

CONSUMERS' INTENTION TO ATTEND SOCCER EVENTS:  
APPLICATION AND EXTENSION OF THE THEORY OF  
PLANNED BEHAVIOR<sup>1,2</sup>

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*Summary.*—The purpose of this study was to identify important factors of consumers' intention to attend professional soccer events among Saudi Arabian soccer fans. To explore the decision-making process of this relatively understudied population, the theory of planned behavior was used as theoretical background. Particularly, this study measured the effect of attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control (time and money), and game importance on intention to attend, and examined the moderating role of commitment. Structural equation modeling (SEM) using 231 Saudi university students ( $M=21.9$  yr.,  $SD=1.21$ ) indicate that attitude and game importance were significantly related to attendance intention. The effect of subjective norms was significant only for the low commitment group and game importance was more important for the low than the high commitment group.

The theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 1991) has proved to be useful as a framework in understanding a wide variety of human behaviors. Numerous studies have adapted the theory to investigate consumer behaviors in different or target markets (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Ajzen, 2005). The theory of planned behavior is an extension of Fishbein's theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and proposes that people's behaviors can best be predicted by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2005). Intentions to engage in an explicit behavior are the most proximal antecedent to actual behavior, and intention toward the behavior is shaped by three factors: one's affect or attitude toward the behavior; subjective norm, which is defined as the social pressures felt by to perform the behavior; and perceived behavioral control, defined as the perceived ease or confidence toward a behavior.

A great deal of research has utilized TPB to understand involvement in exercise (e.g., Hagger, Chatzisarantis, and Biddle, 2002). There is also

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support for the theory in the domains of sport coaching behaviors (Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006) and the recycling behaviors of sport spectators (McCullough & Cunningham, 2011). Of most relevance to the current study, in the field of sport marketing, Cunningham and Kwon (2003) used the theory to understand and predict sport consumption behavior among hockey fans. The authors found that the attitudes, subjective norms, previous behaviors, and perceived behavioral control (time availability) accounted for 64% of the variance in intentions. Attitudes and subjective norms accounted for the most variance. Lu, Lin, and Cheng (2011) also found support for the theory of planned behavior among volleyball spectators in Taiwan. In sport spectating, intentions to attend a game (along with the perceived behavior control of attending) should predict actual attendance at a game. Attendance intentions would be significantly influenced by attitudes toward the event, the social pressures toward attending, and the perceived control that consumers may feel they possess toward attending a game in the future.

Consumers' commitment to a team is an important determinant of spectators' decisions to attend an event (Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000; Kim, Trail, & Ko, 2011). Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) defined commitment as "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (p. 316). Kim, *et al.* (2011) found that commitment was positively related to game attendance. Funk and Pritchard (2006) investigated the moderating role of commitment on the relationship between publicity and consumers' attitudes toward a sport team, finding that highly committed fans had more stable beliefs and feelings toward sports teams than did general spectators. Highly committed fans recalled more positive publicity messages, whereas people who were uncommitted recalled more negative publicity. To date, the role of spectators' commitment has not been examined in conjunction with specific variables of the theory of planned behavior. The examination of the moderating effect of commitment would contribute to sport marketing and consumer behavior literature by enhancing understanding of spectators' attendance decisions.

Also of importance is that sport fan behaviors in the Middle East have received almost no attention in the literature. The sport markets of Middle Eastern countries have become more significant in the sport industry due to these consumers' high buying power and increased interest in and commitment to sport of soccer (The Middle East Institute, 2010). People in this region share highly collectivistic cultural values (Hofstede, 1980, 2001); it could be argued that it is necessary to understand their psychological and behavioral patterns to develop more effective marketing strategies.

The current study was conducted to identify variables predicting the intention among Saudi consumers to attend soccer events. TBP constructs

and measures (Attitude, Subjective norm, and Perceived behavioral control) were modified for this purpose. The moderating effect of consumers' psychological commitment was examined, since the target population has shown higher commitment than other consumer groups (The Middle East Institute, 2010). These hypothesized relationships described below are summarized in Fig. 1.

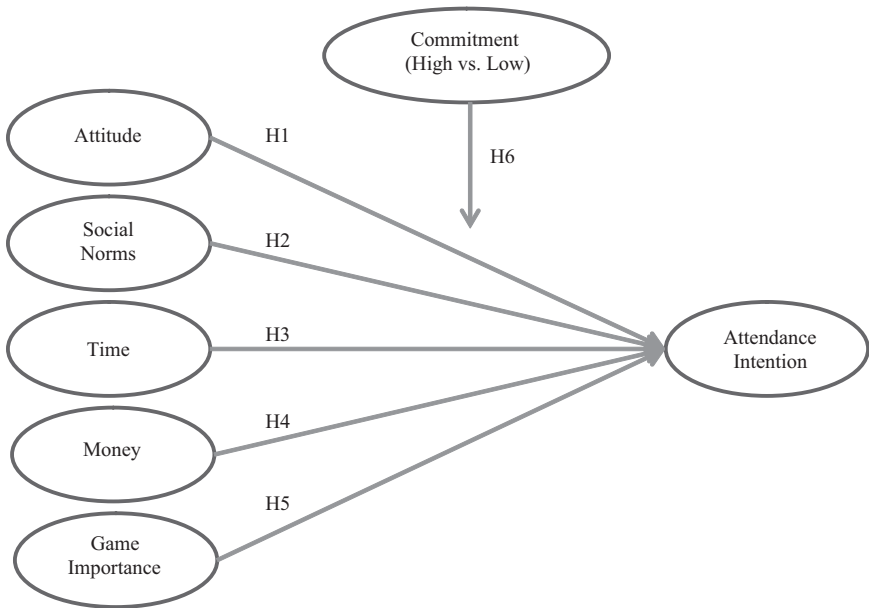


FIG. 1. The proposed research model

*Hypothesis 1.* Attitudes toward an event are positively related with intention to attend.

*Hypothesis 2.* Social norms are related with intention to attend.

*Hypothesis 3.* The perceived behavioral control (time) has a positive effect on intention to attend.

*Hypothesis 4.* The perceived behavioral control (money) has a positive effect on intention to attend.

*Hypothesis 5.* Perceived game importance has a positive effect on intention to attend.

*Hypothesis 6.* Commitment to a team has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between the selected antecedent variables and intentions to attend a sport event.

## METHOD

*Participants and Procedure*

After receiving approval from the university's research committee, the researchers distributed the questionnaire to the undergraduate students registered at a large public university in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. They shared their prior experiences of game attendance in the King Cup of Champions. This event is an end-of-season cup competition in Saudi Arabia. Generally, the top eight teams in the professional leagues compete in the King Cup. From the 318 questionnaires distributed, 231 students responded and were included in the data analysis. The mean age was 21.9 yr. ( $SD=1.2$ ). With respect to the education level, 45.0% were in their fourth year in college, 42.4% were in their third year, 11.7% were in their second year, and only 0.9% were in their first year. In terms of parent education levels, over 50% of the respondents answered their father's education levels were high school and bachelor's degree (55.0%), while mother's education levels were primarily no education or primary / junior school (66.7%). In terms of marital status, the majority of the participants were single (84.4%), and only 15.2% were married.

*Translation and Modification of the Questionnaires*

Brislin's (1986) translation techniques guided the development of the Arabic items. The items (see below) were translated from English into Arabic by the principal researcher who is a bilingual speaker. With the help of a professional translation agency in Saudi Arabia, a second translation of the questionnaires into Arabic was undertaken, which was then translated back into English. The researcher compared the two Arabic translations and created a refined draft of the Arabic version of the items. Two experts in the Arabic language then reviewed and evaluated the drafts of both the English and Arabic versions for content analysis. Ambiguities and difficulties with the translations were discussed and resolved. After the draft of the Arabic version of the questionnaires was evaluated, the questionnaires were then field tested on a small sample ( $n=10$ ) of young Saudi students. Modifications were made according to the comments of these students to clarify the content. The students individually suggested the substitution of a number of words and expressions by synonyms to facilitate comprehension and to ensure cultural and linguistic accuracy.

*Measures*

In the TBP, the three antecedent-constructs are often measured directly: no control–complete control, no intentions–intentions, impossible–possible. Each of these three constructs can be traced to a set of corresponding underlying beliefs about behavior for the specific population under study.

For example, for the subjective norm variable the normative expectations of specific significant others (e.g., spouses, family members, friends) can influence behaviors. Perceived behavioral control is measured as facilitating or impeding factors (Cunningham & Kwon, 2002; Sagas, *et al.*, 2006). Facilitating and impeding factors could serve as a focus for marketing tactics that positively or negatively affect game attendance behavior.

Following Ajzen (1991, 2006) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), a pilot study was conducted to develop the questionnaire for the main study. To develop the measures, it was first essential to identify who served as "important referents" for the targeted sample, and what factors affected their control over decisions to attend Saudi soccer games in the stadium during the King Cup of Champions 2012. Open-ended questionnaires were distributed to 25 students, asking them to respond to the two items listed above. For the first question, 56% of respondents indicated that family members were most likely to serve as important referents. To a lesser extent, 54% indicated friends, 52% mentioned elite players, and 30% identified Saudi princes and royal family (their presence at the games) as influencing their decision. In terms of the perceived control question, 52% indicated time, followed by money (43%) and the importance of match (43%), as the three most frequently mentioned factors that influenced their attendance decision.

The main questionnaire contained items related to the participants' demographics (i.e., age, academic year, accumulative grade, marital status, level of parents' education), past experiences, commitment, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and attendance intentions. Attitudes were assessed using four semantic differential scales in response to the following item: "For me, attending Saudi soccer games in the stadium during the King Cup of Champions 2012 would be ..." The four scale items were Unpleasant–Pleasant, Dull–Entertaining, Worthless–Valuable, and Not comfortable–Comfortable, rated on a 7-point scale. The mean of the four responses represented the final score on attitude. This is consistent with the measures used in previous research (e.g., Yordy & Lent, 1993; Hagger, Chatzisarantis, & Biddle, 2001). The reliability estimate (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) was .87.

Subjective norm was assessed using three items (Cunningham & Kwon, 2002): "Most of the important people to me would approve of my attending this event," "Close people to me are likely to attend this event," and "My important referent is likely to attend this event." All items were rated on a 7-point scale with anchors 1: Strongly disagree and 7: Strongly agree. The mean of the three items represented the final score. The reliability estimate (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for this measure was .72. Perceived behavioral control was measured based on the preliminary results from the pilot study. However, time, money, and game importance were consid-

ered to represent three different aspects of perceived behavioral control; thus, each dimension was measured using a single item: "It would be difficult for me to find the time to attend these games," "I do not have the money available to attend these games," and "The importance of the game (e.g., derby game, final, or semi-final) would determine my attendance of these games." These items were rated on a 7-point scale with anchors 1: Strongly disagree and 7: Strongly agree.

Intention to attend was measured using three items: "I will try to attend Saudi soccer games at the stadium during the upcoming season of the Saudi King Cup of Champions," "Attending these games is something I plan to do," and "I intend to attend Saudi soccer games at the stadium during the upcoming season of the Saudi King Cup of Champions." These items are similar to those in Hagger, *et al.*'s (2001) study inasmuch as participants were asked if they intended to, planned to, and tried to attend a game. The items were rated on a 7-point scale with anchors 1: Strongly disagree and 7: Strongly agree. The mean of the three items represented the final score. The reliability estimate (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for this measure was .86.

Psychological commitment was assessed using four selected items from the Psychological Commitment to Team scale developed by Mahony, *et al.* (2000): "I am dedicated to my favorite Saudi soccer team," "I am faithful to my favorite Saudi soccer team," "I am devoted to my favorite Saudi soccer team," and "It would be unlikely for me to change my allegiance from my favorite Saudi soccer team." These items were on a 7-point scale with anchors 1: Strongly disagree and 7: Strongly agree (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ).

### *Data Analysis*

To test overall properties of scales and research hypotheses, SPSS Version 18.0 and AMOS Version 18.0 were utilized. In the first step, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, including all latent variables (commitment, attitude, and intention) to examine psychometric properties of the measurement scale. Chi square ( $\chi^2$ ), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to test measurement model fit. Then, average variance extracted (AVE) and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  were examined to establish reliability of the scale items using SPSS 18.0. Multi-group structural equation modeling (SEM) was also employed to test the moderating effect of commitment. A median split (median=5.25) was used to determine low and high loyalty groups as summarized in Table 1 (Yoshida & Gordon, 2012). As Table 1 shows, the high commitment group has significantly high means at most questions. To test the moderating effect, a chi-squared difference test was conducted to compare a model in which all paths were constrained to be equal across the two groups with an unconstrained model in which the hypothesized path to be moderated was permitted to vary freely across the groups. If the un-

TABLE 1  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, FACTOR LOADINGS, CONSTRUCT RELIABILITY, AND AVERAGE VARIANCE  
EXTRACTED (AVE)

Factor	Item	$\lambda$	AVE	$\alpha$	Low Loyalty ( $n=121$ )		High Loyalty ( $n=110$ )		$p$
					$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$	
Attitude	Unpleasant–Pleasant	.83	.64	.87	3.46	1.70	4.08	2.05	*
	Dull–Entertaining	.89			3.79	1.54	4.26	1.91	*
	Worthless–Valuable	.77			3.79	1.61	4.33	1.98	*
	Not comfortable– Comfortable	.68			3.02	1.67	3.05	1.96	.90
Subjective norms	Most of the people important to me [mentioned in the previous section] would approve of my attending this event.	.80	.51	.72	4.06	2.07	5.37	1.84	‡
	My important refer- ent is likely to at- tend this event.	.82			4.06	1.97	5.27	1.54	‡
	People close to me are likely to attend this event.	.47			3.79	1.73	4.70	1.69	‡
	I intend to attend the soccer game in the stadium.	.89	.68	.86	3.58	1.94	4.37	2.07	†
Intention	Attending this event is something I plan to do.	.76			3.58	1.83	4.07	2.07	.56
	I will try to attend the soccer game.	.83			3.91	1.95	4.37	1.99	.75
	I am dedicated to my favorite Saudi soc- cer team.	.73	.66	.88	3.04	1.38	5.74	1.36	‡
	I am faithful to my fa- vorite Saudi soccer team.	.93			3.76	1.68	6.64	0.62	‡
Commit- ment	I am devoted to my favorite Saudi soc- cer team.	.86			3.93	1.72	6.67	0.66	‡
	It would be unlikely for me to change my allegiance from my favorite Saudi soccer team.	.71			3.87	2.19	6.77	0.84	‡

Note.— $p$  value of the comparison between Low and High scoring groups: \* $p < .05$ . † $p < .01$ . ‡ $p < .001$ .

constrained model demonstrated a significantly lower chi-square than the constrained model at  $p < .05$ , the moderating effect would be supported (Bhuian, Menguc, & Bell, 2005).

## RESULTS

### *Assessment of the Measures*

Prior to testing the proposed research model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the psychometric properties of the measures. The maximum likelihood method of estimation was employed to test the model. Based on the results of CFA analysis, one item from Attitude and one item from Subjective norms were eliminated due to low factor loadings. The model fit of the final measurement model was acceptable:  $\chi^2_{32} = 72.82$ ,  $p < .001$ , RMSEA = 0.07, standard root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.01; CFI = 0.96. Additionally, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  estimates ranged from .71 (subjective norms) to .87 (attitude). The AVE values ranged from .51 (subjective norms) to .68 (behavioral intention; Table 1).

Each measurement scale item's loading was greater than the suggested value of .50 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2005). Additionally, critical ratios of indicators ranged from 6.43 to 14.49 and were greater than the significant value of 1.96 at  $\alpha = .05$ . To examine discriminant validity, correlations were calculated between measured constructs. Correlations among constructs were moderate, ranging from .38 (Attitude and Subjective norms) to .62 (Attitude and Behavioral intention). Since each of the squared correlations were smaller than AVE values for the factors, the measures are considered discriminant (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In sum, the results provide empirical support that the measurement scale was reliable and valid.

### *Main Effects*

The relationships between TPB factors and intention to attend games were examined using SEM. The results showed that the model had an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 158.80$ ,  $df = 62$ ,  $\chi^2 / df = 2.56$ ,  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = 0.08; CFI = 0.92). Among the selected antecedents, attitude ( $\beta = 0.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and game importance ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were significantly related to students' intention to attend. Hence, Hypotheses 1 and 5 were supported (Table 2).

### *Moderating Effects*

A multi-group SEM analysis was conducted to test the moderating effect of commitment in the proposed structural model (Palmatier, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 2007). As shown in Table 3, among the five factors the moderating effects of subjective norms, time, and game importance were significant; financial resources and attitude had no significant moderating effects. Within the model, although attitude had a direct effect on behavioral inten-



TABLE 2  
EFFECTS OF THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR VARIABLES ON INTENTION TO ATTEND

Path	Standardized $\beta$	SE	Critical Ratio	$p$
Attitude $\rightarrow$ Intention	0.49‡	0.08	6.80	< .001
Subjective norms $\rightarrow$ Intention	0.13	0.07	1.89	.06
Time $\rightarrow$ Intention	0.02	0.05	-0.39	.70
Money $\rightarrow$ Intention	-0.03	0.05	-0.53	.60
Game importance $\rightarrow$ Intention	0.38‡	0.05	6.49	< .001

‡ $p < .001$ .

tion in both groups, its moderating effect was not significant. The effect of attitude was slightly larger for the high loyalty group ( $\beta = 0.51, p < .001$ ) than the low loyalty group ( $\beta = 0.45, p < .001$ ). The effect of subjective norms on behavioral intention was significant only for the low loyalty group ( $\beta = 0.18, p < .05$ ). The effect of game importance on behavioral intention was stronger for the low loyalty group ( $\beta = 0.53, p < .001$ ) than the high loyalty group ( $\beta = 0.22, p < .01$ ). Finally, although a significant difference in the chi-squared value was found for the effect of time in a comparison between high and low loyalty groups, the effect was not in the hypothesized direction.

#### DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study were: (a) to identify factors that significantly influence the intention to attend in soccer events using the theory of planned behavior and (b) to examine the moderating role of "commitment" in the relationships between antecedents selected from the TPB and intention to attend. A research model was developed to evaluate direct effects of TPB variables on intention to attend Saudi Arabian soccer events and to examine the moderating effect of commitment. The results of this study indicate that the TPB is an effective theoretical approach to predict the spectators' intention to attend. Furthermore, this study identified key

TABLE 3  
MODERATING EFFECTS OF LOYALTY TOWARD BEHAVIORAL INTENTION

Measure	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	Moderating Effect	Commitment			
				High		Low	
				$\beta$	$p$	$\beta$	$p$
Attitude	1.68	1	No	0.51	< .001	0.46	< .001
Subjective norms	2.75†	1	Yes	0.11	.64	0.18	.02
Time	2.30*	1	Yes	-0.02	.55	-0.04	.26
Money	1.38	1	No	-0.05	.66	-0.06	.12
Game importance	2.10*	1	Yes	0.33	< .001	0.49	< .001

\* $p < .05$ . † $p < .01$ .

factors that may shape the intention to attend of this unexplored sport market segment.

### *Theoretical Implications*

Before examining the research models, the validity and reliability of the measurement scale were established through a CFA and statistical equation modeling (SEM analyses). Empirical evidence indicated that the measurement scale was psychometrically sound. Reliability and validity were tested by Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and discriminant and construct validity, and both were supported.

The SEM results indicated that spectators' attitudes toward the soccer game of Saudi King Cup and the perceived importance of games positively influenced their intention to attend. In particular, spectator's attitude was found to be the single most important predictor of game attendance. This is consistent with the previous research findings that pre-existing attitudes are one of the most important predictors of future behavioral intention (e.g., Cunningham & Kwon, 2003; Rhodes, Courneya, & Jones, 2004). Perceived importance of the game can be understood from the perspective of game rivalry. Rivalry refers to the competition among teams that are known to be historically significant competitors (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006), and it is an important factor that attracts fans through enhanced team identity and brand image (Richelieu & Pons, 2006). Rivalry significantly increases entertainment value (e.g., fun, excitement, and drama), and these entertainment values are highly related to spectators' commitment and intention to attend in games (Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014). Subjective norm was marginally related to spectators' behavioral intention, which indicates that sport spectatorship is a social function in Saudi soccer culture. Time and financial resources were not important predictors of intention to attend among the spectators of Saudi King Cup, which is consistent with the findings of Cunningham and Kwon (2003).

The results of the multi-group SEM indicate that students' commitment significantly moderated the relationships. In particular, results support the model's assumptions that the low commitment group was more strongly influenced by the importance of the game when compared to the high commitment group. Additionally, social norms were a significant predictor of intention to attend a game among the low commitment group. These results indicate that among Saudi fans subjective norm positively relates to intention to attend, but, as expected, the relationship is diminished by the moderating effect of commitment. Sport event attendance decision among highly committed fans was found to be made based mainly on their own preference. The results reflect that consumers in Saudi Arabia share a highly collectivistic cultural value that reinforces the notion of responsibility to other members of their group (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Ed-

dosary, 2010). The members of this society appear to be sensitive to others' opinions when making a purchase decision. This result is consistent with a recent finding that there is a strong relationship between subjective norms and behavioral intention in the Arab world (Al-Gahtani, Hubona, & Wang, 2007, Eddosary, 2010). Although the importance of commitment is well documented in business (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004), few studies have compared highly committed fans and general spectators in sport events. As such, this study gives unique contribution to spectator behavior research.

#### *Practical Implications*

The sport of soccer is the most popular in Saudi Arabia. The results of this study may contribute to the continued growth of the soccer industry in this country by providing managers with systematic information about their consumers. A clearer understanding of this market may help develop market segmentation strategies, and ultimately, increase spectators' attendance. Particularly, the results indicate that it is important to develop spectators' positive attitudes toward soccer events to increase the probability of their game attendance regardless of their pre-existing commitment level. Thus, on a practical basis, marketers need to focus on forming positive attitudes among their target customers by developing and implementing effective marketing and communication strategies.

Results indicate that general spectators were more likely to be influenced by game importance and social referents than were highly committed fans. As such, marketers of soccer events may consider aggressively targeting general spectators by highlighting rivalry between teams when promoting the events. In the sport realm, rivalry matches can be an effective way to attract general spectators who do not have a targeted team to commit to, in line with Késenne's (2000) suggestion that the value of a game affects attendance. To attract new customers, marketers could actively use integrated marketing communication approaches using social media to allow their customers to be engaged in word-of-mouth recommendations for the events among important others including family members and friends. Additionally, special events for groups of customers (e.g., family and friend nights) could also be offered to boost attendance.

#### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

The results should be interpreted with caution due to several limitations. First, this study used a student sample using a convenience sampling approach. Due to the unique characteristics of sport consumption culture in Saudi Arabia (women are not allowed at sporting events), the authors could not test the theoretical model using female spectators. Future

studies need to focus on activities that female Saudi consumers are legally allowed to participate in to learn more about this unexplored customer group. Second, as in many other TPB studies, the authors measured intention to attend rather than actual behavior. Although prior meta-analysis research (e.g., Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992) has established that intentions significantly predict actual behavior, future research would benefit from the inclusion of actual behavior to more accurately explain and predict sport consumption behavior of the consumers in this region.

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