



Cattedra

RELATORE

CANDIDATO

Anno Accademico

*To my parents, my sister, my girlfriend
and all my closest friends*

Contents

PART 1. Introduction.....	4
PART 2. The effect of sports sponsorships on people perception.....	7
2.1 Determinants of consumers' sponsorship awareness.....	7
2.2 The impact of identification and isolation on sponsorship.....	9
2.3 The effect of sport sponsorship on consumers' purchase behaviour.....	11
PART 3. How reactions to sponsorships vary between different scenarios.....	14
3.1 Does gender matter?.....	14
3.2 Differences between sports and athletes.....	15
PART 4. The survey: Reactions to kit's sponsorship in our geographic area.....	21
PART 5. Conclusion.....	27
References:	
Bibliography and Sitography.....	29

PART 1

1. INTRODUCTION

From the most remote past, sport has always been one of the most effective means of communication, just think of the Olympic games in the ancient Greece, which were able to give period of peace between populations at war with each other, or just think to the Roman age in which noble families were interested in sponsoring sport events in order to increase their reputation.

In the last decades, due to a large sport globalization, sports and sport events have become part of people daily life, involving a very large part of the world population. Thus, relative clubs or firms started to move from a simple and often local growth and development scenario to an international, larger and more complex one.

This process of sport globalization has involved almost every single relative field, from the most complicated – such as corporate structure of sport entities (e.g. top management organization, department division, etc.) – to the easiest.

Due to its always increasing international appeal, sport globalization has constantly contributed to increase the popularity of sports, making them an important means of communication, leading marketing activities to become one of the primary sources of growth and firms' value creation.

Nowadays, one of the most relevant factors in terms of sport marketing deals with sponsor relationships which are defined as: “sponsorship and financing of an event of public interest by a company (sponsor) in order to promote and improve its image in association with that of the sponsored organization (sponsee).”¹

Usually, when two parties engage in a voluntary sponsor relationship, means that the sponsor will provide its economic support to the sponsee, which could be a club, a company, or a person that are very popular within the public, in order to gain in return, the advertising and the evidence of its brand image to the largest possible audience.

Today, when we talk about sports, it's quite normal to being familiar with sponsorships, even because almost every kit (in sports like football, basketball, volleyball, etc.) and every necessary vehicle – such as in Formula One, Moto gp and cycling – are studded of one or more sponsors.

At the beginning, during the late 1950s, sponsor relationships were driven by emotional factors; they were usually offered by entrepreneurs that were strictly related to a sport club by sporting faith or friendship relations, and so, they were not the result of a precise strategy analysis. Initially, the growth and development of sponsorships have not been rapid.

¹ Sponsorizzazione: significato, definizione. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.glossariomarketing.it/significato/sponsorizzazione/>.

In fact, dealing with football, after the first attempts by several clubs – such as Vicenza and Monza in Italy at the beginning of 1960s (respectively sponsored by “Lanerossi” and “Simmenthal”), and Kettering Town in England in 1976 (sponsored by “Kettering Tyres”) – Sponsor contracts have been banned until the season 1978/1979 which is remembered as the season in which sport sponsorships passed from an emotional approach to a strategical and analytical one.

In 1978, in Italy, because of the prohibition to exhibit sponsorships on football shirts, Udinese broke the mould taking to the football pitch with “Samson” written on their shorts, and forty years ago, in 1979, Liverpool Football Club has showed to the world the first ever main sponsor in the England national league: a contract of about one hundred thousands of pounds for two years with the manufacturing company “Hitachi”.

Thanks to economic changes, growth and development, club and athletes – but also sports associations (such as UEFA, FIFA, FIBA, and nationals’ sports associations) – started to understand and realize the possibility to exploit their fame and their image in order to have success expanding their brand with the aim of making profits. Thus, they begin to change their point of view on sponsor relationships, increasing confidence with them.

In this connection we have passed from a more emotional link between sponsors and sponsee to a more rational strategy of communication between companies and sports club.

In fact, if at the beginning sponsorship were not so expensive and economically relevant, nowadays we are witnessing to a purely capitalistic interpretation of them in which sports entities bind to long-term contracts in order to increase sponsorship awareness within consumers and, thus, make it profitable and successful.

It’s clear that sponsorships’ first purpose has become and is becoming more and more that of creating firms value and making profits; just think to few clear examples – such as Manchester United, Real Madrid or Barcelona, which have the most expensive sponsorships contracts with countless sponsoring companies, respectively evaluated for 269 million euros (with about 68 contracts), 178 million euros, and 261 million euros (with about 43 sponsorships contract).

However, the research of a new sponsor is not only committed to maximize the value of the company, but just the same is aimed at motivate a reaction from the determined customer segment, thus trying to impact on sponsorship awareness.

Focusing on this latter concept, my research will be imprinted on analysing the effect of sports sponsorships on customers: how they are influenced or not, and how they are able to determine the effectiveness of sponsors. Through a zoom-in, I will pass from the more general concepts to the specific ones; in particular analysing, first of all, the involvement and the reaction of the market target to sports related sponsorships, which is helpful in determining the pattern of my research, putting attention on how they affect the memory of the people and how people change their purchasing behaviour according to changes in sponsorships.

Narrowing the field of research, I will then apply the above mentioned general concept analysing the difference of the effects of this phenomenon on different kind of sports – such as football and motorsports.

Finally, I conduct an empirical research in which I take in consideration a sample of about one hundred sports fans aged between eighteen and twenty five years old across my geographic area in order to define and generalize, through a survey and interviews, my results, identifying the relative framework of sponsorship consideration.

In the following paragraphs, in order to get a derivation of my research hypotheses, I am going to analyse existing sources. Therefore, illustrating my research methodology and my results, I will be able to argue this study's implications.

PART 2

2. THE EFFECT OF SPORTS SPONSORSHIP ON PEOPLE PERCEPTION

2.1 Determinants of consumers' sponsorship awareness

Having become, in the last period, a long term investment, sponsor relationship is aimed at fulfilling and increasing customers awareness and convincing them about sponsors positive effect.

Customer sponsorship awareness could be for the firm an important factor which provide a critical analysis on sponsorship efficiency and effectiveness.

In this connection, in fact, few of the fundamental factors that affect sponsorship awareness are the characteristics of individual customers, their individual involvement and their feelings in the memorization of the brand.

Consumers usually refers to sponsor distinction in their memory process, moreover their identification with the brand is intended to be above average when sponsor relationships are signed together with well-known company and when consumers agree with the complementarity between the sponsor (the company) and the sponsee (an object or an event).

In fact, "the more a person is exposed to the sponsorship linkage, the more likely the link will be stored in memory and can be remembered instantly". (Meenaghan, 2005)

Again, related with sponsorship in a determinant way, are, as above mentioned, individual characteristics of customers; how customers are involved in connection with the sponsored activity or product is a in important indicator of customer sponsorship awareness. Usually, they are more willing to consume and identify themselves with product sponsored by familiar or well-known brand, thus affecting sponsorship awareness.

However, there are many other factors which could be determinant in order to define the level of sponsorship influence on people perception. First, demographic factors could be necessary to evaluate the ability of the population to interact with sponsor contracts in mnemonic and behavioural terms. The second relative important factor that could affect awareness and perception is strictly related to education levels and gender differentiation; generally, people with higher education levels and men, more than women, are relatively more able to be willing to participate in a sponsorship program. Last element, but not least, deals with age: younger people are better than older people to enter in, and better memorize, a sponsor link between the company and the product, or event.

The long-term structure of today sponsor relationship, lead to a greater recognition and to an increasing identification of customers in the sport-related company. Thus, increasing over time their relative awareness on brand and their behaviour due to the replication of the brand image and, so, its advertising message.

Dealing with sports sponsor relationships, we are aware, nowadays, of their importance in terms of company's income, but more specifically in terms of fans identification and integration in the community.

As a matter of fact, since the growth of sports as global and social effect, sports entities have been starting to develop and integrate their marketing strategies in order to reach and satisfy customers, in this case sports fans, even though identification in sponsorship.

Moreover, sports fans are influenced by many different factors – such as brand image, brand loyalty, its quality and its commitment.

Different analysis and studies have been concentrating on the relevance of these variables in order to connect them with customers' behaviour, emotions, attention and opinions.

In this process, consumers deal directly with the brand company with the intention of building a connection aimed at contributing to the improvement and the expansion of the brand in the relative marketplace.

“Key factors that affect the consumer brand relationship include purchasing experience, cognitive beliefs, and brand commitment”². (Evard and Aurier, 1996 – Fournier, 1998)

The consumer brand relationship is strictly linked to brand loyalty, which strengthen satisfaction and lead to an increase in consumers' consumption.

Indeed, the creation of brand loyalty lead to an increase in levels of satisfaction and an increase in consumers' positive opinions.

Other studies analyses have underlined the fact in which determinant factors – such as brand awareness, commitment, brand image and perceived quality – vary between the previous period and the period succeeding the signing of the sponsor contracts. A striking example is presented by the experimental research made by two Korean – Jung-Yong Lee and Chang-Hyun Jin, respectively a PhD candidate at SungKyunKwan University (Seoul, Korea) and a marketing professor at Kyonggi University (Gyeonggi-do, Korea) – in 2018 with reference to the world cup of football of the same year.

They were able to analyse the effect of sponsorships and their determinant factors on football-related consumers and on their relational link with the sponsoring brand. The results showed that “the path coefficient of perceived quality on brand commitment was not significant either before or after sponsorship, and the path coefficient of perceived quality on brand commitment was not significant prior to sponsorship. On the other hand, the sponsor's brand awareness and image were closely related to consumer-brand relationship satisfaction and commitment. Also, consumer-brand relationship satisfactio positively affected brand commitment.”³

² Lee, J.-Y., & Jin, C.-H. (2019). The Effect of Sponsor's Brand on Consumer–Brand Relationship in Sport Sponsorship. *Global Business Finance Review*, 24(1), 27–43. doi: 10.17549/gbfr.2019.24.1.27

³ Lee, J.-Y., & Jin, C.-H. (2019). The Effect of Sponsor's Brand on Consumer–Brand Relationship in Sport Sponsorship. *Global Business Finance Review*, 24(1), 27–43. doi: 10.17549/gbfr.2019.24.1.27

2.2 The impact of fans identification and isolation on sponsorship

Sports globalization led to the expansion of sport teams and their relative brands, aimed at reaching the largest possible audience worldwide. That is one of the reasons why, in the last decades, a lot of sports fans have become “out-of-market”. In fact, since sports have become more and more popular and easy to practice and participate, many fans could interact with their favourite sports clubs even though they live outside of the relative national market.

One of the most relevant and famous examples of out-of-market sponsorship is held up by the English football team Manchester United, one of the most productive sport club in terms of marketing activities, and its main sponsor Chevrolet. With this sponsor relationship the football club and the automotive company try to reach, in particular, fans who live outside England and United Kingdom which account for the majority of Manchester United fans.

In this connection sports sponsorship necessarily have to deal with fans isolation and identification which, most of the time, affect and guide the performance of the sponsors relationship.

Therefore, it is possible to divide fans in two main categories according to their level of isolation and identification – isolated strong fans and isolated weak fans.

Generally, their relative level of isolation – defined as “the experience of feeling separated from the team community”⁴ – lead to different fans reactions. The former category of sports fans usually follows the basic team strategy to be connected with it – the so called “doubling-down” effect – while the latter category, being weaker, try to find a connection with others avoiding any link with their team sponsors (“desertion” effect). Strictly related to fans isolation we find identification which affect directly fans affiliation to the team and the sponsoring company. In fact, “isolation increases affiliation motives for all fans, but the effect of affiliation on brand sponsor performance vary by fan identification, such that affiliation increases attitude toward a brand sponsor among strong fans but decreases it among weak fans”⁵.

Sponsorship effectiveness is influenced by both isolation and identification in different ways; extant researches show that the first one, isolation, deals with the separation of the fan and its team community. It is a psychological separation in which fans, influenced by their social environment, feel, temporarily or permanently, separated from sports communities. Several factors lead to isolation including, mainly, fans geographic distance to their team headquarter. In fact, out-of-market fans, hence those who live abroad, live

⁴ Mazodier, M., Henderson, C. M., & Beck, J. T. (2018). The Long Reach of Sponsorship: How Fan Isolation and Identification Jointly Shape Sponsorship Performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 82(6), 28–48. doi: 10.1509/jm.17.0360

⁵ Mazodier, M., Henderson, C. M., & Beck, J. T. (2018). The Long Reach of Sponsorship: How Fan Isolation and Identification Jointly Shape Sponsorship Performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 82(6), 28–48. doi: 10.1509/jm.17.0360

in isolation with respect of their sport team community and are, therefore, less involved in the consumer-brand relationship.

Identification, instead, is defined as “the extent to which a person self-categorizes as a fan of a given team and his or her generalized sense of emotional significance and symbolic meaning derived from belonging to the team’s fan community”⁶.

As a matter of fact, differently from isolation, identification does not involve physical presence but strictly depends on the strength of the connection between the fan and the sport entity. Again, it affects both strong and weak fans behaviour over time: the first ones are generally prouder of their favourite team; thus, they are more willing to consume team-related items or experiences. On the other hand, weak fans are less expected to follow and attend team-related event experiences when the team reputation is decreasing.

Together with isolation, identification has become one of the most important determinants of the performance of a sponsorship; in fact, affecting people perception, identification lead strong fans to be more willing to purchase sponsors brand related with their team environment, they are even more able to recognize their team in a determined sponsoring brand and, usually, they enter in a consumer relationship with the brand just to demonstrate attachment to the sport club and establish a strong connection between them and the club.

Once Again, isolation and identification are jointly determinants of sponsor relationship performance. While isolation “will trigger an increased desire to affiliate”⁷ (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Mead et al. 2011), identification determines fans reactions to isolation, thus a reaction to an increasing desire of affiliation.

As shown by several studies, the interaction between these two concepts is almost always positive. Moreover, for example, in the research conducted by Marc Mazodier, Conor M. Henderson, and Joshua T. Beck for the Journal of Marketing of the American Marketing Association is presented the positive relationship between isolation and identification, and consumers’ purchase intention and sponsoring brand recall.

⁶ Mazodier, M., Henderson, C. M., & Beck, J. T. (2018). The Long Reach of Sponsorship: How Fan Isolation and Identification Jointly Shape Sponsorship Performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 82(6), 28–48. doi: 10.1509/jm.17.0360

⁷ Mazodier, M., Henderson, C. M., & Beck, J. T. (2018). The Long Reach of Sponsorship: How Fan Isolation and Identification Jointly Shape Sponsorship Performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 82(6), 28–48. doi: 10.1509/jm.17.0360

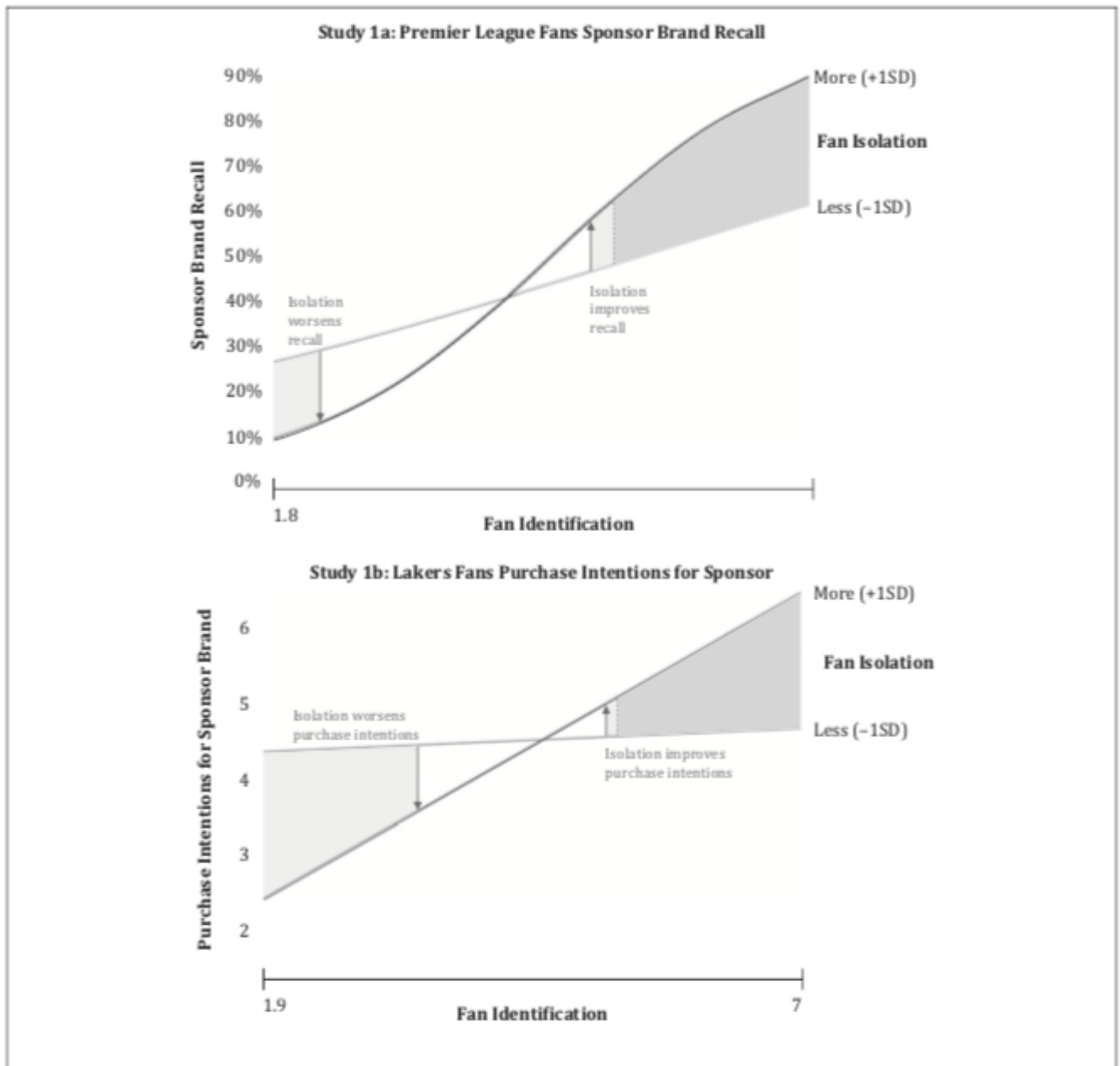


Figure 2. Study I: Estimated effects of fan identification × isolation on sponsor performance.

Notes: 1.8 and 1.9 were the minimum observed value for fan identification in the Study 1a and 1b samples. Shading represents regions at which effect of isolation is significant at 90% (light gray) and 95% (dark gray) confidence levels.

Figure 1⁸

2.3 The effect of sport sponsorship on consumers' purchase behaviour

From the time when the growth and development of sponsor relationships has become fast, also sponsorship expenditure largely increased over time; even for the period of the great economic collapse, their expenditure have exponentially increased: in 2016, sponsorship expenditure reached the threshold of 60.1 billions of

⁸ Mazodier, M., Henderson, C. M., & Beck, J. T. (2018). The Long Reach of Sponsorship: How Fan Isolation and Identification Jointly Shape Sponsorship Performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 82(6), 28–48. doi: 10.1509/jm.17.0360

dollars, with an estimated growth of 4.6 percent, and in 2017 they have almost touched 63 billions of dollars, with a growth of 4.5 percent with reference to 2016.

About 70 percent of these total sponsorship expenditure belongs to sports sponsorship, the most popular sector in the sponsorship field. As a matter of fact, sports industry could offer larger opportunities to connect with new customers and expand relative brands.

Due to fans passion and their positive feelings, sports environment is one of the most fruitful sectors in terms of sponsorship for sponsoring companies.

In this connection, sports sponsorships are strictly related to people perception and opinions and generally affect customers' purchase behaviour of the sponsored products and the sponsor's products.

People perceptions and opinions are crucially essential in sports sponsorship since their involvement in the specific process of brand commitment. In fact, sports fans generally connect with their favourite clubs by different means of interaction – such as purchasing products, wearing relative clothes, watching games and matches at the stadium or on television and discuss about sports club and relative organized events.

One of the most important factors of critical evaluation of sponsor relationships effectiveness deals with customers' purchase behaviour and intention; when the two parties, the sponsor and the sponsee, decide to engage a sponsorship, they have to be aware of people perception and thoughts in order to satisfy the needs of their followers and themselves have success in terms of brand images and brand revenues.

The impact of sports sponsorship on fans is very high. A sport fan during the purchasing process, for any sport-related item, is strongly influenced by the relative sponsor relationship in which its favourite team is committed.

In particular, fans sensitivities to sponsorship are differently affected by factors such as their familiarity with the brand, the international appeal of the sponsoring company, the opportunities of involvement offered by the partnership and, finally, the visual design which the sponsor brand provides to the product.

The first to propose a connection between consumers' perceptions and brand equity was Aaker (1991), presenting a four dimensions model which include brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty.

“Brand awareness refers to the ability of a consumer to recognize the brand while brand association refer to ‘anything linked in memory by brand’ (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality captures the consumer’s perceptions toward the overall quality of a product or service (Zeithaml, 1988) and brand loyalty reflects the possibility of a customer to switch to another brand (Aaker, 1991).”⁹

⁹ Tsordia, C., Papadimitriou, D., & Parganas, P. (2017). The influence of sport sponsorship on brand equity and purchase behavior. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 26(1), 85–105. doi: 10.1080/0965254x.2017.1374299

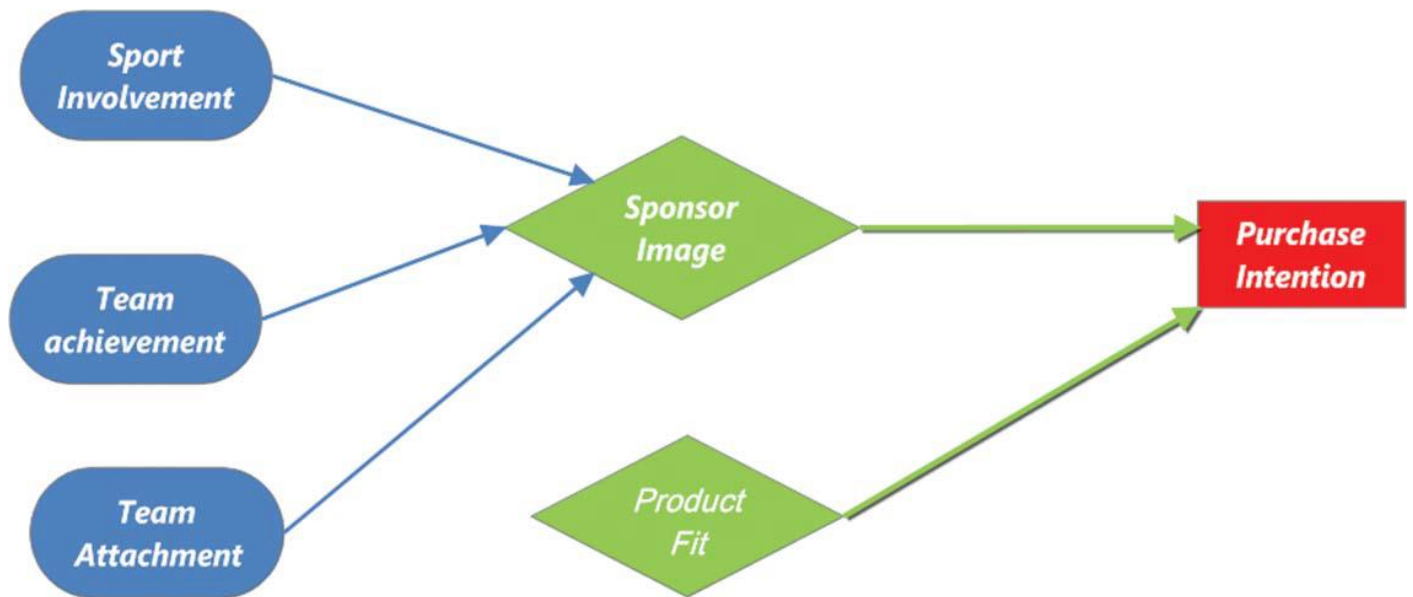


Figure 2: "Sport sponsorship effectiveness model"¹⁰

In a social point of view, fans recognize themselves in the engagement as they show positive reactions to sponsor partnership relative to their favourite teams and tend to give a higher positive support becoming an incentive to create and increase the connection between brand image and teams.

When sports fans are well arranged to the relationship between their favourite team and its relative sponsoring company, they are more willing to get involved, thus more willing to associate with them and positively identify in their team community.

As usual, reactions to sponsorship varies among different customers target; in fact, dealing with sports sponsorship it is possible to show how different factors – such as gender, age, type of sport, type of sponsor and sponsee, geographic location and demographic elements – matters in terms of sports sponsorship critical analysis.

In the next chapter I am going to illustrate all those relevant elements that affect and differentiate people perceptions on sports sponsorship leading the way to the presentation of the hypotheses and the results of my empirical research.

¹⁰ Konstantinos Koronios, Marina Psiloutsikou, Athanasios Kriemadis, Pavlos Zervoulakos & Eleni Leivaditi (2016) Sport Sponsorship: The Impact of Sponsor Image on Purchase Intention of Fans, Journal of Promotion Management, 22:2, 238-250, DOI: 10.1080/10496491.1121739

PART 3

3. HOW REACTIONS TO SPONSORSHIPS VARY BETWEEN DIFFERENT SCENARIOS

3.1 Does gender matter?

Originally, sports were conceived just as a male practice, in fact due to cultural and religious predispositions the female society was not able to be involved and participate to the sports environment until 1928, when female sports have been officially introduced in the Olympics games.

Nowadays, female sports are always closer to male sports in terms of level and professionalism, but mostly in terms of audience which lead to the approach of sponsoring companies to the relative sport association or sport club. In this connection it is possible to introduce the relationship between genders and sport sponsorship, analysing the potential influence of gender on the sponsor relationship and how the differences in their reactions.

Due to this male orientation of sports the largest portion of sponsor relationship has often taken into consideration male sports and male audience without involving female sports and female consumers.

However, in the last few years, thanks to different factors sponsoring companies started to move their attention on women's sports and their relative audience. The factors of main influence are principally three: first of all one of the most useful variables to determine customers segments it is just the gender: "Gender (in the context of biological sex) is an objective variable that is sizeable, identifiable and reachable through marketing campaigns"¹¹. Then, the second main factor of influence deals with the recognition of the importance of this segment and its correlative potential of making profits through the exploitation of the whole environment. Finally, the third relevant factor which lead to the shift of the attention on women's sports is about the differences in consumer behaviour between the male and female audiences.

Although this is still an unclear assumption on sponsorship effect, we can consider several different analyses which design the framework of the connection between gender and sponsorship. As shown by Funk et al. (2001) in their research suggest that involvement could be dependent on gender and, in that case, women react more positively to opportunities and presents a peculiar factor in female sponsorship which is gender solidarity. In fact, generally, women support women and, thus, support female sports. Although it has not been considered yet, gender solidarity is a factor of influence in women's world sponsorships.

Nowadays, sports events are generally attended by both women and men which create one of the largest audiences with reference to public events. As of their sponsorship response the difference lies in their relative level of personal involvement as consumers; this factor of influence lead to differences but also similarities

¹¹ Horning, D. L. (2018). Consumer response to cause-related sport sponsorship: does gender matter? *Journal of Marketing Trend - Communication*, 5, 143–162.

between women and men's reactions to sponsors. For example, considering the research made by Dr. Denyse Lafrance Horning, Assistant Marketing Professor at Nipissing University in Canada, in which personal involvement has been measured according to gender sports and by affiliated cause. It is possible to indicate how personal involvement vary between gender and social causes: generally, women, due to new trend of sports association and clubs to build sponsoring partnerships with breast cancer and other health and wellness associations, are more likely to interact and react positively to these type of social causes sponsors. However, in addition to female, a breast cancer, for example, has a particular impact even on men, which become, as women, supporters of these sponsoring social causes.

Again, as shown from the antecedent empirical research, men are usually less involved than women in sports of the alternative gender, and so they are less willing to be reactive to sponsor relationships, in fact there is a lower connection between male personal involvement and sponsorship reactions when we move from a male sport to a women sport.

Gender solidarity, in fact, is not only purely a female characteristic but, in terms of sports events, it is even a male peculiarity which lead to the above mentioned weakness.

As a matter of fact, the research shows just that "women would mostly support women and that men would mostly support men"¹². But women's support of their gender sports seems to be greater with respect to men's support for their own gender sports games. Again, women break the mold of gender solidarity showing great and higher support, compared to male audience, even for men's sports.

Finally, this led to the conclusion that, even if reactions to sponsorships across gender are quite similar, due to their higher level of support, women are more likely to positively react to sports sponsorships than men.

"When women are connected to a sponsored event, they are more likely to perceive the sponsor as being sincere in their motives to contribute to the event and affiliated causes"¹³.

3.2 Differences between sports and athletes

Let's now consider two completely different sports and their relative athletes and their relative sponsor relationships. For example, let's analyse one of the most popular sport in the world and one of the fullest sports in term of sponsor contracts of any kind – respectively football and motorsports (Formula One or MotoGP).

The first one, as already known, is the most followed sport in terms of audience and, mostly, in terms of merchandising and sponsorship. The second one is a more restricted subset of sports in terms of audience, but it could be considered one of the first in terms of sponsorship contracts.

¹² Horning, D. L. (2018). Consumer response to cause-related sport sponsorship: does gender matter? *Journal of Marketing Trend - Communication*, 5, 143–162.

¹³ Horning, D. L. (2018). Consumer response to cause-related sport sponsorship: does gender matter? *Journal of Marketing Trend - Communication*, 5, 143–162.

Starting from the second one is very interesting to note the different possible way of sponsorship contracts. One of the most interesting things is that a sponsoring company that want to invest money in the MotoGP or Formula One environment could decide to sponsor the whole sport team or just the rider (or pilot). Illustrating the difference between the two main different type of sponsorship, I will analyse their impact on people perceptions and their influence on people's memory.

First of all, engage a sponsorship with a motorsport team, specially with an official team – such as Ferrari, Mercedes, Yamaha, Honda and so on – give the opportunity to the company to start a business with the above mentioned motorsports companies (or other) which may become clients of their sponsoring company.

Then, the majority of the teams have – in their headquarter or in a different place – several infrastructures, such as the company museum or racing department, which could be useful to sponsoring companies in order to promote or present new products on the market or just to have public relations activities.

Furthermore, riders (or pilots) could get injured or pass from a team to another; in this connection, in fact, motorsports team are more solid and reliable giving the possibility to sponsoring companies to engage in a long term sponsorship contract with ability to improve it during the determined period.

However, although it would seem more convenient deciding to start a sponsor contract with a motorsports team, this is not always the case.

As a matter of fact, if we introduce the disposable time to create a strong relationship between the brand and its relative target as a fundamental variable, a rider (or pilot) will achieve the result faster.

It is worth noting that one becomes more quickly attached to the rider (or pilot) as individual than to an object – such as their vehicle. In fact, even though the individual has not that instrument useful in certain period to boost sponsorship relationships, it has the charisma, the fame and the fans' recognition.

Sometimes, it happens that a sponsoring company decide to invest and, thus, to sponsor both the team and the rider (or pilot); usually it depends from the relative company sponsors' budget.

"Give a child a sheet of paper, some colours and ask him to design a car, he will surely make it red." This is one of the most famous sentences pronounced by Enzo Ferrari, entrepreneur and founder of the car manufacturer Ferrari, which is seen as the driving sentence of every marketing man in the motorsport's environment.

The aesthetic and the chromatic impact of a sport car or a sport motorcycle have always had a very important value in the people fantasy and memories not only for motorsports fans but also for occasional fans who watch sports on television or read about it on newspapers.

From the early 1970s, motorsports audience started to see sponsored vehicles on the track and immediately love the announcement; this was the intuition of those who decide to convey their image and their brand through the desired racing objects loved by the large part of the public.

Therefore, they passed from cars or motorcycle with just some national sticker to those which we are nowadays accustomed to see every Sunday on the track.

Since the beginning sponsored cars or motorcycles have left indelible memories in people's imagination; just think to Lotus Jps, McLaren Marlboro, Ligier Gitanes, but also Yamaha Gauloises and Honda Camel, all sponsorships that have allowed people to identify the image of the rider (or pilot) to an emblematic brand: when fans refer to Ayrton Senna they connect him to Marlboro, at the same time when fans refer to Valentino Rossi they connect him to Gauloises. Every single fan has the possibility, through sponsorship, to identify itself in its favourite rider (or pilot); this is easier for motorcyclists due to the need to be equipped with the daily technical clothing that the car does not provide. Wearing a suit or helmet in replica version makes their champions feel tremendously closer, makes them empathize at least until they get on the bike itself.

Dealing with football, one of the most popular sport in the world, it is nowadays very easy to get in touch with sponsorship and every sponsorship-related situation. In this regard, one of the first thing it is worth noting is the very large amount of money that sponsorship relationship could generate for sports clubs, in this case football clubs. It is very interesting to find out how increasingly sponsoring companies are more willing to pay football clubs to become their official main sponsor or their official kit provider.

Before analysing the impact of football sponsorships on people's memories and perceptions, it is fundamental to underline the economic relevance that these relationships have acquired over time; in particular, as for the main sponsors on football kits, in recent years has developed an upward strategy with respect to the technical sponsors of football team kits.

Just think to the last five or ten years, in which almost every European football club signed a sponsorship contract with one or more kit suppliers. The leaders of this kind of economic movement are English Premier League's football clubs which since the beginning of sports sponsorships have always occupied a leading position in the field of marketing and, in particular, merchandising.

As a matter of fact, in 2012, Liverpool F.C. signed an onerous sponsor contract with the company Warrior Sports for a payment of twenty five millions of pounds per year, and in 2014, Arsenal Football Club announced its new technical sponsor and signed a five-years contract with Puma for more then thirty millions of pounds per year. But the great shock, in this sense, was led by Manchester United F.C. and its 2014 world record technical sponsor contract with Nike which brought, and it is still carrying, in the coffers of the company sixty millions of pounds per year for ten years.

As already specified, the other sponsor in a football kit is a corporate sponsorship contract which is nowadays fundamental for sports club in terms of international appeal and influence on relative fans.

According to Forbes, the five most expensive sponsorships on football kits belong to some of the most famous and followed team of the world – in order of sponsorship contract, Manchester United, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Liverpool and Real Madrid.



Figure 3: “Kettering Town’s Derek Dougan in 1976, Kenny Dalglish in Liverpool’s Hitachi kit, Paul Gascoigne in 1990 and Alex Pritchard in Huddersfield’s fake kit. Composite: Getty Images, Shutterstock”

Again, as in motorsports, football kits main sponsors could influence fans behaviour and their memories linked with their favourite team.

The aesthetic and the match between it and the visual design of the sponsor surely influence people perceptions and sometimes affect their purchasing behaviour.

At the beginning, in the late 1970s, when sponsorships were showed and noted for the first time, it must have hurt people minds; football fans were accustomed to deal with pure kits and not affected by any kind of advertisement. However, this has been a positive change, in fact, since the beginning topflight sponsorships have become one of the main elements through which football fans are able to remember and become attached to football kits and to their favourite team historical moments.

For the majority of football lovers, to remember the variuos sponsorships on their favourite team game kit is the way to remember these kits and their relative positive or negative memories regarding the team sport performances. Kids, for example, with their tender age, may not be able to connect a corporate sponsor partnership with their football team but, thanks to the brand advertisment on their favourite team kit, they surely relate the two and will link fond or bad memories in the future.

In fact, as publicly said by Max Rushden of “The Guardian” – “As far as I knew from all my extensive Panini ’87 swap deals, AVCO made West Ham kits and WANG Oxford. Everton were NEC and Arsenal were JVC. Perry Groves recounted this week how the players got half-price TVs from the deal. He would buy a load and sell them to his mates – cost price, not for profit!

I remember seeing an advert with Jeff Goldblum drinking Holsten Pils and my brain completely failing to work out the connection between that and Tottenham Hotspur. I didn’t know who Jeff Goldblum was. I didn’t really know what beer was. And I couldn’t for the life of me link that to the glorious Hummel/Holsten late-80s Glenn Hoddle kit. I am a sucker for those chevrons.

I remember the unbridled joy of getting the full Spurs kit and proudly wearing it for about four weeks solid. It was the Gascoigne, Lineker, Holsten shirt – chevrons down the shorts too. I spent the late-80s and early-90s entirely dressed in Spurs and Cambridge. I don't have a clue who designed the Cambridge ones but the sponsors are etched on my mind, from Lynfox to Howlett ... then, as we went up the leagues, Fujitsu – a foreign company! Since then we've returned to steel works and skip manufacturers – proper League Two sponsors. All the way through I couldn't tell you who actually designed them – until now. We have chevrons.”¹⁴

However, there are some example of football teams which have decided in the past and in recent years to take the field without a topflight sponsorship, thus leaving kits pure and unbranded. A clear example of the past is F.C. Barcelona, the Spanish football club which decide to be free of topflight sponsorships for one hundred and thirteen years until they start the partnership first with Unicef and, then, with Qatar Airways and Rakuten. Although today every football club tends to hold one, or more, sponsorships on their kits, there are some exception. In the past semester, for example, with regard to the english Premier League, the case of Huddersfield Town has been object of the discussion for media and newspapers.

Two months ago Huddersfield Town and Paddy Power (a sport betting agency) announced their partnership for the season 2019/2020 in the english Championship. When the home kit was presented to the public, his design was characterized by a big white diagonal band with the topflight sponsorship Paddy Power. It immediately aroused bad humor among Huddersfield fans which suddenly define the white diagonal band as the “hen party sash”.



The week after the launch, the majority thought that was a joke, but this feeling stopped when football players took the field of their first friendly match with the presented shirt. Some days later the match, both Huddersfield Town and Paady Power, announced to the world that the presentation of the kit was a show, and that Huddersfield would not have a topflight sponsor for this coming season.

¹⁴ Rushden, M. (2019, July 25). Kit sponsors can offer fond memories but betting logos would not be missed | Max Rushden. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2019/jul/25/kit-sponsors-football-betting-logos>.

This stunt was an initiative of Paddy Power to support their own campaign “Save Our Shirt”, which is aimed to support unsponsored kits in order to give the kits back to the fans in their genuine design. Immediately after Huddersfield Town unsponsored its kit, some other football teams followed suits – in particular Newport County and Motherwell.

PART 4

4. THE SURVEY: REACTIONS TO FOOTBALL KITS' SPONSORSHIPS IN OUR GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Methodology

In this research I will analyse the reactions and the emotions which relates football fans to their favourite team kit's sponsorship, together with their sponsorship awareness and their evaluation of their favorite teams' sponsorship activities.

In order to develop my analysis I considered several variables which were fundamental determining the environment and the target of people to which dispense the survey.

As a matter of fact, I took in consideration a very specific target of people; in particular, I interviewed about one hundred football fans, the major part of which were male (women were around five percent of the sample), aged between eighteen and twenty five years old, all across my geographic area, thus Italy, in particular the region of Lazio.

The participants of my survey and my interviews were not randomly selected, in fact, I tried to involve in my research all those football related people with a minimum level of involvement in the field of research. Almost every participant were well engaged in the issue and strongly helped me to derive my results and conclusions. In this direction, I developed a ten questions survey which I administered both online, through social media and other platform such as private message and websites, and orally, interviewing directly some participants. The participation of the sample has been very high, in fact, every single member have answered to every single question in the survey, thus, outlining a very good variety of answers collection which has been very useful to determine and design results and conclusions.

As I said before, the posed questions were ten and very specific in order to test my hypothesis. The main issue of my research was to find out the relationship between football kits' sponsorships and people perception and buying behaviour, starting from the hypothesis according to which people perceptions and emotions are influenced by football sponsorship and that their purchasing behaviour is, again, affected by their favourite team kit's sponsors in relation with their sponsorships awareness and their identification with their favourite team.

H1: Football kits' sponsorships positively (or negatively) affect fans perception and emotions

H2: Football fans purchasing behaviour is influenced by their favourite team kit's sponsorship

H3: More identified and more aware fans are more emotionally involved in their team sponsorships, thus, more satisfied.

To test these three main hypothesis I tried to pose as specific questions as possible which tend to widely cover every single field.

For example, in order to collect answers on the first hypothesis, I asked to the sample population few questions on football fans related passion and their connection with historical moments of their favourite team and that season football kit's sponsorship, or, for instance, on the emotions which a particular sponsorship have given them in a particular football kit. Instead, to test the other two hypothesis I asked different questions on the connection of football fans purchasing behaviour with sponsorships and, then, their degree of sponsorship awareness and identification.

Below, the ten questions in the survey.

1. Have you ever bought, or thought to buy, the jersey of a football team?
2. If yes, has your choice ever been influenced by the main sponsor or by the various sponsors on the jersey?
3. On a scale of one to five, how much do you think a sponsor, rather than another, could influence the choice of buying a football jersey?
4. Has the choice of a main sponsor of your favourite football team ever given you any emotion?
5. If so, what does your reaction depends on?
6. Has the sponsor, or one of the main sponsors of your favourite team, ever linked you to memories, good or bad, concerning the club's history?
7. Are you aware of the sponsorship activities of your favourite team?
8. If so, through what channels do you keep yourself informed?
9. From one to five, how do you rate your favourite team's sponsorship activities?
10. What is your favorite team?

The first three questions of the survey are aimed to determine the relationship between sponsorships and football fans purchasing behaviour; from the fourth to the sixth the aim is to find out if there is an emotional involvement in the relationship between football fans and football kits' sponsorships; from the seventh to the ninth I tried to design their sponsorship awareness, thus, their relative identification with the team. Finally, the tenth and last question is about the name of their favourite team, it was just a question to determine the

geographical pattern of my research and to measure the relationship between different teams' international appeal and sponsorships.

Results and Analysis

In this section I will present the results of my research together with a brief analysis of the single questions results.

For what concern the first part of the survey, that relative to football fans purchasing behaviour and its connection with sponsorships, I collect very interesting data. As to be expected, the largest part of the sample population positively answered to the first question, relative to the purchasing intention of a football jersey, in fact, 86,21 percent of the people interviewed have already bought or they thought to buy, at least once in a lifetime, their favourite team football kit.

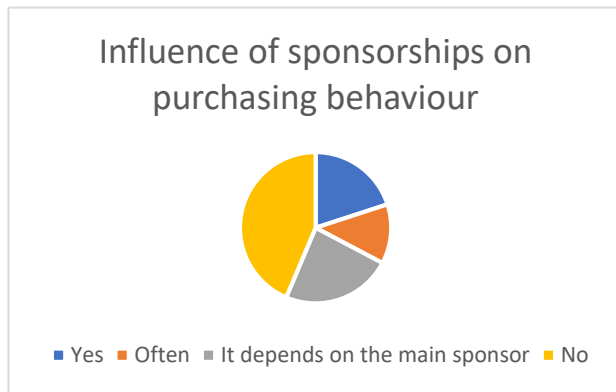


The interesting results of this first part of the survey came from the second and the third question, which respectively analyse the relationship between sponsorship and football fans purchasing behaviour, and the importance of topflight sponsorships according to fans perceptions.

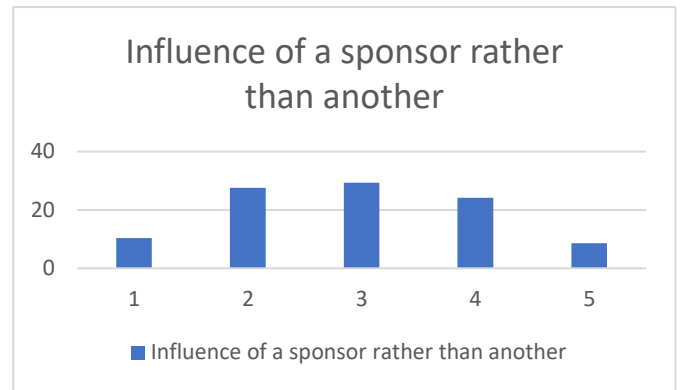
For the majority of the participants, 56,37 percent, the decision to purchase (or not) their favourite team football jersey depends on the topflight sponsor (or more than one) on the shirt, however, even it is possible to enclose it in a unique category, the level of influence was different between fans. As a matter of fact, this 56,37 percent majority is composed by, 20 percent of people who are definitely influenced by sponsorships, 12,73 percent of the sample who are often influenced by sponsorships, and 23,64 percent of the sample who are influenced by sponsorships depending on the main sponsor on the shirt.

For what concern the importance given to the sponsorships influence, thus the third question, results were various and predictable. On a scale of one to five, the weighted average of the influence of a sponsor rather than another is about 2.93, with respective percentages equal to 10,34 percent (1), 27,59 percent (2), 29,31 percent (3), 24,14 percent (4), 8,62 percent (5).

2. Question 2



3. Question 3



For what concern the second part of the survey, thus, from the fourth to the sixth question, I tried to analyse the relationship between sponsorships and football fans emotions.

51,72 percent of the sample population answered positively to the fourth question, underlining the existent relationship between sponsorships and people emotions. In order to better specify, through the following question it is possible to define how sponsorships affect people perceptions in terms of emotions.

58,62 percent of the interviewed population connect the main sponsor of their favourite football team to historical moments or other kind of memories concerning the history of their favourite football club.

In order to define how sponsorships affect people's memories and emotions, I asked to football fans what are the fundamental factors of sponsorships influence on their perception and I obtained the following results:

According to 48,08 percent of football fans the reaction to a particular topflight sponsorship depends on the visual design it gives to the football kit, again, 30,77 percent of the population is influenced by the international appeal of the sponsoring partner, thus from the international fame of the sponsorship brand.

The remaining 21,15 percent can be divided into two categories: 19,23 percent of football fans positively react to a sponsorship if, and only if, they are familiar with the sponsoring company and its activities, the last 1,92 percent does not have a particular factor of influence in order to connect with their favourite team sponsorship, and very often does not even react to a sponsoring partnership.



In the last questions of the survey, I tested the third hypothesis according to which reactions to sponsorships are strongly related with customers' sponsorships awareness and football fans identification.

Usually, sponsorships aware football fans are those who are better identified in their favourite team community, thus, those who positively react the most to sponsoring partnerships.

The last part of my survey is indeed oriented in this direction, in order to define the correlation between sponsorships awareness, identification and football fans effective reactions.

As shown from survey's results, interviewed sample population is largely aware of their favourite football clubs' sponsorship activities.

In fact, 26,32 percent of the sample it is said to be definitely aware of its team sponsorship activities, 42,11 percent, as expected, it is said to be enough aware, while the remaining 31,58 percent of the questioned people is, according to the results, definitely not aware of sponsorship activities (3,51 percent) or not much aware (28,07 percent).

The following two questions are aimed to define the framework of football fans sponsorship awareness; in particular, outline the means of communication through which they keep themselves informed, and how they consider their favourite football teams' sponsorship activities in terms of importance and development.

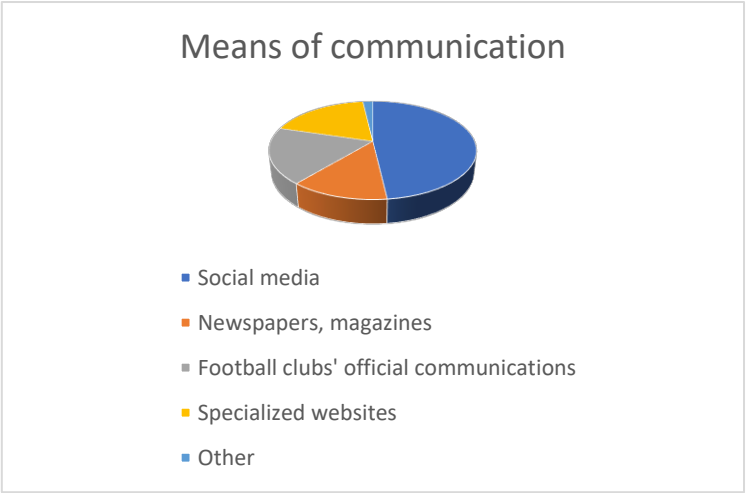
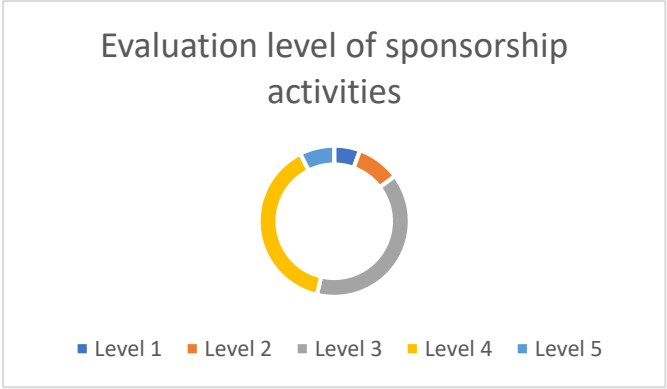
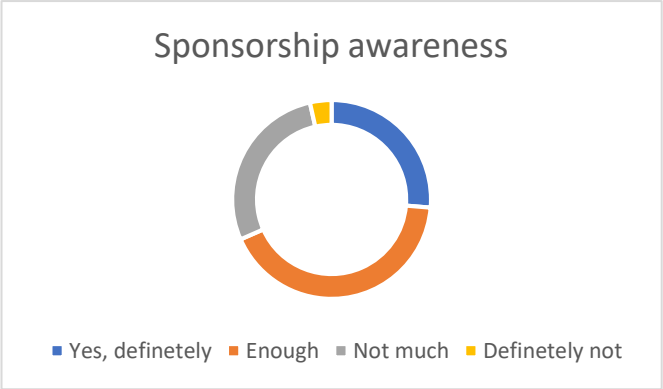
The results show that the largest part of the football fans interviewed keep itself informed through a large variety of means of communication: 48,15 percent answered that social medias are the best means through which remain informed about the marketing activities of football clubs, a very consistent number of participants think that football clubs' official communications (18,52 percent) or specialized websites (18,52 percent) are the best way to deal with sponsorships. Instead a small sector of participants, about 14,81 percent, keep themselves informed through the always dear newspapers or magazines (12,96 percent) or other sources of information – such as mobile applications or direct meeting with football clubs' employees.

For what concern the evaluation of football clubs' sponsorship activities, in terms of development and importance, according to their relative fans, the weighted average seems to be quite significant. In fact, on a scale of one to five, the weighted average is equal to 3.33, with an equal number of answers for the third (38,89 percent) and the fourth level (38,89 percent) of the scale. Concerning the other levels of the evaluation scale the survey presents the following results: 5,56 percent (level one), 9,26 percent (level two) and 7,41 percent (level five).

As I present in the introduction of my research, the last question (tenth question), was just aimed to pattern the geographical framework of my research – which was therefore designed and restricted to Italy, and, mostly to the central part of the Country. However, this question let me able to analyse the relationship between sponsorship awareness and reactions with the international fame and appeal of football teams.

What it is clear from the matching answers is that, football fans of more internationally involved football teams – such as Juventus FC, Inter Fc, AC Milan and AS Roma – are more aware and identified in their team sponsorship activities and, more, react positively to any change in sponsor partnership with respect to lower

level (or less international) football clubs fans which are usually more reluctant to be connected with their club sponsorship activities.



5. CONCLUSION

The results of the above conducted empirical research show and confirm the validity of the three main hypothesis of the study. As a matter of fact, survey results shows, at first, the positive correlation between football kits' sponsorships and football fans perception and emotions (Hypothesis 1).

Indeed, as shown by the survey results, football fans perceptions and emotions are largely influenced by football kits' sponsorships; a large part of questioned people are positive affected by sponsorships and this lead them to get and perceive good or bad memories connecting a particular sponsor with a particular historical moment, or period. The major part of the positively affected people usually link a determined topflight sponsorship to specific sports event relative to their favourite football team – for example, most of them seem to mostly keep in their mind sponsorships relative to their football team victories, good years' performances or those which are/has been related to a specific favourite player (or vice versa, bad moments such as bad defeats).

Together with perceptions and emotions, football kits' sponsorships influence relative fans purchasing behaviour (Hypothesis 2); in fact, results show that the majority of football kits' buyer are affected by the main sponsor of their team game kit. Most of them are affected in their purchasing behaviour due to different factors of influence – such as international appeal of the sponsoring company, the visual design that the sponsor gives to the football kit and the familiarity of the customers with the sponsoring company.

Moreover, the last three questions show that people who are more aware of their football team's sponsorship activities are more willing to positively react to determined kits' sponsorships, and, more, football fans of most famous teams, tend to be more involved, thus more influenced, in their clubs' sponsor partnerships presenting more individual emotional involvement and more satisfaction with reference to their purchasing behaviour (Hypothesis 3).

Summing it all up, it is possible to conclude this empirical study stating that the three main hypothesis initially considered are quite supported from data and results.

Therefore, it is possible to confirm that football kits' sponsorships surely influence (totally or partially) people perceptions, emotions and customers' purchasing behaviour. That is, for what concern football kits, relative sport fans tend to consider topflight sponsorships a very important factor of influence, involvement and identification which is strongly related with football clubs and, much more, with relative football fans.

Identification seems to be one of the most important factor of influence for what concern sponsorship fans' awareness and involvement, and it has a particular relevance when we talk about sponsorships related emotions and perceptions. In fact, more involved and more identified football fans are more willing to be engage in an emotional relationship with sponsors and relative football kits, hence increasing the possibility of satisfaction in terms of purchasing football related items (mainly shirts or kits) and customers experience.

Moreover, this category of football fans is the one which, according to the results of the survey, refers to sponsorships in connection with emotional historical moments of their favourite football team.

One of the most interesting thing to note is the fact that, even if fans' perceptions on sponsorships are quite the same, the variability of fans' reactions is due to different factors of influence such as the international fame of sponsoring companies and the familiarity that fans have with them, or just the visual impact of the sponsor on the football kit and other related items.

However, according to what football fans said, to be successful a sponsor relationship has to be related to significant historical sports moment such as the team performances, hence its sporting success, in order to be well remembered and well connected with fans communities, thus having increasing effects on people perceptions, emotions, purchasing behaviour and identification.

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