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Assessment of the Effectiveness of Sport Sponsorship as a Tool of Marketing Communications

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Abstract:

Sport sponsorship as a tool of marketing communication is nowadays regarded as the most significant and lucrative type of sponsorship. Even though recent decades have witnessed a continuous upsurge in the spending on corporate sponsorship, the insight into the effectiveness of this technique remains deficient. The purpose of this research is therefore to expand the existing knowledge on the subject. The study examines the effectiveness of sports sponsorship as a function of the public's attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for a football team and depending on whether the products/services offered by the sponsor require low or high consumer involvement. It tests how the awareness, attitude and buying behaviour toward sponsors are generated and by so doing, assesses to what extent sport sponsorship attains its desired goals. In order to collect data, the study used an online questionnaire, targeted at an international sample of supporters of different teams. The results confirmed that sport sponsorship is generally effective in creating brand awareness and motivating behaviour toward the sponsor. It was found that sponsor awareness depends on one's attitudinal loyalty for a team and on his purchase intentions toward the products/services of that team. Attitudinal team loyalty was also found to boost one's attitude toward the sponsor's identity, but it was behavioural team loyalty that was discovered to mediate one's attitude toward the products/services of the sponsor. Ultimately, attitudinal team loyalty was found to increase the chances of one owning a product/service from the sponsor, yet it was only the purchase intentions for the team that were found to increase the purchase intentions for the products/services of the sponsor. The level of involvement of the latter products/services was not discovered to have a considerable impact on any changes in purchase intentions ensuring from any changes in a team's sponsorship.

Keywords: sport, sponsorship, effectiveness, football, purchase intentions

1. Introduction

Despite the mounting evidence on the growing importance of corporate sponsorship as a tool of marketing communications, the academic research on the subject has been criticised ever since the end of the last century (Biscaia *et al.* 2013; Cornwell & Maignan 1998; Hoek 1999; Koo, Quarterman & Flynn 2006; McDaniel 1999). Sponsorship entails a sponsor that provides financial or other resources to the sponsee and thereby expects reciprocal benefits; for example, companies sponsor sports teams in order to gain the liking of fans, to popularise brands, to increase sales or for other commercial ends (Biscaia *et al.* 2013:288-289).

Sport sponsorship, in particular, generates tens of billions of dollars every year and the investments continue to increase, still the insight into the pertinent effectiveness of this technique remains deficient (Biscaia *et al.* 2013; Cornwell & Maignan 1998; Hoek 1999; Koo, Quarterman & Flynn 2006; Madrigal 2001; McDaniel 1999). It is not only difficult to assess the impact of sports sponsorship in isolation from the other promotional tools used by a particular brand in a particular campaign but also the lingering effects of past campaigns alongside the changeable market environment and the fluid socio-economic backdrop may interfere with the accuracy of any such assessment (Crompton 2004:268-272; Hoek 1999:1, 4-5). Though the principal objective of sponsorship is recognised in terms of image-building, i.e. creating awareness, imparting positive brand associations and the like, it is in fact purchase intentions and actual sales that give the clearest picture as to the effectiveness of this communication tool (Fill 2013:493-494; Moriarty, Mitchell & Wells 2012:560; Crompton 2004:275-279).

Given that sponsorship is becoming more and more prominent element in the communication mix of modern-day companies, it is very important that sponsors get better insight into the actual outcomes of their endeavours (Fill 2013:478-482; Moriarty, Mitchell & Wells 2012:560). This study was undertaken to examine the effectiveness of sports sponsorship as a function of the public's attitudinal and

behavioural loyalty for a football team and depending on whether the products/services offered by the sponsor require low or high consumer involvement. It tested how the awareness, attitude and buying behaviour toward sponsors are generated and by so doing, assessed to what extent sport sponsorship attains its desired goals.

In general, the main objectives of the research are: (1) Assess attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for a team; (2) Assess sponsor recall; (3) Assess attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for a sponsor; (4) Examine how attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for a team reflect upon sponsor recall and attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for a sponsor; and (5) Test the proneness to change in one's consumer behaviour for products/services of different involvement as a response to changes in team sponsorship;

2. Background and Concepts

Recent decades have witnessed a significant upsurge in the use of sponsorship as a tool of marketing communications. Whereas in 1996 the global spending on sponsorship was estimated at a bit less than \$14 billion, in 2013 it was four times more (Cornwell & Maignan 1996:1; IEG 2013:6). Furthermore, sport sponsorship currently accounts for about 70% of the worldwide sponsorship market, which consolidates its position as the most significant and lucrative type of sponsorship (Statista 2013; Nufer&Bühler 2010:304). Moving on to the sponsorship on the European football market in particular, the most recent data is from season 2012/2013, when the market grew by 11% to reach a total of €19.4 billion (Deloitte 2013:6). Indeed, the growth in sponsorship is unparalleled by the growth in any other communication technique (See Table 1).

		Advertising	Sales Promotion	Sponsorship
		%	%	%
year	2010	2.0	-9	3.9
	2011	3.2	2.3	5.5
	2012	3.5	3.2	4.4
	2013 (projected)	2.6	3.0	5.5

Table 1: Spending in Communication
Source: IEG 2013:9

As Fill (2013:478) points out, sponsorship is advantageous in that it is not as intrusive as traditional advertising yet generates comparable exposure and in the same time creates trust and confidence on an equal par with public relations. What is more, sponsorship allows for more precise targeting, since the supporters of the sponsored event/person/organisation/etc. normally represent a cluster with a specific profile (Fill 2013:482). In fact, the ascent of sponsorship to popularity has been explained namely with its lesser costs but similar functionality to advertising, the increased media coverage of sponsored events (especially with the new media) and the need for more precise targeting (Madrigal 2001:146).

Despite the heaped use of this communication tool however there is still no evidence that sponsorship always works. There are numerous examples of successful and unsuccessful sponsorship initiatives and no single conclusion as to the effectiveness of the technique (Crompton 2004). "For some companies it definitely is effective; for others the effects are limited", as Nufer and Bühler (2010:303) write in their comparative research of the effectiveness of sponsorship at the FIFA World Cup tournaments in 1998 and 2006.

The theoretical assumptions behind sponsorship and the concepts that determine its effectiveness are the following. To begin with, sponsorship entails two dimensions: behavioural and symbolic. In the first dimension, sponsorship draws on the consumer's past pleasurable experiences with the brand and reinforces them through reminiscence (Fill 2013:484). In the second dimension, it creates positive associations between the sponsee and the sponsor in terms of common values, projected identity and all other aspects that boost the brand's worth in the eyes of the consumer (Moriarty, Mitchell & Wells 2012:560; Fill 2013:484). For example, brands that sponsor the Olympics aim to be perceived along the lines of strength, fairness and solidarity. The underlying idea is that better corporate image fosters favourable beliefs about the brand in the consumer's mind, which in turn improves brand attitude and ultimately promotes purchase intentions (Fill 2013:484). Madrigal (2001:150) calls this a beliefs-attitude-intentions hierarchy, i.e. "beliefs represent the basis for an attitude toward engaging in a specific behaviour".

Still, it is important to note that in order for sponsorship to take a brand successfully through this hierarchy, the public should first know that the brand is indeed a sponsor of a particular event/person/organisation/etc. Awareness has two dimensions: recall (being able to name a sponsor without any assistance) and recognition (being able to name a brand as a sponsor after seeing it). Academics are unanimous that sponsor awareness is a crucial measure of the effectiveness of sponsorship as it lies in the heart of sponsor attitude and thereby drives purchase intentions (Biscaia *et al.* 2013:291).

In short, sponsorship elicits a positive response from the sponsee's supporters, their goodwill transfers to the sponsor and this leads to the realisation of the latter's corporate objectives (Biscaia *et al.* 2013:288-289; Crompton 2004:268-269; Hoek 1999:1). There are however different categories of supporters, set on a continuum from low to high identifiers. Wann and Branscombe (1993), as referred to by Madrigal (2001:148), applied this observation to the case of football fans to conclude that the higher one's affection and concern for a particular team, the higher his identification with that team. Fans of high identification are typically more loyal to their teams and presumably more loyal to the sponsors as well; nonetheless, such fans appreciate better the benefits that a sponsor brings to their team and thus have a higher motivation to repay the sponsor for its partnership (Biscaia *et al.* 2013:291-292; Madrigal 2001:149).

Loyalty however is known to have two dimensions: attitudinal loyalty, which is the psychological attachment and preference for an entity, and behavioural loyalty, which is the purchase frequency of products from that entity (e.g. tickets and club merchandise in the

case of football teams and brand products/services in the case of sponsors) (Biscaiaet al. 2013:289-290). In a research on the effectiveness of the sponsorship for football club *Sport Lisboa e Benfica (SLB)*, Biscaiaet al. (2013:290) studied team loyalty namely in its duality in order to “better understand the correspondence of actual and future behaviours of the fans toward their team”.

To sum up, the main concepts that determine the effectiveness of a sponsorship campaign are on the one hand, attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for the sponsored team and on the other, the sponsor recall and the attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for the sponsor.

3. Methodology

The current research was designed to assess the links between attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for a team and the ensuing sponsor recall, attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for the team’s sponsor and to thereby evaluate the effects of sports sponsorship on purchase intentions for products/services of the sponsor.

The employed research design was descriptive as the studied concepts were already known in the onset of the research, i.e. this study had to “describe specific phenomena, to test specific hypotheses and to examine specific relationships” (Malhotra, Birks & Wills 2012:89).

The current study will use the one by Biscaiaet al. (2013) as a reference point because the latter is the only research on the effectiveness of football sponsorship which investigated the implications of team loyalty from two sides: attitudinal and behavioural.

- H1: The greater the attitudinal loyalty for a team, the greater the behavioural loyalty for that same team

As Madrigal (2001:149) assumes, one’s affection for a team should motivate him to act toward that team, i.e. higher identifiers should exhibit more frequent purchase behaviour or at least higher purchase intentions regarding the products/services of their favourite team. Biscaiaet al. (2013:295) substantiated this assumption by discovering a direct positive effect of attitudinal loyalty on the behavioural loyalty for a team.

In other words, the existing literature suggests that behavioural loyalty could be treated as both consequence and proof of attitudinal loyalty; this is what the current survey will also test.

- H2: The greater the attitudinal loyalty for a team, the greater the sponsor recall;
- H3: The greater the behavioural loyalty for a team, the greater the sponsor recall;

According to the existing literature, fans of higher identification are more likely to seek and retain information about their favourite team; thus, they are also more likely to be aware of the team’s sponsors (Biscaiaet at. 2013:290).

When Biscaiaet al. (2013:294-296) tested the validity of this assumption, they however concluded that only behavioural loyalty connects positively with sponsor recall, i.e. sponsorship awareness is not driven by attitude toward the sponsored team but instead by exposure to the sponsor’s name (which normally happens when fans go to the stadium, to the fan shops or other places where they can demonstrate their behavioural loyalty to the team).

This study will test the same hypotheses as the ones of Biscaiaet al. (2013) in an attempt to establish consistency.

- H4: The greater the attitudinal loyalty for a team, the better the sponsor attitude;
- H5: The greater the behavioural loyalty for a team, the better the sponsor attitude;

This logic behind sponsorship is that “the goodwill that consumers feel toward an event, cause, or sports team will rub off on their brands” (Madrigal 2001:145). Biscaiaet al. (2013:290) cited several studies that have proven this relationship and even managed to themselves prove that attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for a team boost the attitude toward the team’s sponsors (2013:195-296).

The current research will also investigate the links between team loyalty and sponsor attitude yet it will not only treat loyalty in its duality but will adopt the same approach toward attitude, i.e. it will examine the attitude toward the sponsor’s brand identity and the attitude toward the sponsor’s products/services.

- H6: The greater the attitudinal loyalty for a team, the greater behavioural loyalty for the sponsor;
- H7: The greater the behavioural loyalty for a team, the greater behavioural loyalty for the sponsor;
- H8: Purchase intentions for products of lower involvement are more susceptible to the desired effects of corporate sponsorship than products of higher involvement;

Fans of higher team identification are presumably more keen on purchasing products/services from the team sponsors since they are nonetheless more appreciative of the sponsor’s support and more willing to reward this support (Madrigal 2001:149).

Past studies such as the one by Smith, Graetz and Westerbeek (2008:397), who examined the links between team support and purchase intentions for a professional rugby club in Australia, confirmed that “[p]assionate supporters have significantly higher purchase intentions, both directly and in total”. In their research, Biscaiaet al. (2013:295) likewise examined the behavioural loyalty for a sponsor only in its prospective dimension, i.e. purchase intentions, yet found that the attitudinal loyalty for a team had a direct effect only on the purchase intentions for products of low-involvement, while the behavioural loyalty for a team linked positively with the purchase intentions for both products of low and high involvement.

This research will study the behavioural loyalty for a sponsor not only as a potential act (purchase intentions) but also as a fait accompli (past purchases) so as to upgrade the existing literature. For the same purpose, it will look more closely into the difference in purchase intentions regarding products of low and high involvement.

Schematically we present the research model and hypotheses in Figure 1.

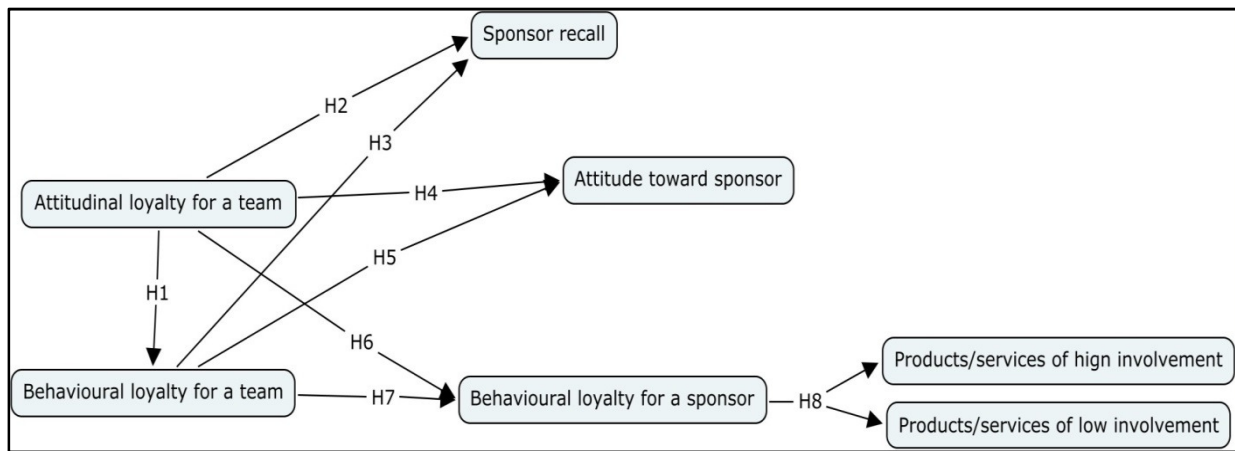


Figure 1: Research Model and hypothesis

The study used an online questionnaire, using the “Qualtrics Survey Software” to collect quantitative data from people who consider themselves fans of a particular team. The questions for the survey were formed following the models of other surveys on the topic and with regard to the studied concepts. The respondents had diverse national backgrounds and so did the supported teams.

Even though this diversity might seem to make this research a bit unfocused, in fact it gives a very good picture of the average football fan. Other researchers have gathered data from paid-up club members, game attendees or people who live in the vicinity of the club and have thus studied samples with presumably very high levels of team identification (Barros & Silvestre 2006; Biscaia *et al.* 2013; Garland, Charbonneau & Macpherson 2008; Lings & Owen 2007; Madrigal 2001; Nufer&Bühler 2010; Smith, Graetz&Westerbeek 2008). The majority of a club’s supporters however typically comprise moderate fans, i.e. studying the average fan is a worthy enterprise.

The online survey was activated on March, 2014 and the results were downloaded on April, 2014. Overall 114 responses were registered, but three of them was irrelevant (the respondents indicated no interest in football and no favourite team; that is, no valuable insight could have been extracted from these answers) and 18 of them were incomplete (the respondents did not reach essential sections such as *Sponsors and buying behaviour*, i.e. these responses could not have contributed to the ultimate purpose of the research). The data analysis and results were therefore based on 93 duly completed responses.

The collected data was processed and analysed via SPSS version 19, which is a software package for statistical analysis. The used tools were: Cronbach alpha, descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation & chi-square tests, T-tests for independent samples and bivariate correlations.

All in all, the original questionnaire entailed 15 questions and returned 37 variables (16 nominal and 21 scale), where each of them served the following function: (1) Questions 1 & 2 (two variables) asked for the respondent’s favourite team and the length of this support, so as to assess his attitudinal loyalty for the club; the longer one has supported a particular club, the more likely he is to be a higher identifier; (2) Questions 3 & 4 (three variables) evaluated the respondent’s behavioural loyalty for the team by asking for his purchases and prospective purchase intentions for the products/services of his favourite team; (3) Question 5 (two variables) measured the recall for the team’s sponsors; recognition was not used a measure of awareness in this survey because every respondent could have named a different team with different sponsors, i.e. not a single list of sponsors available for recognition could have been prepared; (4) Questions 6 & 7 (four variables) measured the respondent’s attitude for the products/services and identity of the sponsor, i.e. attitudinal loyalty for the sponsor; (5) Questions 8, 9 & 10 (11 variables) evaluated the respondent’s behavioural loyalty for the sponsors by asking for his purchases and prospective purchase intentions for the products/services of the sponsor as well as by inquiring after the reasons for this behaviour; (6) Questions 11 & 12 (12 variables) examined the susceptibility of purchase intentions to the effects of sport sponsorship in regard to products of low and high involvement; (7) Questions 13 & 14 (two variables) set the demographics of the sample: gender and age.

4. Data analysis

Out of the 93 respondents, the overwhelming majority were in their early to mid-20s, almost two thirds were women (table 2). The sample cannot be considered representative. Even so, the ensuing findings will be compared with past studies on the subject so as to substantiate the former’s validity.

		F	%
YearsOld	19-24	71	87%
	25-30	6	6.5%
	31-36	6	6.5%
Gender	Female	54	58%
	Male	39	42%

Table 2: Sample: Years old and gender

In order to evaluate the validity of the survey, the alpha cronbach was calculated at .906, which is very good, and the value *if item deleted* of none of the variables was substantially higher.

A cross-tabulation between the length of one’s support for a team (measure of attitudinal loyalty) and respectively his past and intended purchases from that team (measures of behavioural loyalty), showed that almost two thirds of the life-long supporters own products/services from their team and in fact, the people who have supported the team for a longer period of time tend to have higher purchase intentions (Table 3 & 4). Yet, none of these tests returned a significant chi-square.

		I have previously bought products and services from this team (e.g. merchandise, tickets, mobile apps, etc.)		Total
		Yes	No	
I have supported this team for:	Less than 1 year	6	3	9
	2-5 years	6	15	21
	6-10 years	12	9	21
	All my life	33	9	42
Total		57	36	93

Table 3: Team support and consumer behavior

		I intend to purchase products/services from the team in the future-Strongly disagree:Strongly agree							Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I have supported this team for:	Less than 1 year	3	0	0	3	0	3	0	9
	2-5 years	6	0	1	3	3	3	3	21
	6-10 years	6	0	1	0	0	3	9	21
	All my life	0	1	1	18	0	3	15	42
Total		15	1	3	24	3	12	27	93

Table 4: Team support and purchase intention

Likewise, no significant correlations were found between the length of support for a team and one’s propensity to have bought or to intend on buying products from the team. A T-test for independent samples, ran according to the length of one’s support for a team and the factors of past team purchases and intended team purchases, also returned no Sig. (2-tailed) <.050.

Hence, the first hypothesis cannot be accepted.

In order to test the levels of awareness of the team’s sponsors, the research used the measure of recall. Half of the respondents indicated that they could barely name with confidence more than one sponsor and in fact, seven of them did not even attempt to name such a sponsor (Table 5). What is even more interesting is that some of the named sponsors were not really sponsors of the indicated team.

How many sponsors of the club can you name with confidence without having to check outside resources?		Frequency	Percent
Valid	0-1 (please specify)	45	48.4
	2-3 (Please specify)	39	41.9
	4-5 (please specify)	9	9.7
	Total	93	100.0

Table 5: Sponsor recognition

A cross-tabulation between the length of support and the number of sponsors that the respondent could name returned no significant chi-square. However, there was a significant difference in the average number of recalled sponsors between the people who have supported a team for less than a year and those who have been life-long supporters (Table 6 & 7); this finding suggests that the longer one has supported a team, the more likely he is on average to know its sponsors.

The second hypothesis is therefore confirmed.

	I have supported this team for:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
How many sponsors of the club can you name with confidence without having to check outside resources?	Less than 1 year	9	1.00	.000	.000
	All my life	42	1.86	.663	.177

Table 6: Sponsor recognition and team support

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
How many sponsors of the club can you name with confidence without having to check outside resources?	Equal variances assumed	3.774	.071	-2.183	15	.045
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.837	13.000	.000

Table 7: Levene's Test (sponsor recognition and team support)

A cross-tabulation between the number of sponsors one could recall and his propensity and intention to own something from the team returned no significant chi-square. A T-test between owners and non-owners of team products/services and their recall of sponsors likewise showed no significant relationship. However, a T-test for people who intend to buy products/services from the team (neither agree nor disagree:strongly agree) and people who do not (somewhat disagree:strongly disagree), showed that the former are on average more likely to recall more sponsors (Table 8 & 9).

	I intend to purchase products/services from the team in the future-Strongly disagree:Strongly agree	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
How many sponsors of the club can you name with confidence without having to check outside resources?	>= 4	66	1.77	.685	.146
	< 4	27	1.22	.441	.147

Table 8: Sponsor recognition and purchase intention

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
How many sponsors of the club can you name with confidence without having to check outside resources?	Equal variances assumed	2.552	.121	2.217	29	.035
	Equal variances not assumed			2.656	23.049	.014

Table 9: Levene's test (sponsor recognition and purchase intention)

The third hypothesis is hence only partially confirmed.

The attitude toward the sponsor was assessed in two dimensions: attitude toward the sponsor's products/services and attitude toward the sponsor's corporate identity. As table 10 suggests, the people who liked a sponsor for its products and services were also likely to endorse its identity. Indeed, a cross-tabulation between the two studied dimensions of attitude returned asymp. Sig. (2-sided)=.003, which reveals a significant relationship. Furthermore, the correlation between these two was also found of relevance (Sig. (2-tailed)=.002) and the strength of it was estimated as medium (.542).

	Positive attitude: identity		Positive attitude: Products/services		Recall	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
4-5 sponsors	-	-	-	-	9	9.6%
2-3 sponsors	15	16.1%	12	12.9%	39	41.9%
0-1 sponsor	78	83.9%	71	76.3%	45	48.5%

Table 10: Sponsor recall and sponsor attitude

In the process of testing the hypothesis, a cross-tabulation between the length of one's support for a team and the two dimensions of his attitude toward the sponsor returned no significant chi-square. A T-test for independent samples, comparing the attitudes toward sponsors of life-long fans and of recent supporters, however showed that the former are on average more likely to endorse the identity of more sponsors but not more likely to endorse the products/services of more sponsors (Table 11 & 12).

	I have supported this team for:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
How many of these sponsors do you actually like in terms of products/services offered?	Less than 1 year	9	1.00	.000	.000
	All my life	42	1.21	.426	.114
How many of these sponsors do you actually like in terms of their identity?	Less than 1 year	9	1.00	.000	.000
	All my life	42	1.29	.469	.125

Table 11: Sponsors like and team support

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
How many of these sponsors do you actually like in terms of products/services offered?	Equal variances assumed	5.460	.034	-.850	15	.409
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.883	13.000	.082
How many of these sponsors do you actually like in terms of their identity?	Equal variances assumed	11.765	.004	-1.029	15	.320
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.280	13.000	.040

Table 12: Levene's test (Sponsors like and team support)

The fourth hypothesis is therefore only partially confirmed.

A cross tabulation between the number of sponsors one likes in terms of identity or products/services and his propensity to own or to intend on owing something from the team returned no significant chi-square.

A T-test for owners and non-owners of team products/services nonetheless showed that on average the owners are more likely to endorse a sponsor's products/services (Sig.2-tailed=.042), but no such relationship was found regarding the attitude toward a sponsor's identity.

The same test, ran for people who are likely to purchase from the team (neither agree nor disagree:strongly agree) and people who are not (somewhat disagree:strongly disagree) likewise returned a significant difference in means regarding one's attitude toward a sponsor's products/services (Sig.2-tailed=.042) and no significance in terms of attitude toward a sponsor's identity.

These results suggest that behavioural loyalty for a team only partially improves one's attitude toward a sponsor, i.e. the fifth hypothesis is not entirely supported.

The behavioural loyalty for a sponsor was assessed in terms of whether the respondent owns or intends to own any products/services from this sponsor.

Only a third of all the respondents have previously purchased from the sponsors of their teams with almost half of them being life-long supporters (Table 13).

	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Allmylife	30	32.2%	12	12.9%
6-10 years	15	16.1%	6	6.5%
2-5- years	9	9.6%	12	12.9%
Lessthan 1 year	9	9.6%	0	6.5%

Table 13: Do you own any products/services from the sponsor

The highest number of respondents (24) was undecided about whether to purchase from the sponsor and the majority of them (18) were actually life-long supporters; a fifth of the sample (18 respondents) intended no purchase at all; only two people demonstrated strong desire to make such a purchase.

A cross-tabulation between the length of one's support for a team and his propensity to own or to intend on owning something from the sponsor returned no significant chi-square.

A T-test for independent samples however revealed that people who have supported a team for a longer period of time are no average significantly more likely to own products/services form the team's sponsors; no such link was however found as to the intention to own something from the sponsors (Table 14 & 15).

	I have supported this team for:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	All my life	42	3.71	1.490	.398
Do you own any products/services from any of your team's sponsors?	Less than 1 year	9	2.00	.000	.000
	All my life	42	1.71	.469	.125

Table 1: Purchase intention and team support

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
I intend to purchase products and/or services from the team's sponsors in the future-Strongly disagree: Strongly agree	Equal variances assumed	.000	.984	-1.101	15	.288
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.083	2.880	.361
Do you own any products/services from any of your team's sponsors?	Equal variances assumed	11.765	.004	1.029	15	.320
	Equal variances not assumed			2.280	13.000	.040

Table 2: Levene's test (purchase intention and team support)

The evidence in favour of the sixth hypothesis is thus partial.

A cross tabulation between one's propensity to own something from a team and his propensity to own something or to intend on owning something from the sponsor returned no significant chi-square. The situation was the same regarding one's intention to own something from the team and his propensity or intention to own something from the sponsor.

A T-test for owners and non-owners of team products/services showed no significant difference in means regarding one's propensity or intention to own something from the sponsor. The same test however showed that people who intend to buy something from the team (neither agree nor disagree:strongly agree) are on average more likely to intend on buying something from the sponsor as well (Table 16 & 17).

	I intend to purchase products/services from the team in the future-Strongly disagree:Strongly agree	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Do you own any products/services from any of your team's sponsors?	>= 4	66	1.59	.503	.107
	< 4	27	1.89	.333	.111
I intend to purchase products and/or services from the team's sponsors in the future-Strongly disagree:Strongly agree	>= 4	66	4.14	1.552	.331
	< 4	27	2.11	1.537	.512

Table 3: Sponsor products and purchase intention

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Do you own any products/services from any of your team's sponsors?	Equal variances assumed	21.225	.000	-1.628	29	.114
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.929	22.441	.066
I intend to purchase products and/or services from the team's sponsors in the future-Strongly disagree:Strongly agree	Equal variances assumed	.055	.817	3.307	29	.003
	Equal variances not assumed			3.321	15.072	.005

Table 4: Levene's test (Sponsor products and purchase intention)

Since the behavioural loyalty for a team only partially reflects upon the behavioural loyalty for a sponsor, the seventh hypothesis is only partially confirmed.

The survey tested the purchase intentions of its respondents regarding three products/services of high involvement (car brand, mobile/internet service provider, insurance company) and three products/services of lower involvement (supermarket chain, clothing/footwear brand, cosmetics company). Table 18 shows the frequency of responses.

	Car brand		Mobile/internet service provider		Insurance company		Supermarket chain		Clothing/footwear brand		Cosmetics company	
	Stop buying	Start buying	Stop buying	Start buying	Stop buying	Start buying	Stop buying	Start buying	Stop buying	Start buying	Stop buying	Start buying
Very Unlikely	42	24	30	16	30	21	27	15	18	12	33	15
Unlikely	16	12	12	21	12	24	15	18	15	12	15	18
Somewhat Unlikely	6	6	12	0	12	0	12	0	6	0	15	6
Undecided	18	21	21	21	33	24	21	15	21	15	21	15
Somewhat Likely	9	15	6	21	0	18	3	15	9	24	6	12
Likely	0	9	9	9	3	6	9	21	12	18	0	15
Very Likely	0	6	3	3	3	0	3	9	12	12	3	12
Total	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93

Table 5: Categories of products

It appears that respondents were more likely to start buying a brand (if a new sponsor joins their team) rather than to stop buying a brand (if this brand starts sponsoring the team's biggest rival). This conclusion is based on the fact that the total number of respondents for the categories from somewhat likely to very likely is always substantially bigger in the "start buying" section than in the "stop buying" section for each item; 30:9 for a car brand; 33:18 for a mobile/internet service provider; 24:6 for an insurance company; 45:18 for a supermarket chain; 54:33 for a clothing/footwear brand and 42:9 for a cosmetics brand.

As the descriptive statistics confirm, the respondents' purchase intentions were more volatile vis-à-vis adopting a new brand (Table 19). As regards products of lower involvement, the respondents exhibited higher susceptibility to change their consumer behaviour and start buying an item of a new sponsor; yet, whereas the answers fluctuated around somewhat unlikely for products of high involvement (the average score for "start buying" the three products of high involvement is 3.35), they fluctuated around undecided for products of lower involvement (the average score for "start buying" the three products of low involvement is 4.10), i.e. the difference between the two categories of products was not very big.

In the case of terminating purchases from a particular brand in response to changes in sponsorship, no particular trend was detected. Indeed, consumers were most unlikely to change a product of high involvement, being a car brand (2.29), but the second most unlikely brand change was a product of low involvement or namely cosmetics (2.61); the third and fourth places were again for products of high involvement – insurance company (2.81) and mobile/internet service provider (3), however the respondents were almost as unlikely to stop buying from their usual supermarket (3.10); the most likely change in consumer behaviour was registered as to brands for clothing and footwear (3.77).

	Product categories	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
STOP BUYING	Car brand	93	1	5	2.29	1.465
	Mobile/internet service provider	93	1	7	3.00	1.844
	Insurance company	93	1	7	2.81	1.621
	Supermarket chain	93	1	7	3.10	1.921
	Clothing/footwear brand	93	1	7	3.77	2.077
	Cosmetics company	93	1	7	2.61	1.585
START BUYING	Car brand	93	1	7	3.45	1.964
	Mobile/internet service provider	93	1	7	3.48	1.842
	Insurance company	93	1	6	3.13	1.688
	Supermarket chain	93	1	7	4.03	2.073
	Clothing/footwear brand	93	1	7	4.39	1.961
	Cosmetics company	93	1	7	3.90	2.087

Table 6: Stop and start buying product categories

In light of these indecisive results, the eighth hypothesis cannot be entirely confirmed.

5. Discussion

Contrary to previous research and in dissonance with existing literature (Biscaia *et al.* 2013:295-296), the current study found no connection between attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for a team (Fig 2).

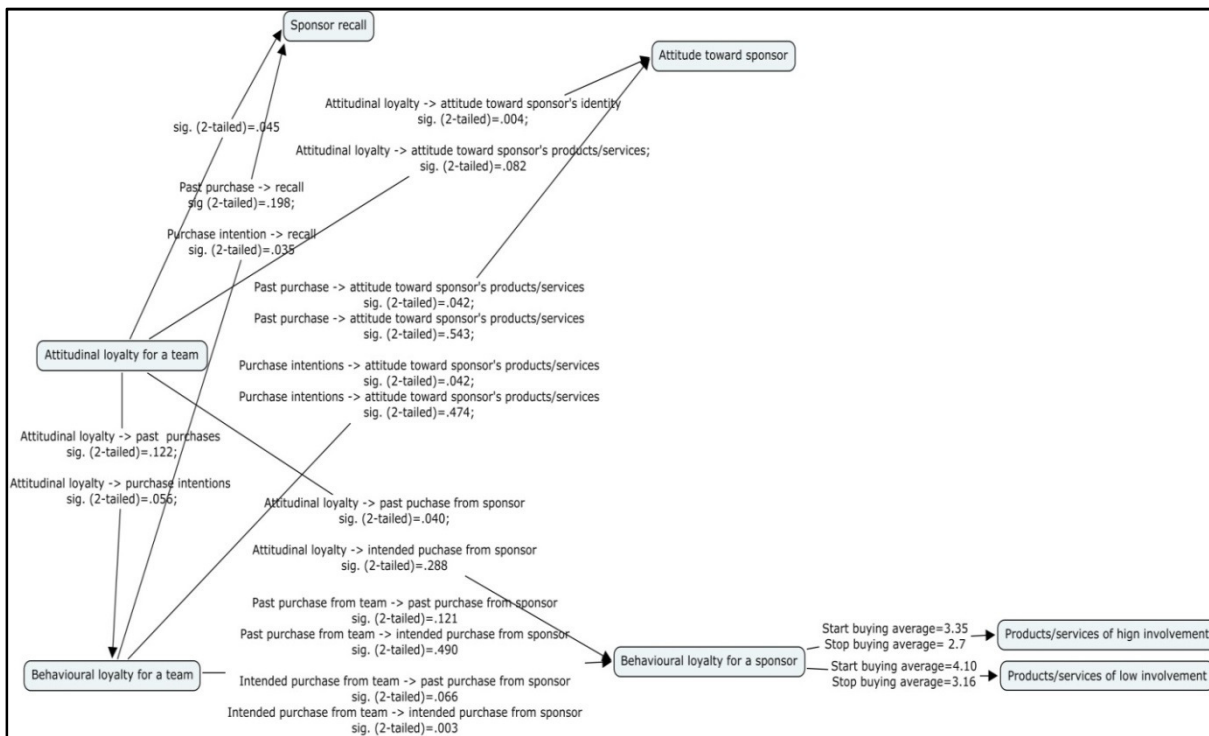


Figure 2: Model and hypothesis

First, as the focus of this paper was the average fan and just under half of the respondents defined themselves as life-long supporters, neither their attitudinal nor their behavioural loyalty for the team was very prominent. The lack of salience regarding the studied concepts logically made their accurate assessment more difficult.

Second, only one variable was used to measure attitudinal loyalty for a team and just two variables measured the adjacent behavioural loyalty. This suggests that the assessment of these concepts may not have been sufficiently thorough. Yet, as the survey was purposefully made as concise as possible in order to motivate more respondents to complete it fully, this problem could not have been avoided.

The current research discovered a significant relationship between attitudinal loyalty for a team and sponsor recall, which conforms to the academic assumption that more fervent fans tend to know more about their teams, including the teams' sponsors. This finding suggests that sponsors should aim to partner with teams of larger fan bases for the purpose of raising more public awareness.

Yet, the study found that the relationship between behavioural loyalty for a team and sponsor recall is only partial. Unlike the research by Biscaia *et al.* (2013:295-296), this one did not manage to establish any link between past purchases from a team and sponsor recall. Instead, it found that only fans who intend on purchasing something from the team in the future are likely to recall more sponsors. These findings mean that as long as the fans' interest in purchasing from a team is kept alive, their interest in the team's sponsors will likewise permeate. In other words, sponsors should look for teams which actively try to motivate purchase intentions in their supporters.

The discrepancy in the present findings and the ones by Biscaia *et al.* (2013:295-296) could once again be explained with weaknesses in sampling in the current research and with the potential inaccuracies in its assessment of the attitudinal and behavioural team loyalty of the respondents.

The current research studied sponsor attitude in two dimensions: attitude toward the sponsor's identity and attitude toward the sponsor's products/services. No previous research has ever adopted this approach and that is why the current findings are not directly comparable with past ones.

To begin with, it was discovered that the two dimensions of attitude are linked in a direct ratio, i.e. if one's approval of the sponsor's identity increases, so will his attitude toward the sponsor's offers. Still, the approval of the sponsor's identity was found to depend on the length of one's support for a team, i.e. fans of higher attitudinal loyalty tend to like the identity of more sponsors. The attitude toward the sponsors' products/services was however found to be dependent on one's behavioural loyalty for a team, i.e. fans who own or intend to own team products/services are on average more likely to endorse the products/services of the team's sponsors.

In entirety, it can be said that team loyalty mediates attitudes toward the sponsor, which is indeed the conclusion of all past studies on the topic, still a closer look at the current data reveals that it is in fact specific dimensions of team loyalty that relate to specific dimensions of sponsor attitude.

In other words, if the sponsor's end is to improve mainly its image, then it should partner with teams of larger fan bases so that more people can develop a liking for the sponsor's identity. Such an approach is suitable for organisations such as charitable foundations, where selling products/services on an every-day basis is not the prime commercial objective. On the other hand, if the sponsor's main goals are to promote its products/services and to thereby increase sales, then it should partner with clubs whose fans are known to

frequently purchase from the club. Arguably, the proclivity to action is a trait of some fan clusters, meaning that the supporters of some clubs are generally more willing to spend money on their teams and the related entities, i.e. the sponsors. Yet, more research is necessary to substantiate the latter speculation.

Since this research looked at the behavioural loyalty toward a sponsor not just in its prospective dimension, no direct concurrence could be sought between the current and past findings.

No relationship was discovered between attitudinal loyalty for a team and purchase intentions for the sponsor (which is contrary to the findings of the other researchers), however it was found that more fervent team supporters are on average more likely to own products/services from the team. Indeed, as those people presumably feel more thankful to the sponsor, they are more likely to have felt an urge to repay the sponsor by making a purchase from it.

Regarding behavioural loyalty for a team, it was discovered that it was only the intention to purchase from the team that boosts the intention to purchase from the sponsor; no links were revealed between past team purchases and prospective sponsor purchases. This conclusion suggests that, similarly to the case of sponsor recall, fans whose interest in purchasing from the team is kept alive will be more interested in purchasing from the sponsor as well. In other words, sponsors should indeed aim to partner with teams which actively try to motivate purchase intentions in their fans.

Even though the research of Biscaia *et al.* (2013:295) suggested that there could be a relationship between the volatility of purchase intentions and a product's level of involvement, the current research did not find any decisive evidence in this direction.

Respondents were found generally more likely to experiment with a new brand (if this brand becomes a sponsor of their team) rather than to stop buying a brand they prefer (only because it has started sponsoring a rival team). This suggests that sponsorship has only a limited impact on a fan's consumer behaviour.

Furthermore, it was discovered that the respondents were indeed a bit more likely to experiment with a new brand in the case of products of lower involvement; still, no such consistency was established as regards to stop buying products from a particular brand. No definite conclusion can be therefore drawn as to whether the level of a product's involvement has to do with one's susceptibility to change his buying behaviour in response to the effects of sponsorship.

6. Conclusions

The current research confirmed that sport sponsorship as a tool of marketing communications can be generally considered effective in creating sponsor awareness and motivating action toward the sponsor. However, owing to its attempt to examine all key concepts from multiple dimensions and contingent upon weakness in sampling, the study failed to provide conclusive evidence on all projected points. It was confirmed that attitudinal team loyalty improves sponsor recall; still, it was only the prospective dimension of behavioural team loyalty (purchase intentions) that was found to serve the same purpose. Attitudinal team loyalty was likewise found to boost sponsor attitude but only as to sponsor identity; behaviour loyalty, on the other hand, appeared to better solely one's attitude toward the sponsor's products/services. Ultimately, attitudinal team loyalty was found to increase the chances of one owning a product/service from the sponsor, yet it was only the prospective dimension of behavioural team loyalty that was discovered to generate purchase intentions for the sponsor. Another key point is that a product's level of involvement was not discovered to have a substantial mediating effect of the volatility of one's purchase intentions as regards to any changes in a team's sponsorship.

Any company that plans to become a sponsor of a football club should carefully inspect the levels of behavioural and attitudinal loyalty of the club's fans, so as to find the most conducive sponsee to the attainment of its set corporate objectives.

As already established, this research has several shortcomings regarding sampling and scale.

First, in its attempt to study the average fan, the research yielded in a small and unrepresentative sample. Nonetheless, it did not use fan sites or other channels that are typically used by high identifiers. If more time for data collection was available, more responses could have been recorded and the representativeness of data could have been improved. Also, trying to generalise the results for an international sample (as the one used for this research) always ignores the possibility that substantial differences could exist between different demographics. If the average fan was studied on a country-by-country basis and the results were later on compared, the accuracy of the conclusions would have been much better.

Solving the problems with the sample would have reflected upon the quality of the studied concepts. For example, had this survey registered more responses, the assessment of some less salient concepts such as the attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for a team would have been statistically more precise.

The quality of the data would have also benefited from the addition of more variables for the assessment of all of the studied concepts. Measuring attitudinal and behavioural loyalty for both teams and sponsors through questions with bipolar scales would result in simple numerical values and would improve the accuracy of the results. Additionally, incorporating the measure of recognition would have enhanced the assessment of sponsor awareness; for example, a different list of sponsors could be presented to the respondent in accordance to the country of origin of his favourite team but it should be noted that such an improvement would be very hard to arrange.

There is still a lot of room for study on the field of sponsorship effectiveness. Most of the existing research has been quantitative, which suggests that some qualitative insight could come in handy.

For example, in order to test the susceptibility of a consumer's purchase intentions to any changes in team sponsorship, role-playing games could be arranged. Subjects could be given a particular sum of money and sent to a supermarket to buy several products (e.g. computer accessories, sportswear, etc.). After a few weeks, the same subjects could be presented with a hypothetical situation (i.e. a Chelsea fan could be told that Samsung is switching its sponsorship to Tottenham and that Adidas is going to sponsor Arsenal) and sent to make the same purchases again. Any changes in the selection of brands for the same products will be subsequently analysed.

Whereas the abovementioned test will provide more insight into the behavioural outcomes of sponsorship, word association tests can better the understanding of the awareness and attitude that sponsorship generates. For example, subjects could be first asked to name all the sponsors of their club, which they can recall; then, they will be asked to say the first word that comes to their mind upon hearing the names of different brands (not all of them sponsors of the team); ultimately, they will be given the long list of brands and asked to circle the ones that they recognise as sponsors of their team. This approach will allow for a very accurate measurement of awareness and in the same time, the discourse of the brand associations will provide very rich insight into the effects that sponsorship has on brand attitude.

Both of the studies suggested above require that a preliminary assessment of the respondent's levels of team identification be performed in order for any links between the latter and sponsorship effectiveness to be discovered.

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