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# The Effect of Sport Sponsorship on Brand Equity: A Study Within the Context of Professional Soccer

**James B. Hunt**
Cameron School of Business
University of North Carolina Wilmington, United States

**Tammy G. Hunt**
Cameron School of Business
University of North Carolina Wilmington, United States

**ABSTRACT**

**This study examines the effects of sport sponsorship on brand equity. More precisely, the impact of sport sponsorship is assessed for each of Aaker's (1991) components of brand equity: brand personality; brand awareness; brand associations; perceived quality; brand loyalty. Research is conducted within the domain of a sports team sponsorship, specifically Nivea Men's sponsorship of Liverpool Football Club. The results demonstrate that all five components of brand equity are positively influenced by sport sponsorship, ultimately supporting the proposition that sport sponsorship has a positive impact on brand equity. While sponsorship may not by itself be sufficient for brand equity building or sales enhancement, sponsors should be able to leverage their association with the team to promote their benefits and motivate fan engagement.**

**Keywords:** Sport sponsorship; Brand equity; Fan loyalty; Football/soccer marketing

## INTRODUCTION

The sport business has grown exponentially over the last two decades (Ljubica & Seric, 2018) predominantly due to media presence that has propelled professional sport into the international spotlight. Sport sponsorship is currently the most popular type of sponsorship, attracting over $57 billion globally, and this figure is predicted to grow to $90 billion in 2027 (Gough, 2021). Justification for these vast investments is based on the belief that sport sponsorship has the capability of building brand equity, differentiating brands from competitors, and introducing new audiences to the brand (Cornwell et al., 2001; Donlan, 2014; Henseler et al., 2007; Zarei et al., 2019). One facet of brand equity, brand loyalty, has attracted particular attention as it has the potential to generate sales volume and enable premium pricing (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006; Sayman & Hoch, 2014; Vivek et al., 2012). From an academic perspective, brand equity is regarded as a principal marketing concept (Keller, 2013; Tsordia et al., 2018). Aaker's (1991) model has been extensively used as the standard measurement tool, with a number of researchers making their own modifications (Cornwell et al., 2001; Grohs et al., 2004; Henseler et al., 2007; Smith, 2004; Tsordia et al., 2018).

The specific effects of sport sponsorship on brand equity are relatively unknown. A lack of sufficient research, combined with limitations of the few relevant studies, necessitates that

further research be conducted to fill this literature gap. Brand equity consists of five core components: brand personality; brand awareness; brand associations; perceived quality; brand loyalty. These components are assessed individually in the present study. Special attention is paid to brand loyalty, with the hope of discovering whether a sport fan's loyalty can be harnessed and directed towards the sponsor's brand itself. The assessments of the effect of sport sponsorship on each individual component are then considered as a whole to form a general impression of the impact sport sponsorship has on overall brand equity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### What Exactly Is Sports Sponsorship?

International Events Group (IEG) is the foremost professional authority in sponsorship consulting and research. In 2001 they defined sponsorship as 'cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property' (Belzer, 2013). This definition has been consistently used in the academic literature. Nafziger (2011) has provided a definition of sport sponsorship that goes beyond the general definition of sponsorship. Specifically, sport sponsorship is an agreement that 'contractually provides financing or other support to establish an association between the sponsor's image, brands or products and a sponsorship property in return for rights to promote this association and/or for the granting of certain agreed direct or indirect benefits' (p. 527). This ability to promote the association is the most crucial aspect of sport sponsorship. There are three types of sport sponsorship categories: individual, team, and event (Shank, 2009). The present study examines sport sponsorship within the context of a team. However, the implications of the results are relevant to all forms of sport sponsorship.

### Objectives of Sport Sponsorship

The aims of sport sponsorship include increasing awareness (Armstrong, 1988; Dixon, 1985; Sakarya-Tapan, 1993), enhancing brand image (Abratt et al., 1987; Armstrong, 1988; Choi & Yo, 2011; Dixon, 1985; Meenagan, 1983; Sakarya-Tapan, 1993), building relationships with customers (Abratt et al., 1987; Abratt & Grobler, 1989; Armstrong, 1988), aiding sales promotions (Choi & Yo, 2011; Meenaghan, 1983), and fulfilling social responsibility goals (Sakarya-Tapan, 1993).

Arguably the most important aspect of sport sponsorship is that it creates or increases awareness of a product/service or brand. It can be an extremely beneficial tool for enhancing awareness over a brief period of time (Fortunato, 2013). Also relevant to the attention stage, sport sponsorship can help penetrate target markets as it has the unique ability to reach people who share common interests. Companies are thus able to get a natural segmentation of customers through their sponsorship deals (Dolphin, 2003).

Another important goal of a sponsorship campaign is to maintain or build the brand's image. The image building process has been compared to a two-way street (Shank, 2009) given that both the sponsor and sports unit are dependent on each other to some extent. For example, a sponsor can profit from a winning athlete or team by associating themselves with that winning identity. Additionally, as noted by Mullin et al. (2007), sport sponsorship plays the important role of building long-term relations of trust between brands and customers. And of course, the success of the sponsorship deal is ultimately dependent on this translating to increased sales (e.g., Andreff & Szymanski, 2006; Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Dolphin, 2003; Mullin et al., 2007).

## How Sport Sponsorship Operates

Four relevant theories of sport sponsorship have been proposed in the literature. Together, they help explain how awareness, positive brand associations, and loyalty (key components of brand equity) may be built through a sports sponsorship arrangement. The first, Mere-Exposure Theory (Zajonc, 1968), postulates that repetitive exposure to a stimulus, without involving attitudes, can create knowledge of the object and trigger positive feelings towards the stimulus. In other words, the more exposure an individual has to a stimulus (e.g., a sports team), the more probable they are to like the stimulus.

The second relevant theory is the Social Identity Theory. Proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), this theory argues that individuals establish self-concepts through their connections with social groups to which they affiliate (e.g., identification with a sport team). Thus, the fan groups with which people associate, whether in-person or via social media, may help shape their views and consumption of relevant brands.

The third theory is the Affective Transfer Model credited to Pracejus (2004). Pracejus submitted that the transmission of positive affect from an event, team or individual to a sponsor brand could occur by association. The final theory is Gwinner's (1997) Image Transfer Model. Like the Affective Transfer Model, the Image Transfer Model refers to the transfer of meanings and connotations related to a sponsored entity (e.g., athlete or team) to a sponsoring brand or company.

## Brand Equity

Brand equity is a vitally important marketing concept (Keller, 2013; Tsordia et al., 2018). It can be succinctly defined brand as 'the added value a given brand endows a product' (Farquhar, 1989, p. 7). Another approach, viewing brand equity as the added preference a consumer has for a branded product over a similar product, has been adopted by Keller (1993), McQueen (1991), Srinivasan et al. (2005), and Yoo and Donthu (2001). More comprehensively, Aaker has provided what is now a familiar definition of brand equity, describing it as 'the set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand – its name and symbols – that add value to, or subtract value from, a product or service' (Aaker, 1991, p.15).

It is worth noting that Aaker's (1991) original proposal identified five dimensions that have been recognized as the true sources of brand equity: brand personality, brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Aaker's (1991) model had been extensively employed to study consumer behavior in numerous industrial sectors (Che-Ha & Hashim, 2007; Kim & Kim, 2005; Tong & Hawley, 2009). Aptly, Aaker's model has been applied to sport sponsorship (Cornwell et al., 2001; Grohs et al., 2004; Henseler et al., 2007; Smith, 2004; Tsordia et al., 2018). It is thus reasonable and appropriate to use Aaker's (1991) model as the basis for analyzing the effect of sport sponsorship on brand equity.

### *Brand Personality*

Brand personality encompasses the human features related to the brand (Aaker, 1997). Understanding brand personality is crucial, as consumers use brand personality to convey their social and ideal identities (Gill & Dawra, 2010). Sirgy (1982) has shown that the greater the agreement between brand personality and ideal self, the more probable a brand is to be preferred. Additionally, with the possibility of unique personality traits being associated with


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certain brands, it becomes clear that brand personality can be exploited to create positive brand differentiation. As such, brand personality is a chief aspect of brand equity.

### *Brand Awareness*

Keller (1993) links brand awareness with brand recognition and brand recall. Aaker (1997) extended Keller's observations by adding brand dominance, brand knowledge, and brand opinion to create an awareness continuum. Aaker (2002) maintains that brand awareness should be viewed as the power of a brand's presence in the customer's mind. The further along a consumer lies on Aaker's brand awareness spectrum, the more likely is he or she to purchase that product compared with lesser known brands. Glynn and Woodside (2009) outline the importance of brand awareness as it leads to increased brand knowledge, favorability, and sales over time. With customers more likely to select and value those brands with which they are familiar, brand awareness is key to a brand's overall success (Aaker, 1991; Glynn & Woodside, 2009; Gordon et al., 1993).

### *Brand Associations*

Brand associations denote everything linked in memory to a brand (Aaker, 1991). These connections make up the unique collection of brand associations know as brand identity. Gill and Dawra (2010) suggest that brand association gives meaning to a brand, defining its strength, favorability, and uniqueness. Thus, brand associations can greatly impact the decisions of consumers.

### Perceived Quality

The greater the perceived quality of a brand, the higher the brand equity. Consumers make inferences on quality from the limited information they are given. Moreover, the seller controls much of this information. The brand name, the product design, the packaging, and advertisements are among the most common types of information that communicate unobservable or intangible quality to the consumer (Gill & Dawra, 2010).

### *Brand Loyalty*

Lastly, brand loyalty can be thought of as an outlook toward a brand conveyed through intention and behavior to repurchase and/or recommend the product (Hausman, 2004). Oliver (1999) describes loyalty as a state of enduring preference. Brand loyalty is viewed as consisting of both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions (Gill & Dawra, 2010; Tsordia et al., 2018). Attitudinal loyalty deals with the psychological attitudes such as commitment or uniqueness (Evanschitzky et al., 2006), while behavioral loyalty concerns the recurrence of authentic purchase behavior (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Brand loyalty is a key component of brand equity as its presence results in customers coming back to enjoy the product (Mao, 2010). Indeed, loyal customers not only contribute to higher sales volumes, but also give companies a premium pricing ability (Sayman & Hoch, 2014). Moreover, with word of mouth (WOM) and social media fueled electronic WOM, brand loyalty has the capacity to radically boost the number of total customers. Sport sponsorship may well provide a platform for brands to take advantage of brand loyalty within a fan base.

## Sports Sponsorship and Brand Equity

Cornwell et al. (2001) and Henseler et al. (2007) found that sport sponsorship positively impacted brand equity. However, their research was confined to a manager's viewpoint and ignored the opinions of consumers. Likewise, Zarei et al. (2019) reported results of a survey of company managers that revealed sport sponsorship to have significant positive effects on brand equity which subsequently had a significant positive impact on firm performance.

While incorporating the views of customers into their studies, Donlan (2014) and Jaravaza and Guveya (2016) were able to affirm that sport sponsorship had a strong relationship with all components of brand equity. In particular, Donlan (2014) found that sport sponsorship was especially proficient in building brand associations and enhancing perceived quality if sponsors selected exclusive and costly sponsorships. Unfortunately, Donlan's (2014) study was confined to only two specific athletic events in the UK. Research conducted by Jaravaza and Guveya (2016) revealed that sport sponsorship directly impacted brand awareness. There was, however, a lack of consideration of consumer purchase intention or actual buying behavior.

As previously suggested, brands may leverage their position by linking to other entities and creating positive brand associations that result in higher brand equity. Meenaghan (2001) has examined how sport sponsorship can prove an effective source of creating such positive brand associations that ultimately influence brand equity. D'Alessandro (2001) labels this the 'halo effect,' and along with De Pelsmacker et al. (2008), has supported Meenaghan's (2001) views by demonstrating there is a carry-over effect to the sponsoring firm from consumers' attitudes of the sponsored brand.

Tsordia et al. (2018) have highlighted how the perceived personality fit between a sponsor and the supported entity influence brand equity. Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006) have found that sport fans who believe an event or team matches well with its sponsor are more inclined to transfer positive associations of the event or team to the sponsor's product. Interestingly, this relationship works in the other direction, too. A study of teams' marketing promotional activities found that agreement between brand personality and promotional actions has a positive effect on evaluation of the activities and on brand equity of the team (Giroux et al., 2017). Thus, it is crucial that a sponsor's personality match that of the entity being sponsored.

Additionally, Papadimitriou et al. (2016) have shown that the greater the perceived fit, the more favorable the perception of the sponsor's quality. Tsordia et al. (2018) found that when it comes to perceived quality, the more sport fans value the sponsor's brand, the more likely they are to engage with the brand and build stronger brand loyalty. As such, perceived fit appears crucial to ensuring positive brand associations and higher quality perceptions. Consequently, a brand manager must understand brand personality to enhance brand equity.

Nonetheless, Jaravaza and Guveva (2016) have downplayed the impact that sport sponsorship can have on perceived quality, finding the impact to be only moderate. Yet the findings of Tsordia et al. (2018) hold considerable weight given that their conclusions are consistent with Aaker's (1991) belief that consumers' decisions are highly affected by their evaluation of the brand's quality. Furthermore, Aaker (1991) has previously acknowledged the capability of brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality to improve brand loyalty and remove consumers' incentive to try competing brands. Given the connections between brand


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awareness, brand associations, brand engagement, perceived fit, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, it appears crucial that sponsoring companies carefully examine the fit between their brand and the sponsored team, individual, or event.

Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006) and Vivek et al. (2012) found that sport sponsorship could build brand loyalty and lead to customer recommendations for the product. Since sport sponsors are usually viewed as crucial partners in accomplishing the goals of the team, individual, or event, they are typically recognized by fans as group members (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). As such, certain supporters are motivated to purchase a sponsor's product (Lings & Owen, 2007; Madrigal, 2000) with some becoming loyal customers (Levin et al., 2004) who build positive attitudes towards the sponsor and overemphasize their positive aspects (Gwinner & Bennet, 2008). More recently, Tsordia et al. (2018) emphasize how brand engagement with sponsors is crucial to creating brand loyalty.

Biscaia et al. (2017) presented a comprehensive model of how team brand experience during the season impacts sponsorship brand experience. Their framework is based on constructs identified from previous research aimed at understanding sponsorship effectiveness. Though not empirically tested, the model does provide a simplified view of how fan team brand experience (e.g., past behaviors, brand associations, satisfaction, and psychological loyalty) plays a crucial role in enhancing consumer experience with the sponsorship brand, and is manifested through a range of responses that often start with sponsorship awareness and eventually to increased purchases of the sponsor's products.

**More on the Role of Brand Loyalty**

The greatest display of brand loyalty happens when consumers engage with and devote resources into a brand outside of the point of purchase or process of consumption (Keller, 2001). Hollebeek (2011) describes brand engagement as the degree of cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in brand connections. The similarities between this definition and those of brand loyalty should be noted. It is thus not surprising that customer engagement has been repeatedly linked to brand loyalty (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006; Groeger et al., 2016; Tsordia et al., 2018; Vivek et al., 2012).

Studies have previously addressed the impacts of sport sponsorship on a sponsor's brand equity, yet the variable of brand loyalty has been only partially explored or been ignored altogether (Grohs et al., 2004; Smith, 2004). Indeed, such failings have stemmed from a lack of consideration given to customers' perceptions and thoughts. As Tsordia et al. (2018) have highlighted, this is unacceptable due to the focus that Aaker's (1991) brand equity model places on customers' opinions. It is disappointing that attempts to measure effects on brand equity have misapplied Aaker's (1991) model.

This oversight is particularly germane to sport sponsorship due to the extremely loyal and fervent consumers that sport engages (Wakefield, 2016) and the continuous nature of these relationships (Vallerand et al., 2008). There are masses of sport fans who devote time, energy, and financial resources into supporting an athlete, team, or sporting event. Moreover, a large proportion of these fans are anomalous consumers due to their extreme passion (Vallerand et al., 2008), loyalty (Dalakas & Melancon, 2012), and engagement with one or multiple teams (Funk & James, 2001; Yoshida et al., 2014). Such displays typically occur in the form of following

sport news, discussing such news with others, attending events, viewing games live or on television, purchasing sport products, wearing sport clothing (Vallerand et al., 2008; Yoshida et al., 2014), spreading positive opinions (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000), or purhasing products endorsed by a favorite athlete/event (Hunt et al., 1999). These behaviors are even more pronounced given the prevalence of the internet, e-commerce, blogs, and various social media entities.

Yet left underexplored, from both an academic and practitioner viewpoint, is the extent to which sport sponsorship can act as a foundation for fans to engage with the sponsor's brand and subsequently develop feelings of loyalty towards the sponsor. The aim of any sport sponsor must surely be to encourage fans to engage not solely with the sport team or event being sponsored, but also with the sponsor itself. In essence, sponsors need to harness sport fans' passions by seeking to replicate these feelings of loyalty towards the sponsoring brand itself.

The present study looks to make a contribution by adding insight into the effects of sport sponsorship on brand equity, while particularly focusing on the mostly unexplored area of exploiting sports enthusiasts' loyalty and directing such loyalty to the sponsoring brand itself. In doing so, this study aims to address recent petitions in the sponsorship literature to use consumer behavior as a measure of sponsorship effectiveness (Biscaia et al., 2013; Cornwell et al., 2005; Madrigal, 2001; Ngan et al., 2011).

## HYPOTHESES

### Effect of Sport Sponsorship on Brand Personality

Five core characteristics make up brand personality – competence, excitement, sincerity, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). To date, studies on brand personality have been directed in relation to other aspects of brand equity. For example, Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006) and Tsordia et al. (2018) assessed brand personality to ascertain whether the perceived fit between sponsor and sponsored entity influenced brand associations and brand equity in general. Due to a lack of relevant literature, it is difficult to predict the impact that sport sponsorship will have on a brand's personality and the effect that this will subsequently have on the attractiveness of a brand to consumers. Nonetheless, the sport sponsorship theory of Social Identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and the Affective Transfer Model (Pracejus, 2004) suggest that individuals identifying themselves with a particular team, individual, or event are apt to pass on similar feelings towards the sponsoring brand, and that these feelings will inevitably be positive. Thus, the following hypothesis is speculated:

**H1:** Among a team's fan base, sport sponsorship positively influences a brand's personality.

### Effect of Sport Sponsorship on Brand Awareness

Research by Areska (2012) revealed that sport sponsorship increases brand awareness, with both brand recognition and brand recall playing a part. These conclusions are consistent with those of Jaravaza and Guveya (2016) who found that sport sponsorship has a direct impact on brand awareness. Moreover, such empirical findings have served to confirm the literature which has repeatedly postulated that sport sponsorship activity creates or increases awareness of a brand (Fortunato, 2013) and is supported by the Mere-Exposure Theory (Zajonc, 1968). As a result, the following is proposed:

**H2:** Sport sponsorship directly increases fan brand awareness of the sponsoring brand.


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### Effect of Sport Sponsorship on Brand Associations

Studies conducted by D'Alessandro (2001), De Pelsmacker et al. (2008), and Meenaghan (2001) have found that sport sponsorship can create positive brand associations. Gill and Dawra (2010) recommend strength, favorability, and uniqueness as central to assessing the effectiveness of brand associations. All authors have highlighted a carryover effect from the associations of the sponsored entity to the sponsoring brand. This carryover, if properly leveraged, may significantly improve brand equity. Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006) also noted that the greater the perceptions of fit between sponsor and sponsored unit, the more likely positive brand associations are to exist. Yet, it is Donlan (2014) who provides the greatest indication of the relationship between sport sponsorship and brand associations as his research highlighted sport sponsorship to be especially proficient in building brand associations. Additionally, such a conclusion would be expected based on the Affective Transfer Model (Pracejus, 2004) and the Image Transfer Model (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Consequently, the following is postulated:

**H3:** Sport Sponsorship creates clearer and stronger brand associations among a team's fan base.

### The Effect of Sport Sponsorship on Perceived Quality

Perceived quality concerns a consumer's opinion of a product irrespective of the actual performance of that product. According to Donlan (2014), sport sponsorship enhances perceived quality only if sponsors select exclusive and costly sponsorships. Additionally, Papadimitriou et al. (2016) discovered that the effect on perceived quality was conditional on the perceived fit between sponsor and sponsored entity. It is thus unsurprising that when Jaravaza and Guveva (2016) observed the effect of sport sponsorship on perceived quality, only a moderate impact on perceived quality was observed. Yet following the theory of Social Identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the Affective Transfer Model (Pracejus, 2004), one would expect the perceived quality of the brand to benefit from simply being the sponsor of a sports team, event or individual. Given the uncertainty that exists, along with additional variables that may influence the effect of sponsorship on perceived quality, the following hypothesis is put forward:

**H4:** Among a team's fan base, sport sponsorship improves the perceived quality of a brand.

### The Effect of Sport Sponsorship on Brand Loyalty

Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006), Vivek et al. (2012), and Wakefield (2016) have found that sport sponsorship has the capability of building brand loyalty because sport fans are extremely loyal and passionate consumers. However, Tsordia et al. (2018) implied that for sport sponsorship to truly generate brand loyalty, brand engagement must be encouraged and facilitated. Evidently, the extent to which sport sponsorship acts as a foundation for fans to engage with the sponsor's brand, leading to the development of loyalty towards the sponsor, has not been sufficiently explored. Both attitudinal loyalty (psychological thoughts and feelings toward the brand) and behavioral loyalty (repetition of actual purchase behavior) should be addressed. To provide clarification, the following hypothesis is posited:

**H5:** Sport sponsorship increases brand loyalty among a team's fan base.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Context

The hypotheses are tested within the domain of a sports team sponsorship with the English football team, Liverpool Football Club (FC), and Nivea Men, a German body care brand. Liverpool FC is one of the winningest football teams in Europe, having been crowned champions of England 19 times – second only to Manchester United – and champions of Europe six times – an achievement only bettered by Real Madrid and AC Milan. Liverpool FC is known for its passionate fans and has an estimated global fan base of 92.7 million people (GOAL, 2021).

In February 2015, Liverpool FC announced its first sponsorship agreement with Nivea Men, who became the club's official men's grooming brand. Nivea Men is a leading global men's skin care brand. They provide products ranging from intensive face cream to energizing shower gel and hair-styling gel. The sponsorship agreement has been promoted through various means, including advertisements and promotional events that have featured current and former players of Liverpool FC using Nivea Men products.

### Research Design and Data Collection

Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental or expert sampling, is used in this study. It is a type of nonprobability sampling that seeks to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the relevant population (Glen, 2021). As Nivea Men's target group is solely formed of men, only adult males (at least 18 years of age) were considered useful for research purposes. Additionally, research was confined to one market to minimize differences in external environments distorting the results. As such, the UK market was chosen given that Liverpool FC is located there. Moreover, we aimed for approximately half of the eligible individuals to be Liverpool FC fans. This would allow for comparison of the effects of the sport sponsorship agreement on Liverpool FC fans with that of non-Liverpool FC fans.

The survey was distributed in two ways. First, it was posted on a Liverpool FC fan page forum, with clear instructions that the survey was only to be completed by those at least 18 years of age, male, fans of Liverpool FC, and currently living in the United Kingdom. The survey was also posted on a general football fan page with the same instructions outlined above, although this time it was required that respondents <u>not</u> be Liverpool FC fans. Again, the aim was to allow responses between Liverpool FC fans and non-Liverpool FC fans to be compared.

An online survey was chosen due to flexibility, convenience, and anonymity. To ensure respondents could understand the questions posed, jargon and technical terms were omitted. Simple, and concise sentences were used where possible. Introductory text, a progress indicator, and detailed instructions within the online survey were included (Dillman et al., 2014). The survey consisted of 27 items concerning perceptions of Nivea Men's brand personality, brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty (including an assessment of actual behavior), and demographics. Respondents were also asked to what extent they considered themselves to be fans of Liverpool FC.

The survey included two items that tested whether respondents were paying attention or answering randomly. An instructed response item was used within the survey as attention detector (Meade & Craig, 2012). The second item assessed consistent responding, a further attention detector item (Meade & Craig, 2012). Within the sport sponsorship setting there are


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concerns that sport fans are eager to portray themselves in a way that is agreeable to other fans (Levin et al., 2004). To reduce effects of social desirability bias, questionnaires were self-administered and anonymous. Also, respondents were reminded that the survey was purely for academic research and that there was no relationship with the sponsor or team (Tsordia et al., 2018).

**Scale Development and Operationalization of Constructs**

In developing the questionnaire, a five-point Likert scale was utilized, with 1 defined as 'strongly disagree' and 5 meaning 'strongly agree.' Aside from the demographic and purchase behavior items, all responses were measured using this scale. To gauge the influence of the sponsorship on Nivea Men's brand equity, the effect of the sponsorship deal on each component of brand equity was analyzed. The following section presents the operationalization of the constructs.

***Operationalization of Brand Personality***

The five core characteristics (Aaker, 1997) making up a brand's personality – competence, excitement, sincerity, sophistication, and ruggedness – form the basis for survey questions. Respondents were asked their perceptions of Nivea Men and given associated words to guide their decisions (see codification in Table 1 below).

**Table 1. Brand Personality Measurement**

| Concept | Codification | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Competence | Reliable, intelligent, successful | Aaker (1997) |
| Excitement | Trendy, imaginative, daring | Aaker (1997) |
| Sincerity | Honest, friendly, down-to-earth | Aaker (1997) |
| Sophistication | Charming, glamorous, upper-class | Aaker (1997) |
| Ruggedness | Tough, rigid, durable | Aaker (1997) |

***Operationalization of Brand Awareness***

This study includes two brand awareness items proposed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) and used by Tsordia et al., (2018). One question focuses on general awareness, while the other focuses specifically on brand recognition. Brand recall not measured as brand recognition remains the most important aspect of brand awareness for products, such as Nivea Men, where consumers' decisions are usually reached at the traditional point of sale (Bettman, 1978; Keller, 2013). Keller (1993) also proposed measuring brand awareness by assessing consumers' brand knowledge levels. Accordingly, this approach has been incorporated into the questionnaire.

**Table 2. Brand Awareness Measurement**

| Concept | Codification | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Awareness | Awareness of the product | Tsordia, et al. (2017)<br>Yoo and Donthu (2001) |
| Knowledge | Knowledge of brand's values and product offerings | Keller (1993) |
| Recognition | Recognition of the product among other competing brands | Tsordia, et al. (2017)<br>Yoo and Donthu (2001) |

### *Operationalization of Brand Associations*

When measuring brand associations, Gordon et al., (2016) utilized thoughts of consumers. Specifically, they wished to identify if the associated thoughts with a brand were negative or positive. This approach has been implemented in the present study. Additionally, consistent with the method of Chatzipanagiotou et al., (2016), the strength and rapidity of these associations have been assessed.

**Table 3. Brand Associations Measurement**

| Concept | Codification | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Type of associations | Whether the associations are mostly negative or positive | Gordon, et al. (2016) |
| Strength of associations | The clarity of the associations in the consumer's mind | Chatzipanagiotou, et al. (2016) |
| Speed of associations | The speed at which the associations are made in the consumer's mind | Chatzipanagiotou, et al. (2016) |

### *Operationalization of Perceived Quality*

To measure perceived quality, a three-indicator scale utilized by Yoo et al., (2001) was implemented. The three-indicator scale consisted of measuring the likely quality of the product, the likely functionality of the product, and the likely reliability of the product.

### *Operationalization of Brand Loyalty*

To measure the attitudinal dimension of brand loyalty, three items from Yoo and Donthu (2001) were used. To assess the behavioral dimension of brand loyalty, three items were utilized that have been used by several other researchers (Bosnjak et al., 2011; Ferguson et al., 2007; Lee & Xie, 2011; Papadimitriou et al., 2013).

**Table 4: Brand Loyalty Measurement**

| Concept | Codification | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Attitudinal Loyalty | (i) Perceptual loyalty<br>(ii) Products are first choice<br>(iii) Competing products are ignored | Yoo and Donthu (2001) |
| Behavioral Loyalty | (i) Recommending certain products to others<br>(ii) Encouraging others to purchase certain products<br>(iii) Positive comments made publicly or privately towards a product | Bosnjak, et al. (2011)<br>Ferguson, et al. (2007)<br>Lee and Xie (2011)<br>Papadimitriou, et al. (2013) |

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

There were 229 responses to the survey. However, 29 were excluded due to one of the following three reasons: (i) the questionnaire was returned incomplete, (ii) respondents fell foul to the attention detector items or, (iii) respondents were ineligible for the questionnaire.

The dependent variables (brand personality, brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty and brand equity) were created by averaging the items comprising each


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variable. The independent variable is categorical: whether or not an individual is a Liverpool fan. All respondents were male and currently living in the UK as required.

### Influence of Sport Sponsorship on Brand Personality

The first hypothesis posits that sport sponsorship positively influences a brand's personality. ANOVA is used to compare brand personality between Liverpool and non-Liverpool fans. Mean values and ANOVA results for brand equity and all components are shown below in Table 5.

**Table 5: Comparison of Means for Brand Equity and Its Components**

| DV | Mean | One-way ANOVA Sig. |
|---|---|---|
| Brand Personality | Non-Liverpool fan (n = 85) 3.36 | .001 |
| | Liverpool fan (n = 115) 3.59 | |
| | | |
| Brand Awareness | Non-Liverpool fan (n = 85) 4.03 | .000 |
| | Liverpool fan (n = 115) 4.32 | |
| | | |
| Brand Associations | Non-Liverpool fan (n = 85) 3.22 | .000 |
| | Liverpool fan (n = 115) 3.85 | |
| | | |
| Perceived Quality | Non-Liverpool fan (n = 85) 3.78 | .000 |
| | Liverpool fan (n = 115) 4.16 | |
| | | |
| Brand Loyalty | Non-Liverpool fan (n = 85) 2.03 | .000 |
| | Liverpool fan (n = 115) 2.85 | |

A higher score represents a more favorable view of Nivea Men's brand personality. The descriptive statistics show that Liverpool fans perceive Nivea Men's brand personality in a better light, with the mean for Liverpool fans being 3.59 versus 3.36 for non-Liverpool fans. With a p-value of 0.001, there is a statistically significant difference between the means. Liverpool and non-Liverpool fans have different views as to the brand personality of Nivea Men. This supports H1, that sport sponsorship positively influences a brand's personality.

### Influence of Sport Sponsorship on Brand Awareness

H2 proposes that sport sponsorship directly increases brand awareness of the sponsoring brand. The descriptive statistics show Liverpool fans to be more aware of Nivea Men than non-Liverpool fans. The ANOVA shows a significance level of 0.000, supporting H2 that sport sponsorship increases brand awareness of the sponsoring brand.

### Influence of Sport Sponsorship on Brand Associations

The third hypothesis states that sport sponsorship creates brand associations, and these will be positive associations if they are properly leveraged. A higher mean represents stronger and clearer brand associations of Nivea Men. The descriptive statistics show that Liverpool fans have greater brand associations than non-Liverpool fans. The one-way ANOVA shows a significance level of 0.000. This supports H3, the notion that sport sponsorship creates clearer and stronger brand associations.

### Influence of Sport Sponsorship on Perceived Quality

The fourth hypothesis proposes that sport sponsorship improves the perceived quality of a brand. A higher mean represents a more favorable perception of the quality of Nivea Men products. ANOVA shows a significance level of 0.000, demonstrating that Liverpool fans perceive the quality of Nivea Men products to be higher than how non-Liverpool fans perceive them. These results suggest that sport sponsorship improves the perceived quality of a brand and support H4.

### Influence of Sport Sponsorship on Brand Loyalty

H5 postulates that sport sponsorship increases brand loyalty. A higher mean represents greater brand loyalty towards Nivea Men. The descriptive statistics show there is greater brand loyalty among Liverpool fans (2.85) compared with that of non-Liverpool fans (2.03). The mean difference between the fan variables is the largest gap found within any of the dependent variables tested. The one-way ANOVA shows a significance level of 0.000. This lends considerable support for H5 and provides evidence that sport sponsorship can successfully foster brand loyalty.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Managerial Implications

The incredible rise of the sport industry has led to sport sponsorship becoming the most popular type of sponsorship. However, the lack of significant research on this topic has left marketers somewhat unaware as to possible benefits. With annual spending on sport sponsorship approaching $60 billion and rapidly growing, it is essential that businesses understand what they are getting for their money (Jensen & White, 2018; Gough, 2021). Being informed of the effects of sport sponsorship on brand equity will support managers in using sport sponsorship to escalate the value of their brands. Moreover, if businesses are looking to improve on a certain component of brand equity, they can use the findings of this study to establish whether sport sponsorship is an effective strategy, and if so, assist managers to design and execute their sponsorship activities effectively.

The primary objective of this study was to ascertain the effect that sport sponsorship has on brand equity. A comprehensive review of the literature revealed that brand equity consists of five main components: brand personality, brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Hypotheses were proposed for each component. The research conducted was confined to the domain of a sports team sponsorship, nonetheless, such research may also contribute to filling gaps in the prevalent brand equity literature. The results demonstrate statistically significant differences between the responses of Liverpool fans and non-Liverpool fans. With respect to each component of brand equity, the responses of Liverpool fans were more positive than non-Liverpool fans, thus suggesting that sport sponsorship has a significantly positive effect on brand equity overall. Moreover, for nearly all the components of brand equity, the differences in responses between the two groups were considerable. While sponsorship may not by itself be sufficient for brand equity building or sales enhancement, sponsors should be able to leverage their association with the team to promote their benefits and motivate fan engagement. The emotional connection between many fans and their favorite teams is strong, which can make a sponsor's products especially attractive to the fans of a sponsored team. Fans who are familiar and involved with a team through game attendance


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and/or television viewing form positive attitudes towards the sponsor and this may also influence their behavioral intentions.

## Limitations and Future Research

We present a unique approach to measuring the effects of sport sponsorship on brand equity, as it measures the impact of sport sponsorship on each individual component of brand equity by comparing the responses of fans with non-fans of the sponsored sport team. A limitation of this study is that it was confined to the domain of a sports team sponsorship. The results are thus specific to a sports team sponsorship context, and their implications for a sports event sponsorship or individual athlete sponsorship is limited.

Nonetheless, we believe this study adds value to the existing sport sponsorship and brand equity literatures. Most importantly, it has laid the foundation for future research that will provide invaluable insights to this important marketing topic. Future studies should have a deeper analysis of the effects of sport sponsorship on each component of brand equity. A larger, more robust set of questions relating to each component would likely provide researchers with richer results.

It is also worth noting that much research has disregarded the fact that the majority of sport sponsored properties are sponsored by a multiplicity of brands. For example, seven official FIFA partners were prominently featured in the 2018 World Cup. Liverpool FC has 22 official partners for the 2022-23 season. A brand may consider the presence of concurrent sponsoring brands as a potential threat as consumers' notice may be diverted away from the sponsor's advertisements to concurrently visible brands. This notion of simultaneous sponsorship ignores the possibility that, in such settings, sponsors could also encounter a spillover of brand associations from concurrent sponsor brands. In fact, Boroncyk and Breuer (2021) found that brand aspects can indeed spread between concurrent sponsors and under particular conditions, brands may actually profit from their cosponsors.

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## APPENDIX: RELEVANT QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Please indicate to what extent you agree, or disagree, with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

### BRAND PERSONALITY

I believe Nivea Men to be a competent brand (i.e., reliable, intelligent, successful).
I believe Nivea Men to be an exciting brand (i.e., trendy, imaginative, daring).
I believe Nivea Men to be a sophisticated brand (i.e., charming, glamorous, upper-class).
I believe Nivea Men to be a rugged brand (i.e., tough, rigid, durable).
I believe Nivea Men to be a sincere brand (i.e., honest, friendly, down-to-earth).

### BRAND AWARENESS

I am aware of the brand, Nivea Men.
I have good knowledge of Nivea Men (their products and value).
I can recognize Nivea Men products among other competing brands.

### BRAND ASSOCIATIONS

When I think of Nivea Men my thoughts are usually positive.
When I think of Nivea Men I have clear associations (their products and value).
These associations come to mind quickly.

### PERCEIVED QUALITY

I believe the quality of Nivea Men products are likely to be extremely high.
I believe the likelihood that Nivea Men products are functional is very high.
I believe the likelihood that Nivea Men products are reliable is very high.

### BRAND LOYALTY

I consider myself to be loyal to Nivea Men products.
Nivea Men products are my first choice when I search for a product in their category.
I would not buy other products if Nivea Men products were available.
I have recommended Nivea Men products to other people.
I have encouraged others to buy Nivea Men products.
I have said positive things about Nivea Men on a public platform or directly to other people.
I have suggested to others that they try Nivea Men products.


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