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## Evaluation of Sponsorship Activation Strategies Employed by a Minor League Baseball Team

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# EVALUATION OF SPONSORSHIP ACTIVATION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY A MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAM

by

VELINA BOTEVA

(Under the Direction of Todd Hall)

## ABSTRACT

A common challenge for corporations engaging in sport sponsorship activities lies in the evaluation of these activities. Some of the struggle is in the multitude of objectives that can be pursued through developing sponsorship relationships. Typical objectives include increasing brand awareness and recognition (Cornwell, Humphreys, Maguire, Weeks, & Tellegen, 2006), increasing sales (Choi, Stotlar, & Park, 2006) accessing specific target markets (Doherty & Murray, 2007), developing goodwill (Meenaghan, 2001), and positioning the brand (Ferreira, Hall, & Bennett, 2008). With so many differing objectives, it can be difficult to identify and/or develop standard rules, measurement scales, or generally accepted techniques that guide sport properties and corporate sponsors in their efforts to measure sponsorship effectiveness (Shankinlin & Kuzma, 1992). Despite the inherent challenges in doing so, this study examined the activation strategies employed by one Minor League Baseball team and three of its game night title sponsors as they pursued increased awareness, purchase intentions, and sales.

INDEX WORDS: Sponsorship, Evaluation, Minor League Baseball, Activation strategies

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MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAM

by

VELINA BOTEVA

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VELINA BOTEVA

Major Professor: Todd Hall  
Committee: Samuel Todd  
Henry Eisenhart

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to my parents – Botio and Diana Botevi who have supported me every step of the way and stood behind my every endeavor. Their continuous support is what keeps me wanting to achieve more and more. I would also like to dedicate this to my extended family in Japan who has also shown me a great deal of support throughout this experience.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship is identified as “an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity” (Meenaghan, 1991, p.36). Throughout the years sponsorship has evolved from an obligation to give back to the community (Catherwood & Van Kirk, 1992) to a full-fledged business strategy now exceeding \$46.3 billion in annual corporate spending globally, a growth of 5.2 % in 2010 from the previous year. These statistics were provided by the International Evaluation Group (IEG, 2010), which is one of the most trusted sources in generating sponsorship reports.

According to IEG (2010), sponsorship has seen a 3.9 % increase in spending in North America in the year of 2010. This accounts for \$17.2 billion spent on sponsorship activities in North America alone (IEG, 2010). This growth occurred despite the economic recession and the slight decline of spending in sports in 2009. Furthermore, spending on entertainment tours and attractions, festivals, fairs and annual events, and associations and membership organizations all experienced growth (IEG, 2010). In 2010, the largest segment, sports, grew 3.4 % with a 7.6 % growth in the four major U.S. sports leagues – NBA, NFL, NHL, and MLB (IEG, 2010). Projections by IEG also suggest that the sponsors will allocate about the same amount of funds in 2011 as in 2010.

Nearly two decades ago, sponsorship was linked to philanthropy and the financial goodwill of companies, that senior management decided to sponsor (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Today, over two-thirds of sponsorship funds are put into sports with

the rest divided between cause-related marketing, art, and entertainment tours (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Therefore, investment in sports makes up the greatest portion of sponsorship expenditures. One of the reasons why corporations choose this form of promotional activity is the opportunity sponsorship provides to cut through the clutter of traditional media and reach well-defined target markets (Cliffe & Motion, 2005; Gardner & Shuman, 1987).

Apart from spending money on the right to associate with a given sport property, companies also spend funds in order to be effective in leveraging and activating their sponsorship. Usually, sponsors buy a platform from the sport event and that platform provides a central subject that can focus and integrate a steady message with the help of various promotional and communication vehicles (Howard & Crompton, 2004).

Leveraging that platform consists of “developing an integrated promotion plan that specifies the role that each of the promotional tools will play and the extent to which each will be used” (Howard & Crompton, 2004, p.490). Taken from its mechanical meaning, leveraging is defined as the ability of an object to lift something twice or more its weight. In financial terms, this means that a larger gain can be received with a smaller input. In other words, by sponsoring different events and teams, companies gain access to their target markets and achieve high returns for their investments. According to DeGaris, West, and Dodds (2009), “leveraging a sponsorship presumes that sponsorship is an asset which can be used to improve the effectiveness of marketing promotions” (p. 89).

Together with an increase in sponsorship spending, companies are becoming more and more involved in leveraging their investments and want to ensure that their funds are effective in reaching sponsorship goals. This study is an attempt to measure whether the

money that sponsors spend on leveraging and activating actually achieve desired objectives.

Many people use the terms leverage and activation interchangeably. Even though they are used to reach the same goal and move in the same direction, leveraging and activation are two separate entities. “In most cases, sponsorships need to be activated with marketing promotions in order to generate awareness and positive consumer attitudes and behaviors; however, the ‘marketing capital’ generated by prominent and favorably regarded sponsorships can be leveraged effectively with marketing promotions”(DeGaris et al., 2009, p. 90). Examples of activation strategies include media (trade-outs, editorial coverage, advertising), signage, retail, prizes, rewards, sweepstakes, and licensing/packaging (Howard & Crompton, 2004).

When companies invest their money in sport through sponsorship, they often expect a return on their investment. Since sponsorship has moved from a philanthropic concept to a strategy seeking to achieve specific marketing objectives, firms commonly want to know what they are getting for their dollar. Common sponsorship objectives include: brand positioning (Farrelly, Quester, & Burton, 2006), brand awareness (Cornwell, Humphreys, Maguire, Weeks, & Tellegan, 2006), increasing sales (Choi, Stotlar, & Park, 2006), improving brand image (Doherty & Murray, 2007), and boosting employee motivation and relations (Cornwell, Pruit, & Clark, 2005). Some market-driven objectives are increased market share, new client acquisition, new product awareness, and on-site sales (Irwin & Sutton, 1994). According to Stotlar (2004), much of the corporations focus on measuring sponsorship effectiveness. The biggest controversy comes into play when it is time to evaluate the effectiveness of sponsorship. There are no

standard rules, measurement scales, or generally accepted techniques that guide properties and sponsors in their efforts to measure effectiveness (Shankinlin & Kuzma, 1992). However, with the selection of proper and commonly employed strategies from various research endeavors, this study attempts to evaluate whether the activation strategies used by one Minor League Baseball team help achieve sponsorship goals and objectives.

#### Purpose of the study

As sponsorship evaluation continues to be a struggle for corporations, it may be important to consider which activation strategies are effective in attaining certain objectives. As such, the research question driving this study is: “Are activation strategies helping title night sponsors achieve objectives at Minor League Baseball games in the Southeastern United States?” This study is an attempt to estimate whether the title night sponsors of a Minor League Baseball team, the Savannah Sand Gnats, meet their objectives. More specifically, this research will evaluate which activation strategies (signage, discounted entrance, coupon redemption, video board commercials, and public address announcements) are effective in achieving objectives: increase awareness, purchase intentions, and sales.

To accomplish this research agenda, this thesis project has been organized into five chapters. Chapter two provides literature review and introduces the main objectives set by the title night sponsors of a Minor League Baseball team. Chapter three details the methodology used in this study including team information, participants, procedures, instruments employed, validity and reliability, and analysis procedures. Chapter four

presents the results of this study and chapter five is a discussion and a review of the implications and limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

Ever since sponsorship has moved from a simple philanthropic gesture to a revenue generating marketing strategy, sponsors enter into partnerships with sport properties with agendas and objectives they plan to pursue. In the case of event marketing, sponsors and events should have congruency between image and the needs of the consumers in order to achieve the objectives. “The unique appeal of event marketing is the sponsor’s ability to blend its message into gathering what engages consumers” (Close, Finney, Lacey, & Sneath, 2006, p. 422). The clearer the objectives, the easier it is to create activations that match the event with the sponsor and achieve them.

Awareness, image enhancement, demonstration platform, hospitality, and product trial or sales opportunities are the most common objectives that companies set before they start a partnership (Howard & Crompton, 2004). According to Irwin and Sutton (1994) target market fit and company image were the two most important criteria in funding a sponsorship proposal. Therefore, it is vital for companies and properties to have congruency in target market fit and to have a desired image, which is similar to the image of the sport, in order to reach those objectives. Sponsorship goals can be achieved through a variety of activation strategies: signage, giveaways, promotions, player appearances, title nights, etc. When the right activation strategies are used to accomplish the given objectives, then spectators at the event will be more likely to recall or favor the sponsor from its competitors. Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy (2005) state that building a link or an association between a sponsor and an event is the most important aspect in reaching the consumers.

Different sport properties and sponsors engage in various activation efforts. The study at hand focuses on a minor league baseball team's sponsorship activation strategies employed by its title night sponsors. Minor League Baseball was founded in 1901 with stated goals to provide affordable and family friendly leisure for people of different ages (MiLB Marketing, n.d.). Furthermore, the league customizes programs that reach fans through different channels – giveaways, title nights, signage, and web exposure (MiLB Marketing, n.d.).

The Savannah Sand Gnats MiLB team was established in 1984. Its stadium has the capacity to seat 4,700 people. The team engages in various marketing efforts to reach sponsorship goals and access its fan base. The three title night sponsors studied in this research were Subway, Kroger, and Kraft. “A key objective to any retail outlet that is a sponsor is to drive traffic into the stores”( C. Polhemus, personal communication, July 20, 2011). For example, Subway and Kroger, have structured their sponsorship in a way that puts shoppers in the store through the use of coupons. The Director of Sales at the Savannah Sand Gnats, Mr. Polhemus, said: “since people have different ways in which they learn information, it is important to diversify your methods in which you try and reach your audience”(personal communication, July 20, 2011). For example, PA announcements are better for those that listen to information. Video board reaches out to those that need to see the information, and on field promotions are used as a tool to keep everyone's attention and maybe give out some free merchandise.

First, I will describe the activation strategies that were employed at the Savannah Sand Gnats baseball games followed by a discussion of the objectives desired by the title night sponsors in this study.



### *Activation Strategies*

The Savannah Sand Gnats and the three title nights sponsors – Kroger, Kraft, and Subway employed various activation strategies in order to reach their objectives – increase in awareness, purchase intentions, and sales (C. Polhemus, personal communication, July 20, 2011). As identified by the baseball team at hand, the activation strategies consist of signage, giveaways, coupons, discounts, public service announcements, and video board commercials. Signage at the event included in stadium and local area banners. Giveaways incorporated promotional items in the form of reusable grocery bags, and coupons. Public service announcements and video board commercials took place in between innings. Through these activities, fans were introduced to the brand in many different ways. All of these integrated promotional tools allow for repeat exposure of the brand names for the spectators at the stadium and association of the brand with the team.

In the sport sponsorship literature, promotions are described as price and nonprice promotions (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2007). Price promotions take place when entrance tickets are offered at a discounted price. For example, in the case of the Sand Gnats, Kroger offered an entrance fee for one dollar for up to four people if a Kroger member card is presented. In the case of Kraft, people could buy one ticket and get one free with the presence of a Kraft package wrapper. Nonprice promotions take place when teams present spectators with giveaways such as bobbleheads or t-shirts.

Various studies show the effectiveness of different promotions in an effort to achieve sponsorship goals. O'Reilly, Nadeau, Seguin, and Harrison (2004) found that

82% of fans in the Canadian Football League Grey Cup game were aware of what a video board commercial was about through unaided recall. This is a large percentage considering that spectators were not given any cues as to who the sponsor was. In a different study, DeGaris et al. (2009) examined whether “NASCAR-linked sales promotions increase favorability towards NASCAR sponsorships and drive sales for sponsors”(p.88). The results of the study showed that “one-third of NASCAR fans ‘sometimes’, ‘often’, or ‘always’ participated in promotional games, contest or sweepstakes” (p.92). This study also showed that fans respond to sponsorship activation efforts. Therefore, reaching objectives through various activations is possible and sponsors are able to cut through the rest of the marketing clutter thrown at consumers.

#### *Awareness*

The Product Adoption Process consists of five consecutive steps: Awareness, Interest, Evaluation (may be Trial), Decision, and Confirmation. They all take place in the consumer’s purchasing decision making (Howard & Crompton, 2004). During the Awareness stage, consumers become aware of the brand’s existence. Companies that aim to increase awareness often launch a new product, their brand is relatively new, or they want to increase awareness of an existing product in new target markets. According to Zajonc (1968), the more frequently a sponsor’s name is encountered by consumers in the context of an event, the more positive feelings they are likely to have towards that sponsor.

An increase in public awareness was identified as one of the top three objectives of sponsorship during the Atlanta Olympic Games (Ludwig & Karabetsos, 1999). Moreover, as awareness is the first step of the Product Adoption Process, without it,

product trial or product purchase cannot take place. Measuring this particular objective tells companies whether they have met one of their sponsorship goals. All three of the title night sponsors of the baseball team in this study have selected awareness as one of their primary objectives. Most of them are interested in generating awareness specifically in the local area and markets.

Pracejus (2004) listed simple awareness, affect transfer, image transfer, affiliation, implied size, implied endorsement, and reciprocity as the seven mechanisms which influence the consumer's cognitive elaboration. What this means is that simple awareness is part of a psychological assimilation stimuli that sponsors use to reach and influence consumers. Simple awareness is achieved through mere exposure. Awareness takes place when the consumers are constantly and repeatedly exposed to a stimulus. For example, signage can be positioned at numerous locations in and around the stadium. Other marketing efforts of the same sponsors, like giveaways, also expose the brand repeatedly to fans.

According to Pracejus (2004), if consumers have experienced mere exposure to a brand, they are more likely to pay attention to other communication and advertising vehicles used by that brand to reach consumers. For example, if a fan of the tennis star Jelena Jankovic has seen the logo on her dress of the up and coming Chinese apparel brand, ANTA, and later he sees another commercial or an ad of that brand, he will be more likely to pay attention to that commercial. In other words, mere exposure is the very simple act of making sure the consumer is repeatedly exposed to a stimulus. However, it opens their mind for more marketing and communication tools that the brand or company is using to reach consumers and achieve other objectives like increased sales.

Sponsors use different vehicles to give the consumer a chance to encounter the sponsoring brands as many times as possible during an event. This can be achieved through signage positioned at numerous locations in and around the event, giveaways throughout the duration of the event, TV advertising, game day magazine advertising, and company logos placed on store memorabilia. For example, a sponsor at a baseball game can provide visors which people will be likely to wear especially if it's a hot and sunny day. Another example of a giveaway that consumers will use and will encounter the brand numerous times is sunscreen at baseball games. Player appearances can also be used to achieve exposure and ultimately awareness. For example, if David Beckham is signing autographs at a local Wells Fargo branch, this would likely generate multiple media mentions and much traffic to the actual branch. Fans of the soccer star will be exposed to the banking company and when recalling the brand, they will likely experience positive feelings and emotions. According to Pracejus (2004), "the more frequently a sponsored brand name is encountered by a consumer in the context of an event, the more positive feelings he or she has toward the brand" (p. 178).

In another study, Sutherland and Freidman (2000) suggest that yes and no questions that ask whether spectators at an event recall seeing a brand will yield highly artificial figures. They suggest that questions explaining the ad or logo or banner need to be included in order to determine the exact source of sponsorship stimuli. For example, the spectator may answer that she has seen an ad for a particular brand but when asked what ad it was, she selects a totally different source for that ad. In order to properly measure particular company's sponsorship effectiveness, it is important to ask the right

questions that will ultimately reveal whether the particular activation strategies have achieved sponsorship objectives.

In order to achieve awareness goals, sponsors and properties engage in strategic activation initiatives. The most commonly used technique is repeated exposure (Pracejus, 2004). This can be achieved through signage positioned at numerous locations in and around the stadium, giveaways throughout the continuation of the event, TV advertising and more.

*Research question 1:*

*Do activation initiatives employed by the sponsors of a MiLB team achieve sponsor awareness among spectators attending minor league baseball games?*

#### *Purchase Intentions*

The second most important objective for the title night sponsors of the baseball team is to increase purchase intentions (C. Polhemus, personal communication, July 20, 2011). Some of the companies' aim is to acquire new clients as well as to generate traffic in their local branches.

Purchase intentions often determine whether a consumer would buy a product. Intent to buy a product does not determine whether one would actually make the purchase. However, often times it is not possible or it is highly inconvenient to measure actual purchasing behavior. Therefore, in most sponsorship studies, researchers assess the desire to buy a sponsoring product. Furthermore, measures of purchase behavior focus on the effect that sponsorships have on sales (Smith, Graetz, & Westerbeek, 2008).

Sport sponsorship literature shows that purchase intentions are highly related to fan identification and perceived group norms (Levin, Beasley, & Gilson, 2008; Madrigal, 2000). Furthermore, identification with a group teaches one how to think and behave in the social context of the group (Levin et al., 2008). In other words, when fans identify themselves with a sport entity or when they view themselves as part of a group they want to engage in activities that the other group members are engaged in. Furthermore, they are more likely to purchase products from a brand sponsoring that entity or that other group members are purchasing from. In a way, by purchasing products people increase their feeling of belonging to certain group as other members buy similar goods and services from the same brand.

Both Madrigal (2000) and Levin et al. (2008) suggest that in order to increase fan identification and ultimately purchase intentions, sport properties should create a structure that would strengthen the alliance between team or event and the fans. Furthermore, to increase purchase intentions, sponsors at events should use activation strategies that increase fans' identity. This could be achieved through various on-site activities, promotions, signage, etc. that would influence the feeling of belonging to the team or event and the sense of belonging to the fan group as a whole.

The sponsors of the Savannah Sand Gnats employ discounted promotions for fans to enter the games. They use coupons or buy one, get one free promotions in order to increase purchase intentions among spectators of the games.

*Research question 2:*

*Do activation initiatives employed by the sponsors achieve purchase intent among spectators attending minor league baseball games?*

## *Sales*

According to Howard and Crompton (2004), product trial and sales opportunities can be used to influence purchasing decisions during the product adoption process. During this phase the sponsor's activation strategies aim to persuade the consumer to purchase the product. Achieving sales objectives is one of the ultimate goals for many sponsors (Crompton, 2004). In the current study, one of the title night sponsors had given a discounted entrance to the game where fans simply had to show a package wrapper with the company logo on it. Another sponsor was using a membership card or a coupon for discounted entrance in the stadium.

In theory, image transfer is defined as the transfer of associations attributed to the sponsored activity to the sponsoring brand (Gwinner, 1997). Therefore, with the use of activation strategies, the event image will "rub off" onto the sponsoring brand, creating more sales opportunities. If fans attend the games, this means that they have a positive image of the team in their minds and this attitude is more likely to transfer onto the sponsoring companies. Consequently, when fans are faced with a purchase decision, they may recall the sponsoring brand due to this transferring of the image. Also Gwinner (1997) has proposed a model of image creation and image transfer in event sponsorship. Some of his propositions include "the higher the degree of similarity (image or functional based) between event and sponsorship brand, the more effective the image transfer between event and brand; the more exclusive the level of sponsorship, the more effective the image transfer between event and brand"(p.153).

Grohs and Reisinger (2005) evaluated the images of an event as well as that of the five main sponsors at the event and answered questions related to the three main variables driving image transfer – event-sponsor fit, event involvement, and sponsorship exposure. Their results showed that event-sponsor fit and event involvement both have positive impact on image transfer with event-sponsor fit having the strongest influence. In the case of the team’s title night sponsors, the image of the team transfers onto the sponsoring companies and fans should be more likely to purchase products and services from the sponsoring entities.

One way to evaluate whether sponsors reach their sales objectives is to measure whether fans have actually bought the product. Participants in the survey were asked whether they have purchased the product of one of the sponsoring companies prior to the event.

*Research question 3:*

*Do use of activation initiatives achieve sales of sponsor products among spectators of a minor league baseball team?*



## CHAPTER 3

### Method

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology employed to measure the research questions developed in Chapter 2. It is organized in the following manner: the first section describes the participants in this study, the second explains the procedures used to collect the data, the third part shows the research design and the sample selection process. Next, each of the variables of interest is discussed, and then questions of validity and reliability are covered. Finally, the data analysis techniques employed are discussed.

Participants in the study were spectators of the MiLB team – The Savannah Sand Gnats. Data were collected on three separate nights. Sunday was Subway night where spectators received a coupon for 50% off on a sandwich purchase. Monday was Kroger night where people could get in for \$1 with a Kroger card or a Kroger coupon distributed in the stores. On Tuesday, the title sponsor was Kraft and people could buy one ticket and get one free if they brought a Kraft product package wrapper to the stadium. All three sponsors received at least one PA announcement and video commercial prior to the third inning. All three sponsors also had signage located inside the stadium. The surveys were administered after the third inning and the researchers made sure that at least one PA announcement and video board commercial actually took place for each sponsor. Fans were approached and asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire whereby agreeing to participate they provided informed consent and if they did not wish to participate, then they simply did not need to complete it. A group of five graduate students and college seniors were collecting the data. They were trained to provide the information on the

back of each survey, which was the informed consent. They had to make sure all participants were at least 18 years old and follow the rest of the instructions as listed in the informed consent (Appendix B). The survey was paper based and completely voluntary. Spectators were approached as they were sitting and watching the game. The research group covered all sections of the stadium including the box seats with season ticket holders. To ensure anonymity, participants were not be asked for their names, social security numbers, or any kind of information that would help identify participants after the survey is completed. The method used to administer the surveys is called mall intercept. As the name suggests, fans were approached and asked to participate in the study. This method is popular because fans are questioned “in their natural habitat” (Churchill & Brown, 2007, p. 208).

A total of 538 surveys were collected and 530 were deemed usable. The questionnaire completion for respondents took approximately 4-5 minutes. On Subway night 155 spectators agreed to fill out the survey, on Kroger night, 238 responded, and on Kraft night – 137 fans. Reported attendance was 1,166, 1,091, and 1,099 respectively for the three nights that surveys were collected. The gender representation was pretty evenly distributed between male (50.8%) and female (49.2%). The majority of respondents were Caucasian (85.1%), had a college degree (40.9%), income between \$25,001 and \$50,000 (25.2%), and were aged between 18 and 30 years (37.7%). Table 1 shows the details of the demographic information.

Question number one on the survey measured awareness through unaided recall. Questions two, three, and four measured effectiveness of the different activation strategies employed by the sponsors through aided recall. These questions were a

modified version of the aided recall questions based on O'Reilly et al. (2007). Question number five was the only question that changed in the three different questionnaires. Since the three title night sponsors employed different strategies, the surveys were designed to measure each one of them separately. Therefore, question five measured sales for Kraft; increase in membership and purchase intentions for Kroger; and future purchase intentions for Subway.

Questions six, seven, eight, and nine measured purchasing intentions for all three sponsors. They were based on Beatty and Kahle (1988), Jacoby and Chestnut (1987), Dick and Basu (1994), and Cornwell and Coote (2005).

The questions assessing demographics, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 are separating spectators by gender and reflecting their age, ethnicity, education, and household income as employed in Bennett, Cunningham, and Dees (2006).

The entire questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix C.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

The three main objectives for all three title night sponsors were awareness, purchase intent, and sales. Awareness was measured through aided and unaided sponsor recall questions; purchase intent for all three was measured through the use of four specific items and for Kroger and Subway through two specific questions; sales was only measured for Kraft, with one specific question.

The first question measured awareness. Participants were not given any clues but simply asked to write down who the main sponsor was. The results show that 22.6% correctly identified Subway; 62.2% correctly identified Kroger; and 21.2 % identified Kraft. The results from the unaided recall question can be found in Table 2. This is illustrated as a percentage as previously done in O'Reilly et al. (2007).

The second, third, and fourth questions also measured awareness. Respondents were given a question where they were prompted with names of different companies. The companies included the sponsors along with several competitors. Spectators were able to recall seeing signage for Subway (64.2%), Kroger (67.7%), and Kraft (12.3%). Fans were also asked whether they have seen a video commercial. About 66.3% recalled seeing a Subway commercial, 25% said that Kroger appeared in one, and only 22.2% saw a video for Kraft. The public announcement activation that all three sponsors employed yielded 64.1% recall for Subway, 28.8% for Kroger, and 26.1% for Kraft. These results are illustrated in Table 3.

Two of the three specific questions for each sponsor measured purchase intentions. On the Subway night, participants were asked to select whether they plan on

using their Subway coupon. A Likert-scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) was employed. The majority (62.1%) responded that they are likely or extremely likely to use their coupon ( $M=3.5$ ,  $SD=1.3$ ). These results are illustrated in Table 4. During Kroger night, participants were asked to respond whether they used a Kroger card to enter the stadium at a discounted price. About 63% of respondents said they used the Kroger promotion. This information can be found in Table 5.

There were also four items used in this survey that measured purchase intentions. Each was measured using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The homogeneity of the items allowed the creation of a new combined and averaged variable as previously done by Cornwell and Coote (2005). The results revealed an average rating with  $M=2.64$ ,  $SD=.85$ . The scale was checked for construct validity (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.88$ ) which means that it has good internal consistency. These numbers are illustrated in Table 6.

To measure sales, respondents were asked whether they have used a Kraft package wrapper to enter the stadium buy one get one ticket free. Only about 10% said that they have taken advantage of this promotion. This is also illustrated in Table 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion and Sponsorship Implications

The goals of this research project were to evaluate whether activation initiatives employed by the sponsors of a MiLB team achieve their sponsorship goals. Research question one asked whether the activation strategies employed at the Savannah Sand Gnats games achieved sponsor awareness. The second research question examined whether the activation initiatives employed at the games achieved intent to purchase among spectators. Finally, the third research question aimed to determine whether the use of activation initiatives achieved sales of sponsor products among attendees. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to interpret the results of the given survey.

Achievement of awareness was measured through aided and unaided recall. Results show that Kroger had the highest unaided recall of 62.2%. This means that people were able to remember Kroger as the main sponsor without being given any assisting clues. Subway and Kraft had about the same levels of recall with 22.6% and 21.1% respectively. Subway's low unaided recall is discussed below.

Interestingly, about 63% of respondents said that they have used their Kroger card to enter the stadium at a discounted price and 62.2% were able to list Kroger as the main sponsor without any aid. Therefore, usage of the membership card achieved awareness. Moreover, people that have enrolled as a member of the store will be likely to make purchases at that store, which implies future intent to purchase products at Kroger.

Aided recall questions were designed to measure whether the specific activations achieve their ultimate goals of increased awareness. There were three different measures that were used to evaluate whether signage, PA announcements, and video commercials actually reach the audience. In those questions, fans were given options of the title night sponsors and some of their main competitors from which to select.

The highest percentage of people (67.7%) was able to recall Kroger signage. Also, 64.2% of spectators were able to recall seeing Subway signage. Kraft received the lowest response with 12.3%. This could be explained by the positioning and size of signage. Kroger's signage was located right next to the main scoreboard and Subway's was to the right of the video scoreboard. Compared to the other sponsors, these two sponsors had much bigger letters on the signs, therefore they were much easier to recognize and read. There were a couple of sponsor signage boards that could not be read from the distance of the stands. Kraft's signage was located in the stadium, however it was only present when the company was a title night sponsor. On the contrary, Kroger and Subway kept their signage during all the games and they received substantially higher results than Kraft did.

Subway received the highest aided recall for the video board commercial (66.3%). However, Kroger and Kraft had similar low response rate of 25% and 22.2% respectively. Whether people pay attention to video commercials may depend on different factors like score of the game, weather, day of the week, etc. For example Subway was a title night sponsor on a Sunday and people are not so preoccupied and worried about their weekly tasks and are more likely to pay attention to the ad. Future research on how these factors affect participants' responses may be useful to fully

understand the differences in their answers. O'Reilly et al. (2007) conducted a similar study where they asked respondents to select what product was promoted and which company was promoted during a Canadian Football Grey Cup event. The response rate was 76% for the correct product on the second sponsor and 38% for the correct company. However, the first sponsor received 71% in the correct product category and 80% in the correct company category. Those are somewhat similar results with the study at hand.

Subway also received the highest response rate on recall of public service announcements (64.1%). Kroger and Kraft again had similar low rates with 28.8% and 26.1% respectively. Table 3 illustrates the results of all three aided recall questions.

Purchase intent was measured through four different questions that were combined in one averaged variable. All four variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, as indicated in the Methods section, and were used as a combined variable similar to Cornwell and Coote (2005). The results show  $M= 2.64$  and a  $SD=.85$ . This shows that fans fall between neutral and disagree when choosing brands, products, and services offered by the three title night sponsors of the Savannah Sand Gnats. Cornwell and Coote's (2005) study showed a much higher mean for purchase intent ( $M=3.52$ ,  $SD=.62$ ). However the event for their study was a breast cancer awareness race with 34% of participants being breast cancer survivors. The Sand Gnats are a professional sports team and this can explain the difference between the purchasing intent for their sponsors compared to purchase intent toward the sponsors for a cause-related event. Participants in cause-related events have much higher emotional attachment and thus are more likely to identify with the event and its sponsors (Cornwell and Coote, 2005). In the current study,



fan identity measures were not included and this is discussed in the shortcomings and future research suggestions section.

Results from the study have significant managerial implications for the baseball team and its' sponsors. One of the main reasons why studies like this are needed, is the demand to determine the return on investment for the sponsors. If there is a return, then the team can show other potential sponsors that it can reach and influence certain target markets. For example, the majority of fans attending on Kroger's title night were able to recognize the store as the main sponsors (62.2%). That means the activation strategies employed achieved high degrees of awareness, especially when fans were not given any clues. However, this was not the case with the other two sponsors Subway and Kraft. Kraft had the lowest response rate, even though people could buy one ticket and get one free with a Kraft product package wrapper. Since all three sponsors had the same in-stadium activations, it is relevant to suggest that Kroger used activations outside the stadium. For example, while driving to the stadium, the team distributing the surveys heard a commercial for Kroger night on a local radio station. The ad promoted the entrance activation where people could get in for only a dollar with a store membership card. Apart from engaging in additional activations on their own, we can suggest that the Kroger entrance activation was much simpler than Kraft's. From a simple convenience standpoint, bringing a card and getting in for a dollar is much simpler than looking for a Kraft product wrapper and having to buy one ticket to get a friend or a family member for free. Initiatives of this nature could very well explain the differences between the three sponsors.

Interestingly, more people selected the Humane Society as the main sponsor on Sunday when Subway was the title night sponsor (Table 2). This was not a surprise to the researchers since the night was also called Humane Society night and people could bring their pets to the ball park. The baseball team also ran video board commercials and PA announcements that presented the night as “Humane Society Night”. It is imperative that, when teams offer a certain sponsor the exclusivity to be a title night sponsor, the themes and promotions should revolve around those sponsors. Otherwise, as happened in this case, spectators will confuse and mix the different partners. Despite the low awareness levels for Subway, the majority (52.5%) of fans said that they are likely or extremely likely to use their Subway coupon (Table 4). Similarly, in a study assessing fan loyalty and goodwill, Dees, Hall, Tsuji, and Bennett (2010), found that the majority of fans would buy the sponsors’ products.

#### *Limitations of the Study and Future Research Suggestions*

Although this research found some of the activations employed by the sponsors effective, future research that would expand this project could be beneficial. For example, prior studies have included variables that measure how the level of fan identification with the sport organization impacts future purchase intentions. A study that would combine activations’ effectiveness and fan identification might explain the low levels of purchase intent.

Even though signage should be accounted for creating awareness, a study done by Maxwell and Lough (2009) examined the effectiveness of signage on sponsorship recognition in women’s college basketball games. They tested a game where sponsor signage was present vs. a game where it was not. Surprisingly, they found that there is

very little difference between the responses to aided recall questions in the two different instances. They argue that the influence of other repeated stimuli has had an impact on the spectators. Therefore, the high signage recall rates for Kroger (67.7%) and Subway (64.2%) could be influenced by the other activation initiatives employed at the games, like PA announcements and video commercials.

Despite the attempt of this research to study the effectiveness of each activation separately, this task was nearly impossible. Spectators were exposed to the different marketing stimuli simultaneously and they all have had an impact on the responses. Even though the questions asked specifically for each activation, chances are that fans might have recalled seeing signage for one of the sponsors, when in fact, they have heard a PA announcement or seen a video commercial. Furthermore, when asked whether they have seen signage of different companies, the respondents could have easily looked around the stadium and seen the signage. This also could explain why Kraft had the lowest signage response of the three sponsors. Their signage was not located on the field.

### *Conclusion*

The evaluation of the activation strategies employed by a Minor League Baseball team show mixed results. This study attempted to answer three research questions pertaining to the activation initiatives employed in the stadium of a Minor League Baseball team. The first question asked whether the activations achieve sponsor awareness. The findings of this study suggest that two of the title night sponsors, Kroger and Subway, were able to achieve this objective. Fans were able identify the store and

restaurant chains as title night sponsors through aided and unaided recall. However, the third sponsor, Kraft, received low awareness results among spectators of the games.

The second sponsorship objective for all three was purchase intent. Through the combined variable for all the sponsors, they achieved fairly indifferent intent to purchase among the spectators. However, Subway had a specific activation that gave a store discount. That particular promotion yielded high purchase intent. Therefore, Subway achieved this particular objective.

As a final point, sales objectives were measured for Kraft. Since spectators were able to enter the stadium at buy one –get one free with a product package wrapper, it was possible to measure whether people actually bought a product and brought it to the game. This activation seemed more complicated than Kroger’s activation and the number of people that actually took advantage of the promotion was very low.

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## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY

#### *Activation Strategies Effectiveness*

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this study, please record your responses to the survey questions to the best of your ability. Thank you!

1. Please, write down the name of the main sponsor for tonight's game?

---

2. During the past couple of innings a commercial was aired on the video board. Which one of the following companies was promoted?

*Please, check all that apply:*

<input type="checkbox"/> General Mills	<input type="checkbox"/> Heinz	<input type="checkbox"/> Arby's
<input type="checkbox"/> Subway	<input type="checkbox"/> Wal-Mart	<input type="checkbox"/> Walgreens
<input type="checkbox"/> Kellogg	<input type="checkbox"/> Firehouse Subs	<input type="checkbox"/> Kroger
<input type="checkbox"/> Sam's Club	<input type="checkbox"/> Kraft	<input type="checkbox"/> Quizno's

3. Do you remember seeing signage in or around the stadium for any of the following companies?

*Please, check all that apply:*

<input type="checkbox"/> General Mills	<input type="checkbox"/> Heinz	<input type="checkbox"/> Arby's
<input type="checkbox"/> Subway	<input type="checkbox"/> Wal-Mart	<input type="checkbox"/> Walgreens
<input type="checkbox"/> Kellogg	<input type="checkbox"/> Firehouse Subs	<input type="checkbox"/> Kroger
<input type="checkbox"/> Sam's Club	<input type="checkbox"/> Kraft	<input type="checkbox"/> Quizno's

4. Do you recall hearing a public service announcement about any of the following companies?

Please, check all that apply:

<input type="checkbox"/> General Mills	<input type="checkbox"/> Heinz	<input type="checkbox"/> Arby's
<input type="checkbox"/> Subway	<input type="checkbox"/> Wal-Mart	<input type="checkbox"/> Walgreens
<input type="checkbox"/> Kellogg	<input type="checkbox"/> Firehouse Subs	<input type="checkbox"/> Kroger
<input type="checkbox"/> Sam's Club	<input type="checkbox"/> Kraft	<input type="checkbox"/> Quizno's

\*5a. Did you purchase a Kraft product to get a discounted ticket today?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know \_\_\_\_\_

\*5b. Did you sign up for a Kroger card or a coupon to get a discounted ticket today?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Don't know

\*5c. How likely are you to use the Subway coupons that you received during the game to purchase from the teams' sponsors (if you have received any)?

Extremely Unlikely      Unlikely      Neutral      Likely      Extremely Likely  
                                  1                   2                   3                   4                   5

Please, circle the number on the scale that best reflects your opinion of the following statements.

6. When choosing brands and retailers, I choose those that sponsor the Sand Gnats.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree  
                                  1                   2                   3                   4                   5

7. I would drive out of my way to buy from a sponsor of the Sand Gnats.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree  
                                  1                   2                   3                   4                   5

8. When a new sponsor joins the Sand Gnats, I switch my buying to support them.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. I would choose to buy from a sponsor of the Sand Gnats, even if the prices of competitors were lower.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10. How do you identify yourself?     Male     Female

11. What is your age?     18-30     31-40     41-50     51-60     61 or older

12. What is your ethnicity?

African American     Asian/Pacific Islander     Caucasian     Hispanic     Native American/Alaskan

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

13. What is your education level?

High School     Some college     College     Graduate School

14. What is your household income?

under 25,000     25,000-50,000     50,001-75,000     75,001-100,000

100,000-150,000     150,001 or more

\*Questions 5a, 5b, and 5c appeared as question 5 in the three separate surveys.

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONCENT

1. This research is conducted by Velina Boteva, vb00375@georgiasouthern.edu, a graduate student in the Sport Management program at Georgia Southern University, and supervised by Dr. Todd Hall, thall@georgiasouthern.edu. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H\_\_\_\_\_.
2. The purpose of this research is to evaluate sponsorship activation strategies and whether sponsors reach fans effectively.
3. Participation in this research will include completion of a survey.
4. There are no known risks associated with participating in the voluntary survey related to sponsorship evaluation. However, if you feel discomfort and wish to discontinue taking the survey, feel free to stop taking the survey at any point in time.
5. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study and you will receive no compensation for participating. There are no penalties if you decide to not participate.
6. Completion of the survey should take no longer than 10 minutes.
7. Your participation will be voluntary and anonymous. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Following the completion of the questionnaire, any information you provide will be kept in locked cabinets in Hollis Building on GSU campus for up to 3 years following the completion of the study.
8. Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the beginning of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a

research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843.

9. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are not required to participate and you may end your participation at any time by not completing the survey.
  
10. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this study and to the terms above, please record your responses to the survey questions printed on the back.

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs <b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>	
Phone: 912-478-0843	Veazey Hall 2021 P.O. Box 8805 Statesboro, GA 30460
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

**To:** Volian Potava - Tugal Hall  
Samuel Todd - Henry Hisehart  
Department of Hospitality, Tourism, and Family and Consumer Sciences

**CC:** Charles B. Peterson  
Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACCC/IRB)

**Initial Approval Date:** September 20, 2011

**Expiration Date:** September 20, 2012

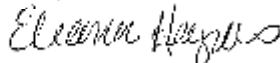
**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H12030**, and titled "Evaluation of Sponsorship Activation Strategies Employed by a Minor League Baseball Team," it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of **200** subjects.

*Therefore, as authorized by the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer

TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

	Total	
	N	%
<hr/>		
Gender		
Male	263	50.8
Female	255	49.2
<hr/>		
Age		
18 to 30 years	200	37.7
31 to 40 years	98	18.5
41-50	73	13.8
51-60	77	14.5
61 or older	81	15.3
<hr/>		
Ethnicity		
African American	33	6.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	7	1.4
Caucasian	441	85.1
Hispanic	21	4.1
Native American/Alaskan	5	1.0
Other	11	2.1
<hr/>		
Education		
High School	43	8.2
Some College	124	23.6
College	215	40.9
Graduate School	144	27.4
<hr/>		
Household Income		
Under 25,000	71	14.8
25,001-50,000	121	25.2
50,001-75,000	101	21.0
75,001-100,00	97	20.2
100,001-150,000	50	10.4
150,001 or more	41	8.5



Table 2. Unaided Recall

	Identified	%	Unidentified	%
Subway	35	22.6	120	77.5
Kroger	148	62.2	90	37.8
Kraft	29	21.2	108	78.8
*Humane Society	41	26.5		

\*Humane Society was not a title night sponsor, however results show that more people selected it as a sponsor than the actual the sponsor (Subway).

Table 3. Aided recall

	Video Commercial		Signage		PA Announcement	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Subway	266	66.3	292	64.2	189	64.1
Kroger	100	25	308	67.7	85	28.8
Kraft	89	22.2	56	12.3	77	26.1

Table 4. Subway Coupon Use

	N	%	N	Mean	SD
Extremely Unlikely	18	12.4	145	3.53	1.3
Unlikely	14	9.7			
Neutral	23	15.9			
Likely	53	36.6			
Extremely Likely	37	25.5			

Table 5. Entrance Promotion

	Kroger		Kraft	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	149	62.9	13	9.6
No	85	35.9	121	89.6
Don't know	3	1.3	1	.7

Table 6. Combined Purchase Intentions

N	527
Mean	2.64
SD	0.85
Cronbach Alpha	0.88