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Sung Wook Son

Farmingdale State College, seanson83@gmail.com

Antonio Williams

Indiana University - Bloomington, aw22@indiana.edu

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Matching Colors in Jersey Sponsorship: The Effect of Team-colored Sponsor Logo on Jersey Aesthetics and Purchase Intention

Sung Wook Son

Farmingdale State College

Antonio Williams

Indiana University – Bloomington

Please send correspondence to Sung Wook Son, seanson83@gmail.com.

Abstract

In jersey sponsorship, some sponsors today have decided to modify their logo colors to match the team colors. The present research examined the role of team-colored sponsor logo in jersey sponsorship, paying particular attention to its impact on perceived aesthetics of the jersey and fans' willingness to purchase. Three experiments using both fictitious and actual sponsors across two different sports showed that the team-colored sponsor logo on a jersey was a positive predictor for both perceived aesthetics and purchase intention at all levels of team identification. The findings also revealed the indirect effect of the team-colored sponsor logo on purchase intention via perceived aesthetics. The findings provide insights for both sponsors and teams to maximize jersey sponsorship outcomes for short- and long-term benefits.

Keywords: aesthetics, consumer behavior, jerseys, logo, marketing, uniforms

In jersey sponsorship, because simply displaying a sponsor logo on a jersey is not enough to be strongly associated with the sponsored team (Mazodier & Quester, 2014), some sponsors today adopt a unique approach by modifying the logo colors to match the team colors. For instance, the Bibigo logo on the Los Angeles Lakers jersey is recolored to match the team's iconic yellow-purple color scheme. Team colors are one of the most recognizable identities affecting emotions, often being displayed wherever fans reside (Schleifer & Tamir, 2023). A jersey is also an extremely unique advertising space, usually holding a special position in the minds of the fans and being worn or collected universally (Benzecry, 2008). Thus, this might be an effective strategy to advertise the company while protecting the team's symbol.

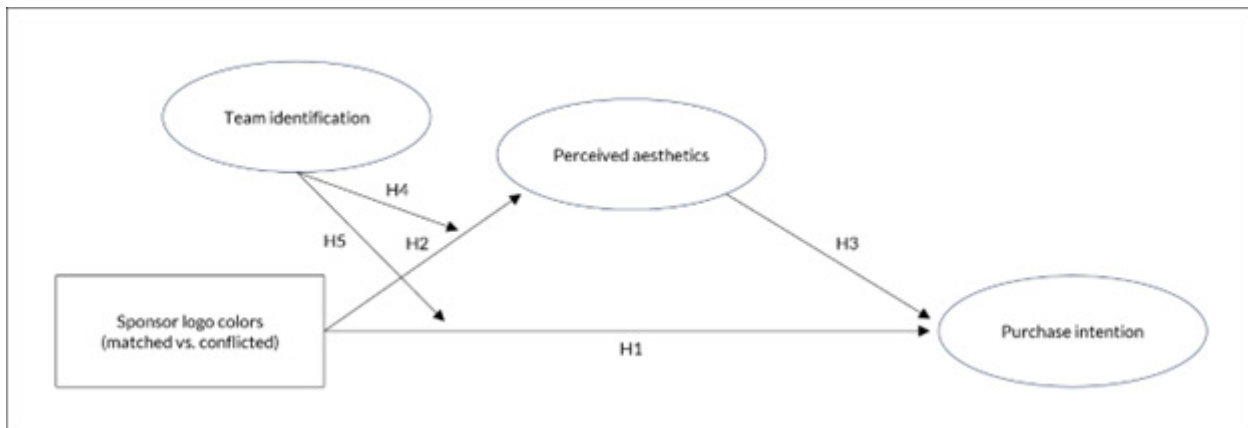
How fans evaluate the commercialized jersey and its impact on sales could be a significant issue for both jersey sponsors and teams. Fans annually spend billions of dollars on sport merchandise (CBS News, 2016), and jerseys tend to be one of the most popular items purchased by sport consumers (Layden, 2016). Importantly, many expect every jersey available for fans will feature corporate logos in the future, similar to soccer jerseys in the marketplace (Lefton & Lombardo, 2019). Furthermore, as the core benefit of jersey sponsorship is transforming anyone wearing the jersey into moving advertising billboards (Smith, 2016), the more jerseys are sold, the more advertising opportunities are created. This could be an urgent topic also for college athletics given college football is planning to adopt jersey sponsorship (Parks, 2024).

Recently, Son and Williams (2023) investigated the effect of a team-colored sponsor logo on attitude toward the jersey sponsor. The study revealed that a team-colored sponsor logo signaled the sponsor's support for the team, generating favorable consumer attitudes toward the sponsor. Following up this study, we explored the role of a team-colored sponsor logo, focusing on the aesthetics of the jersey. More specifically, the present research aimed to investigate the effect of a team-colored sponsor logo on perceived jersey aesthetics and fans' willingness to buy the jersey.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is illustrated in the model found in Figure 1. Sponsor logo colors are shown to influence consumer perceptions of aesthetics and purchase intentions. Perceived aesthetics will also influence purchase intentions. Team identification is positioned to moderate the relationship between sponsor logo colors and perceived aesthetics as well as the relationship between sponsor logo colors and purchase intentions.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Hypothesis Development

When it comes to sponsorships, congruity between a sponsor and a sponsee is an essential factor for successful outcomes (e.g., Close & Lacey, 2013). Although it commonly occurs naturally, congruity can also be created by matching visual associations such as brand colors, producing similar benefits to natural congruity (Zdravkovic et al., 2010). Once achieved, congruity generates positive consumer attitude and stronger intention to consume sponsor products (Papadimitriou et al., 2016). For instance, Henderson et al. (2019) found that matching sponsor-team colors for in-stadium billboards, package design, and online advertising predicted positive intention to buy the sponsor products. Similarly, created visual congruity within product design also predicts positive evaluation and higher willingness to buy the product (Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2011). Son and Williams' (2023) recent jersey sponsorship study revealed that a team-colored sponsor logo generated positive attitudes toward the sponsor; therefore a team-colored logo on the jersey may produce more favorable intention to buy the sponsorship product (i.e., the jersey) due to the achieved visual congruity. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: A team-colored sponsor logo has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Visual congruity may also increase the aesthetics value of the jersey. The color harmony theory (Burchett, 2002) explains people evaluate colors based on their symbolic, psychological, and subjective preferences. The ecological valence theory (Palmer & Schloss, 2010) also indicates people prefer the colors associated with salient objects evoking emotions, and this logic is not limited to natural objects but includes learned associations. For example, the UC Berkeley students would evaluate a product in the university colors more aesthetically pleasing due to the learned association (Palmer et al., 2013). Because a team's colors act as a symbolic representation of the team (Derbaix & Decrop, 2011), fans may evaluate the team colors as more harmonized colors. Hence, fans should perceive the jersey with a team-colored sponsor logo more positively and aesthetically pleasing because of their attachment to the team colors and the perceived color harmony. With that in mind, the next hypothesis is proposed:

H2: A team-colored sponsor logo has a positive effect on perceived aesthetics.

Numerous studies have shown visual attractiveness enhances the perceived value of products, leading to higher intention to buy (e.g., Kristensen et al., 2012). Importantly, this logic also works for sport merchandise consumption. Numerous sport scholars have identified perceived aesthetics as one of the significant factors explaining merchandise consumption behavior (e.g., Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2018; Lee et al., 2013; Papadimitriou & Apostolopoulou, 2018). Thus, as Le Hoang (2020) argued that the colors in product design increased the emotional value of the product and strongly influence the decisions to buy, a team-colored sponsor logo on a jersey would enhance the jersey's aesthetic, emotional value through visually congruent and harmonized colors, consequently increasing purchase intention, compared to an incongruently colored sponsor logo. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H3: A team-colored sponsor logo has an indirect, positive effect on purchase intention via perceived aesthetics.

Last, numerous studies have used team identification, an individual's level of cognitive connection with a sport team (Wann, 2006), as an important concept for consumption behavior. More specifically, many signified a moderating effect of team identification in relation to merchandise consumption behavior (e.g., Cheng et al., 2014). In the case of jersey sponsorship, fans are normally against the overcommercialized jersey (Jensen et al., 2012). Suh et al. (2020) recently found a sponsor logo on a jersey significantly decreased the purchase intention for both avid and casual fans. In this study, we expected a team-colored sponsor logo would mitigate this effect. It is common that fans exhibit the team colors as a means of their support (Derbaix et al., 2002). Also, Tamir (2020) claimed team colors were an essential component of sport fanship, arousing various emotional responses. In all, because of fans' strong levels of emotional attachment to team colors (Funk & James, 2001), highly identified fans should perceive the jersey with a team-colored sponsor logo as more aesthetically attractive, formulating stronger intention to buy the jersey. Thus, the following hypotheses are put forth:

H4: Team identification positively moderates the effect of a team-colored sponsor logo on perceived aesthetics.

H5: Team identification positively moderates the effect of a team-colored sponsor logo on purchase intention.

Study 1

For testing the hypotheses, the LA Lakers jersey and a fictitious sponsor logo were utilized in Study 1. The fictitious sponsor logo was created either congruent with or incongruent with the Lakers' colors. A pilot study using the brand credibility scale (e.g., "I think this company is competent."; $\alpha = .91$; Napoli et al., 2014) and the realism scale (e.g., "I have no difficulty to imagine seeing this company in the industry."; $\alpha = .88$; Liu & Mattila, 2017) assured the participants perceived the fictitious sponsor as an actual brand in the marketplace ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 0.93$; $M = 5.99$, $SD = 0.75$). A manipulation check using the color compatibility scale ("The sponsor logo colors on the jersey overlap the brand colors of the team."; $\alpha = .92$; Zdravkovic et al., 2010) showed there was a significant difference between the colors of the two stimuli ($M_{\text{matching colors}} = 5.72$ vs. $M_{\text{conflicting colors}} = 3.16$), $t(80) = 10.86$, $p < .001$).

Procedure

For the main experiment, 400 participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk).

After the screening questions, 386 Lakers fans without color blindness were randomly assigned to one of the two groups. Each participant first completed the questionnaire on team identification (e.g., “I consider myself to be a real fan of the team.”; $\alpha = .88$; Parker & Fink, 2010). The respondents’ attitudes toward jersey sponsorship (Dick, 2019) were also measured to control its effect. They were then exposed to either the jersey with the Lakers-colored sponsor logo or the jersey with the incongruently colored logo in a fictitious news article. After the exposure, the perceived aesthetics of the jersey—operationalized as the aesthetic appeal and attractiveness of the jersey (e.g., “The jersey looks appealing.”; $\alpha = .91$; Homburg et al., 2015)—and purchase intention (e.g., “There is a strong likelihood that I would purchase the jersey.”; $\alpha = .87$; Kwak & Pradhan, 2019) were measured.

Results

A majority of the participants were White (62.7%) males (70%) aged 25 to 44 (73.4%). Table 1 provides the correlations, means, and SDs for Study 1.

Table 1

Correlations, Means, and SDs for Study 1

	1	2	3	4
1. Matching colors ^a	1			
2. Perceived aesthetics	.72**	1		
3. Purchase intention	.71**	.76**	1	
4. Team identification	.16**	.23**	.29**	1
<i>M (SD)</i>		4.92 (1.48)	4.57(1.73)	5.64(1.06)

Note.^a Coded as 0 = conflicting colors and 1 = matching colors; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

The results from the moderated mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2018) showed the team-colored sponsor logo on the jersey was a positive predictor for both perceived jersey aesthetics and purchase intention, supporting H1 and H2. Perceived aesthetics was also a significant predictor for positive intention to buy the jersey. This revealed the indirect effect of team-colored sponsor logo on purchase intention via perceived aesthetics, supporting H3. Because the interaction effect was also significant for predicting both perceived aesthetics and purchase intention, the moderating effect of team identification was found (H5 and H6). The index of moderated mediation was significant, and both direct effect of the created color congruity on purchase intention and indirect effect through perceived aesthetics were significant at all levels of team identification (see Table 2).

Table 2*Results of Moderated Mediation Analyses for Study 1*

	Perceived aesthetics ($R^2 = .58$)				Purchase intention ($R^2 = .68$)			
	B	Bias-corrected 95% CI			B	Bias-corrected 95% CI		
		SE	Lower	Upper		SE	Lower	Upper
Matching colors (vs. conflicting colors)	1.87***	.11	1.65	2.09	1.14***	.15	.84	1.43
Team identification	0.15**	.05	.05	.25	0.16**	.05	.06	.26
Interaction (matching colors x team identification)	0.51***	.09	.33	.70	0.30**	.09	.11	.49
Perceived aesthetics	-	-	-	-	0.47***	.05	.37	.58

Conditional indirect effects of color congruity on purchase intention at different levels of team identification

	Effect	Boot SE	LLCI	ULCI
Low	0.67	.11	.46	0.89
Moderate	0.91	.14	.65	1.20
High	1.16	.18	.83	1.54

Index of moderated mediation			
Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
.24	.06	.15	.37

Note. SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The first study showed that the Lakers fans possessed stronger intention to buy the team jersey with the team-colored sponsor patch, compared to the jersey bearing the sponsor logo with the conflicting colors. More importantly, the participants perceived the jersey with the team-colored sponsor logo more aesthetically attractive. Furthermore, as expected, these effects were stronger for the avid fans due to their stronger attachment to the team colors.

Study 2

To ensure the earlier results were not derived from a single league, one specific team, a particular fanbase, or the participants' subjective preference for the sponsor logo, Study 2 was conducted with a soccer jersey (i.e., the LA Galaxy jersey) and a new fictitious sponsor logo. A pilot study using the same measurements confirmed that the respondents perceived the fictitious sponsor as an authentic company ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.01$) and the fictitious sponsor information as real ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 0.70$). The manipulation

check also revealed there was a significant distinction between the two stimuli in terms of colors ($M_{\text{matching colors}} = 5.82$ vs. $M_{\text{conflicting colors}} = 3.77$, $t(80) = 8.17$, $p < .001$).

Procedure

For Study 2, 400 LA Galaxy fans were recruited using MTurk. After the data screening, a total of 370 Galaxy fans participated. The experimental procedure, measurements, and data analysis were replicated from Study 1.

Results

The majority of participants consisted of males (70%) ages 25 to 44 (69%). Most of the participants were White (67%), followed by African American (15%). The correlations, means, and SDs for Study 2 are provided in Table 3. Results of the moderated mediation analysis are provided in Table 4.

Table 3

Correlations, Means, and SDs for Study 2

	1	2	3	4
1. Matching colors ^a	1			
2. Perceived aesthetics	.42**	1		
3. Purchase intention	.44**	.64**	1	
4. Team identification	.18**	.27**	.49**	1
<i>M (SD)</i>		4.98 (1.33)	5.16 (1.46)	5.40 (1.21)

Note ^a Coded as 0 = conflicting colors and 1 = matching colors; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

The moderated mediation analysis showed the positive effect of team-colored sponsor logo on the participants' willingness to buy the jersey, as well as on perceived aesthetics (H1 and H2). Perceived aesthetics positively affected purchase intention, confirming the indirect effect of the team-colored sponsor logo on purchase intention through perceived aesthetics (H3). Regarding the role of team identification, the interaction between the team-colored sponsor logo and team identification had a significant impact on both perceived aesthetics and intention to purchase the jersey. Of note, both the direct and indirect effects were stronger for the highly identified fans, confirming H5 and H6. Ultimately, the index of moderated mediation was found to be significant.

Table 4*Results of Moderated Mediation Analyses for Study 2*

	Perceived aesthetics ($R^2 = .58$)				Purchase intention ($R^2 = .68$)			
	B	Bias-corrected 95% CI			B	Bias-corrected 95% CI		
		SE	Lower	Upper		SE	Lower	Upper
Matching colors (vs. conflicting colors)	0.90***	.12	.67	1.13	.62***	.13	.37	.87
Team identification	0.21***	.05	.11	0.31	.46***	.05	.36	.56
Interaction (matching colors x team identification)	0.61***	.09	.42	0.80	.25**	.10	.05	.45
Perceived aesthetics	-	-	-	-	.46***	.05	.35	.56

Conditional indirect effects of color congruity on purchase intention at different levels of team identification

	Effect	Boot SE	LLCI	ULCI
Low	.16	.08	.01	0.31
Moderate	.44	.09	.28	0.62
High	.72	.14	.47	1.00

Index of moderated mediation			
Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
.28	.07	.16	.43

Note. SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

Similar to the findings in Study 1, in Study 2, the fans of the Galaxy showed stronger purchase intention when exposed to the jersey with the Galaxy-colored sponsor logo. They also evaluated the jersey with the team-colored sponsor logo more aesthetically pleasing compared to the one with the incongruently colored sponsor logo. Again, we found the moderating role of team identification in this relationship, confirming the positive impact of team-colored sponsor logo and its interaction effect with team identification on both aesthetics and purchase intention.

Study 3

The final study was conducted for testing the hypotheses in the real-world setting. With this reason, the Golden State Warriors jersey and their current sponsor, Rakuten, were selected. More specifically, the Rakuten logo was recolored in the Warriors' colors and a manipulation check confirmed a significant color-difference between the original jersey and the manipulated jersey ($M_{\text{matching colors}} = 5.81$ vs. $M_{\text{conflicting colors}} = 4.10$, $t(80) = 6.33$, $p < .001$). Importantly, because the actual brand was utilized, a randomized control

group pretest-posttest design was employed. Furthermore, although the analysis methods were replicated, the premeasured values were treated as covariates following the suggestions of Valente and MacKinnon (2017) and Hayes (2018). The participants' attitudes toward jersey sponsorship, as well as their prior interest, knowledge, and experience with Rakuten, were also controlled.

Procedure

For the main experiment, 387 Warriors fans (77% male, 83% ages 25 to 44) from MTurk were selected as the final participants. They first completed the questions regarding attitude toward jersey sponsorship, team identification, perceived aesthetics, and purchase intention, while seeing the original Warriors jersey with the Rakuten logo. After the random assignment, the respondents viewed a fictitious article featuring either the original Rakuten logo or a team-colored logo. Next, the participants answered the questionnaire on perceived aesthetics and purchase intention once again. Additionally, brand familiarity (e.g., "It is not familiar to me–It is familiar to me"; $\alpha=.88$; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012), and brand involvement (e.g., "I am very involved with the brand."; $\alpha=.89$; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) with Rakuten were measured to control their possible effects.

Results

The analysis again confirmed the positive impacts of the team-colored sponsor logo on perceived aesthetics and purchase intention (H1 and H2). Perceived aesthetics was another significant predictor for purchase intention, indicating the indirect effect (H3). The interaction effect between the team-colored sponsor logo and team identification was significant, revealing that the main effect was varied by the levels of team identification. Thus, H5 and H6 were confirmed. Tables 5 and 6 provide the relevant statistical information for Study 3, with Table 5 offering the correlations, means, and SDs, and Table 6 providing the moderated mediation analysis.

Table 5

Correlations, Means, and SDs for Study 3

	1	2	3	4
1. Matching colors ^a	1			
2. Perceived aesthetics	.37**	1		
3. Purchase intention	.29**	.69**	1	
4. Team identification	.03**	.32**	.57**	1
<i>M (SD)</i>		5.27 (1.39)	5.02 (1.75)	5.58 (1.06)

Note ^a Coded as 0 = conflicting colors and 1 = matching colors; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Table 6*Results of Moderated Mediation Analyses for Study 3*

	Perceived aesthetics ($R^2 = .58$)				Purchase intention ($R^2 = .68$)			
	B	Bias-corrected 95% CI			B	Bias-corrected 95% CI		
		SE	Lower	Upper		SE	Lower	Upper
Matching colors (vs. conflicting colors)	0.75***	.08	.59	.91	.53***	.09	.36	.71
Team identification	0.11**	.04	.02	.19	.33***	.04	.25	.42
Interaction (matching colors x team identification)	0.36***	.08	.21	.52	.17*	.08	.01	.32
Perceived aesthetics	-	-	-	-	.31***	.05	.21	.41
Conditional indirect effects of color congruity on purchase intention at different levels of team identification								
			Effect	Boot SE	LLCI		ULCI	
Low			.14	.05	.06		.25	
Moderate			.25	.06	.14		.38	
High			.34	.09	.18		.52	
Index of moderated mediation								
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI				
	.11	.04	.04	.21				

Note. SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

Study 3 confirmed the positive effect of team-colored sponsor logo on jersey aesthetic and purchase intention in the real-world setting. Identical to the earlier findings, the Warriors fans preferred the jersey with the team-colored sponsor logo in terms of its aesthetic appeal and attractiveness, showing stronger willingness to buy the sponsorship jersey. Moreover, these effects were larger among the highly identified fans, when compared to casual fans. plays a role in the frequency and longevity of participation with connected fitness endeavors. Users motivated to use the Peloton for health reasons may be more transient because their needs are met through a wider range of fitness offerings. Connected fitness companies will need to leverage their unique competitive and social value which may not be inherently present in gyms or other fitness endeavors.

Implications

The aim of the present research was to explore the effect of a team-colored sponsor logo in jersey sponsorship, in relation to the aesthetics of the jersey and purchase intention. Three studies confirmed its positive effects for both NBA and MLS jersey sponsorship. Theoretically, the current study supports the notion that visual congruity is a significant predictor for positive behavioral intention (e.g., Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2011). More specifically, our findings showed color congruity enhanced purchase intention not only for sponsor products (i.e., Henderson et al., 2019), but also for sport merchandise.

Furthermore, the present investigation supports the aesthetics theories in the sport product and sponsorship context. As the color harmony theory (Burchett, 2002) and the ecological valence theory (Palmer & Schloss, 2010) suggest, the results reveal that sport fans recognize an object in the favorite team's colors more aesthetically pleasing, showing higher intention to purchase. Consequently, aligning with the previous sport merchandise studies (e.g., Papadimitriou & Apostolopoulou, 2018), our study signifies the importance of perceived aesthetics for merchandise consumption behavior.

Additionally, the present research also extends the idea that team identification moderates how fans perceive visual information. Traditionally, it has been believed that avid fans are more strongly attached to any team-related visual identities (e.g., Derbaix & Decrop, 2011). Accordingly, our findings show highly identified fans perceive the jersey with a team-colored sponsor logo more aesthetically pleasing due to their stronger attachment to the team colors, possessing higher purchase intention. Ultimately, extending the study of Son and Williams (2023), the present study identified that the team-colored sponsor logo acted as an indicator for the high aesthetic value and purchase intention, showing matching logo colors in jersey sponsorship influences not only affective responses, but also behavioral intention.

Practically, the current findings suggest a sponsor's decision to alter its logo colors would provide an improbable advertising opportunity. As stated earlier, when jersey sales increase, more advertising opportunities will be created for the sponsors. With the fact that sport fans often cite certain jerseys by the sponsors (e.g., Arsenal's O2 jersey), this would generate an advertising effect that could last even after the sponsorship ends. Also, because fans tend to be skeptical about the logo placement on a jersey, sponsors must show their respect to the team's tradition embedded within the jersey. As seen from the recent jersey sponsorship of the New York Mets, the color-clashing sponsor logo may draw negative responses from various stakeholders (Morik, 2023). The present study suggests modifying the logo colors to match the team's colors as an effective solution for advertising the company without harming the team's symbol.

For teams, our results highlight the importance of brand colors and jersey design. As shown, fans prefer a more aesthetically attractive jersey, and a team-colored sponsor logo enhances its aesthetics. Thus, placing a team-colored sponsor logo can also be an effective strategy for teams, especially considering that the aesthetical attractiveness of a jersey is one of the key factors in merchandise consumption (e.g., Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2018). Importantly, because a team jersey is the most popular product in the billion-dollar sport merchandise market, our findings propose the adoption of a team-colored sponsor logo to amplify the benefits of jersey sponsorship for both teams and sponsors.

Limitations and Suggestions

First, the participants' attitudes toward jersey sponsorship were controlled in all three studies due to its significant effect on consumer behavior (Zdravkovic et al., 2010). However, because jersey sponsorship is relatively novel in the United States, it could be possible that a certain amount of time is required for attitudes toward jersey sponsorship to be thoroughly developed among U.S. fans. In this case, jersey sponsorship attitudes may play a significant role in relation to purchase intention of the jersey with a sponsor logo. Hence, a follow-up study needs to include attitude toward jersey sponsorship as a significant construct within the model.

Furthermore, fans' willingness to purchase the jersey with a sponsor logo may vary across countries. Jersey sponsorship is commonplace in Europe and Asia, which is different than the United States. In fact, some international teams have more than one sponsor logo on their jerseys. For instance, several soccer clubs in the Liga MX have more than six jersey sponsors, which is called unrestrained jersey sponsorship (Mikhailitchenko et al., 2012). Thus, fans of specific leagues in specific countries may not be bothered with the color crash caused by the sponsor logo due to the high familiarity and in turn, the effect of created color congruity on purchase intention may vary. For this reason, a cross-cultural approach may reveal different results.

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