendance (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995) have been examined as a significant outcome of team identification. For instance, according to Wakefield and Sloan, highly identified sports fans have a tendency to attend games despite poor performances during the season. Madrigal gave support to the moderating role of team identification on consumption intention in the sports sector. The author proposed that fans who are highly identified tend to be more likely to purchase products related to the team than fans with low team identification. Based on these results, the current study assumed that fans with high team identification would be more likely than low-identified fans to buy a jersey with an advertisement even if they have a negative attitude toward jersey sponsorship. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H2: Buying intentions for the highly identified fans will be increased with an advertisement on the 76ers' jerseys, whereas buying intentions for the low-identified fans and moderately identified fans will not be changed with an advertisement on the 76ers' jerseys.

## Methodology

### Sample

The data for the current study were collected from message board users provided by different active

sports websites (i.e., forums.realgm.com and phillysportscentral.com). Message boards have been validated by scholars in the communication and sport communication fields (Clavio, 2008; Kian, Clavio, Vincent, & Shaw, 2011). Previous studies took note of not only the large amount of dedicated users, but the increasing focus and expenditure of companies such as ESPN and Fox Sports. Those two websites were selected because of the level of activity by the users on each site. The subjects, who were chosen based on an online convenience sampling approach facilitated through Survey Monkey, were able to access the study's URL that contained the survey questionnaire on the two examined message board sites. Participants first filled out a consent form, and were then asked to answer questions pertaining to team identification, attitude toward a brand, and buying intention. After the consent form, the participants were shown an image of the Philadelphia 76ers jersey with a StubHub sponsor patch in the clavicle area, where all jersey sponsors are placed in the NBA. They were then asked to respond to three questions measuring their attitude towards the brand using a semantic differential scale, the brand was the Philadelphia 76ers for this study. Participants were then asked to answer another three questions pertaining to buying intention, this time using a Likert scale. The participants were then shown the same Philadelphia 76ers jersey without the sponsorship patch, and were asked the same questions. After they had answered both sets of questions, the participants were asked to fill out a seven-question team identification questionnaire, evaluated on an 8-point Likert scale. After filling out the three previous sections, the participants were directed to fill out the demographic portion of the survey. Among the 338 questionnaires returned, 72 questionnaires were dismissed from the study due to incomplete data. Thus, 266 questionnaires were used in this study.

In terms of participant demographics, 81.2% identified themselves as male and 18.8% identified themselves as female. The majority of the study participants were White/Caucasians (61.7%) and between 19 and 39 years of age (91.7%), which is typical for sport fans and internet users (Fullerton, 2011). Regarding the annual income of respondents, 38% made over \$75,000, while 35% reported earnings below \$25,000. Regarding education levels, 5% of the respondents had high school education only, and 55% reported attending college (see Table 2).

### **Measurement**

The questionnaire included scales for attitude toward a brand, buying intention, and team identification. The attitude toward a brand was measured with three items adapted from Bruner and Hansel (1992). The items were measured in a semantic differential scale with seven points. The items asked whether the respondents viewed the brand as bad/good, unfavorable/favorable, and unsatisfied/satisfied. An example of an attitude of brand item is, "Please rate your overall impression toward a Philadelphia 76ers jersey including StubHub advertising."

In order to measure buying intention, this study used three items which were measured in a semantic differential scale using a seven-point Likert scale (i.e., very unlikely/very likely, improbable/probable, and impossible/possible). This scale was originally developed by Yi (1990) and an example of one of the buying intention items is, "Please rate how likely you will consider buying a Philadelphia 76ers jersey including StubHub advertising."

Figure 1.  
Jersey without advertisements



Figure 2.  
Jersey with an advertisement



To measure team identification, this study used the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) by Wann and Branscombe (1993), which is composed of seven items with an eight-point Likert scale. Examples of questions within the modified version of the SSIS used in this study include, "How important is it to you that the Philadelphia 76ers wins?" and "How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the Philadelphia 76ers?" The SSIS has been used to differentiate three levels of team identification (Ahn, Seo, Lee, & Pedersen, 2012). Based on the previous study, three groups were classified by the mean score of team identification as following: 1-3 (low team identification), 4-5 (moderate team identification), and 6-8 (high team identification).

**Data Analysis**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to analyze the data. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare scores on the attitude toward a brand and buying intention among fans with low, moderate, and high team identification. The use of ANOVA is appropriate when there are moderate correlations between dependent variables (French, Macedo, Poulsen, Waterson, & Yu, 2002). In the Table 3, three correlations met the criterion: brand attitude and team identification ( $r = .165, p < .01$ ); brand attitude and buying intention ( $r = .586, p < .01$ ); and buying intention and team identification ( $r = .422, p < .01$ ). For all items in the scales, the internal consistency of reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, which exceeded the recommended value of .70 (Nunnally, 1978): attitude toward a brand (.96), buying intention (.96), and team identification (.96).

Table 3  
*Pearson Correlations*

Variables	Team Identification	Attitude toward a Brand	Buying Intention
Team Identification	1		
Attitude toward a Brand	.165**	1	
Buying Intention	.422**	.586**	1

**Results**

Table 4 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of attitude toward a brand and buying intention according to the three levels of team identification. Participants who had a high level of team identification reported the highest mean scores on brand attitude ( $M = 3.89$ ) and buying intention ( $M = 3.94$ ); participants who had a moderate level of team identification reported the lowest mean scores on brand attitude ( $M = 2.62$ ). Participants who had a low level of team identification reported the lowest mean score on buying intention ( $M = 2.13$ ).

Table 4  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Brand Attitude and Buying Intention by Team Identification*

	Low Identification (n=140)	Moderate Identification (n=39)	High Identification (n=87)
Brand Attitude	3.17 (1.58)	2.62 (1.53)	3.89 (2.04)
Buying Intention	2.13 (1.29)	2.95 (1.34)	3.94 (2.45)

**Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)**

In order to test the hypothesis that the level of team identification (i.e., low, moderate, and high) had an effect on brand attitude and buying intention, a between-groups ANOVA was performed. A post-hoc Scheffe test was conducted on univariate statistics (ANOVA). The Scheffe test is generally regarded as the most conservative procedure for controlling family-wise error rate at 0.05 level and most effective with groups of different sizes (Howel, 1992). Furthermore, the

assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied based on the results of brand attitude (Levene’s F test,  $F(2, 263) = 8.28, p = .000.$ ) and buying intention (Levene’s F test,  $F(2, 263) = 62.56, p = .000.$ ).

For attitude toward a brand, there were significant differences within subjects effect ( $F = 8.341, \eta^2 = .06, p < .001$ ). Specifically, there were significant differences between high identification ( $m = 3.89$ ) and low identification ( $m = 3.17, p < .05$ ) and between high identification ( $m = 3.89$ ) and moderate identification ( $m = 2.62, p < .05$ ). These results illustrate that highly identified fans are more likely to have higher attitudes toward a brand than those with low and moderate team identification.

For buying intention, the results indicated that there were also significant differences within subjects effect ( $F = 28.595, \eta^2 = .179, p < .001$ ). The results found significant differences between high identification ( $m = 3.94$ ) and low identification ( $m = 2.13, p < .05$ ), between high identification ( $m = 3.94$ ) and moderate identification ( $m = 2.95, p < .05$ ), and between moderate identification ( $m = 2.95$ ) and low identification ( $m = 2.13, p < .05$ ) at a marginal level. These results illustrate that highly identified fans are more likely to have higher buying intention than those with low and moderate team identification. In addition, the results suggest that fans with moderate team identification are more likely to have higher buying intention than those with low team identification.

Table 5  
*One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Brand Attitude and Buying Intention by Team Identification*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Brand Attitude	Between groups	50.432	2	25.216	8.341	.000***
	Within groups	795.081	263	3.023		
	Total	845.514	265			
Buying Intention	Between groups	177.549	2	88.774	28.595	.000***
	Within groups	816.492	263	3.105		
	Total	994.041	265			

\*\*\*p < .001

Table 6  
*Significant Univariate Effects and Post Hoc Test for Team Identification*

Dependent Value	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Scheffe
Brand Attitude	50.432a	2	25.216	8.341	.000***	.060	HLTI > LLTI, MLTI
Buying Intention	177.549b		88.774	28.595	.000***	.179	HLTI > MLTI > LLTI

\*\*\*p. < .001  
a R Squared = .060 (Adjusted R Squared = .052)  
b R Squared = .179 (Adjusted R Squared = .172)  
Note.  
HLTI: High level of Team Identification  
MLTI: Moderate level of Team Identification  
LLTI: Low level of Team Identification

**Discussion**



The current study investigated how the different levels of team identification influence attitude toward brand and buying intention in terms of jersey sponsorship. More specifically, this study examined the effect of team identification on attitude toward brand and buying intention when there are no ads on the jersey and when there is an ad on the jersey.

The first hypothesis stated that highly identified fans – in comparison to low-identified fans – would be more likely to show negative attitudes toward the 76ers' jersey that included an advertisement. However, the findings of this study revealed that the brand attitudes of both the low-identified and the highly identified fans were significantly decreased. Based on such results, team identification was found to not have an effect on attitude toward the brand when fans encountered the jersey that included an advertisement. The results showed that for the both the low-identified and the highly identified fans, the attitudes toward the brand decreased when an ad was placed on the jersey. Fans who had low levels of team identification showed a more negative attitude toward the brand. Such a finding is not consistent with the previous studies (Ahn, Suh, Lee, & Pedersen, 2012; Parker & Fink, 2010; Walsh, Winterich, & Mittal, 2010), which claimed that team identification plays a role of moderating factor between redesigned logos and attitude toward brand.

The second hypothesis was presented in order to examine the relationship between buying intention and team identification. The expectation surrounding this hypothesis was that buying intentions for the highly identified fans would increase with an advertisement on a 76ers' jersey, whereas buying intentions for low-identified fans would not change with an advertisement on a 76ers' jersey. However, the results of the study indicated that buying intentions for both the low-identified fans and the highly identified fans significantly decreased when an ad was placed on the 76ers' jersey. Such findings are not supported by previous studies as the high level of team identification has been found to be one of the critical indicators in predicting positive behavioral intentions (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; Madrigal, 2000; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). According to Mahony and Moorman (2000), highly identified fans are expected to form their behavioral intentions such as game attendance and buying intention without being affected by other factors. For example, for the highly identified fans attributes of service quality had little influence on their intentions to attend future games (Hill & Green, 2000).

The findings of the current study contradict some of the assumptions made based on previous studies. One possible explanation for such surprising results is that sports fans in the United States are for the most part still unfamiliar with jersey sponsorships and have negative feelings about the advertisements on jerseys. For example, one of the survey respondents noted in the open-ended comment section of the study “many sports fans are showing their intention to oppose the NBA's decision to jersey sponsorship through social media like Twitter. The (NBA) has been transformed into a commercial league that seeks only profit.” Such a sports fan thinks that major sports leagues do not want to be like what some fans see as the walking billboards for race teams and drivers in sports such as NASCAR. Furthermore, according to Boyd (2000), in the past many professional sports in the United States have been viewed by stakeholders as a segment of the sport industry in which commercial penetration (e.g., jersey sponsor logos) is limited while the fans and viewers consume the events and make lifelong sporting memories. Thus, it can be said that sports fans have often rejected or decried what they might view as rampant sport commercialism.

### **Implications and Limitations**

The findings of the present study will be beneficial for both sport marketing academicians and practitioners by providing a better understanding of sports fans' perceptions, views, and reactions related to team jersey sponsorships. From an academic perspective, this study is one of the few investigations that has sought to understand consumers' reactions toward jersey sponsorships in a widely popular sports league (i.e., NBA) in the United States. Even though the effects and reactions of sponsorship in the sport industry have been considered very important, no studies have been found that have specifically examined jersey sponsorships in leagues such as the NBA in the United States (the focus of this study). Most previous studies related to team identification have explained that team identification affects sports fans' attitudes and behavioral intentions and has a moderating effect. However, in this study, regardless of the type of team identification, both the low-identified and the highly identified fans responded negatively to jerseys that included a corporate advertisement. Based on such discrepancies, the findings of this research can add to the existing knowledge of team identification research and give rise to interesting future research questions.

From a practical point of view, although many fans have a strong negative reaction to jersey sponsorships, leagues continue to use uniform patches as they provide a significant revenue stream for individual teams and the league as a whole. Thus, leaders in the sport industry (e.g., league executives) must believe that a small ad on a jersey does not have a significant negative effect on a league's fan base and they need to pilot test such an initiative because they believe that jersey sponsorships contribute significantly to international corporate sponsorship and globalization, and lead to a huge income for the league as a whole and for the affiliated teams who have jersey deals. It is also noted that European soccer teams with a long history of jersey sponsorships continue to successfully have jersey sponsorship without losing their fans. As the NBA does not have the particular nostalgia and tradition of MLB, while there may be some initial noise regarding jersey sponsorships overall NBA stakeholders may view this corporate involvement as just part of the landscape, similar to stadium naming rights deals (Brown, 2016). Such an assumption allows for the belief that fans will either embrace the corporate ads on jerseys or simply get used to it. However, it should not be forgotten that the current sports fan reaction is strong negative. Loyal fans have a great influence in terms of a team's bottom line (e.g., season tickets, team merchandise) and if the highly loyal fans do not embrace the jerseys with sponsorships then the leagues and teams will face a significant challenge. In addition, it is important for sport practitioners to set various strategies for jersey sponsorships through the use of various experiments to decide where to put an advertisement on the uniform and the size of the advertisement.

The current study has several limitations. As a first-time issue, this study is a result of only one team and its fans, so any generalizations would not be acceptable. Also, because jersey sponsorships have just been introduced, there is an assumption that there might be a strong negative reaction at the moment to such a new initiative (at least for the fans in the United States who might not be familiar with it). It could be assumed that there would be different results after the time when the sponsorship is generalized to other teams and leagues. In addition, it is possible that the larger the ad size, the stronger the rejection of the sports fans. Thus, in future research, it is necessary to investigate the attitudes of the fans about the sponsors who attach advertisements to the uniforms, and it is also necessary to study how they relate to other factors (e.g., team identification, perception, behavioral intentions). It would also be a good idea to compare the results of this study with the reactions of sports fans in the leagues such as MLS and WNBA, which have already introduced jersey sponsorship. Sports fans who are already accustomed to European soccer culture and uniform advertising may react differently.

## References

- Ahn, T., Suh, Y., Lee, J., & Pedersen, P. M. (2012). Sport fans and their teams' redesigned logos: An examination of the moderating effect of team identification on attitude and purchase intention of team-logoed merchandise. *Journal of Sport Management*, 27, 11–23
- Allen, S. (2014, March 20). A brief history of jersey sponsorship. Retrieved from <http://mentalfloss.com/article/27776/brief-history-jersey-sponsorship>
- Allen, S. (2018, November 2). Monumental sports announces Geico as jersey sponsor for Wizards, Mystics and Go-Go. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2018/11/02/monumental-sports-announces-geico-jersey-sponsor-wizards-mystics-go-go/>
- Bassam, T. (2019, October 18). NBA 2019/20 commercial guide: Every team, the marquee sponsors and all the major TV deals. *SportsPro*. Retrieved from <http://www.sportspromedia.com/analysis/nba-2019-20-tv-rights-jersey-patch-sponsors-naming-rights>
- Baysinger, T. (2017, January 25). General Electric to have logo patch on Boston Celtics jerseys. *Yahoo! News*. Retrieved from <https://www.yahoo.com/news/general-electric-logo-patch-boston-celtics-jerseys-175001676--nba.html>
- Boland, B. (2016, May 24). Will others follow the NBA's jersey sponsorship decision? Retrieved from <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/will-others-follow-nbas-jersey-sponsorship-decision/>
- Boyd, J. (2000). Selling home: Corporate stadium names and the destruction of commemoration. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 28(4), 330-346.
- Branscombe, N. R., & Wann, D. L. (1991). The positive social and self-concept consequences of sports team identification. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 15(2), 115-127.
- Brown, M. (2016, April 15). Sponsor logos are coming to NBA Jerseys, but here's why it's a small thing. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/maurybrown/2016/04/15/sponsor-logos-are-coming-to-nba-jerseys-but-heres-why-its-a-small-thing/#565fa86c56f0>
- Bruner, G. C., & Hensel, P. J. (1992). *Marketing scales handbook: A compilation of multi-item measures*. Chicago: American Marketing Association.
- Burns, M. J. (2019, September 4). NFL practice jersey patches proliferate as brands target training camp. *Morning Consult*. Retrieved from <https://morningconsult.com/2019/09/04/nfl-practice-jersey-patches-proliferate-as-brands-target-training-camp/>
- Butcher, L. (2014, February 4). Phoenix Mercury secure new sponsorship. *SportsPro*. Retrieved from [http://www.sportspromedia.com/news/phoenix\\_mercury\\_secure\\_new\\_sponsorship](http://www.sportspromedia.com/news/phoenix_mercury_secure_new_sponsorship)
- Clavio, G. (2008). Demographics and usage profiles of users of college sport message boards. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1, 434-443.
- Fisher, R. J., & Wakefield, K. (1998). Factors leading to group identification: A field study of winners and losers. *Psychology & Marketing*, 15(1), 23-40.
- Funk, D. C., & James, J. D. (2001). The psychological continuum model: A conceptual framework for understanding an individual's psychological connection to sport. *Sport Management Review*, 4(2), 119-150.
- Gillis, R. (2010, November 1). Soccer's biggest signings. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703708404575586162309028930>

- Glass, A. (2019, April 10). WNBA, Nike unveil 2019 uniforms. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alanaglass/2019/04/10/wnba-nike-unveil-2019-uniforms/#4898b693444c>
- Glover, Z. (2017, September 12). Here are the 14 NBA teams that now have jersey sponsorship deals. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zacglover/2017/09/12/here-are-the-14-nba-teams-that-now-have-jersey-sponsorship-deals/#34a6a81d123a>
- Heinrich, G. (2014, October 14). Why jersey sponsors are coming, and why fans should embrace it. *CBS Houston*. Retrieved from <http://houston.cbslocal.com/2014/10/14/why-jersey-sponsors-are-coming-and-why-fans-should-embrace-it/>
- Herbert, J. (2016, October 10). Sacramento Kings become the second NBA team to land jersey sponsor. *CBS Sports*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbssports.com/nba/news/sacramento-kings-become-the-second-nba-team-to-land-jersey-sponsor/>
- Hill, B., & Green, B. C. (2000). Repeat attendance as a function of involvement, loyalty, and the sportscape across three football contexts. *Sport Management Review*, 3(2), 145-162.
- Hunt, K., Bristol, T., & Bashaw, R. (1999). A conceptual approach to classifying sports fans. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 13(6), 439-452.
- Jenson, R. W., Bowman, N. D., Larson, B. V., & Wang, Y. (2013). Looking at shirt sponsorships from both sides of the pond: comparing global trends versus America's Major League Soccer. *Soccer & Society*, 14(4), 515-524.
- Jessiman, E. (2019, March 24). NHL game jersey sponsorship: 'Low hanging fruit' revenue source. *The Hockey Writers*. Retrieved from <https://thehockeywriters.com/nhl-jersey-sponsorship-revenue-source/>
- Kian, E. M., Clavio, G., Vincent, J., Shaw, S. D. (2011). Homophobic and sexist yet uncontested: Examining football fan postings on internet message boards. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58(5), 680-699.
- Kwon, H. H., & Armstrong, K. L. (2002). Factors influencing impulse buying of sport team licensed merchandise. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 11(3), 151-163.
- Lefton, T., & Lombardo, J. (2019, February 25). MBA: Big payoff for a little patch. *Street & Smith's SportsBusiness Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2019/02/25/Leagues-and-Governing-Bodies/NBA-patches.aspx>
- Lombardo, J. (2009, September 7). PNY, Nets do first NBA practice jersey deal. *Street & Smith's SportsBusiness Daily*. Retrieved from <http://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2009/09/20090907/This-Weeks-News/PNY-Nets-Do-First-NBA-Practice-Jersey-Deal.aspx>
- Lowe, Z. (2019, March 15). OKC's jersey patch deal completes sponsorship for all 30 teams. *ESPN*. Retrieved from [https://www.espn.com/nba/story/\\_/id/26262269/okc-jersey-patch-deal-completes-sponsorship-all-30-teams](https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/26262269/okc-jersey-patch-deal-completes-sponsorship-all-30-teams)
- Madden, L. (2012, July 20). Pros and cons: Corporate ads on NBA jerseys may debut in 2013. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/lancemadden/2012/07/20/pros-and-cons-corporate-ads-on-nba-jerseys-may-debut-in-2012-13-season/#7cadb6336ad7>
- Madrigal, R. (1995). Cognitive and affective determinants of fan satisfaction with sporting event attendance. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 27(3), 205-227.
- Madrigal, R. (2000). The influence of social alliances with sports teams on intentions to purchase corporate sponsors' products. *Journal of Advertising*, 29(4), 13-24.
- Mahony, D. F., & Moorman, A. M. (2000). The relationship between the attitudes of professional sport fans and their intentions to watch televised games. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 9(3), 131-139.



- Marcin, T. (2016, May 16). Don't like NBA jersey sponsorships? Five reasons they're here to stay. *International Business Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.ibtimes.com/dont-nba-jersey-sponsorships-five-reasons-theyre-here-stay-2369708>
- Martinez, J. J., Dixon, A. W., & Montgomery, R. (2018). Examining consumer response to sport sponsorship: A case study among fans of a Group of 5 Division I programs. *Global Sport Business Journal*, 6(1), 1-12. Retrieved from <http://www.gsbassn.com/Journal/Vol6-1/GSBJ-Vol6-Iss1-Martinez-pp1-12.pdf>
- Milne, G. R. & McDonald, M. A. (1999). *Sport marketing*. Boston: Jones and Bartlett.
- Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.
- Parker, H. M., & Fink, J. S. (2010). Negative sponsor behavior, team response and how this impacts fan attitudes. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 11(3), 17-28.
- Philadelphia 76ers and StubHub announce first jersey sponsorship in major American professional sports. (2016, May 16). *NBA Media Ventures*. Retrieved from <http://www.nba.com/sixers/philadelphia-76ers-and-stubhub-announce-first-jersey-sponsorship-major-american-professional-sports/>
- Rovell, D. (2016, May 16). 76ers sell first NBA jersey ad. *ESPN*. Retrieved from [http://www.espn.com/nba/story/\\_/id/15559477/philadelphia-76ers-sell-first-nba-jersey-advertisement-stubhub](http://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/15559477/philadelphia-76ers-sell-first-nba-jersey-advertisement-stubhub)
- Sutton, W. A., McDonald, M. A., Milne, G. R., & Cimperman, J. (1997). Creating and fostering fan identification in professional sport. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 6(1), 15-22.
- Wakefield, K. L., & Sloan, H. J. (1995). The effects of team loyalty and selected stadium factors on spectator attendance. *Journal of Sport Management*, 9, 153-172.
- Wagner, U., Hansen, K., Kristensen, M., & Josty, M. (2019). Improving service-center employees' performance by means of a sport sponsorship. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 20(1), 43-60.
- Walsh, M., Winterich, K., & Mittal, V. (2011). How re-designing angular logos to be rounded shapes brand attitudes: Consumer brand commitment and self-construal. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 28(6), 438-447.
- Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N. R. (1993). Sports fans: Measuring degree of identification with the team. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 24, 1-17.
- Wann, D. L., Melnick, M. J., Russell, G. W., & Pease, D. G. (2001). *Sport fans: The psychology and social impact of spectators*. New York: Routledge.
- Yi, Y. (1990). Cognitive and affective priming effects of the context for print advertisements, *Journal of Advertising*, 19(2), 40-48.