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## Article

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## Does Sponsoring Charity Sport Events Improve Customer Behavioral Intention?

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The purpose of the study was to investigate and analyze the relationships among four research variables: participation motivation, event attachment, sponsor's brand image and participants' behavioral intention. This study used on-site convenience sampling. Survey questionnaires were administered to 297 people who had personally participated in the Fubon Taipei International Marathon. The study then used structural equation modeling to run path analysis. The results showed that: (1) participation motivation had an effect on event attachment and sponsor's brand image, (2) event attachment had an effect on participants' behavioral intention, and (3) sponsor's brand image had an effect on participants' behavioral intention. The study found that participation motivation influenced event attachment directly and influenced behavioral intention indirectly. The total effect of the attachment-behavioral intention path was greater than the total effect of the brand image-behavioral intention path. It is suggested that only long-term sponsorship of charity sport events would create the event attachment necessary to influence customers' behavioral intention.

*Keywords:* Participation motivation, Event attachment, Sponsor's brand image, Behavioral intention, Charity sport events

*JEL:* L83, O16

Since the turn of the 21st century, many charity sports events have been held in Taiwan, attracting public attention and helping disadvantaged social groups. Companies believe that by sponsoring these events, they will attract more customers – in other words, they will generate favorable behavioral intention. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by examining the way in which charity sport event participation generates behavioral intention. In

particular the study investigates the synthesis between participation motivation, event attachment, sponsor's brand image and behavioral intention. According to Dacin and Brown (1997), consumers base their behavioral intention to select a product on the brand image and social responsibility of the sponsor. They then develop an image of the sponsor, which has a significant effect on their behavioral intention to purchase a product. This study aims to build on the study of Dacin and Brown's by introducing two important variables:

event attachment and participation motivation. This study investigates the way in which participation motivation, event attachment and sponsor's brand image interact to generate behavioral intention. The study is significant because, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first study comparing the relative importance of event attachment and sponsor's brand image in generating behavioral intention. By elucidating the relationship between sponsor's brand image and event attachment, the study serves as evidence in ascertaining the number of years required for a term of sponsorship to be successful.

This study was motivated by several findings which are widely reported in the literature: 1) that favorable behavioral intention is associated with purchasing in the future (Koo, Byron and Baker, 2014), 2) that sponsoring events establishes a company's brand image (Abratt, Clayton and Pitt, 1987) and 3) that participants develop attachment to charity sports events (Filo, Funk and O'Brien, 2010). The importance of favorable behavioral intention to future purchasing is widely accepted, but there is a gap in the literature regarding the way in which charity sports events generate behavioral intention.

The following article is divided into the following sections: first, the literature review, which explains the four variables (participation motivation, event

attachment, sponsor's brand image, and behavioral intention) and discusses the relationships between the variables in light of literature; second, theoretical framework/hypotheses, describing the theoretical framework and introducing the hypotheses in light of the theoretical framework; third, come the methodology and results; and the paper concludes with a discussion of the results in the light of theoretical framework, as well as implications and limitations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Charity Sport Event Participation Motivation

A charity sport event is defined as a special event where participants raise funds for a charitable organization by participating in some kind of sporting activity (Filo, Funk and O'Brien, 2010). These events offer participants a meaningful experience in which they help others. Charity is a complicated decision built on various motivations, satisfying the behavioral intention demands of participants and spurring their participation in the events. Ebenkamp and Stark (1999) argue that consumers increasingly desire to find meaning and value in the ethical, social and spiritual aspects of life and that they are increasingly likely to take a company's involvement with a cause into account when buying a product.

Bartol and Martin (1998) define motivation as a force that energises and directes behavior, creating a tendency to persist. Motivation can reflect people's physiological demands and influence their behaviors and actions (Dann, 1981). According to the recreational motivation theory proposed by Iso-Ahola (1982), motivation comprises of two dimensions: seeking and escaping. Beard and Ragheb (1983) make a four-fold distinction between intellectual, social, stimulation-escaping-, and competence- motivation. Gunter (2008) finds that participants in a sporting activity are motivated by its perceived physical benefits. Dawson (1988) and Kottasz (2004) argue that reciprocity is an important incentive. Filo, Funk and O'Brian (2008) propose that participants in charity sports events are motivated both by recreation-based motives of intellectual, social, competency and escape-motivation, and by charity-based motives of reciprocity, self-esteem, need to help others and desire to improve the charity. Zhao and Zhu (2014), who write from the perspective of self-determination theory, believe that motivation helps individuals to find meaning and significance in their work, which engenders a sense of community that increases participants' sense of belonging and personal

obligation and may lead to strong loyalty and continuous participation.

### **Event Attachment**

In their discussion of place attachment, Eder and Arnberger (2012) note that attachment has emotional, symbolic and functional aspects. They add that an individual may come to see a place as an essential part of his or her self. Importantly, they note that attachment is usually related to a recreational activity that an individual might pursue. Further studies have shown that secure attachment is positively correlated with measures of well-being, and that attachment creates a sense that the world is a safe place (Bodner, Bergman and Cohen-Fridel, 2014). According to the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) by Funk and James (2006), the process of activity attachment is divided into four stages of ascending intensity– awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance. If an activity satisfies participants' attachment needs and motivations in a manner that is consistent with their core values and self concepts, then the stage of attachment is attained.

Bricker and Kerstetter (2000) emphasize the concept of lifestyle attachment, pointing out that people's demands must be satisfied through special

activities at special places. Their research highlights the value of environment for people, and suggest that event attachment helps people achieve their behavioral and actional objectives. Schultz, Kleine and Keman (1989) regard event attachment as a common experience in a person's whole life cycle. Event attachment is a person's positive emotional connection with an event, which is developed from his or her behavior in the event. Motivation can interact with the self-concept and values of participants and build emotional, symbolic and functional meaning into event attachment (Funk and James, 2006). The research of Ramkissoon and Mavondo (2015) suggests that event attachment is a pro-environmental behavioral intention.

### **Sponsor's Brand Image**

Nickell, Cornwell and Johnston (2011) cite two main themes of the scholarly insights attempt to define the concept of sponsorship. First, the exchange between sponsor and sponsored property, where both parties earn some benefit; and, second, the association between the sponsor and the sponsored property. Sponsorship allows firms to differentiate themselves from their competitors, build brand awareness and influence buyer attitudes.

Brand image is the consumer groups' faith in, attitude towards and image of an enterprise (Barich

and Kotler, 1991). Image influences individual consumers' perception and understanding about products and services, so it should be seen as an important factor (Dichter, 1985). Keller (1993) notes that although brand image has long been considered an important concept in marketing, scholars disagree to its definition. He defines brand image as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory". In a more recent review on definitions of brand image, Lee, James and Kim (2014) defined the term as "the sum of a customer's perceptions about a brand generated by the interaction of the cognitive, affective, and evaluative processes in a customer's mind".

Much has been written on the benefits of sponsoring sports events. But Yoon, Zeynep and Schwarz (2006) caution that perceived sincerity is important in determining whether sponsoring charity events is an effective marketing strategy. Pappu and Cornwell (2014) also argue that a perceived lack of sponsor and sponsee similarity may have a negative effect on brand image. Nonetheless, sport sponsors believe that their sponsorship can improve their brand image and product publicity (Thomasine, Frye and Stellar, 2004). Many scholars have argued that if an event is meaningful for the participants, the

event will help sponsoring institutions shape their brand images (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999, Filo *et al.*, 2010). Abratt, Clayton and Pitt (1987) advocate that sponsors establish brand image through community participation and through establishing or altering their business reputation. Winters (1986) argues that three factors influence sponsor's brand image: sponsorship, social behavior, and donation. Syed Alwi and Kitchen (2014) believe that positive brand image can be spread through positive word-of-mouth. Scheinbaum and Lacey (2015) confirm the strong link between event social responsibility and attendees' support for sponsors. These studies offer evidence for corporate sponsors that sponsorship of community-based events demonstrates good corporate citizenship and raises the patronage intent of attendees.

### **Behavioral Intention**

Behavioral intention measures the degree to which a person wants to participate in an event (Bearden and Woodside, 1978). Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) believe that behavioral intention consists of two concepts – attitude and subjective norm. Behavioral intention means that consumers are satisfied or dissatisfied with the purchase of products after comparing their expectation with reality. Scholars emphasized the effects of positive and negative

emotion on behavioral intention (Koenig-Lewis and Palmer, 2014). Others have argued that favorable behavioral intention is associated with purchasing in the future, spreading positive word-of-mouth, paying a premium price, spending more money with the company, and remaining loyal (Koo, Byron and Baker, 2014).

People develop a positive or a negative attitude towards a product, service or activity according to their experience. This attitude influences their intention to participate or purchase in the future (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Jaiswal and Niraj (2011) argue that attitudinal loyalty mediates the effect of satisfaction on behavioral intention.

Customers' participation and loyalty reflect their intention to recommend to others and revisit (Chen and Chen, 2010). According to Baker and Crompton (2000), tourist behavioral intention refers to the behavior of a tourist after participation in an activity and consists of three dimensions: the intention to revisit, to recommend, and to offer feedback. Participant loyalty is the indicator that is most frequently used to evaluate behavior (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard, 2000). Wu, Li and Sung (2016) believe that a good perceived environment has positive effects on senior citizen's physical activity behavior intention.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Meaningful activities satisfy participants' attachment demand and motivation. Attachment demand and motivation will, if consistent with participants' core values, interact emotionally with participants' self-concept, inducing in participants the stage of attachment (Filo *et al.*, 2010). In addition, Funk and James (2006) have argued that if an activity motivates a participant, then he or she is more likely to develop an attachment to the activity. This serves as the foundation for the first hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub>: Participation motivation has positive effects on event attachment.

Participation motivation engendered by a charity sport event has positive effects on the participant's perception of the sponsor's brand image (Filo *et al.*, 2010). This serves as the foundation for the second hypothesis:

H<sub>2</sub>: Participation motivation has positive effects on sponsor's brand image.

Jaiswal and Niraj (2011) argued that loyalty is important in generating behavioral intention. Moreover, participants who develop event attachment display loyalty. These loyal participants are, therefore, likely to develop behavioral intention. Additionally, Cronin and Taylor (1992) argued that

people develop a positive or negative attitude towards a product, service or activity according to their experience. This attitude influences their intention to participate or purchase in the future. This suggests that event attachment has positive effects on future participation intent (Filo *et al.*, 2010) and serves as the foundation for the third hypothesis:

H<sub>3</sub>: Event attachment has positive effects on behavioral intention.

According to Pope and Voges (2000), sport sponsorship is directly correlated with brand image and the intention to purchase a sponsor's products; a sponsor's good brand image can attract more participants and customers. This serves as the foundation for the fourth hypothesis:

H<sub>4</sub>: Sponsor's brand image has positive effects on behavioral intention.

## METHODOLOGY

This study analyzed the four variables and the measurement of each variable as follows. The scale items in the questionnaire were adapted from various important studies as explained below.

### -Charity Sport Event Participation Motivation

Beard and Ragheb (1983) defined the participation motivation engendered by a charity sport event as

motivation to participate in an activity, which equipped the participant with some kind of meaningful experience of a sport event that supported a charitable cause. The dimensions of participation motivation in this study included social respect, self-health management, assisting others, and expectations for the charitable institution. Based on Beard and Ragheb (1983), this study used 12 items to measure charity sport event participation motivation.

#### **-Event Attachment**

In their study, Funk and James (2006) defined event attachment as the dependence on and sense of belonging to a special activity, which was derived from the combination of emotion, value, meaning, attitude, thought and intention. The dimensions of event attachment in this study included “functional”, “emotional” and “symbolic”. Based on Funk and James (2006), this study used 8 items to measure event attachment.

#### **-Sponsor's Brand Image**

Filo *et al.* (2010) defined a charity sport event sponsor's brand image as the participants' or recommenders' favorable remarks on sponsors, because of the sponsors' patronage of the activities. Such factors as the activity's charitable aspects, the activity's social role, and the activity's overall

significance for participants may arouse a positive image of the sponsor that improves the sponsor's brand image. The dimensions of sponsor's brand image in this study included sponsorship, social behavior, and donation. Based on Filo *et al.* (2010), this study used 8 items to measure sponsor's brand image.

#### **-Behavioral Intention**

Filo *et al.* (2010) defined behavioral intention to participate in a charity sport event as the participants' understanding of the content, process, quality and value of an activity and the behavioral reaction and real action they developed according to this understanding. The dimensions of behavioral intention in this study included future activity participation intention and sponsor's product purchase intention. Based on Filo *et al.* (2010), this study used 5 items to measure sponsor's brand image.

#### **Pre-test Questionnaire Reliability Analysis**

To select the pretest sample, the study used convenience sample of citizens who had participated in the Fubon Taipei International Marathon. In this process, 50 copies of the pretest questionnaire were distributed. To ensure high-level reliability, the items measuring the dimensions of study variables in the questionnaire were evaluated according to their



Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for the variables were as follows. Sport event participation motivation, .91; activity attachment, .90; sponsor's brand image, .89; behavioral intention, .88. All the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of the variables were over .80, indicating that the questionnaire was highly reliable.

## RESULTS

### -Description of The Sample Structure

In 2012 this study collected 297 valid questionnaires at the Fubon Taipei International Marathon. 170 (57.2%) were female and 127 (42.8%) were male. All the samples had that very same day participated in the marathon, so we utilized convenience sampling. As far as the subjects' age was concerned, 111 subjects (37.4%) were aged from 41 to 50, 81 (27.3%) were aged from 31 to 40, 52 (17.5%) were aged from 21 to 30, 31 (10.4%) were aged 51 or above, and 22 (7.4%) were aged 20 or below.

### -Reliability and Validity Analysis

This study used AMOS 12.0 statistical software to carry out confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation model analysis for the dimensions of the variables. The measurement model the study used had undergone testing for model fitness, reliability,

and validity. In order to verify the relationship between each dimension and item, the study focused on the dimensions of participation motivation, activity attachment, sponsor's brand image, and behavioral intention to engage in confirmatory factor analysis. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), a composite reliability value (CR) over .60, and an average variance extracted (AVE) over .50 respectively demonstrate that the research variable scale has good convergent validity and reliability. Hatcher (1994) proposed that the confidence values formed by covariance and standard error do not include 1, which indicates good discriminant validity between the dimensions.

Convergent validity and reliability of participation motivation, activity attachment, sponsor's brand image, and behavioral intention shown in Tables 1-4. The study found that all of the completely standardized factor loadings in the scales were greater than .50. Each item also reached the level of significance, with the CRs between .71 and .87 and the AVEs between .55 and .76, which indicated that the three variables had good convergent validity and reliability.

In addition, the potential construct discriminant validity analysis showed that the bracket formed by the covariance of the participation motivation

variable's two dimensions and plus or minus two multiples of standard error was 0.239~0.032, 0.352~0.041, 0.225~0.029, 0.305~0.037, 0.204~0.028 and 0.297~0.035, that for event attachment, it was 0.271~0.032, 0.244~0.031, 0.291~0.033, that for sponsor's brand image, it was 0.279~0.031, 0.244~0.030, 0.207~0.027, and that

for behavioral intention, it was 0.290~0.035, which conformed to the standard of Hatcher (1994). According to the analytical results, the dimensions of this study were obtained by weighting the factor loading of each item (the significance level of  $\alpha$  was .05).

Variable	Dimension	Composite reliability	Extracted variance
Participation Motivation	Social respect	.805	.580
	Self-health management	.817	.598
	Assisting others	.868	.688
	Expectation for charity institution	.864	.680

Fitness: RMR =.021; GFI=.942; AGFI=.906; NFI=.952; CFI=.972; RMSEA=.064

*Table 1: Convergent validity and reliability analysis of participation motivation scale*

Variable	Dimension	Composite reliability	Extracted variance
Event Attachment	Functional	.838	.721
	Emotional	.820	.603
	Symbolic	.837	.631

Fitness: RMR =.012; GFI=.967; AGFI=.931; NFI=.972; CFI=.972; RMSEA=.063

*Table 2: Convergent validity and reliability analysis of event attachment scale*

Variable	Dimension	Composite reliability	Extracted variance
Sponsor's Brand Image	Sponsorship	.874	.701
	Social behavior	.806	.676
	Donation	.711	.556

Fitness: RMR =.012; GFI=.973; AGFI=.931; NFI=.952; CFI=.977; RMSEA=.075

*Table 3: Convergent validity and reliability analysis of sponsor's brand image scale*

Variable	Dimension	Composite reliability	Extracted variance
Behavioral Intention	Future activity participation intention	.879	.709
	Sponsor's product purchase intention	.868	.766

Fitness: RMR =.006; GFI=.992; AGFI=.971; NFI=.993; CFI=.998; RMSEA=.041

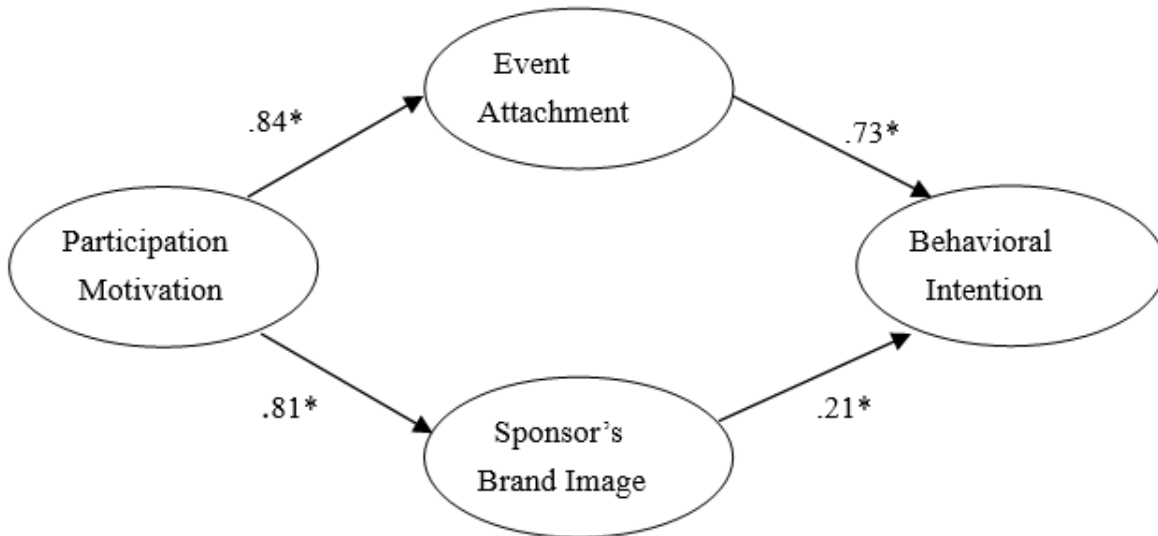
*Table 4: Convergent validity and reliability analysis of behavioral intention scale*

**-AMOS Empirical Analytical Results**

Figure 1 shows the analytical data of the structural model for the effects of event attachment and sponsor's brand image on behavioral intention of participants.

The regression coefficient of the effects of participation motivation on sponsor's brand image was .81,  $p < .05$ , which reached a significant level; hence, H<sub>2</sub> was supported.

H<sub>3</sub>: Event attachment has positive effects on



*Figure 1: Structural model results*

\*  $p < .05$ , and has reached significant level

*Fitness: GFI = .93; AGFI = .90; NFI = .95; CFI = .97; TLI = .96; RFI = .94; IFI = .97; RMR = .02; RMSEA = .07*

**-Test of Hypotheses**

H<sub>1</sub>: Participation motivation has positive effects on event attachment.

The regression coefficient of the effects of participation motivation on event attachment was .84,  $p < .05$ , which reached a significant level; hence, H<sub>1</sub> was supported.

H<sub>2</sub>: Charity activity participation motivation has positive effects on sponsor's brand image.

behavioral intention.

The regression coefficient of the effects of event attachment on behavioral intention was .73,  $p < .05$ , which reached a significant level; hence, H<sub>3</sub> was supported.

H<sub>4</sub>: Sponsor' brand image has positive effects on behavioral intention.

The regression coefficient of the effects of sponsor's brand image on behavioral intention was

.21,  $p < .05$ , which reached a significant level; hence,  $H_4$  was supported.

## DISCUSSION

1. Demographic variable-based evaluation of the variables

There was no significant difference in the effects of event attachment and sponsor's brand image on behavioral intention of participants between different genders and among different age groups.

2. Participation motivation in charity sport events

According to the regression coefficients of the dimensions of participation motivation, "demand for helping others" has the best reflection effect ( $\beta = .91$ ), followed by "social respect" ( $\beta = .81$ ), "desire to support charity institutions" ( $\beta = .80$ ), "self-health management" ( $\beta = .69$ ). This shows that participating in charity sport events is meaningful for the participants, whose greatest motivation to participate is the event's perceived physical benefits. Participation motivation has a positive effect on event attachment and this accords with the studies by Filo *et al.* (2010) and by Funk and James (2006). In addition, participation motivation has a positive effect on sponsor's brand image, in accord with the research of Cronin and Taylor (1992).

3. Event attachment in charity sport events

According to the regression coefficients of the dimensions of event attachment, "emotional" has the best reflection effect ( $\beta = .89$ ), followed by "symbolic" ( $\beta = .86$ ) and "functional" ( $\beta = .72$ ). This shows that participants develop special emotional dependence and attachment when participating in charity sport events. Event attachment has a positive effect on behavioral intention, as was suggested by Filo *et al.*, (2010).

4. Sponsor's brand image

According to the regression coefficients of the dimensions of sponsor's brand image, "donation" has the best reflection effect ( $\beta = .89$ ), followed by "social behavior" ( $\beta = .82$ ) and "sponsorship" ( $\beta = .81$ ). This shows that maintaining brand image is vital for the sponsors of charity sport events and that donation and patronage help sponsors create a good brand image. Sponsor's brand image has a positive effect on participants' behavioral intention, as was proposed by Pope and Voges (2000).

5. Behavioral intention

According to the regression coefficients of the dimensions of behavioral intention, "future activity participation intention" has the best reflection effect ( $\beta = .89$ ), followed by "intention to purchase sponsor's products" ( $\beta = .77$ ). This shows that

charity sport event attachment arouses people's intention to re-participate in the events and repurchase sponsor's products. Meanwhile, it demonstrates the proposal by Cronin and Taylor (1992) that people develop a positive or negative attitude towards a product, service or the activity based on their experience of it. This attitude influences their intention to participate or purchase in the future.

### CONCLUSION

Participation motivation in charity sport events has a positive effect on event attachment and sponsor's brand image. Participants' event attachment has a positive effect on participants' behavioral intention, and sponsor's brand image has a positive effect on participants' behavioral intention. The unique contribution of this study is that participation motivation influences event attachment directly and behavioral intention indirectly. The total effect of the attachment-behavioral intention path is greater than the total effect of the brand image-behavioral intention path. So, the key to influencing consumers' behavioral intention lies in creating event attachment by providing long-term sponsorship of charity sport events. Short-term sponsorship is unlikely to create the event attachment necessary to influence consumers' behavioral intention.

### IMPLICATIONS

According to the above discussion, charity sport events provide the participants with an attachment to the events and meaningful experience. Moreover, corporate enterprises sponsor the events, helping disadvantaged social groups and people in need. In other words, charity sport events are an opportunity to help others. To provide some reference for the planning of charity sport event participation, this study makes the following proposals:

(1) Charity sport events are worthy of being promoted by the government. According to this study, there is no significant difference in the effects of gender and age on the activity attachment, sponsor's brand image and behavioral intention of charity sport activity participants. Obviously, male or female, old and young, can participate in charity sport events, making them suitable for families. Participants in charity sport events can help others and improve physical health as well as passion for sports. Moreover, the events offer companies an excellent opportunity to do things for the public interest and establish brand image, thus creating fruitful win-win results.

(2) Managerial units should help sponsors to plan charity sport events and create a culture of participating in the events, providing diverse sporting

activities, making the events a part of people's daily life, and motivating people to enjoy high-quality sport events and recreational lifestyles. This will widen the range of charity sport events and shape a special culture for the events.

(3) Sponsors should make strategic action plans to choose the most effective sponsorship opportunities, improve brand image, and increase the effects of brand image on participants' behavioral intention. This is vital to engender the intention to purchase the sponsor's products in participants.

#### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study used convenience sampling to distribute the copies of the questionnaire among the subjects. Nevertheless, the demographic variables were not evenly distributed. Moreover, the study took only the citizens who had participated in the Fubon Taipei International Marathon as the subjects of the investigation, which may have limited the generalization of the results of the study.

We suggest the following questions as worthy of future research. 1. Whether a person's excessive motivation for or involvement in charity sport events would limit his or her participation in other recreational activities. 2. Charity sport events have become increasingly popular in recent years, so

further studies should be conducted on the different participants and sponsors of similar charity sport events.

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