

## Sports Sponsorship in Brand Advertisement: A Single-factor Between-subjects Experimental Design

**Ha Thuc Nhi NGUYEN**

London School of Economics and Political Science, Department of Media and  
Communication, United Kingdom

[h.nguyen13@lse.ac.uk](mailto:h.nguyen13@lse.ac.uk) <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7104-2360>

**Merel WALRAVEN**

University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Netherlands

[m.walraven@uva.nl](mailto:m.walraven@uva.nl) <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8781-4417>

**Thi Thu Huong NGUYEN**

School of Interdisciplinary Sciences and Arts, Vietnam National University, Hanoi;  
Vietnam

[huong1485.sis@vnu.edu.vn](mailto:huong1485.sis@vnu.edu.vn) <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7735-3272>

### Abstract

This study sets out to investigate how the inclusion of sports sponsorship in brand advertisement affects brand attitude. We used a single-factor between-subjects experimental design (sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement: high-congruent vs. low-congruent vs. absent). The findings demonstrated that only a high-congruent sponsorship results in a more positive attitude towards the brand as opposed to the lack of a sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement. Furthermore, it was discovered that there is no distinction in the acquired brand attitudes between a low-congruent and a high-congruent sports sponsorship. In addition, the mediation role of attitude towards the commercial was limited to the favorable attitude towards the brand that results from a congruent sports sponsorship as opposed to the absence of one. The results have significant ramifications for businesses looking to increase brand appeal.

**Keywords:** Sports Sponsorship, Brand Advertisement, Attitude Towards the Brand, Attitude Towards the Advertisement, Brand Evaluation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Thanks to its power in subtly influencing consumer opinion through the association of a company with a sponsored object, sponsorship as marketing strategy has experienced the fastest growth over the last 20 years (IEG, 2017a). Although sponsorship is adopted across a wide spectrum of industries, sports sponsorship is the most common type overall.

Worldwide, sports sponsorship has become exponentially more popular over the years. Since 2014, sponsorship expenditure has increased by 4% annually on average, and 70% of all sponsorship funds have been allocated to sports sponsorship (Hodson, 2019). Despite the fact that sports sponsorship is seen as a crucial and expensive tool for marketing communication, corporations often misjudge the success of their sponsorships (Crompton, 2004). Therefore, in order for marketers to evaluate and justify their sponsorship expenditures, it is becoming more and more important to comprehend how the inclusion of sports sponsorship in brand advertisements affects consumers' perceptions of the brands (Schönberner et al., 2021).

There has been insufficient research conducted in the past on how brand attitudes are affected by sports sponsorship's presence or absence in commercials (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; DeGaris et al., 2017). Apart from that, previous research has primarily relied on surveys, investigating exclusively at the relationship between sponsorship and brand attitude (Ko and Kim, 2014). As a result, this study aims to close the academic gap by investigating the causal relationship between the two factors listed above through an experiment.

One of the concepts in sponsorship research that is most frequently studied is congruence the idea that the sponsor and the sponsored object or activity should be similar (Coppetti et al., 2009). This concept highlights the contradictory impacts that high and low congruence have on customer perceptions (Belanche et al., 2021). Some research highlights the comparable impacts of low-congruent commercials, despite the fact that increased congruency induces better attitudes (Cicco et al., 2021). Therefore, the current study also aims to shed further light on these seemingly at odds congruency level findings.

Additionally, given that opinions about advertisements have the power to shape people's perceptions of brands (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989), this study aims to investigate a process that is shaped by these opinions and determine if it can explain why there is a connection between a brand's attitude and the presence of a sports sponsorship in an advertisement.

The research question is as follows, aggregating the previously mentioned notions: How does a sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement (high-congruent vs. low-congruent vs. absent) affect viewers' attitudes towards the brand and to what extent is the relationship mediated by viewers' attitudes towards the advertisement?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES**

### **2.1. The impact of a sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement on perception towards the brand**

Sponsorship, as described by Gardner and Shuman (1998), is an investment made in a cause or event that advances the goals of the firm, such as raising consumer perception of the brand or raising company recognition. Specifically, by establishing a connection between the brand and sports entity, sports sponsorship provides companies with a means of communication with their sports-loving clientele. Additionally, sponsorship cues convey competence, dependability, and quality, according to Till and Shimp (1998). Customers often see brands affiliated with respectable

organizations as being more dependable and superior. A more favorable assessment of the brand will result from its affiliation with a respectable sponsored organization.

According to Ko et al. (2017), a crucial factor in fostering positive consumer perceptions of sponsorship is the perceived congruence between the sponsored entity and the sponsor. Different disciplines define congruence differently. According to Johar and Pham (1999), congruence is the relatedness or relevance in sponsorship research; in cause-related marketing, on the other hand, it is fit. Sponsor-sponsee congruence is generally understood to be the fit between an event and the sponsoring firm, while there are notable variations in this idea (Maanda et al., 2020).

There is sound theoretical foundation for the relationship between brand attitudes and sponsorship congruence. First, according to the Meaning Transfer theory, when someone is shown two related constructs, they are conflated and the meaning of one is transferred to the other (McCracken, 1989). Put otherwise, when a sponsored entity is presented on behalf of a particular brand, the customer's attraction to the information will naturally translate into their perception of the brand. Positive meaning increases the likelihood of a successful relationship (Campbell and Warren, 2012). The congruency between the sponsored entity and the brand is referred to as this well-established relationship. Favorable opinions about the brand are likely to arise, especially if there is a strong congruence between the two entities. Earlier research also suggests that when consumers are exposed to a sponsored entity that aligns with the company's image, their attitudes alter significantly due to the halo effect (Cui et al., 2019). The halo effect happens when a connection is made to influence a person's attitude towards a brand. Customers are therefore more likely to form positive opinions of the brand when there is a strong congruent link between the sponsored entity and the brand.

Furthermore, if consumers were given the information, the previously noted problem of inconsistent brand expansions might be resolved – in fact, reversed (Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994). To put it another way, people analyze the logo and the material in a less congruent environment for longer, which improves memory retrieval (Furnham and Price, 2006; Santos et al., 2019) thus, which potentially makes it more successful than without a sponsorship.

Consequently, we hypothesize that compared to the lack of sports sponsorship, the presence of sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement – both high and low congruent – can result in a more positive brand attitude. Here is how the theories are put together:

H1: Compared to when there is no sports sponsorship in a brand commercial, the presentation of a congruent sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement has a positive effect on brand attitudes.

H2: When a brand is advertised with a less congruent sports sponsorship, consumers' opinions of the brand are more favorable than when it is not.

High sponsor-sponsee congruence would lead to more positive opinions towards the brand than low sponsor-sponsee congruence, according to several studies (Rifon et al., 2004; Speed and Thompson, 2000). The Match-up hypothesis, which states that advertising efficacy is increased when the image of one entity converges or fits with the image of another entity, can explain this.

According to Joo et al. (2021), the Schema Congruity theory posits that customers exhibit a preference for consistency in their thinking and are more inclined to respond positively to a high degree of consistency. Misra and Beatty's (1990) Filtering model provide additional insight into this phenomenon by suggesting that information that is highly congruent will be more readily encoded into people's minds, while less relevant information would be filtered out. As a result, people's attitudes towards the brand would be impacted since it would be simpler to recall more congruent information and more difficult to recall lower congruent information. Therefore, the following theory is put out in light of the above mentioned theoretical background:

*H3:* Compared to the presence of a low-congruent sports sponsorship, the inclusion of a high-congruent sports sponsorship in a brand commercial results in higher positive views towards the brand.

## **2.2. Mediating Effect of Attitude Towards the Advertisement**

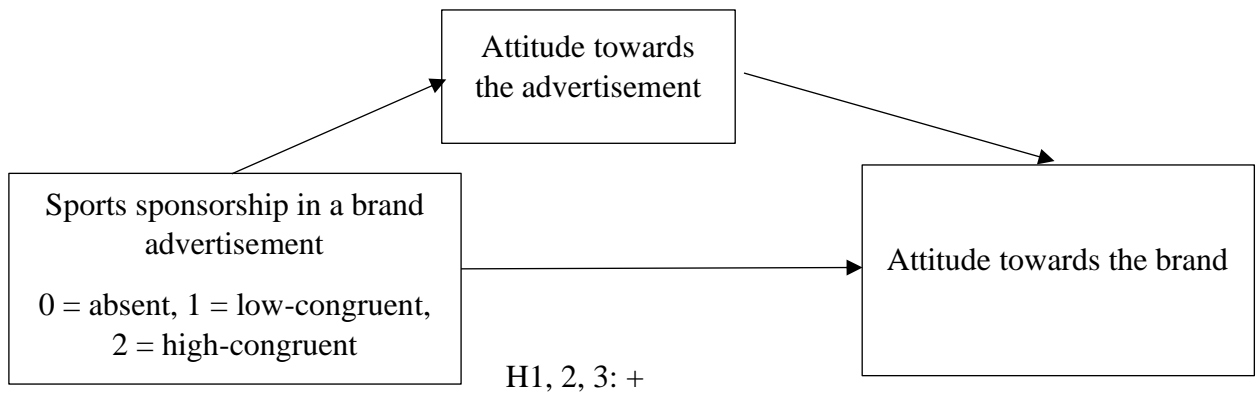
Attitude towards the advertisement is seen as "an important mediator of advertising response," per MacKenzie and Lutz (1989, p. 48). This is because consumers' attitudes towards advertisements play a significant part in how they perceive and assess the commercial as a whole, which affects their ensuing behaviors. The authors of these studies described viewers' attitudes towards advertisements as an emotional construct that reflected their feelings, which may be either favorable or negative. According to earlier research, attitudes about the brand and the commercial are directly correlated (Kinney and McDaniel, 1996; MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989).

According to Li et al. (2022), when there is a high level of consistency and matching between the sponsor and the sponsee, customers are more likely to notice sponsorship firms, which has a favorable impact on their perceptions of the sponsorship commercials. This may therefore result in a more positive perception of the brand. This phenomenon can be explained by applying the process model of attitude-behavior interaction from the work of Fazio and Zanna (1981), which suggests that attitude operates to "guide" the processing of information in a specific context. It would seem, therefore, that a person's reaction to an advertisement would be a significant indicator of how the audience will feel about the company after seeing it. The analysis leads to the development of the following hypotheses:

*H4a:* The attitude towards the advertisement acts as a mediator between the presence and absence of a high-congruent sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement. This means that (a) a congruent sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement causes a more positive attitude towards the advertisement than absence, and (b) a more positive attitude towards the ad results in more positive attitudes towards the brand.

*H4b:* The attitude towards the advertisement mediates the positive effect of having a low-congruent sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement over not having one, so that (a) having a low-congruent sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement results in more positive attitudes towards the advertisement than absence, and (b) having more positive attitudes towards the ad results in more positive attitudes towards the brand.

The theoretical foundation of the study is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical foundation of the study

(Source: The author, 2024)

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Data Analysis

A single-factor between-subjects experimental design (sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement: high-congruent vs. low-congruent vs. missing) was employed for this study. Given that the purpose of the study is to investigate a potential causal relationship between sponsorship presence and brand attitude, an experimental approach is a fitting methodology (Gravetter and Forzano, 2015).

In addition, an examination of the research materials (N = 10) was performed to ascertain that the instruments are viewed as intended and that the study protocols, data collection tools, and sample recruitment tactics would produce a suitable number of respondents. Utilizing the same sample strategy and survey tools as the study protocol, the testing of the research materials adhered strictly to it. Following the collection of the necessary data from ten individuals, SPSS was used to download and analyze the data. In summary, there was enough data, and the study was prepared for wider distribution. The subjects were not included in the main study because they were the researcher's acquaintances. Also, all of the data that was obtained for the initial investigation was permanently removed from the system.

#### 3.2. Stimulus Material

The researcher generated the entirety of the stimulus materials (see Appendix). The stimulation materials were displayed as advertising for VictorySole and SleepySole, two fictional shoe manufacturers. Three distinct advertisements were made in total, each of which matched one of the study's three conditions: one featuring a sponsored sporting event with a high degree of congruence between the brand and the event; another featuring the same sponsored sporting event with a low degree of congruence between the brand and the event; and a third with no sponsorship.

Given that sports apparel—in particular, shoes—are among the top sponsorship spenders in 2015, IEG (2017b) they are selected as the category for the congruent condition company. When it comes to sense-making, perceived consistency, and image likeness, sports shoes stand out from other types of shoes as having the strongest obvious link to sports in the context of sports sponsorship. Conversely, a particular brand of slippers was selected for the company with low congruent conditions. Slippers should only be used indoors, specifically for activities conducted within your home, as they are warm, soft and comfortable for users' feet against the floor (Haskell, 2017). Thus, while this may be appropriate for viewing sports from home, it is not immediately related to sports, which are intended to be played outside on fields or indoors on courts, involving intense physical activities.

In light of the study's background, prior research has primarily concentrated on auto racing, such as The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR), and sports sponsorship in football (Chanavat and Martinent, 2019). As a result, this study opts to investigate the connection between sports sponsorship and spectator perceptions within a particular setting, namely tennis and the prestigious Wimbledon tournament. The selection of tennis as the study's subject was based on its accessibility as a straightforward, inclusive sport that anybody may participate in (Bevis, 2009). Because it can reach a wide audience, the sport has a significant fan base, which makes it a valuable tool for marketers to sponsor. The selection of Wimbledon as the study's focus was due to the fact that, in addition to being the only tennis tournament held on grass, Wimbledon is the oldest tennis competition in the world, having been around since 1877 (Rudnansky, 2017). Therefore, Wimbledon is considered a reputable event and distinct from other tennis championships, drawing more attention from sports enthusiasts. To account for brand awareness and preexisting views, two fictional brands—VictorySole and SleepySole—were included in the stimuli. All of the stimulus material's texts had the same word count and phrasing. Finally, the texts concluded with an invitation to act: "Don't settle for less, buy [brand's name] shoes". Furthermore, the designs of the advertisements were identical, with the exception of the brand name.

### **3.3. Procedure**

The first thing the participants were asked to do when they entered the experiment on Qualtrics was to offer their informed consent. They then responded to a series of demographic enquiries about their age, gender, and place of residence at the time. Then, participants were split into three groups at random: (1) a sports shoe brand called VictorySole that sponsors Wimbledon; (2) a slipper company called SleepySole that sponsors Wimbledon; and (3) a sports shoe company called VictorySole that does not sponsor Wimbledon. After 20 seconds, the participants were shown the next button so they could examine the stimuli in greater detail. Subsequently, enquiries were made about their perspective on the campaign and brand. A manipulation check was the next block, which checked to see if the stimulus was understood as intended. Finally, there were enquiries about Wimbledon's likeability and level of familiarity. To wrap up the experiment, each participant received a thank-you note and a debriefing detailing the entire goal of the study, including specifics about each condition.

### 3.4. Sample

The study employed an online Qualtrics experiment to gather data during a ten-day period, from April 26 to May 6. The entire experiment took approximately ten minutes to complete. As part of a collaborative effort, the experiment utilized only pertinent study-related data extracted from the final data file. Owing to project financial and time constraints, snowball sampling was used to find volunteers. Through a variety of social networking sites, the researcher's social circle received a link to the study, which the participants then further disseminated. There are 171 participants in all ( $N = 171$ ). Nevertheless, two participants' incomplete responses and seven participants' incorrect answers about their bias towards the fictional brands resulted in their exclusion from the study. Consequently, a total of 162 participants ( $N = 162$ ) were involved in the study, of whom 55 were placed in the high-congruent condition, 57 in the low-congruent condition, and 50 in the absent condition. The age range of the respondents ( $M = 26.58$ ,  $SD = 10.15$ ) was 18 to 61. In terms of gender, 59.9% of respondents ( $n = 97$ ) identified as female, 29% as male, 10.5% as non-binary, and 0.6% as preferring not to identify ( $n = 1$ ). In terms of current residency, the majority of participants ( $n = 66$ ; 40.7%) were from the Netherlands, followed by Vietnam ( $n = 33$ ; 20.4%) and Switzerland ( $n = 19$ ).

### 3.5. Operationalization

#### 3.5.1. Attitude Towards the Advertisement

The scale for the mediator "attitude towards the advertisement" was taken from the Ketelaar et al. (2010) study. Seven items (don't like/like; irritating/not irritating; does not appeal/appeal; ugly/pretty; not pleasant/pleasant; bad/good; and not inviting/inviting) were used to build the scale for this variable. The items were scored on a 5-point semantic scale. The seven elements create a single uni-dimensional scale, according to a main axis factor analysis (PAF): the scree plot clearly displays an inflection point after the component with the only Eigenvalue above 1 (Eigenvalue 4.93). When taken as a whole, these variables account for 70.4% of the variation in the original variables (items). All items experience a positive correlation with the first factor following a direct oblimin rotation; however, the item "Attitude towards the advertisement (bad/good)" shows the largest link (factor loading of 0.90). The items significantly correlate, and the scale is extremely reliable, according to the internal reliability test, which revealed a high Cronbach's alpha value of 0.93. Consequently, to sum up, every item assesses the same hidden construct of "attitude towards the ad." The "attitude towards the ad scale" ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ) was then created by averaging the elements on the scale that measures "attitude towards the ad."

#### 3.5.2. Attitude Towards the Brand

The "attitude towards the brand" is the main dependent variable. The study by Ko et al. (2017) provided the four 7-point items on the semantic differential scale (bad/good, unfavorable/favorable, negative/positive, and dislikeable/likeable) that were used to measure this variable. An examination of the major axis factor was conducted to guarantee that every item measures the same underlying notion. The outcome showed that just one component (Eigenvalue 3.44) has an Eigenvalue greater than 1, and the explained variance is 86.1%. The scree plot clearly

shows a point of inflection following this component. Following a direct oblimin rotation, all items show a positive correlation with the first factor; at the factor loading of 0.92, the item "Attitude towards the brand (unfavorable/favorable)" shows the strongest link. Strong correlations and reliability are demonstrated by the scale's high Cronbach's alpha value of 0.95 in the internal reliability test. To sum up, every item assesses the same underlying construct known as "attitude towards the brand." The components in the previously described "attitude towards the brand" scale were then averaged to create the final scale, which was given the label "attitude towards the brand scale" (M = 3.98, SD = 1.35).

### *3.5.3. Congruence Between the Sponsor and the Sponsored Event*

A five-item, seven-point Likert-type scale from Speed and Thompson's (2000) research was used to measure the perceived congruence between the sponsor and the sponsored event (e.g., There is a logical connection between Wimbledon and the sponsor). To quantify this latent variable, a primary axis factoring factor analysis was carried out. One component with an Eigenvalue greater than 1, which is 4.17, with an explained variance of 83.3%, was identified by the correlation analysis results. There is just one underlying dimension, as indicated by the scree plot's revelation of a single dot prior to the moment of inflection. After a direct oblimin rotation, the item "The sponsor and Wimbledon fit together well" has the strongest connection (factor loading is 0.94), with all items correlating positively with the first factor. The scale is reliable since the internal reliability test yielded a high Cronbach alpha score of 0.95. The same latent construct, "congruence between the sponsor and the sponsored event," is measured by a significant correlation between all of the items, it is concluded. The final scale, known as the "congruence scale" (M = 4.08, SD = 1.68), was then created by averaging the items in the previously mentioned scale, "congruence between the sponsor and the sponsored event."

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. Manipulation Check**

To determine if the manipulation was perceived as planned, an attention test was conducted. There were three chi-square tests run for every research condition. This check was successful, according to chi-square analysis, with  $\chi^2(1, N = 162) = 5.88, p = .015$ , and  $n = 102, 93.6\%$  of correct responses for the present condition and  $n = 43, 81.1\%$  for the absence condition. Another check was conducted for event name recall ( $\chi^2(1, N = 162) = 32.97, p < .001$ ), yielding 100% correct responses for the unknown condition and 96% correct answers for the correct event condition ( $n = 2$  and  $n = 97$ ). This suggests that the event name recall attentiveness check was effective. However,  $n = 89$ , or 78.8%, correctly answered the questions about the high-congruent condition, and  $n = 33$ , or 67.3%, correctly answered the questions about the low-congruent condition. A chi-square analysis was conducted for the attention check of the congruence between the sponsor and the sponsored event, and the results were found to be non-significant with  $\chi^2(1, N = 162) = 2.40, p = .122$ . This outcome demonstrates that the sponsor and sponsored event congruence attention check was unsuccessful.



An independent t-test was used to evaluate the intended perception of the manipulation by determining whether there was a significant difference in the perceived congruency between the two conditions including sponsorship in a brand advertising. The outcome revealed that there was a  $t(100) = -7.27$ ,  $p = .113$  significant difference between the conditions. Because of this, the participants were unable to distinguish between the two situations' perceived congruence (high-congruent vs. low-congruent). In summary, the manipulation's perception check was unsuccessful.

#### 4.2. Randomization and Control Variable Check

There were three randomization tests for country of residence, gender, and age. A one-way analysis of variance was performed with respect to the age randomization and found that,  $F(2, 159) = .482$ ,  $p = .619$ , there are no appreciable changes in the participants' ages between the conditions. The randomization for gender was then checked using a chi-square test, which produced a non-significant result ( $\chi^2(6, N = 162) = 4.84$ ,  $p = .565$ ), indicating that gender is not different for each research condition. Finally, with the aim of verifying the randomization for the residing nations, a chi-square test was conducted. The results indicated a non-significant difference ( $\chi^2(34, N = 162) = 33.61$ ,  $p = .487$ ), indicating that there is no difference between the residing countries for each condition.

To investigate two control variables—Wimbledon likeability and familiarity—two chi-square tests were run. A chi-square test revealed a non-significant result for familiarity with Wimbledon, meaning there is no difference between the conditions for familiarity with Wimbledon ( $\chi^2(12, N = 162) = 12.90$ ,  $p = .376$ ). A chi-square test was conducted to determine the likeability of Wimbledon. The results showed that there is no significant difference in the likeability of Wimbledon between the circumstances, with  $\chi^2(12, N = 162) = 9.65$  and  $p = .647$ .

In summary, no confounders have been found, hence these factors do not need to be incorporated into the primary analysis.

#### 4.3. Direct Effect Results

Using a one-way analysis of variance and Bonferroni post-hoc analysis, the major effect of having a sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement—whether high-congruent or low-congruent—on the consumer's attitude towards the brand was determined. The results of the ANOVA table indicate a significant difference between the study conditions:  $F(2, 159) = 6.01$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ . With  $F = 0.028$  and  $p = .972$ , allowing us the assumption of equal variances in the population.

The high-congruent presence of a sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement considerably stimulates a positive attitude towards the brand ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) compared to the lack of a sponsorship ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ). These findings were obtained by post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test. Attitudes towards the brand did not, however, differ substantially between the low-congruent existence of a sports sponsorship ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) and its absence ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ). In a similar vein, there is no discernible difference in the attitude towards the

brand between the low-congruent presence ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) and the high-congruent presence ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) of a sports sponsorship (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and One-way Analysis of Variance in Attitudes Towards the Brand.

Measure	High-congruent sports sponsorship		Low-congruent sports sponsorship		Absent sports sponsorship		$F(2, 159)$	$\eta^2$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$		
Attitude towards the brand	4.41	1.33	3.96	1.29	3.52	1.32	6.01*	.07

Note: \* $p = .003$

The results demonstrated a substantial p-value for the hypothesis, which states that the high-congruent presence of a sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement leads to more positive views towards the brand compared to the absence of sports sponsorship (H1). Subjects who saw the brand advertisement with the high-congruent sponsorship and those who saw it without it showed significantly different attitudes towards the brand, according to a post-hoc test ( $M_{\text{difference}} = 0.89$ ,  $p = .002$ ). This showed that, in comparison to when there is no sponsorship, consumers have a more favorable opinion of a brand when there is a high-congruent presence of sports sponsorship in the advertisement. Thus, we discovered evidence in favor of hypothesis 1.

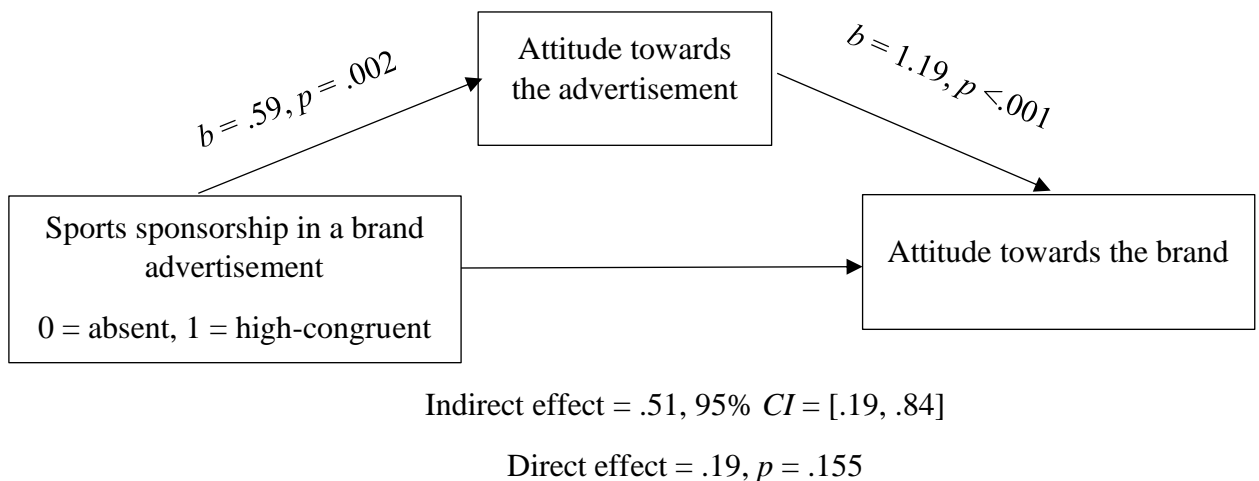
The test findings revealed a non-significant p-value for the hypothesis that having a low-congruent sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement causes consumers to feel better about the brand than if it doesn't have any (H2). Therefore, when comparing the low-congruent presence of a sports sponsorship to the lack of a sports sponsorship, there is no difference in the attitude towards the brand ( $M_{\text{difference}} = 0.44$ ,  $p = .247$ ). Consequently, hypothesis 2 is rejected. The results also showed a non-significant p-value for the hypothesis that states the existence of a high-congruent sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement leads to more positive attitudes towards the brand compared to the presence of a low-congruent sports sponsorship (H3). This suggests that there is no difference in consumer attitudes towards the brand between when a sports sponsorship is high-congruent and when it is low-congruent ( $M_{\text{difference}} = 0.44$ ,  $p = .226$ ). As a result, hypothesis 3 is likewise rejected.

#### 4.4. Mediation Effect Results

A multi-categorical PROCESS model 4 with an indicator system was estimated and bootstrapping of 5000 samples with a 95% confidence interval was used to assess the mediated association. The conditions of the study served as the study's predictors, the attitude towards the advertisement

served as the analysis's mediator, and the attitude towards the brand was the result of the variable analysis.

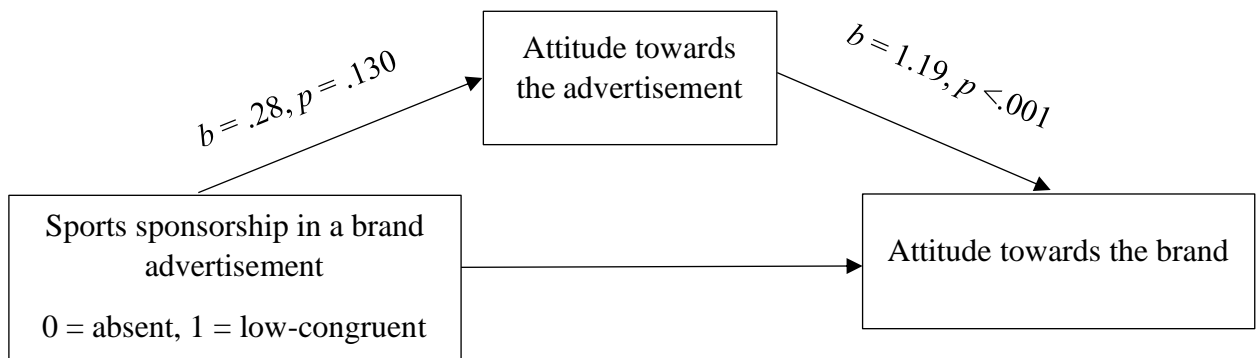
The outcome demonstrated a significant result for the mediated relationship with hypothesis 4a, which states that a high-congruent presence of sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement will lead to a positive attitude towards the advertisement and subsequently, gaining more positive attitudes towards the brand (H4a). The findings demonstrated that, in comparison to the lack of a sponsorship, a high-congruent sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement would cause consumers to have a more favorable opinion of the advertisement ( $b = .59, p = .002$ ). After adjusting for the existence of a sports sponsorship, the mediation analysis revealed that the mediator's (attitude towards the advertisement) effect was significant on attitude towards the brand ( $b = 1.19, p < .001$ ), indicating that the more positive one's attitude towards the advertisement, the more positive one's attitude towards the brand. The mediation analysis's findings demonstrated that, when attitude towards the advertisement was held constant, the direct impact of sports sponsorship on that attitude was not statistically significant (direct effect = .19, 95% CI = [-.07, .44],  $p = .155$ ). The indirect effect, however, was statistically significant, according to the results (indirect effect = .51, SE = .16, 95% CI [.19, .84]). This is an indirect-only mediation, or full mediation, as indicated by the significant indirect impact and non-significant direct effect results (Hair et al., 2021). As a result, the link is completely mediated by attitude towards the advertisement, supporting hypothesis 4a (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Mediation model for Hypothesis 4a

A non-significant result was discovered in relation to the theory that the low-congruent presence of a sports sponsorship in a marketing campaign results in more positive impressions of the advertisement and, consequently, the brand (H4b). The findings demonstrated that there is no difference in the attitude towards a brand advertisement between having a low-congruent sports sponsorship and not having one ( $b = .28, p = .130$ ). According to the mediation analysis, attitudes towards the brand are positively correlated with attitudes towards the advertisement ( $b = 1.19, p < .001$ ). The mediation analysis's findings demonstrated that, when attitude towards the advertisement was held constant, the direct impact of sports sponsorship on that attitude was not

statistically significant (direct effect = .11, 95% CI = [-.14, -.35],  $p = .395$ ). In a similar vein, the findings indicated that the indirect effect (indirect effect = .33, SE = .21, 95% CI [-.07, .75]) was not statistically significant. As a result, hypothesis 4b is disproved and attitude towards the brand does not mediate this link (see Figure 3).



Indirect effect = .33, 95% CI = [-.07, .75]

Direct effect = .11,  $p = .395$

**Figure 3.** Mediation model for Hypothesis 4b

## 5. DISCUSSION

Through the experiment, this study was able to shed light on two key relationships: first, whether a sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement is high- or low-congruent with respect to the attitude towards the brand, and second, whether or not the attitude towards the advertisement mediates this relationship.

First, in line with many previous studies (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999), the research indicates that the inclusion of sports sponsorship in brand communication only adds value if the sponsor-sponsored entity relationship is congruent. Furthermore, no discernible variations in the opinions of consumers regarding the brand were discovered for the low-congruent presence of a sports sponsorship in comparison to its absence and for the high-congruent presence of a sports sponsorship in comparison to its low-congruent presence.

According to the Meaning Transfer Theory, the idea that a sports sponsorship in a commercial advertisement has a high-congruent presence causes consumers to have a better impression of the brand (McCracken, 1989). The reason for this relationship's noteworthy outcome is that there is a well-established, congruent connection between the sponsor and the sponsored event. Consequently, there is a positive halo effect, whereby the favorable perception of the relationship influences the perception of the brand. Consequently, it makes sense that, as opposed to the absence of a sports sponsorship, a high-congruent sports sponsorship in a brand commercial would result in more favorable attitudes towards the brand. In order to maximize positive brand

assessments, marketers are advised to build a high-congruent sponsor-sponsored entity relationship.

It is important to note, nevertheless, that because the perception check was unsuccessful, the participants were unable to distinguish between the different congruence circumstances. Stated differently, it is challenging to make definitive judgements about how congruency affects brand attitude. The study's validity can be impacted if the differences cannot be found.

Second, the findings showed that, in contrast to the absence of a sports sponsorship, the favorable impact of the high-congruent presence of a sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement on the attitude towards the brand is mediated by the attitude towards the commercial. This finding added to our understanding of how consumers make decisions by highlighting the idea that a favorable perception of the advertisement will reinforce the positive correlation between a high-congruent sponsor-sponsored entity and brand attitude. This proves that spending money on advertising is necessary to increase brand likeability.

However, when contrasted with the lack of a sports sponsorship, attitude towards the company and the ad do not mitigate the impact of a low-congruent existence of a sports sponsorship. As a result, this finding contradicts other research (Kinney and McDaniel, 1996; MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989) that suggests that attitudes towards advertisements may always be the underlying factor that influences attitudes towards brands. In practice, incorporating incongruent advertisements might not be detrimental, but it also would not influence a shift in the brand's appeal.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

When viewed as a whole, this study offers significant new information about how brand attitude and sports sponsorship presence or absence interact. This study does have certain drawbacks, though. First off, out of the five hypotheses in the study, there were only two meaningful conclusions. This could be the result of a small sample size and low level of diversity in the demographic data. Apart from that, it is impossible to say for certain how a high-congruent presence of a sports sponsorship in a brand advertisement can improve consumers' perceptions of the company. This might be due to the fact that the study was implemented as an online experiment using Qualtrics. As a result, it is impossible to account for outside influences. As a result, the internal validity is reduced. Furthermore, the fact that this study was carried out in a particular setting may have reduced its external validity. There is also another issue with external validity: the non-probability snowball sampling technique was used for the sample process. Eventually, the participants' inattentiveness caused the perceptual check for congruency to fail. In terms of the study design, in order to improve internal and external validity, more participants should be included in the sample in subsequent research employing random sampling techniques. To further enhance the study's internal validity, it is advised that anyone doing an experiment on this subject do it in a laboratory setting where outside influences may be controlled. It is also advised to employ a long-term experiment in subsequent research to acquire more understanding of consumer behavior.

The findings supported established theories by showing that, in low congruence and absent cases, the mediation impact of the advertisement's attitude on brand likeability was not statistically significant. Thus, given that earlier research highlighted the potential influence of low congruence on the way the advertisement is processed mentally, it could be advantageous to investigate how these circumstances affect brand memorability in more detail. It was specifically recommended that linkages between seemingly incongruent ideas be given more consideration and that the brand's attitude rises when these connections are made intentionally or artificially. As a result, these suggest that the research undertaken yielded inconsistent results, which merit further investigation. Lastly, as the attitude towards the advertisement is thought to be a significant predictor of brand attitudes, it should still be considered as a mediator in interactions pertaining to brand evaluations. Although this mediator did not perform well in conjunction with other variables for this study, it is still a crucial component to consider when conducting research on sponsorship communication and brand evaluations.

### REFERENCES

- Belanche, D., Casaló, L. V., Flavián, M., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2021). Understanding influencer marketing: The role of congruence between influencers, products and consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 132, 186–195.
- Broniarczyk, S. M., & Alba, J. W. (1994). The importance of the brand in brand extension. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 31(2), 214–228.
- Campbell, M. C., & Warren, C. (2012). A risk of meaning transfer: Are negative associations more likely to transfer than positive associations? *Social Influence*, 7(3), 172–192.
- Chanavat, N., & Martinent, G. (2019). Measuring ambush-marketing and sponsorship effects: A football consumer response approach. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 29(2), 158–180.
- Cicco, R. D., Iacobucci, S., & Pagliaro, S. (2021). The effect of influencer-product fit on advertising recognition and the role of an enhanced disclosure in increasing sponsorship transparency. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(5), 733–759.
- Coppetti, C., Wentzel, D., Tomczak, T., & Henkel, S. (2009). Improving incongruent sponsorships through articulation of the sponsorship and audience participation. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 15(1), 17–34.
- Crompton, J. L. (2004). Conceptualization and alternate operationalizations of the measurement of sponsorship effectiveness in sport. *Leisure Studies*, 23(3), 267–281.
- Cui, G. Q., Lee, J. Y., & Jin, C. H. (2019). The role of sports sponsorship in negative new stories about a brand: Approach the halo effect. *Cogent Business & Management*, 6(1), 1-20.
- Dean, D. H. (1999). Brand endorsement, popularity, and event sponsorship as advertising cues affecting consumer pre-purchase attitudes. *Journal of Advertising*, 28(3), 1–12.
- DeGaris, L., Kwak, D. H., & McDaniel, S. R. (2017). Modeling the effects of sponsorship-linked marketing: When does memory matter? *Journal of Promotion Management*, 23(2), 320–339.

- Fazio, R.H., & Zanna, M.P. (1981) Direct experience and attitude-behavior consistency. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 14, 161-202.
- Furnham, A., & Price, M. T. (2006). Memory for televised advertisements as a function of program context, viewer-involvement, and gender. *Communications*, 31(2), 155–172.
- Gravetter, F. J., & Forzano, L. B. (2015). *Research Methods for the Behavioral Sciences*. Cengage Learning.
- Gwinner, K. P. & Eaton, J. (1999). Building brand image through event sponsorship: The role of image transfer. *Journal of Advertising*, 28(4), 47–57.
- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T., Ringle, C. M., Sarstedt, M., Danks, N. P., & Ray, S. (2021). Mediation analysis. *Classroom Companion: Business*, 139–153
- Haskell, D. (2017, August 15). *The history of the slipper*. Ernest journal.
- Hodson, J. (2019). *Global sports sponsorship spends to reach \$65 billion in 2019*. Australian Ministry of Sport.
- IEG. (2017a). *IEG's guide to sponsorship*. IEG, LLC.
- IEG. (2017b). *Top sponsors report: The biggest sponsorship spenders*. ESP Properties.
- Johar, G. V., & Pham, M. T. (1999). Relatedness, prominence, and constructive sponsor identification. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 36(3), 299.
- Joo, S., Koo, J., & Nichols, B. S. (2021). Understanding consumer attitudes in cause-brand alliances in sports: The role of sport entity attitudes. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship*, 22(3), 507–528.
- Ketelaar, P. E., Van Gisbergen, M. S., Bosman, J. A. M., & Beentjes, J. (2010). The effects of openness on attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and brand beliefs in Dutch magazine ads. *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 32(2), 71–85.
- Kinney, L., & McDaniel, S. R. (1996). Strategic implications of attitude-toward-the-ad in leveraging event sponsorships. *Journal of Sport Management*, 10(3), 250–261.
- Ko, Y. J., & Kim, Y. K. (2014). Determinants of consumers' attitudes toward a sport sponsorship: A tale from college athletics. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 26(3), 185–207.
- Ko, Y. J., Chang, Y., Park, C., & Herbst, F. (2017). Determinants of consumer attitude toward corporate sponsors: A comparison between a profit and nonprofit sport event sponsorship: Consumer attitude toward sponsor. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 16(2), 176–186.
- Maanda, P. M., Abratt, R., & Mingione, M. (2020). The influence of sport sponsorship on brand equity in South Africa. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 26(6), 812–835.

- MacKenzie, S. B., & Lutz, R. J. (1989). An empirical examination of the structural antecedents of attitude toward the ad in an advertising pretesting context. *Journal of Marketing*, 53(2), 48–65.
- McCracken, G. D. (1989). Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 310.
- Misra, S., & Beatty, S. E. (1990). Celebrity spokesperson and brand congruence: An assessment of recall and affect. *Journal of Business Research*, 21(2), 159–173.
- Rifon, N. J., Choi, S. M., Trimble, C. S., & Li, H. (2004). Congruence effects in sponsorship: The mediating role of sponsor credibility and consumer attributions of sponsor motive. *Journal of Advertising*, 33(1), 30–42.
- Rudnansky, R. (2017, September 27). *Wimbledon Tennis 2013: Why Historic Tournament Is Most Prestigious Grand Slam*. Bleacher Report.
- Santos, M. A. D., Moreno, F. C., & Crespo-Hervás, J. (2019). Influence of perceived and effective congruence on recall and purchase intention in sponsored printed sports advertising: An eye-tracking application. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship*, 20(4), 617–633.
- Schönberner, J., Woratschek, H., & Ellert, G. (2021). Hidden agenda in sport sponsorship - The influence of managers' personal objectives on sport sponsorship decisions. *Sport Management Review*, 24(2), 204–225.
- Speed, R., & Thompson, P. (2000). Determinants of sports sponsorship response. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(2), 226–238.
- Till, B. D., & Shimp, T. A. (1998). Endorsers in advertising: The case of negative celebrity information. *Journal of Advertising*, 27(1), 67–82.



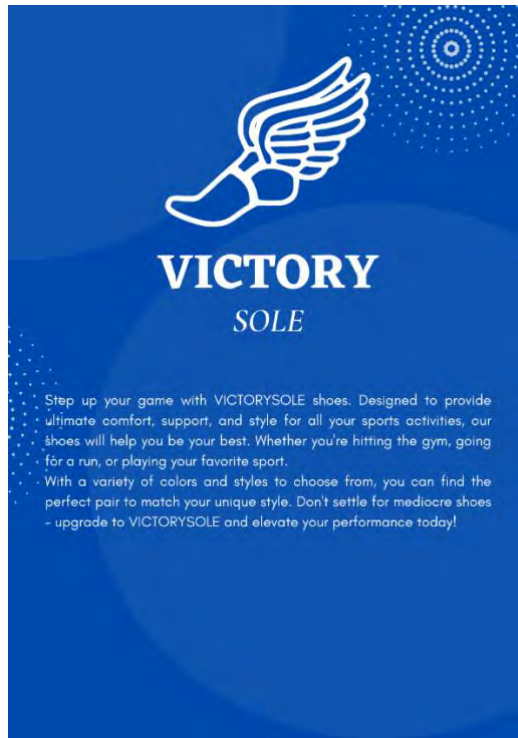
APPENDIX



A1: High-congruent sports sponsorship condition



A2: Low-congruent sports sponsorship condition



A3: Absent sports sponsorship condition