

The Intersection of Business and Sport – Sponsorship and Branding

LAB University of Applied Sciences
Bachelor of International Business
2023
Phan Le Nhat Huy
Pham Thi Phuong Dung

Abstract

Author(s)	Publication Type	Completion year
Phan Le Nhat Huy	Bachelor's Thesis, UAS	Autumn 2023
Pham Thi Phuong Dung	Number of pages	
	52	
Title of the thesis		
The Intersection of Business and Sport		
Sponsorship and Branding		
Degree, Field of Study		
Bachelor of Business Administration, International Business		
Name, title, and organization of the client		
Abstract		
<p>The thesis explores the complex convergence of business and sport, focusing on the symbiotic relationship between sponsorship and branding. The research dives into the strategic relevance of corporate sponsorship in the athletic sphere and its significant influence on brand development through a thorough assessment of case studies, industry trends, and theoretical frameworks. The thesis aims to understand the incentives for firms to invest in sports sponsorship by examining the mutual advantages gained by both sides. The research seeks to provide valuable insights for marketers, business leaders, and sports professionals by investigating examples and shedding light on the strategic considerations that underpin effective sponsorship and branding.</p> <p>The theory of the thesis was compiled from a variety of sponsored literature, which included both books and article journals. Marketing and branding literature was used to supplement the content. Secondary data analysis will be the main method used to analyze the thesis. In addition, content analysts and case studies are used to illustrate theory in practice as well as answer research questions.</p> <p>According to the key findings, sports, and business are always intertwined to grow together through mutual profits by giving sponsorship and receiving effective branding in return. Finally, the thesis not only provides to the academic discourse on the intersection of business and sport, but it also has practical implications for businesses looking to optimize their sponsorship strategies and strengthen their brand positioning in the dynamic and competitive sports industry.</p>		
Keywords		
Sports business, Sports sponsorship, Branding		

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Research Background	1
1.2	Thesis Objectives	3
1.3	Thesis Limitations	3
1.4	Research Questions	5
1.5	Methodology and Data Collection	5
2	Sponsorship and Symbiosis.....	7
2.1	The Significance of Sports Sponsorship.....	7
2.2	Branding Strategies by Sponsorship in Sports	9
2.3	Sports Sponsorship and Branding Effectiveness.....	16
2.4	Challenges and Future Directions	22
2.4.1	Challenges.....	22
2.4.2	Future Direction	24
3	Case Studies	27
3.1	The Coca-Cola Company and Olympic.....	27
3.2	Qatar Airways and FIFA World Cup 2022	32
3.3	E-sports Sponsorships.....	36
4	Conclusion.....	41
4.1	Answers to Research Questions.....	41
4.2	Contribution of the Study	42
4.3	Validity and Reliability	43
4.4	Recommendations for Future Research.....	43
	References	45

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In today's society, when it comes to business or sports, perhaps everyone feels extremely familiar. They are concepts mentioned everywhere, all the time, on the television, the internet, social media, or on brightly lit billboards at night. Some people may think that these two fields seem separate and unrelated. But in fact, they are closely connected. In the thesis, we will discuss those intersections.

Sports have a record dating back at least 3,000 years. Throwing spears, sticks, and rocks, as well as engaging in one-on-one combat with opponents, were common early sports activities that were intended to prepare players for battle or train them to be hunters (Bellis 2019). From something taken to improve people's health, sports have transformed into something more entertaining for players and viewers. The intense competition between teams or individuals makes watching matches highly engaging. Predicting the outcome and supporting favourite teams creates excitement. Sports highlight exceptional skills and impressive achievements, providing viewers with the opportunity to appreciate athletes' dedication and talent. Sports also serve as a social bonding platform, fostering discussions and camaraderie among friends and family during significant events. Sports narratives, filled with triumphs and emotional moments, offer unpredictable and memorable experiences. That is why sports have permeated our daily lives, not only directly participating in a sport but also indirectly participating through watching sporting events. The Ancient Greeks introduced formal sports to the globe with the inaugural Olympic Games in 776 BC, which featured competitions in foot and chariot racing, wrestling, jumping, discus, and javelin throwing (Bellis 2019).

People are increasingly passionate about sports, even crazy with each match. Sports have become important and are now considered a form of "soft power", having a significant influence on many fields, even the image of a country (Winder 2020, 3). During the last decades, along with the development of society, sports have undergone a meaningful change. The increased international trade and investments, opened national economies, new communication technologies, and increasing mobility of labour and citizens have been driving the process of commercialization of sport (Wagner & Storm 2017, 3). The sports business was born in that situation.

The relationship between sports and business is exemplified through sponsorship and advertising deals. Over the decades, sponsorship has grown gradually from small-scale to large enterprises. For many corporations, they believe that it is essential to achieve brand

promotion within a specific scope. (Desbordes & Richelieu 2012, 48.) They understand how important marketing is to their ability to compete with rivals successfully. They know the importance of managing creative advertising to attract their customers and to get a competitive edge. Nevertheless, promotion encompasses far more than just conventional advertising. It is the method by which the business uses mass media to communicate with its target audiences. Furthermore, sports are currently emerging as a somewhat successful and efficient medium for reaching out to existing and new target audiences. (Shank 2009, 263.)

Sponsorship was once considered an act of donation and a display of generosity, but that has changed dramatically in recent years. Today, sponsorship is no longer simply charity for a sports organization or an underfunded sports event. On the contrary, this place is still recognized by investors and businesses as a "gold mine" that can be fully exploited without limit. Mullin et al. (2007, 315) define the term sponsorship as:

The acquisition of rights to the affiliate or directly associated with a product or event for the purpose of deriving benefits related to that affiliation or association. The sponsor then uses this relationship to achieve its promotional objectives or to facilitate and support its broader marketing objectives.

The intricate and dynamic relationship between business and sports has undergone substantial transformation and development throughout history. This evolution has given rise to many perspectives and compelling arguments, each shedding light on different facets of this intricate connection. The sports industry has grown, encompassing various sectors such as sports marketing, sports management, sports media, sports technology, and sports finance. This growth has led to a more remarkable intersection with the business world, creating opportunities and challenges for both industries. Sports franchises, clubs, and organizations have become substantial business entities. Researchers often examine how these entities operate, make financial decisions, and engage in marketing and branding activities.

Sports received 90% of sponsorship revenue in 1984. Even though this percentage has dropped now, it still makes up a sizable share of the funding total. (IEG 2017, 12.) Sports sponsorship is directed at a target group within a sporting activity with which consumers have a solid emotional connection. While advertising and promotion can annoy the public, sponsorship is often acceptable in society since it helps to fund popular causes such as sports. Therefore, sponsorship is an effective channel to build a brand's image.

Next, we delve into several views and arguments to elucidate the nuanced interplay between business and sports, especially in sponsorship and branding.

1.2 Thesis Objectives

The intersection of business and sport is a dynamic and ever-evolving arena that has garnered significant attention in recent years. The thesis delves into this intriguing interplay, focusing on key objectives to illuminate the multifaceted relationship between businesses and sports entities. It endeavors to address three critical dimensions of this nexus:

First and foremost, the thesis aims to consider sports sponsorship's effect on brand recognition and the various factors influencing this cooperation. The symbiotic relationship between businesses and sports entities through sponsorship is not merely a financial transaction; it has profound implications on brand image, awareness, and consumer perception. By investigating the key drivers and impediments to brand recognition in sports sponsorship, the study will provide valuable insights for both academics and practitioners in the field.

The second objective is to analyze the strategies businesses employ in sports sponsorship. This involves a deep exploration of the branding strategies that businesses employ when associating themselves with sports entities. A particular emphasis will be placed on how businesses align their brand identity with the values, emotions, and aspirations of the sports entities they sponsor. Understanding this alignment is crucial as it can determine the success of such partnerships and the impact on brand perception.

Furthermore, the study aims to pinpoint new developments and potential sports branding and sponsorship paths. The sports industry is constantly changing with the introduction of new technologies, changing consumer preferences, and changing cultural dynamics. With an eye toward the future, the thesis will investigate and forecast the patterns influencing sports sponsorship. Researchers interested in the changing nature of sports-business interactions and companies looking to stay competitive in the sports sponsorship market will find great value in these insights.

To summarize, "The Intersection of Business and Sport - Sponsorship and Branding" is in-depth research to increase understanding of the complex ties between corporation sponsorship and sports organizations. It seeks to give complete knowledge of this convergence for academics and industry practitioners by evaluating branding approaches, forecasting future trends, and studying the impacts of sports sponsorship on brand recognition.

1.3 Thesis Limitations

The intersection of business and sports represents a multifaceted landscape where the worlds of commerce and athletics converge. While the broader scope of business and

sports interaction offers a plethora of topics to explore, the thesis deliberately narrows its focus to sponsorship and branding to provide a deep and insightful analysis of this dynamic interplay.

Examining the dynamics of sports sponsorship poses a challenge due to the frequently confidential nature of sponsorship agreements, which usually include intricate and sensitive terms. As authors embark on this study, our access is restricted to publicly available information sources. We acknowledge that hidden, undisclosed information may further enrich our analysis, but it remains beyond our reach. Consequently, our findings will be based on the constraints of accessible data sources, and the thesis will inevitably have limitations in terms of comprehensiveness.

The reports used in the study will often be based on analysis of data from the past to the present to predict future trends. During the forecasting process, there will always be some hypothetical situations, for example, the assumption that the world economy will develop stably, exchange rate differences between currencies of countries will not fluctuate, and the world politics is stable and does not affect economic development, even assuming that respondents or survey participants answered the survey questions objectively, honestly, and without bias or prejudice against any factor such as culture, country, or ethnicity. However, we are living in an era where uncertainty is present everywhere, wars still occur in some regions of the world, and the global economy has not yet been able to fully recover from the COVID-19 epidemic. Therefore, predictions in reports will be affected by these factors. That also entails the limitations of the thesis, which requires readers to have additional considerations in each situation and their own purposes when referring to the content of the thesis.

Furthermore, the rapidly evolving nature of the sports and business landscape presents a challenge when seeking to identify and analyze trends. While numerous factors can be considered as potential trends, our research is constrained by the need for more reliable sources of information on these trends within our scope. In an era characterized by the constant influx of data and digital transformation, it is a regrettable but unavoidable omission that we cannot provide an exhaustive account of all emerging trends. This "force majeure" limitation underscores the need for continued vigilance and adaptability in this ever-changing field.

While some surveys and reports in the field of sports sponsorship and branding are indeed valuable and provide realistic insights, they often come at a considerable cost. Specialized research organizations or industry experts often produce these reports and may be priced beyond the means of students or individuals with limited budgets. This financial barrier can limit access to high-quality data sources that could enhance the thesis's depth. It can make

it challenging to access the most up-to-date and comprehensive data, potentially affecting the thesis's ability to capture the entire landscape of sports sponsorship and branding accurately.

In summary, our research endeavors to overcome the challenges posed by confidentiality and data limitations, providing a valuable contribution to understanding this intriguing relationship while recognizing the need for continued exploration and adaptation in the ever-evolving world of business and sports.

1.4 Research Questions

Within the scope of the thesis, we focus on three primary questions:

What does sponsorship mean in cooperation with sports?

In this part, we provide core theories so that readers can imagine the concept of sponsoring sports and, conversely, the benefits businesses receive when sponsoring sports. Then we can see the reasons why sports attract businesses to invest in this industry and provide basic case studies to make the above theories more convincing.

How does sports sponsorship influence the branding strategies of companies?

To answer this question, we begin by conducting a literature review to understand the existing knowledge about the relationship between sports sponsorship and companies' branding strategies. After that, we synthesize the theories to present standard methods in sports sponsorship, through which we learn why and how the sponsorship will affect the image of a business, as well as the branding strategy for the company.

What innovative activation strategies can the brand employ to engage sports fans and maximize the benefits of their sponsorship investments?

Successful strategies are often researched and accumulated through many experiments. Conducting the survey provides an overview of the strategies that are currently widely applied and have proven effective. The reports we use in the thesis explain these trends.

1.5 Methodology and Data Collection

The methodology employed in the thesis is designed to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis of the complex dynamics between sports sponsorship and branding. Three primary research methods are utilized to achieve this objective:

Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary data analysis is a fundamental pillar of the research approach. This method involves collecting and analyzing existing data sources already produced for other purposes. In the context of the thesis, authors utilize secondary data such as market reports, academic studies, and industry publications to gather information and statistics relevant to the research objectives. This approach helps to take advantage of the others' work and combine them with the findings to construct a comprehensive view of the sponsorship and branding landscape within the business-sports intersection.

Content Analysis

Content analysis plays a crucial role in the research approach. It involves systematically examining publicly available documents and materials related to sports sponsorship and branding, including press releases, financial reports, marketing campaigns, and media coverage. By employing content analysis, authors can uncover patterns, themes, and trends within the data, to clarify insights into how businesses strategically position themselves in sports sponsorship to enhance brand recognition.

Case Studies

Authors incorporate case studies into the research approach to better understand specific instances and real-world applications of sports sponsorship and branding strategies. By examining select sponsorship agreements and branding campaigns in detail, authors explore the intricacies of these partnerships and shed light on the nuances of successful or unsuccessful collaborations. Case studies provide a rich and contextually grounded perspective, offering valuable insights into the practical implementation of sponsorship strategies and their impact on brand recognition.

Combining these research methods ensures a general and multifaceted analysis of the intersection of business and sport, explicitly focusing on sponsorship and branding. Content analysis and secondary data analysis help to establish a broad and data-driven understanding of the subject, while case studies provide depth and context to the findings. This methodological approach comprehensively addresses the thesis's research objectives, offering a well-informed exploration of this dynamic and evolving field.

2 Sponsorship and Symbiosis

2.1 The Significance of Sports Sponsorship

Profitability is generally a top priority for most businesses since their products and services must outperform those of their rivals in their respective industry. This is significant since most products and services are essentially the same. As a result, to stand out from the crowd, firms must be unique in their marketing strategies. To market their products, most corporate departments use a variety of strategies to reach out to both existing and new customers. Companies must transmit their brands, identities, and messages to customers directly; hence, adopting promotion as a marketing strategy is vital. (Myler 2017.)

Advertising is a well-known promotional method and a traditional type of communication. Still, in recent years, consumers have been over-saturated with advertisements both on television and in print media, and the majority need to remember most of the ads they see. Marketers have used a variety of promotional strategies to reach out to consumer markets over the years, including public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, sponsorship, and product placement. (Leigh 2022.)

Companies in today's highly competitive business world continuously seek new ways to create and strengthen their brand presence. Corporate sponsorship is one such strategy that has recently received much attention. The link between corporate sponsorship and branding is dynamic and synergistic, with both entities profiting from their partnership. This section will dive into the delicate relationship between corporate sponsorship and branding, demonstrating how these collaborations generate recognition of the brand, loyalty, and good public perception.

Corporate Sponsorship

Corporate sponsorship is an advertising strategy in which a corporation funds an event, cause, or entity in exchange for publicity and association with the sponsored entity. Sports events, cultural festivals, charitable organizations, and educational institutions are examples of sponsored ventures. Corporate sponsorship is, at its essence, an extension of a company's branding initiatives. It provides a platform for organizations to match their brand with their target audience's values, interests, and goals.

Employees from Nike stores worldwide share their love of sports by volunteering in local schools and communities through the Nike Community Ambassador program. More than 14,500 employees have served as volunteer youth coaches in their communities. (Nike 2022.)

Through the purpose of Nike's community ambassadors, we can see that investing in young athletes from an early age is especially important in their business strategy. In addition to bringing professionalism to the semi-professional tournament, Nike can also use it to promote the most suitable products in terms of price and quality for those semi-professional athletes. Furthermore, this is also a way to legally collect personal information for Nike, and they can get surveys from those organizations from those young athletes to improve product quality. To offer the best products for the semi-professional and low-cost segments.

Increasing Brand Visibility

One of the most apparent advantages of corporate sponsorship is the increased visibility it affords a brand. When a company's name and brand are associated with a well-known event or cause, it obtains exposure to a larger and more diversified audience. Global athletic events, such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup, attract millions of spectators globally. Vivo, Wanda, Qatar Airways, Adidas, Coca-Cola, Visa, Hyundai Kia, McDonald's, and others were among the 32 official sponsors of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, with a total sponsorship revenue of 755.9 million dollars (Global Data 2023). Companies that sponsor such events gain extensive exposure, improving the visibility of their brand on a worldwide scale. In addition, the most easily recognizable example is Red Bull - the most famous energy drink in the world. When you watch tournaments or competitions about extreme sports such as racing, windsurfing, skateboarding, BMX, or mountain climbing... we all see the Red Bull logo as the primary sponsor. Thereby creating a mindset in our minds that Red Bull sponsors all extreme sports. "Red Bull Gives You Wings" is Red Bull's slogan to help the company increase brand recognition, as well as in sports, to help strengthen the spirit of athletes (Red Bull 2023). Just keep doing the craziest things, keep exploding, surpassing all your limits, and Red Bull gives you "wings" to success.

In addition to companies specializing in providing sports goods, such as Nike, Adidas, and Puma, ... We also collected many companies outside the sports industry that have sponsored sports tournaments, as well as athletes, to increase company recognition. Red Bull or Mercedes-Benz are examples, which we cover in Chapter 3.

Building Brand Equity

Brand equity is the intangible asset that encompasses a brand's reputation, perception, and customer loyalty. Corporate sponsorship allows businesses to build and strengthen their brand equity by aligning themselves with reputable and meaningful causes or events. When a brand is associated with a well-regarded entity or cause, it can transfer some of that entity's positive attributes to itself. This association fosters trust and credibility, crucial components of a strong brand. (Keller & Swaminathan 2020, 58, 68.)

For example, a company that sponsors a charitable organization working towards environmental conservation can position itself as environmentally conscious and socially responsible. Customers are more likely to support such a brand as they perceive it as aligned with their values. One brand that might be represented here is UPM. A Finnish enterprise, UPM is known as one of the world's leading sustainable and renewable forest product manufacturers. The company is known for its commitment to sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. (UPM 2023.) These things have brought a lot of sympathy and favor from customers towards UPM products. In addition, UPM is also a long-term partner with The United Nations Global Compact - a voluntary initiative and the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative - and has achieved many achievements in implementing other SGDs targets such as living wages, Gender Equality, Decent Work, and Economic Growth, etc. (United Nations Global Compact.)

Fostering Brand Loyalty

Corporate sponsorship plays a significant role in fostering brand loyalty among consumers. When a company sponsors events or initiatives that resonate with its target audience, it demonstrates a commitment to shared values and interests. This emotional connection – done in a personalized way – can increase customer loyalty (Marigold 2023, 7).

Consumers often choose brands they perceive as socially responsible and invested in their communities. Corporate sponsorship provides a tangible way for companies to highlight their commitment to social and community causes, encouraging brand loyalty. (Duan et al. 2021.)

To sum up, the relationship between corporate sponsorship and branding is symbiotic and powerful. Companies may use sponsorship to increase brand recognition, establish brand equity, foster brand loyalty, and form a favourable public opinion. Businesses may engage with their target audience on a deeper level by connecting with relevant causes, events, or organizations, transcending the transactional nature of consumer-business interactions.

However, businesses must select sponsorships carefully and assess the ability that their investment would connect with their brand values and objectives. Corporate sponsorship, when done intelligently and sincerely, can be a powerful instrument for building a long-lasting and meaningful brand presence in today's competitive marketplace.

2.2 Branding Strategies by Sponsorship in Sports

Sponsorship is not the same as advertising as a tool for brand development and must be managed accordingly. Sponsorship is the commercial association of a brand with a property

such as a sporting event, a team, a cause, the arts, a cultural destination, or entertainment. Sponsorship does not imply endorsement of a brand. An endorser might put their name on things and appear in advertisements and other places as a brand champion. A sponsored event or group, on the other hand, does not provide a brand sponsorship. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 202.)

Nowadays, with the explosion of information and social networks, images are not only an indispensable part but also an important key to opening the door to success in business and society. Building a strong, positive, and unique image is not only a goal for businesses but is also important for organizations and individuals. In this context, sponsorship is not just a source of finance but also a powerful tool to support the process. Figure 1 below explains how sponsorship can play a decisive role in building and honoring the image of an organization or individual. Typically, creating brand exposure and developing brand association are the main objectives. Three other brand-building advantages: mobilizing the organization, offering customers with an event experience and showing new product or technologies may be highly pertinent to the choice and assessment of sponsorships. Linking the brand to the occasion or customer relationship is also another objective. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 163.)

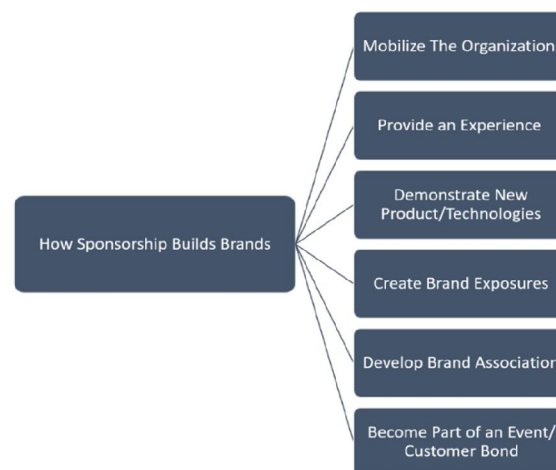


Figure 1. How sponsorship builds brands (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, 163)

In the business world, sponsorship is the courageous support that helps build success for projects and events. Sponsorship is a multi-billion-dollar industry globally, and it has become an integral part of various sectors, from sports to the arts. (IEG 2017, 12.) Imagine you are organizing a major event, and you need funding and resources to make it happen. Let us delve into the four major types of sponsorship that you can choose for your business.

Financial Sponsorship

Financial sponsorship is the leading type of sponsorship for events. When a company decides to sponsor your event, it will ultimately benefit both parties. Your event will have the funds to make a great event, and the sponsor company will get exposure in return. You can also create tiered event sponsorship packages that companies can choose from. The packages can range in price in exchange for more or less event benefits. Lower-priced packages will have more minor compensation benefits, and higher-priced packages will have more considerable compensation benefits. Sponsors provide financial support to the sponsored entity. In addition to donating money, sponsors may pay a sports team's or organization's running expenses, upgrade its facilities, or help an athlete's training and growth. (Pitch 2023.)

In-kind Sponsorship

In-kind sponsors, as opposed to money sponsors, play an essential part in the success of events by assisting in services, experiences, or physical things. This sponsorship may take several forms, allowing businesses to contribute in various ways. For example, some sponsors may pay the expense of food entirely, ensuring that participants are well-fed and happy throughout the event. Others may offer the use of their venue halls or rooms to organizers looking for an acceptable event place, which can drastically cut expenses. Sponsors can also provide prizes and incentives, increasing the enthusiasm and involvement of event attendees. Furthermore, sponsored stuff, such as branded objects and promotional materials, not only adds to the event's ambiance but also increases brand recognition for the sponsor. When a company decides to sponsor your event, they are frequently free to select the type of donation that best fits their brand and objectives. In-kind sponsorships are a win-win situation, as your event benefits from meaningful contributions that improve the entire experience. At the same time, sponsors receive publicity and a favourable association with a successful event. These collaborations highlight the necessity of forming innovative and mutually beneficial relationships in event planning and management. Donations for youth sports might include equipment, uniforms, clothing, or venue rents. In-kind sponsors, like money sponsors, are frequently recognized and promoted. (Keenan 2023.)

Media Event Sponsorships

In today's digital era, it is safe to say that virtually everyone possesses a smartphone, and this broad adoption has resulted in a shift in how businesses engage with their customers. Because of the pervasiveness of social media applications, advertising is now a regular sight, regardless of platform. When a firm adopts media sponsorship, it opens the door to creating commercials and marketing materials precisely tailored to its target demographic.

This strategy primarily benefits small firms, providing them with a terrific opportunity to obtain significant exposure. This media sponsorship framework also includes email marketing, which allows firms to send out email campaigns directly to their desired audience, whether it is about forthcoming events, product launches, or interesting product demos. This changing environment emphasizes the importance of tailoring marketing techniques to the interests of today's tech-savvy consumers. Because of technology advancements in recent years, sports sponsorship may now provide even more benefits to corporations. With the introduction of social media, practically any company can simply link itself with an event and reach a target demographic. These improvements have drawn a large number of sponsors, flooding the market for major sports. Corporations wanting to establish effective sports sponsorship have recently resorted to new markets, whether it is a new sport, discipline, or sport with growing appeal, to stand out from the crowd. Brands also want to be associated with sectors that share their values; this allows the brand to establish a real story with the sport or event being sponsored and promote this story to the audience. (Deloitte 2020, 22.)

Influencer and Content Creator Sponsorships

Lastly, influencers have a large impact on how businesses earn revenue. These influencers have a social media following, and their fans are loyal to their material. According to Forbes, 81% of buyers are motivated to purchase when they come across a product on social media through these famous personalities. Influencers and content producers have a strong presence on social media, and cooperating with them may benefit your brand, making a lasting impression on your target audience. It is worth mentioning that influencers frequently have followers from all over the world, so collaborating with them may broaden your company's worldwide reach, enhancing brand exposure and recognition on a global scale. (Olenski 2012.)

In the field of sports, too, there will be similarities with the above four types of sponsorship. These will be different to be compatible with the sports industry. There will still be four types of sponsorship: individual, team, sport, and event (Figure 2).

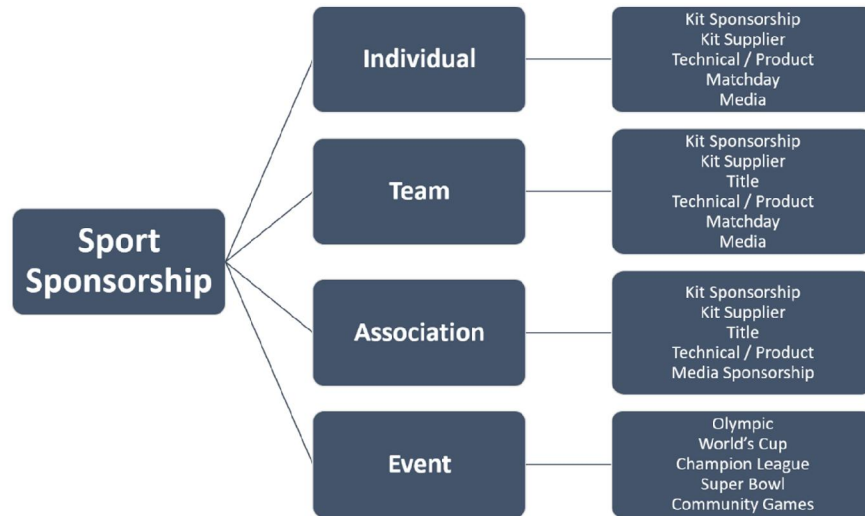


Figure 2. Branding Strategies through Sponsorship (Vandevælde 2021)

Individual Sponsorships

Individual sports sponsorship is the sponsorship when a company or individual proactively provides financial support or other resources to a specific sports activity or athlete. We feel this is very important because it helps promote the development of sports and helps athletes to follow their passions. Individual sports sponsorship can include sponsoring training, competitions, personal promotions, or even the construction of sports facilities. This often requires a strong commitment on the part of the sponsor, but it can bring many benefits to the sport and the individual being supported. Performers that use the "Individual" category may wear a certain brand, exhibit a logo, or promote goods. Conversely, brands cover the costs of travel, competition, and training. (Vandevælde 2021.)

Team Sponsorships

Team sponsorship happens when an organization or corporation donates money, equipment, advertising, or other financing sources to assist a sports team in developing and prospering, such as a football team, basketball team, or any sports team. Team sponsorship can bring great benefits to both parties. Sports teams receive the support they need to grow, while corporate sponsors have the opportunity to advertise and make a positive mark in the sports community. A club or team might carry a company name for the team or venue, hang banners, or wear a uniform. The competition and travel expenses are covered by the sponsor, who upholds his half of the bargain. (Vandevælde 2021.)

Sports Sponsorships

In the case of "Sports" sponsorship, organizations can rename contests, cups, and leagues, while sponsors can brand their development programs or renovate facilities. The most prominent examples of this case are the Leipzig and Salzburg football teams, which were acquired by Red Bull Group and renamed RB Leipzig and RB Salzburg, with RB being the abbreviation for Red Bull. German football does not permit clubs to be called after sponsors, therefore even though Red Bull owns RB Leipzig along with RB Salzburg (Red Bull Salzburg), the New York Red Bulls, RB Brazil, and RB Ghana, the team is officially known as Rasen Ballsport Leipzig rather than Red Bull Leipzig. (Goal 2021.)

Event Sponsorships

Last but not least, brands frequently offer money and free items to help with event organization. This helps to guarantee that the event goes well and that attendees have a great experience. Furthermore, allowing firms to use their trademarks on items allows them to raise brand recognition and promote during the event, establishing a connection between the brand and the event. This benefits both sides since brands may reach a wide prospective audience. Simultaneously, event organizers receive financial and product assistance to help them create a successful event. Some of the most well-known examples of companies sponsoring sporting events are Rolex, Slazenger, and Ralph Lauren for Wimbledon, and Coca-Cola, Airbnb, and Visa for the Olympics. (Pitch 2023.)

In the twenty-first century, the mix of branding and sponsorship has become a significant aspect of marketing strategy. The ability to capitalize on the popularity and impact of events, renowned people, or even partners in the same sector has created several opportunities for businesses and organizations. However, like with all good things, leveraging branding through sponsorship has benefits and disadvantages that must be properly evaluated.

First of all, let us discuss the advantages. An association with a well-known company or a large event might help you swiftly establish your reputation and credibility. Participation in athletic, cultural, or social events allows businesses to profit from the rapid development in brand recognition. This might result in increased sales and the extension of the prospective market. Sponsoring an individual or a sports team benefits sponsors or brands. In terms of marketing, it is a potent instrument for increasing awareness of the company or brand and efficiently selling its products and services. Furthermore, such sponsorships may help a corporation project a pleasant and healthy image, even if its product does not fit this notion. Sponsors can also utilize these connections to reward and incentivize their employees and consumers, creating loyalty and engagement. Furthermore, the enhanced media exposure

these collaborations provide may dramatically raise sales and income, making it an appealing fiscal investment for sponsors.

In addition to their sports sponsorships, advertisers frequently provide influencer packages to athletes who have substantial social media followings. Although this kind of marketing is distinct, the quid pro quo principle applies. The athlete is compensated (cash or merchandise) for promoting the company on their personal social media accounts. This is a situation where everyone wins. (Vandeveldel 2021.)

However, it is also necessary to discuss potential disadvantages. A major commitment to sponsorship might require significant financial and time resources. Furthermore, involvement with a failed event or brand can harm a company's reputation and profitability. If not done appropriately, public and media attention may sometimes be extraordinary.

Unfortunately, there can also be some drawbacks. Sponsorship can occasionally be a risky investment for a brand because sporting success is not always assured. For example, an athlete could get hurt; a team could have bad luck and lose a lot of games; etc. In addition, brands lose visibility and possibilities for advertising if the event is disrupted. Recall the August Belgian Grand Prix that was postponed owing to excessive precipitation. Furthermore, the sponsor is negatively impacted if the athletes or events generate negative press. To mention a few PR nightmares, consider the doping incident involving Lance Armstrong, the adulterous affairs of Tiger Woods, and Floyd Mayweather's convictions and domestic violence. (Vandeveldel 2021.)

Athletes face major risks and disadvantages regarding sponsorship in the sports industry. Sponsors might set restrictions or remove sponsorship time, leaving athletes with little financial stability. This reliance on a single sponsor might be dangerous if the agreement is dissolved. Furthermore, sponsorships from specific businesses, such as alcohol or fast food, may shed a bad light on the sport's image. Generous sponsorships are typically available only to a few outstanding performers, leaving many others needing financial assistance. Athletes, teams, and athletic events may be controlled or abused to coincide with a sponsor's purpose, which could compromise their integrity. For less popular or niche sports with limited media coverage, attracting sponsorship can be an uphill battle, further exacerbating financial instability for athletes in these disciplines. (Bowen 2017.)

Two Coca-Cola bottles were put in front of the Portuguese player during the UEFA Euro 2020 pre-match news conference, which he found annoying. As a supporter of a balanced diet, Ronaldo shifted the glass bottles out of the frame and substituted them with a bottle of water, saying "Water!" in Portuguese. With Ronaldo's activities, Coca-Cola's share price dropped by 1.6% to \$55.22. Market value decreased by \$4 billion, from \$242 billion to \$238

billion. A statement was made in response by Coca-Cola, an official sponsor of Euro 2020, stating that "everyone is entitled to their drink preferences" with varying "tastes and needs". After winning man of the match, Pogba, a devout Muslim who abstains from alcohol, took the bottle out of his hands and sat down to talk with the media. (Garcia 2021.)

Overall, branding strategies by sponsoring sports can be a magnificent branding or marketing tool. There are several substantial advantages to branding through sponsorship, ranging from fast developing a name to extending the market and improving sales. However, remember that any investment has risk, so proceed with caution. Any company or group seeking branding through sponsorship should carefully plan their approach to ensure it aligns with their goals and resources.

2.3 Sports Sponsorship and Branding Effectiveness

Companies should always have certain goals and motivations in mind before committing to sponsor certain events. Sponsorship goals should always be connected to the organization's marketing and, more broadly, promotional objectives. (Shank 2009.)

We can see that sports are not only a playground for celebrities and teams but also a great opportunity for businesses to build their brands through investing in sports sponsorship. The effectiveness of sports sponsorship and branding strategies in this field is not only measured by numbers but also expressed in the level of interaction, positive reviews from the community, and influence on the market.

Sport amateurism has evolved drastically in the previous several decades into a more professional industry, and the amount of entertainment that accompanied this phase was quick. The development that began in the United States has spread swiftly across the world, with many individuals now making their favorite athletic activity their primary method of earning a living. The majority of athletes are full-time professionals who earn money via sponsorships, endorsements, and contracts. One of the biggest advantages of sports sponsorship is its ability to reach a target audience. Major sporting events, such as the World Cup or the Olympics, attract millions of viewers around the world. Having your brand appear in these events helps increase brand awareness and create a positive impression in the minds of fans.

Over half of the world's population aged four and above, or 3.572 billion viewers, tuned in to watch the world football championship, according to audience numbers from the official broadcast coverage of the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The audience was increased by 9.5 percent by an additional projected 309.7 million individuals who chose to watch the broadcast on digital platforms, in public viewing spaces, or at bars and restaurants rather than at home.

A record 3.262 billion people watched at least one minute of in-home TV worldwide. (Inside FIFA 2018.)

To be able to see effective sponsorship and branding based on the above example, let us do a simple calculation. Suppose the unit price of a can of Coca-Cola is 1 euro; according to the data of more than 3 billion people watching at the same time as above, we only need 1/3 of them to buy a can of Coke when seeing the logo appear or Coca-Cola advertising in the match, which made this company earn billions of euros at that time. Although this is just an illustrative example, we can see the success of branding when choosing sports to sponsor. Additionally, sports sponsorship also provides opportunities for businesses to engage in innovative marketing strategies. By integrating logos, advertising, and communication strategies into the sports atmosphere, businesses can capitalize on audience excitement and attention, create unforgettable memories, and increase brand engagement.

This is important for a company; you can see that because companies effectively brand their images, consumers like us will always keep that company's products in mind. For example, when a child drinks soft drinks, when we hear the word soft drink, we only think of Coca-Cola or Pepsi. In our case, when we were born in an underdeveloped country, at that time, there was only KFC for fried chicken, so until now, when we are adults when it comes to eating fried chicken, we only think of KFC even though there are currently dozens of different fried chicken restaurants in Vietnam. We can see that if a company wants to be successful, it must market effectively so that its image always appears in consumers' minds. This method in psychology is considered a type of natural reflex when a person is exposed to certain information over a long period.

In addition, we can also gain a deeper understanding of this argument through the seven keys that lead to an effective sponsorship, according to writers Aaker and Joachimsthaler, which are shown in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3. Effective Sponsorships Keys (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000)

To begin with, clear communication entails creating a transparent and consistent message between the sponsoring company and the audience. It necessitates a strategic fit between the brand's beliefs, ambitions, and identity and the sporting property it supports. Clear communication guarantees that the goals of the brand are properly communicated to the target audience, generating a strong connection and resonance. This entails aligning the brand's story, values, and unique selling propositions with the culture of the sponsored sport. Furthermore, communication openness fosters trust and credibility, boosting the overall efficacy of the sponsorship by forging a genuine bond between the brand, the sport, and its followers. Here is an example of partnership: Michael Jordan has never stepped foot in a Nike sneaker. Yet, his parents persuaded him to choose the offer over Adidas, which started the illustrious collaboration between Michael Jordan and Nike. With the birth of the Air Jordan, the rest is history. This demonstrates the strength of alliances and how two new competitors can work together to have a significant influence. Long-term success can occasionally be achieved by collaborating with someone who shares your goal and can strategically assist you in growing your company. (Centuro Global 2020.)

Being proactive in the context of sports sponsorship and branding effectiveness involves taking the initiative and anticipating opportunities to enhance the partnership between a brand and a sports entity. Proactive sponsorship strategies, as opposed to just responding to current trends or events, entail actively researching methods to develop meaningful and

real relationships between the brand and the sports audience. Identifying developing trends in sports culture, linking the brand with important social or environmental problems, or utilizing technology to engage fans in novel ways are some examples. Proactive tactics strive to develop a dynamic and forward-thinking partnership, ensuring that the brand stays not just visible but also resonant in the ever-changing sports and entertainment sector. Let's consider a sports apparel brand as an example of being proactive in sports sponsorship and branding effectiveness. Instead of simply placing its logo on athletes' uniforms, the brand proactively collaborates with sports influencers to create exclusive, limited-edition collections inspired by the athletes' personal styles and achievements. (Green 2018.)

"Looking for an exceptional fit" refers to the strategic alignment of a brand with a sporting property in order to optimize the partnership's impact. It entails locating and selecting sports teams, events, or individuals whose beliefs, demographics, and image are in sync with the brand's identity and target market. This meticulous selection guarantees that the brand and the sporting property have similar aims and values, resulting in a more real and engaging relationship with the audience. Beyond basic exposure, the excellent fit emphasizes a seamless integration that boosts brand credibility, develops good associations, and ultimately promotes brand loyalty and commercial consequences. An exceptional alignment between a brand and an event is preferable to a decent but forced alignment. Conversely, a poor fit could be a serious setback. When the product can be displayed in a way that is essential to the sponsorship's core, it is a reasonable fit.

"Own sponsorship, if possible," refers to a strategy approach in which a sporting entity strives to acquire its own sponsorships rather than depending on external sponsors provided by a governing body or middleman. This method gives a sports team, player, or organization more control over their brand collaborations, allowing them to be tailored to their values, target audience, and overall brand image. By actively soliciting and managing their own sponsorships, sports organizations may establish more real and meaningful connections with sponsors, increasing the efficacy of branding activities and ensuring that partnerships are consistent with their distinctive identity and objectives. This method enables sports organizations to optimize the impact of sponsorships on brand awareness, engagement, and financial sustainability. An example that can be named here is Manchester United. To increase the efficacy of its branding, the club, which is one of the most globally known and valued football brands, Manchester United has deliberately pursued its own partnerships and has successfully negotiated and acquired big sponsorship deals directly, such as its jersey sponsorship contract with Chevrolet. With this method, the club has been able to customize its sponsorships to its unique demands, assuring harmony with the team's brand and worldwide fan base. Manchester United has been able to optimize financial rewards,

enhance brand loyalty, and maintain a measure of control over the image and message connected with their relationships by handling their own sponsorships. This example demonstrates how taking ownership of sponsorships may help a sporting entity's branding success. Proving that they are in a proactive position to seek sponsorship based on their brand so that brands can compete for sponsorship because, with the image of Manchester United, brands will enhance their image outstandingly. (Joseph 2012.)

In the fifth phase, the corporation needs to search for publicity as these are indicators of successful sponsorships. The process of accomplishing brand-building goals will become more successful and efficient with publicity. Furthermore, a product demonstration strategy or event with the potential for publicity indicates that it has a built-in interest. They are identifying and capitalizing on critical moments within sponsored sporting events, such as championships, record-breaking performances, or high-profile matches, where the brand's visibility may be maximized. Companies hope to increase their exposure, brand awareness, and overall influence on the target audience by associating their brand with these notable happenings. This proactive strategy guarantees that the sponsorship investment extends beyond simple presence and actively contributes to the development of a favourable and long-lasting brand image in the eyes of sports fans and the general public.

"Considering multiple sponsorship payoffs" in the realm of sports sponsorship and branding effectiveness refers to the strategic evaluation of diverse benefits and returns that a brand can derive from its association with a sports property. Beyond typical measurements like exposure and logo placement, this strategy stresses the investigation of multiple possible payoffs, including improved brand loyalty, good consumer sentiment, social media involvement, and alignment with the values of the sporting franchise. By having a comprehensive picture of the sponsorship environment, businesses can optimize the effect of their investment by not only increasing exposure but also establishing deeper connections with the target audience and capitalizing on the emotional resonance that sports frequently generate. This holistic viewpoint recognizes that good sports sponsorship goes beyond mere publicity, striving for a thorough and nuanced understanding of the various ways a brand may profit from its affiliation with sports. Consider Nike's sponsorship agreement with the NBA (National Basketball Association) as an example of "considering multiple sponsorship payoffs." Nike deliberately examines several benefits in addition to the traditional exposure acquired through jersey logos and product placement. The agreement goes beyond simply displaying the Nike emblem on NBA jerseys to include collaboration on novel uniform designs, the creation of technologically sophisticated performance gear, and participation in social impact programs. Nike uses basketball's emotional connection to boost brand loyalty, capitalizing on the NBA's worldwide appeal. The payout includes not just enhanced brand

visibility but also affiliation with cutting-edge sports technology, cultural impact, and a favorable brand image linked with basketball's dynamic and inclusive attitude. This multidimensional method shows the strategic examination of various sponsorship payoffs that extend beyond typical measures. This is an eight-year collaboration agreement. Although the agreement's financial details were not immediately available, sources estimate its value to be over \$1 billion, which represents an annual rise of almost 245 percent over the previous arrangement. (Rovell 2015.)

The last one will be hard to understand if we do not have real-life case studies. In sports, "actively managing the sponsorship" means more than simply donating money to a team or event. It entails actively participating in how your brand is identified with the sporting entity. This requires carefully selecting the correct teams or events to sponsor, ensuring that your brand values align with the sporting entity, and developing appealing campaigns to engage supporters. It is not a passive investment; rather, it is a hands-on strategy that demands constant attention. Actively managing a sports sponsorship entails remaining adaptable to changes and ensuring that your brand receives the most exposure and connections possible from the arrangement. It is all about making the most of the sponsorship in order to establish a strong and enduring relationship with the audience. Adidas' partnership with Real Madrid in soccer exemplifies active sponsorship management. Adidas, in addition to supplying kits, strategically participates in creative jersey designs, marketing initiatives, and leveraging player sponsorships, most notably with players like Cristiano Ronaldo. This strategy extends beyond simply outfitting players to actively participate in the club's story, bolstering the brand's worldwide football cultural footprint, and forging long-term bonds with supporters. This in economics is called "comprehensive partnership," which not only brings material benefits but also undertakes the development of development strategies for mutual benefit. Real Madrid and Adidas have unveiled the jersey for the 2022-23 campaign. The kit represents a tribute to the club's history. Furthermore, a logo celebrating Real Madrid's 120th anniversary is placed on the inside of the button-down collar as a monument to the club's grandeur. Another distinguishing characteristic is the white crest that appears all over the shirt. (Real Madrid 2022.)

In conclusion, in today's marketing world, the relationship between sports sponsorship and branding effectiveness is a key motivator. Aside from monetary gains, successful sponsorships foster emotional bonds, create brand loyalty, and increase worldwide awareness. To handle this dynamic connection, businesses must go beyond basic logo placement and fully immerse themselves in the sports story. Because the digital world provides unparalleled chances for real-time engagement, marketers must remain adaptable and imaginative. Finally, the efficacy of sports sponsorship is measured by the creation of true connections,

the alignment of values with sports culture, and the delivery of unforgettable experiences. In the future, this dynamic alliance will bring both obstacles and possibilities for companies willing to embrace it.

2.4 Challenges and Future Directions

Sports sponsorship, while bringing many benefits, also faces several challenges. In addition, society is evolving rapidly, which forces sports sponsorship to keep up with new trends to continue to grow and create a dynamic landscape with business opportunities.

2.4.1 Challenges

Budgets

When entering into sponsorship event partnerships or other forms of competition, sponsored properties and sponsoring corporations have several things to think about. This intersection offers a unique space for mutual benefit, but not without its share of challenges.

One of the most important challenges that corporations and organizations confront when it comes to sports sponsorship is constrained budget limitations. Limited sponsorship expenditures can be a big impediment to participating in major sporting events or supporting notable teams. Businesses with limited resources must frequently make difficult decisions about which events and teams to prioritize in order to maximize effectiveness. Due to their inability to pay, they may be disqualified from competition to sponsor major international athletic events in some situations.

It is common knowledge that in numerous business sectors, larger companies have a significant edge over smaller ones. This is particularly true if a small business attempts to enter an area that is dominated by large corporations. For example, it would not be a good idea for you to try to reenter the American market with a new brand of car, fuel, or cigarettes. Trying to compete with the well-established, massive companies in these industries would be insane. (Heaton 1946.)

Sponsorship budget constraints not only have an impact on brand presence but also on the capacity to engage in major advertising campaigns and engaging activities with the fan community. This might result in a loss of impact and engagement, reducing advertising objectives and total sponsorship value. Managing and maximizing sponsorship funds thus becomes a strategic problem, particularly for SMEs (Small and medium-sized enterprises) seeking to engage in the international sports world. This necessitates ingenuity and flexibility in creating a fundraising strategy that maximizes available resources while also meeting

the demands and objectives of financial partners. So, let's understand that, in the sports industry, small businesses with small size of capital cannot use this channel to sponsor or do branding effectively when they cannot compete with large companies with big sizes of products. Budget, and not famous enough to be able to "stand" in the ranks of sponsors for major sporting events like the World Cup, and UFC. (Ritson 2017.)

Investment Performance

The investment performance in the sector of sports sponsorship determines the success or failure of an advertising campaign. Businesses that invest in sponsorship not only establish financial expectations but also attempt to maximize value through promotion, active interaction, and favorable relationships with sponsor partners. Advertising is a crucial technique for raising brand awareness and improving brand image. Suppose a company is unable to properly implement an advertising plan through sports sponsorship. In that case, it may need help in gaining audience attention and creating strong partnerships, probably with the community. Active involvement with the sponsoring partner is also important. Assume that a business's connection with its partner cannot provide improved value for both sides. In that instance, the company may miss out on a chance and be disappointed. Businesses rely on sports sponsorship not just to express financial support but also to implement a strong promotional plan and build a positive connection with partners and viewers. Without great success in these criteria, they may conclude that their investments are not meeting their desired aims and that their funding approach needs revisions and creativity. (Diorio 2020.)

The cause-marketing initiative is commendable. News is circulating via social media, online networks, traditional media, and celebrity rumors. However, Pepsi forfeited its long-held Super Bowl advertising space. For Pepsi, a more integrated media strategy that included the Super Bowl would be a wise move. Top marketing executives should have this integration in mind as they hastily adopt digital projects. (Forbes 2010.)

Inevitable

The last thing that is indispensable is the events or external factors that have a common influence on everything in the world. The most typical example of this obstacle is COVID-19, when all business activities, sports, or anything else had to stop to join hands to fight the epidemic. The sports business suffered significant financial losses due to the unexpected development of the COVID-19 virus and its worldwide pandemic. Club closures, postponed events, and sharply reduced apparel and sporting goods sales were all consequences. It came as a huge shock to the sports business.

The COVID-19 virus's unexpected development and global spread caused significant financial losses in the sports business. Clubs were dissolved, contests were canceled, and apparel and sports equipment sales plummeted. It came as a huge surprise to the sports business. The world can realize that if there is any event or peripheral factor affecting the overall situation, all activities will have to be suspended to deal with those things. It could be an epidemic, economic recession, natural disaster, etc. It seems very difficult to organize sporting events or sports activities to attract attention, and it may have to be temporarily suspended. This makes sponsorship deals for branding seem meaningless when too much capital has been invested, but there is no profit, causing the original purpose to go astray. In this situation, sponsorship will become a double-edged sword that can be counterproductive, and the business can go bankrupt because of high-value contracts that are not effective for either the business or the party who received sponsorship. (Keshkar & Karegar 2022.)

2.4.2 Future Direction

Today's technological age is opening up promising new opportunities for developing brands and supporting talent in the sports sector, especially in e-sports and gaming partnerships as well as virtual sports and simulations. These are two important trends, presenting new and unique opportunities to effectively connect with fan communities in modern and innovative ways. Although there has been some interest in this area, it is still a potential area that needs to be further developed in the future.

In recent years, e-sports has been a global phenomenon, drawing millions of fans and bringing in large sums of money. E-sports has gained popularity among the general public and has grown quickly, making it a desirable platform for companies looking to connect with a highly engaged audience. The growth of e-sports has been greatly aided by sponsorship, which offers vital assistance to teams, competitions, and individual players. (Schonauer 2023.)

Virtual sports, to put it briefly, are computer-generated sports simulations. They can be based on actual sports teams and events, or they can use fictitious characters in games that are inspired by actual sports. Even though they are only played virtually, virtual sports seek to simulate the atmosphere of being there at an actual sporting event. They accomplish this by showcasing the players, arenas, and other game elements in the most breathtaking detail possible using cutting-edge visuals. In addition, sounds are employed to immerse the player even further in this virtual environment. These sounds include fans cheering, commentators, and many other well-known noises associated with a certain sport, like the sound of engines revving at the starting line or horses waiting. (B Online Sports 2023.)

E-sports draws a younger, more gaming-focused audience since it emphasizes mental toughness and digital skills. Conversely, virtual sports incorporate exercise into a gamified, virtual environment, increasing accessibility and appeal to fitness for a wide variety of athletes and fitness lovers. (Wraxall 2023.) Meanwhile, Virtual Sports and Simulations are a field that is becoming increasingly attractive. Virtual and simulated sports events not only bring new experiences to fans but also create unique promotional spaces for brands. For example, sponsoring virtual car racing or simulated football tournaments opens up unique opportunities for brands to integrate themselves into the virtual world, where creativity has no limits.

There is an inherent problem with revenue generation in e-sports. Prize money doesn't sustain most e-sports organizations; the industry doesn't have a media-rights safety blanket like traditional sports; there is an overreliance on big-money sponsorships. New options are needed, and e-sports organizations are aware of that. (Daniels 2023.)

In the era of e-sports, sponsoring gaming teams, tournaments or individuals is increasingly becoming an important part of marketing strategies. Brands not only aim for mass popularity but also target precisely the group of passionate video game fans. With the rapid growth of the e-sports industry, businesses can take advantage of this opportunity to build deep connections with the younger generation, through tournaments, online events, and even activities. Interact on social networks. Proving that people are gradually becoming more interested in e-sports, especially the younger generation. We always have the opinion that young people will one day grow up until the older generation is replaced, so their views on life, lifestyle, and personal preferences will be influenced by new things like e-sports. Therefore, electronic sports will become a necessity in life in the future, so businesses that grasp this factor will be successful in branding their brands. According to Insider Intelligence, 31.6 million esports watchers will be tallied in 2023. Esports advertising revenue is predicted to increase 10.0% to \$264.3 million in 2023. (Shalabi 2023.)

A typical example is the F1 E-sports Series tournament, where virtual racing teams conquer millions of fans globally. Brands like Red Bull Racing E-sports have recognized the value of sponsorship in this virtual world, creating unique marketing strategies and driving positive engagement from the fan community.

Driven by the goal of becoming the most successful sim racing team on the planet, we have invested heavily in creating an elite program for our drivers, giving wings to future talent. This includes the creation of the Red Bull Racing Erena at our Formula One Technology Campus in Milton Keynes. The purpose-built state-of-the-art facility

is the epicenter of the Bulls' development as we get ready to embrace the thrills, excitement, and drama of this season. (F1 Esports Series 2023.)

Overall, e-sports and virtual sports are not only fresh industry trends but also an opportunity for finance and commerce to redefine the way they interact with customers, build loyalty, and create unique experiences that only the digital world can deliver.

3 Case Studies

3.1 The Coca-Cola Company and Olympic

The Coca-Cola Company's relationship with the Olympics is one of the longest-standing sports sponsorships, dating back to 1928 (Image 1). This longevity demonstrates a deep commitment to the Olympic movement and its values.

The Worldwide Olympic Partners*



* Allianz's Worldwide Olympic Partnership and Coca-Cola/Mengniu's Joint TOP Partnership began in 2021, but due to the rescheduling of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 to 2021, certain limited marketing rights were extended to these TOP Partners for this edition of the Games.

Image 1. The Worldwide Olympic Partners (IOC 2020a)

The partnership between Coca-Cola and the Olympics is typically renewed on a 12-year cycle. The value of these sponsorship deals has never been disclosed. However, according to experts' assessments, the previous period's sponsorship level - up to the 2020 Olympic period - was at least \$60 million every four years (Around The Rings.) In the extension for the next 12 years from 2021 to 2032, Coca-Cola has cooperated with China Mengniu Dairy - a group specializing in milk and yogurt in China - to sign a record sponsorship agreement with the Olympics worth \$3 billion (Financial Times 2019). The question is, why does Coca-Cola accept to spend such large amounts of money on sports sponsorship?

In fact, it is a long-term marketing strategy of Coca-Cola.

The Olympics provide an unparalleled global platform for The Coca-Cola Company to showcase its brand. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics were still a global event watched by millions of audiences. The Marketing Report Tokyo 2020 of the International Olympic Committee, shows that approximately 3.05 billion unique people watched the Games, with more than 23 billion hours spent via TV and digital (IOC 2020a). To serve such a large number of customers - who come from all over the world - with different habits and preferences, Coca-Cola brought all the products in its portfolio to the Olympics, to satisfy everyone's taste. This event is also specifically aimed at a new customer group - Gen Z - who are often more familiar with e-sports than physical sports

like the Olympics (The Coca-Cola Company 2021.) According to Macrotrends, the company's sales during the event (from July 23, 2021, to August 8, 2021) skyrocketed compared to the time before and after, which shown in below Figure 4. This has partly proven the success of sponsoring this sporting event in increasing sales and attracting customers for Coca-Cola.

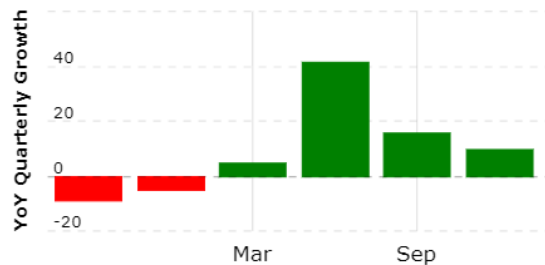


Figure 4. Coca-Cola Revenue 2021 (Macrotrends)

Coca-Cola developed imaginative and poignant marketing ads for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics that complemented the themes of perseverance and togetherness. They capitalize on the Olympic rings' emotional relevance and connect with the spirit of the Games through branding, advertising, and promotional initiatives. One of the flagship campaigns of Coca-Cola during this Olympics is the campaign "I Belong Here" (Image 2).



Image 2. Coca-Cola Marketing Campaign (IOC 2020a)

With this campaign, Coca-Cola wants to convey the message that sports - specifically the Olympics - is a playground for everyone, regardless of whether they are athletes, fans, volunteers, or just someone you know for the first time, regardless of skin color, ethnicity, religion, or culture. No matter who you are, you will find a place for yourself here. This campaign has 80 placard bearers recruited for the Opening Ceremony. For these people,

Coca-Cola has also conducted strict recruitment to convey its message. It features all genders and backgrounds – including people living with disabilities, LGBTQ+ advocates, welfare workers, medical professionals, volunteers, Olympians, and cultural ambassadors – to celebrate the diversity of the Olympic Games. (IOC 2020b.) The action also emphasizes the diversity and inclusion strategy that Coca-Cola mentioned in its 2022 Business and Sustainability Report (The Coca-Cola Company 2022a). This shows Coca-Cola's consistency in sponsorship and marketing strategies.

The “I Belong Here” campaign has reached around 296 million media impressions (IOC 2020a). This shows that Coca-Cola has taken advantage of leveraging the digital age to maximize its presence on social media during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. They used these platforms to extend their reach, connect with a younger, tech-savvy audience, and amplify their branding messages to a global and digital-savvy audience. In addition, Coca-Cola also has many other marketing activities during the Olympics, to interact with customers and fans (Image 3).



Image 3. The Coca-Cola Marketing Event (IOC 2020a)

All activities show the excitement and dynamism of Coca-Cola while implementing the campaign. Data from Morning Consult shows that Coca-Cola is the 2nd brand that is associated

most with the Olympics (Figure 5). This data also illustrates that the sponsoring Olympics has increased Coca-Cola's brand recognition.

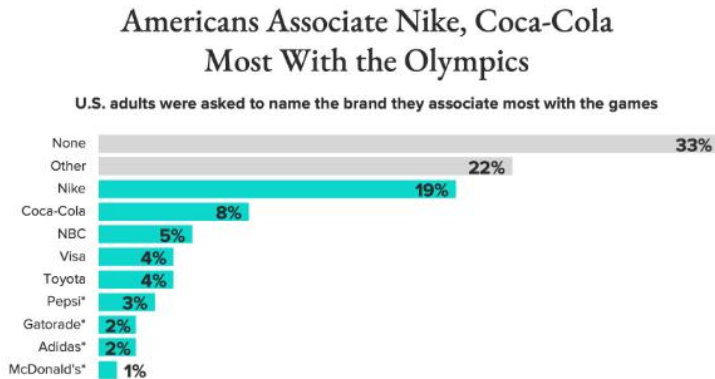


Figure 5. Brands Associate Most with the Olympics (Morning Consult)

Besides that, participating in sponsoring sports, specifically the Olympics, is a practical activity consistent with the company's marketing strategy after much professional research and surveys of its fans.

We seek to be aligned with the things that people care about, and year after year, our fans tell us that they are passionate about sports and the world's pinnacle sporting event, the Olympic Games. The Olympic Games are a truly global event, giving Coca-Cola a unique opportunity to refresh and celebrate with sports fans in the more than 200 countries where we do business. (The Coca-Cola Company 2022b.)

In a recent interview with iWorkinSport and Brad Ross - Vice President of Global Sports and Entertainment Marketing and Partnerships at The Coca-Cola Company, Ross once again affirmed the importance of sports to the company's development and sports sponsorship strategies.

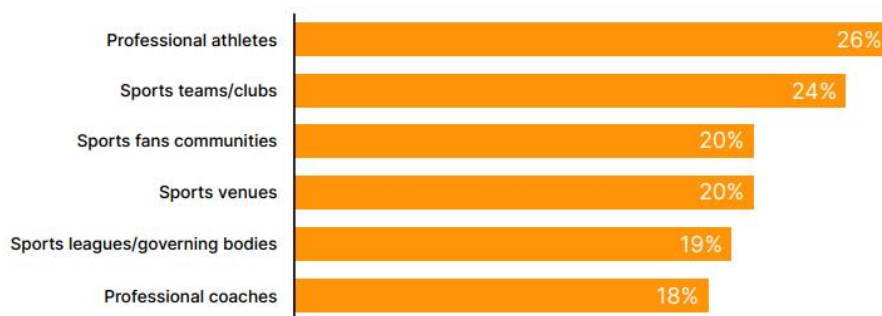
Sports has played such an important role in the growth of the company and our brands over many years and will continue to be a growth driver for the business in the future. We invest in multiple sports and have incredible teams inside the company working across our sports business. We have some of the best global sports partners in the world, including the IOC, FIFA, Special Olympics, and McLaren, to name a few, while also working with many sports entities in markets across the world. (iWorkinSport 2023.)

Ross also emphasized that partnership/sponsorship management and sports marketing are broad areas that Coca-Cola is focusing on because, for them, they recognize that *sports*

are communities, and that is why we are in the business of sports because we build communities (IWorkinSport 2023).

Data from Nielsen Sports shows that sports fan communities are also an effective channel to connect customers. It reveals that 20% of avid sports fans who look to social media for sports news see sports fan communities as an effective way to connect with brands and sponsors, which is presented in Figure 6.

All of the above shows that Coca-Cola understands sports and its customers. Satisfying customers' emotions and sublimating with them in sports - through matches, helps Coca-Cola connect more closely with consumers. They no longer seem to be sellers - buyers, but a group working towards a common passion in sports. This makes customers feel appreciated and treated individually.



Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, July 2021; Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, South Korea, Spain, U.K., U.S.

Figure 6. Brand Partnership Appear (Nielsen Sports 2023)

The most significant asset for a business is a loyal customer base. There is a straightforward but unavoidable result when there are no discernible distinctions between products in every category: emotional reasoning is the primary business driver. A product or service is just like any other product or service if it is emotionless. (IEG 2017, 18.) In another study conducted at the end of 2022, Marigold, in partnership with E-consultancy, surveyed 7,392 European consumers, including Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the Benelux Region - has released results on the European Brand Loyalty Report. The report shows that up to 76% of consumers in Europe are loyal to their favourite brands because they are treated like an individual. (Marigold 2023.) It can be understood that it is when the brand respects each customer, their personal preferences and needs, or in other words, their emotions. This shows the importance of sponsorship in maintaining loyal customers. Thus, it can be seen that, through sports sponsorship activities, Coca-Cola also aims to build customer loyalty.

According to Nielsen's 2023 Annual Marketing Report, released in April 2023, the top 3 goals of a marketing campaign are customer acquisition, brand awareness, and customer retention (Nielsen 2023). The results are shown in Figure 7 below.



Figure 7. Top Marketing Objectives for 2023 (Nielsen 2023)

The above analysis shows that sponsoring the 2020 Tokyo Olympics has helped Coca-Cola achieve all three of these goals. In conclusion, the Coca-Cola Company's long-term cooperation with the Olympics, especially during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, serves as a case study of effective sports sponsorship and branding. The partnership combines a deep history with creative marketing, diversification of products, and fan engagement. It illustrates the power of sports branding and its ability to foster emotional connections with consumers while enhancing the company's global presence and positive brand image.

3.2 Qatar Airways and FIFA World Cup 2022

The FIFA World Cup is one of the most prestigious and widely recognized international football tournaments in the world. It was first held in 1930, and it has been played every four years, except for 1942 and 1946 due to World War II. The FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) established the tournament, the governing body of world football. (Football History.)

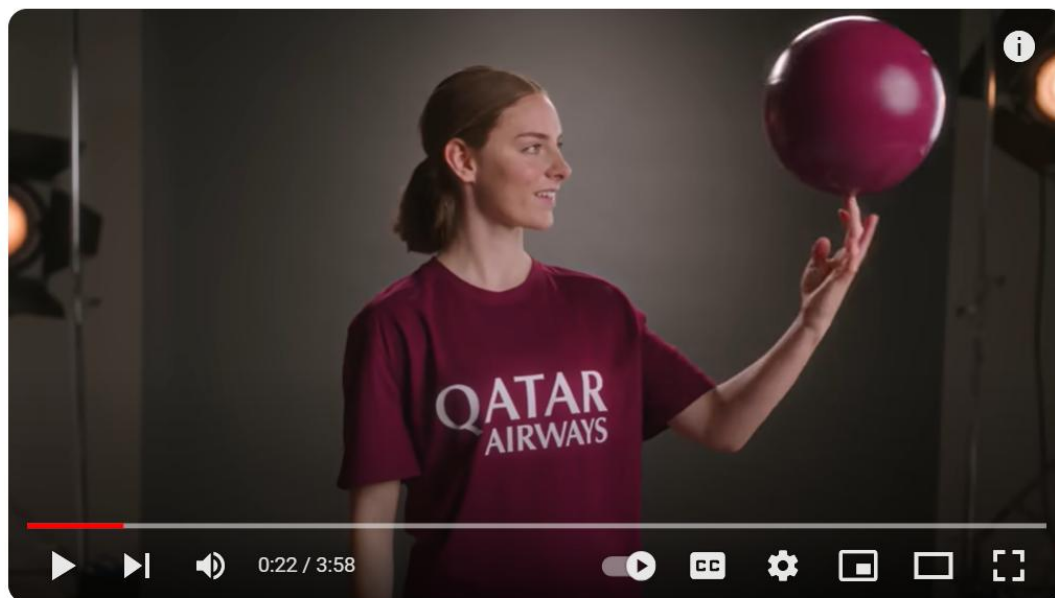
The FIFA World Cup 2022 was hosted in Qatar, the region's first hosting of the competition. It took place from November 21 to December 18, 2022. This timing is different from the traditional June-July schedule to avoid the extreme heat of the Qatari summer. (FIFA 2023.)

Approximately \$229 billion is thought to have been spent by Qatar on World Cup infrastructure; however, the World Cup Organizing Committee has not yet verified that amount. Qatar's FIFA World Cup hosting expenses are tough to pinpoint precisely, but they are unquestionably the most of any World Cup hosted since the original one in 1930. Numerous studies claim that the entire cost of the investment might surpass the sum of the preceding 21 times. (Silic 2022.) When the World Cup was over, it was difficult to explain this enormous investment, but certain things are more important than money.

With more than 5 billion people inspired at FIFA World Cup 2022, accounting for about half of the world's population, this is a great opportunity for brands that want to boost marketing for their brands. Qatar Airways is no exception.

Qatar Airways, an airline half-owned by the Qatari government, is the official airline of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Being the world's fastest-growing airline, it is among the newest to operate on all six continents. (Qatar Airways Group 2023a.) Since the news of Qatar hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup was announced in 2010, Qatar Airways has made preparations to welcome this opportunity. The Group Chief Executive, His Excellency Mr. Akbar Al Baker, said: *The countdown is complete, and after more than a decade, our dream of bringing the world together has truly come alive. We are excited to give the world a taste of Arab hospitality and share our passion for connecting the world through travel and sport.* (Qatar Airways Group 2023b.)

Firstly, to commemorate the start of the tournament, Qatar Airways released the official FIFA World Cup™ promotional song, "C.H.A.M.P.I.O.N.S," featuring internationally recognized artists DJ Rodge and Cheb Khaled, which received 23 million views in just one month, and still increasingly till now (Image 4).



Khaled x Rodge - C.H.A.M.P.I.O.N.S (Official Music Video)



Khaled
2.43M subscribers

Subscribe

39K



Share



Image 4. The Promotional Song FIFA World Cup 2022 (Youtube 2022)

At the same time, Privilege Club, the Official Frequent Flyer Programme of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, welcomed nearly 67,000 new members during the event after having completed five separate offer campaigns. Then, to set a new benchmark for international travel at sporting events, Qatar Airways provided all travelers passing through Hamad International Airport and Doha International Airport with a complimentary experience at the Passenger Overflow Areas pre-departure waiting spaces. In addition to the game, the airline entertained fans with performances by Akon, Tamer Hosny, Robbie Williams, Black Eyed Peas, Jason Derulo, and Enrique Iglesias during seven Qatar Live concerts. Alongside these well-known performers, Qatar Live revived the Daydream event, adding the Magic Lantern as a new stage. In the fan zones and each of the eight stadiums during the competition, FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ goods were exclusively sold by Qatar Duty-Free, the Official Retail Store for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. Qatar Duty-Free also opened the first-ever FIFA store at Hamad International Airport, which featured an assortment of club jerseys, mementos, collectibles, and products (Qatar Airways Group 2023a.)

All of the above moves make Qatar a hot keyword during the World Cup. Data from Google Trends shows that the number of searches about Qatar escalated during the event. (Figure 8.)

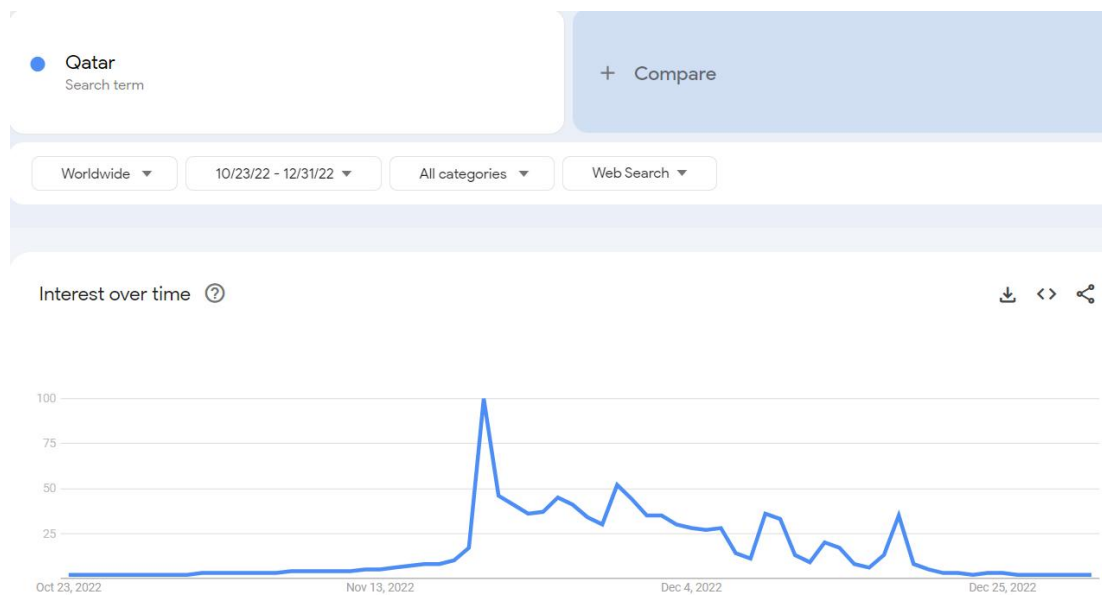


Figure 8. Qatar - Interest over Time (Google Trends a)

According to FIFA, the World Cup 2022 attracted more than 3.4 million spectators to Qatar and 1.8 million visitors. If compared to Qatar's national population (less than 3 million people), this number is truly a big deal for Qatar Airways. There are 13,782 planes touched

down at Hamad International Airport and Doha International Airport. 3,101 more flights arrived in the nation in the five weeks preceding the epidemic, a 29% rise over the same period last year and 10% more than the previous year. The recently reopened Doha International Airport, which took 1,718 of the additional flights, handled a peak of 680 arrivals in the first full week of the competition, a 224% increase in arrivals. (Fox 2023.) The data is illustrated in Figure 9.

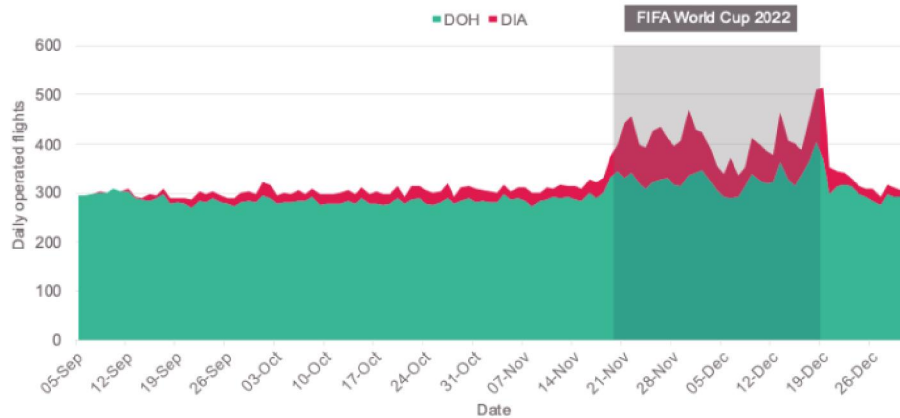


Figure 9. Daily Operated Flights into Qatar, Arrival Airport (Fox 2023)

Fox’s data shows that Qatar received flights from 99 countries and 226 airports during the World Cup, indicating the advancement of competing countries (Figure 10). Before 2010, Qatar was just a tiny peninsula with over 1.7 million people; it seems unknown to most of the world, as well as Qatar Airways. Currently, it is more and more popular globally.

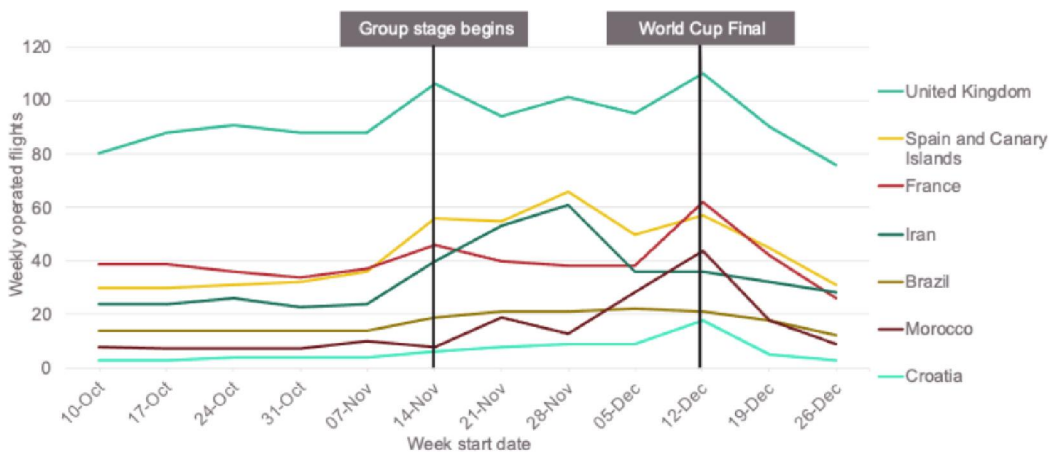


Figure 10. Operated flights into Qatar, selected departure countries (Fox 2023)

In addition to managing a large number of flights, Qatar had to manage increasing demand from unexpected sources, mostly as teams advanced through the competition. Iran fans flew in large numbers during the group stages to watch their team defeat Wales, although they were eventually unable to advance. When the Atlas Lions achieved victories in the semi-finals, aircraft continued to operate out of Moroccan airports, increasing from 19 arrivals the week of their first match to 44 the week of their last. For direct flights from Argentina, the eventual winner, Qatar, is too far away. The fans had a new option to come to Qatar via Spanish airport stops. With their support, connecting with other countries heightened throughout the tournament (Fox 2023.)

After many efforts to operate and support the event, Qatar Airways has achieved certain successes, which are shown in Figure 11. For the fiscal year 2022/2023, Qatar Airways Group declared a net profit of QAR 4.4 billion. Overall sales rose by 45% from the previous year, from QAR 52.4 billion to QAR 76.3 billion. Passenger income surged by 100% compared to the previous year, that is QAR 49.6 billion in 2022/2023 and QAR 24.8 billion in 2021/2022. (Qatar Airways Group 2023a.) This data confirms the effectiveness of Qatar Airways when applying its sponsorship strategy for the 2022 World Cup.

Financial Highlights		Fiscal 2023	Fiscal 2022
Revenue and Other Operating Income	QAR m	76,274	52,431
of which passenger revenue	QAR m	49,581	24,770
of which cargo revenue	QAR m	20,581	23,036
Operating Results	QAR m	11,860	10,490
Net Profit Attributed to Owners	QAR m	4,406	5,607

Figure 11. Industry Leading Finance Performances (Qatar Airways Group 2023a)

The above analysis shows that sponsoring the 2022 World Cup has brought Qatar Airways closer to the whole world. More and more flights are arriving in Qatar, whether the purpose is connecting flights or tourism. More and more people know about Qatar. And accompanying the event, Qatar Airways had a successful financial year with figures that any business would expect.

3.3 E-sports Sponsorships

Even if there had already been e-sports events in the 1970s and 1980s, beginning in the 1990s, one of the first significant steps toward e-sports sponsorship came from the game publishers themselves. Compared to the more than 3,000-year history of traditional sports, this number is modest. It can be said that e-sports, and e-sports sponsorship, is a very new issue. (Schonauer 2023.) But companies have jumped into this, bringing more vibrancy to

the market. The Shikenso Analytics statistics demonstrate the wide range of industries and corporations that have sponsored e-sports, from game publishers and peripherals to fast food chains, electronics, beverages, and the automobile sector, as depicted in Figure 12 below.

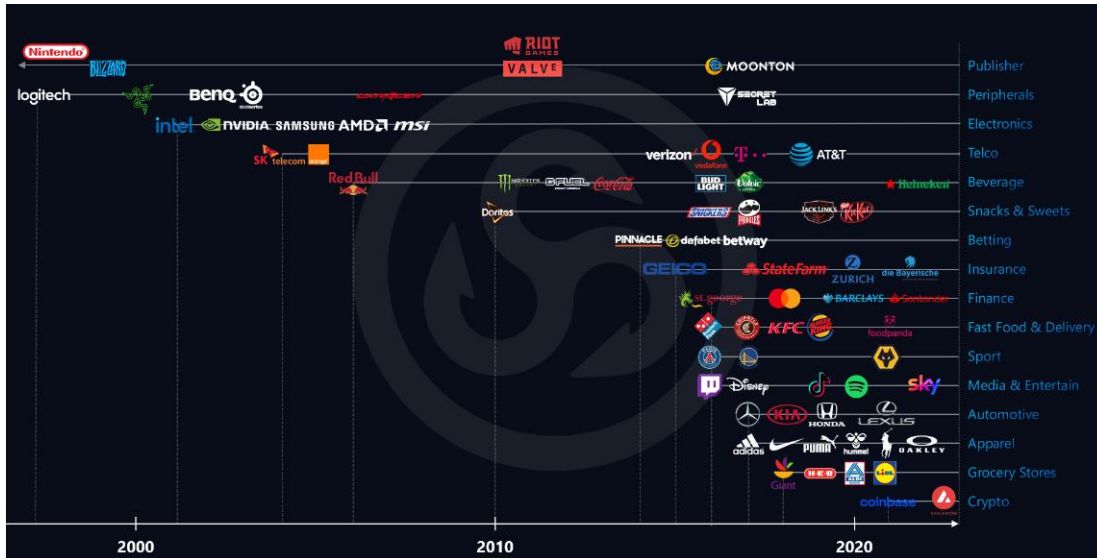


Figure 12. E-sports Sponsorship Market Evolution (Schonauer 2023)

The purpose of game publishers sponsoring tournaments is easy to understand - they want to attract as many players as possible. To them, these sponsorships can be seen as traditional marketing to help advertise products and increase market share. For peripherals, this can also be explained as a way to advertise the product. As e-sports is a sport that uses virtual platforms, chips and technology are essential conditions for developing e-sports products. But why are other industries also jumping on this bandwagon?

The first visible thing is the strong growth of this industry. The Esports Charts has statistics on the top games with the most viewers over the years (Esports Charts 2023). The authors have analyzed the top 5 most popular games over the years, the data is shown in Table 1 below.

Esports	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
League of Legends	2,101,737	2,040,118	3,981,706	3,882,252	4,018,728	5,147,701
Counter-Strike	1,331,781	1,329,096	1,205,103	1,002,132	2,748,434	2,113,610
Dota 2	925,375	1,205,979	1,965,328			1,751,086
PUBG: Battlegrounds	382,331	757,875				
Overwatch	321,960					
Fornite		1,970,982	2,334,826			
Free Fire			2,016,157	2,566,046	5,415,990	
Mobile Legends: Bang Bang				1,387,047	3,191,404	2,845,364
PUBG Mobile				1,153,865	3,801,998	
Valorant						1,505,804
Total	5,063,184	7,304,050	11,503,120	9,991,342	19,176,554	13,363,565
Growth		44%	127%	97%	279%	164%

Table 1. Popular E-sports Games by Viewership (adapted from Esports Charts 2023)

Data indicates that the number of viewers for these games has grown significantly in only the last five years. This figure only halted and then climbed at a three-digit rate even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. If we use 2017 as a baseline, the number of people watching these games has climbed by nearly three times in just five years. Data from Google Trends also shows that the search level for these games has never decreased in recent years (Figure 13).

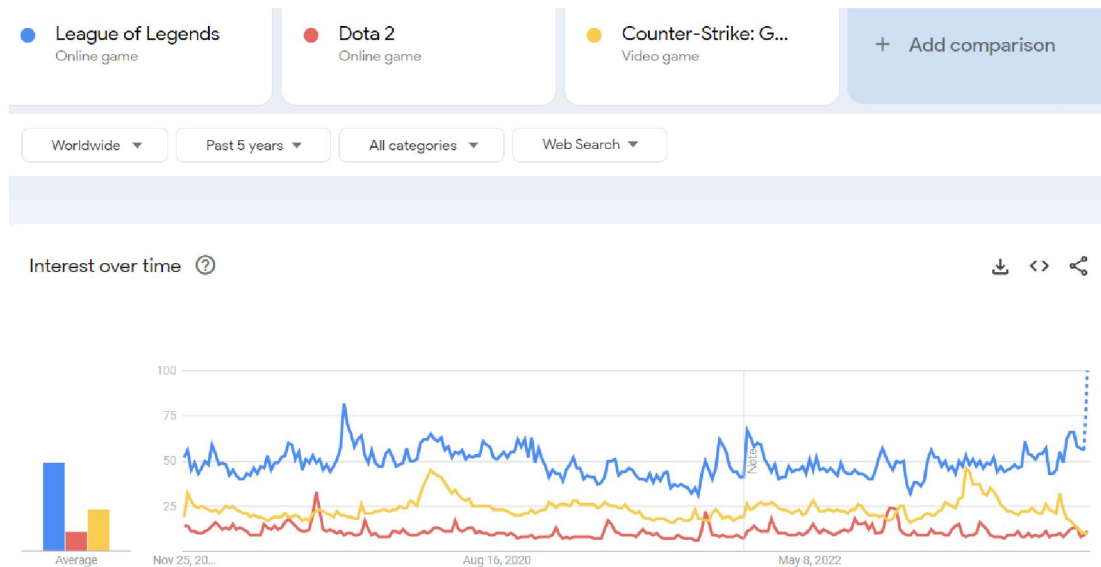


Figure 13. E-sports Games, Interest over Time (Google Trends b)

As a result, as the audience grows, e-sports presents a platform that companies may consider using for marketing purposes, particularly through sponsorship.

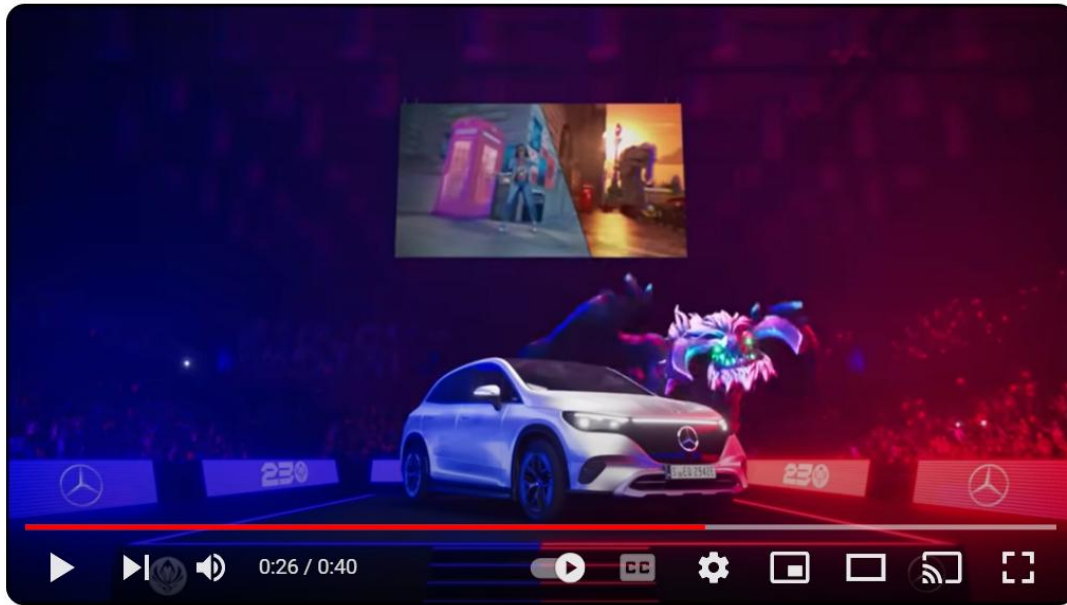
On another hand, in the case of FMCG companies, maintaining market dominance becomes crucial when their products are readily interchangeable. The most common instances are Red Bull and Monster, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, or Adidas and Nike. The other

competitors will feel compelled to enter this field in order to establish their presence when a competitor does.

Red Bull has increased their involvement in e-sports while keeping their sponsorships in more conventional sports. In their portfolio, they list their sponsorship of several StarCraft 2 and Dota 2 competitions alongside well-known teams like Tempo Storm, OG, and G2. Furthermore, Red Bull frequently hosts its own e-sports competitions, such as the Red Bull SoloQ and Red Bull Wololo. They genuinely have an influence on the sector. (Ashley 2023.)

League of Legends has been regarded as the top game in the contemporary e-sports scene for several years running (Table 1). Numerous companies, including Mercedes Benz, Samsung, Red Bull, and Coca-Cola, sponsor games (Stojanovic 2023). This is understandable when the number of people viewing this game has continuously increased in recent years.

In addition to providing financial support, sponsors use a variety of strategies to advertise their goods. One such brand is Mercedes-Benz. A German automaker has officially supported the 2023 League of Legends World Championship (Image 5). The car manufacturer has long supported e-sports, working with groups like T1 and e-sports companies like Riot Games in addition to fielding Mercedes AMG F1 E-sports, a competitive e-sports squad that competes in simulated racing. Mercedes has been supplying players with transportation, showcasing its cars throughout the tournaments, and serving as the official automobile partner for international League of Legends competitions like MSI and Worlds. (Šimić 2023.)



League of Legends MSI 2023 x Mercedes-Benz



Mercedes-Benz ✓
1.84M subscribers

Subscribe

965



Share



Image 5. Mercedes-Benz x League of Legends MSI 2023 (Youtube 2023)

Many nations now recognize e-sports as a legitimate sport. E-sports have been dismissed by detractors as a fad, a small trend, or a one-time event from the very beginning. But now, millions of sportsmen and fans worldwide are involved in the billion-dollar sport of e-sports. E-sports supporters of younger generations outweigh traditional sports fans in many regions, and current trends indicate that this difference is only growing. (Esports Guides 2023.) This demonstrates that e-sports is a potential industry for corporations when using sports sponsorship tactics for various commercial marketing objectives.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Answers to Research Questions

The objectives of the thesis are to learn about the intersection between business and sports, focusing on the argument that sports sponsorship helps increase brand awareness. The thesis explores the concepts of sports sponsorship, influencing factors, strategies businesses apply to enhance cooperation, as well as updated trends to maximize business benefits through this connection. The thesis mentioned many examples to illustrate the points given and analyzed in detail three case studies to prove the points. The questions initially mentioned have been resolved, and are summarized as follows:

Research Question 1: What does sponsorship mean in cooperation with sports?

Normally, sports sponsorship refers to a strategic partnership between a business or brand and a sporting entity, such as a sports team, league, event, or individual athlete. In this relationship, the business or brand will provide financial or material support to the sports entity in exchange for different marketing chances and benefits. There are different kinds of sponsorships, e.g. financial sponsorship, in-kind sponsorship, media event sponsorship, influencer, and content creator sponsorship.

Research Question 2: How does sports sponsorship influence the branding strategies of companies?

Sports sponsorship has a multifaceted impact on a business's image, which in turn directly affects that business's branding strategy. The thesis included several influences such as brand visibility, brand equity, loyalty, emotional connections, and community engagement. Sports sponsorship increases the brand's frequency of interaction with consumers, thereby broadening the brand's consumer base. With sports sponsorship activities, businesses' marketing activities are bolstered, which subsequently enhances their brand value. Sports sponsorship targets customers who have strong emotions about sports, and easily connect those emotions within the fan community. Customers feel connected to their favorite brands, as well as the respect the brand has for them, thereby becoming more devoted to their preferred brands.

Businesses need to take into account several criteria to successfully increase brand awareness, recognition, and equity through sports sponsorship. The thesis mentions some solutions, e.g. Sponsorship activities are suitable, in line with the business's long-term commitments, and compatible with the values of the brand. Sponsorship activities need to target

the right customer base and take advantage of customers' emotional connections. In addition, sponsorship activities should also focus on high-profile sporting events or professional athletes, while leveraging the influence of internet and media technologies.

Research Question 3: What innovative activation strategies can the brand employ to engage sports fans and maximize the benefits of their sponsorship investments?

Within the scope of the thesis e-sports and virtual sports are mentioned as examples of new trends in sports support finance. Although it is still new and may not be familiar to many people, e-sports and virtual sports are present and still growing. More and more businesses are paying attention to this field.

4.2 Contribution of the Study

The thesis contributes to the understanding of the dynamic relationship between business and sports, with a specific focus on sports sponsorship and its impact on brand recognition. Here are some key contributions:

Conceptual Clarification: One of the fundamental contributions of the thesis is the precise elucidation of key concepts at the intersection of business and sports. By delving into the intricacies of sports sponsorship, the study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the underlying principles and dynamics of this interplay. It not only defines the terms but also explores the nuanced interactions, thus serving as an essential reference for academics, professionals, and enthusiasts interested in this subject.

Evolving Trends and Transformations: The thesis offers an analysis of recent reports and data on the evolution of sports sponsorship. It reflects the changes and transformations of sponsorship activities in modern society, demonstrating how this field has adapted and redefined itself to remain relevant in a rapidly changing landscape. This understanding is valuable for businesses, marketing professionals, and researchers seeking to stay informed about the developments in the field.

Practical Insights from Case Studies: By incorporating real-world case studies, the thesis provides practical insights into how businesses apply sports sponsorship to support their activities. These case studies offer a tangible illustration of the strategies and tactics employed by companies to align their brand identity with sports entities. Thereby, readers can imagine how to apply this strategy through practical lessons.

In summary, this study is a contribution to the literature on the interplay between business and sports. By clarifying concepts, highlighting evolving trends, and providing practical insights through case studies, the thesis equips readers with a comprehensive understanding

of sports sponsorship and its influence on brand recognition, benefiting both academics and professionals engaged in this arena.

4.3 Validity and Reliability

The thesis is trustworthy and valid.

The thesis has specific, well-defined goals. To make the goals clear, research questions were raised and addressed. The arguments stated in the thesis have a solid academic basis, drawn from many authors and wide peer reviews. The structure of the thesis is balanced and easy to understand. The study's elements complement one another and are related to one another, which helps to make the thesis' central point more clear.

The secondary sources used in the thesis are the results of extensive surveys, that were conducted over an adequate amount of time to gather relevant data and included respondents with both professional expertise and industrial experience. These reports are prepared by a team of experts from reputable organizations in surveying and evaluating market trends.

The data used for analysis in case studies are collected from official pages of businesses and are publicly available. The analyses use appropriate and understandable methods. Additionally, the limitations of the thesis have been made clear to readers, giving them something to think about while they read the study.

4.4 Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides a general exploration of sports sponsorship and brand recognition, it is essential to acknowledge that the intersection of sports and business is a broad and evolving field. Therefore, several avenues for further research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this dynamic intersection. Some key recommendations for future research include:

Exploring Diverse Dimensions: The thesis predominantly focuses on sports sponsorship and its influence on brand recognition. Future research can delve into other aspects of the relationship between business and sports, such as fan engagement, marketing strategies, or the impact of sports events on local economies. Exploring these diverse dimensions will provide a more holistic view of the intersection.

Active Data Sourcing: The thesis relies on secondary data sources, which are often passive. Future research could involve active data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews, or ethnographic studies. This approach allows authors to gather more specific and

tailored information, thereby providing a deeper insight into the intricacies of sports sponsorship and branding. Readers can also learn more about paid resources. These reports often include very close analysis and provide valuable insight.

Adaptation to Digital Transformation: Given the rapid transformation brought about by digital technology, researchers must stay current with the latest trends in the field. Future studies can examine the role of digital platforms, social media, and emerging technologies in sports sponsorship and branding. Additionally, understanding how these technologies influence consumer behavior and sponsorship strategies is a fertile area for exploration.

Generational Analysis: The thesis hints at the importance of generational differences in consumer behavior. Future research can dive deeper into the preferences and habits of different age groups, especially Generation Z. Investigating how businesses can tailor their sports sponsorship and branding strategies to resonate with specific age cohorts will be of significant value.

Longitudinal Studies: To capture the evolving nature of sports-business dynamics, longitudinal studies can be conducted to track changes and trends over time. This approach will provide valuable insights into how sports sponsorship and branding strategies have evolved in response to societal, technological, and economic shifts.

In conclusion, the thesis serves as a solid foundation for understanding the interplay between business and sport, with a focus on sports sponsorship and branding. However, the vastness and dynamism of this intersection offer numerous opportunities for further research. By exploring diverse dimensions, embracing active data sourcing, adapting to digital transformation, conducting generational analysis, and engaging in longitudinal studies, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced and up-to-date understanding of this exciting field.

References

- Aaker, D. A. & Joachimsthaler, E. 2000. Brand Leadership. New York: Free Press.
- Around The Rings. Coke Sponsor for Olympics Until 2020. Retrieved on 8 November 2023. Available at <https://www.infobae.com/aroundtherings/articles/2021/07/12/coke-sponsor-for-olympics-until-2020/>
- Ashley, J. 2023. Top 10 Esports Sponsorships That Will Redefine the Industry. Esports. Retrieved on 24 November 2023. Available at <https://www.esports.net/news/top-10-esports-sponsorships/>
- Bellis, M. 2019. A Brief History of Sports: From Rocks and Spears to Laser Tag. ThoughtCo. Retrieved on 25 October 2023. Available at <https://www.thoughtco.com/history-of-sports-1992447#:~:text=The%20documented%20history%20of%20sports,-on-one%20with%20opponents>
- B Online Sports. 2023. What Are Virtual Sports? An All-You-Need-To-Know Guide. Retrieved on 23 November 2023. Available at <https://sports.borgataonline.com/en/blog/a-virtual-sports-guide/>
- Bowen, F. 2017. Why Do Some Athletes Make Millions? Because Fans Support Them. The Washington Post. Retrieved on 16 October 2023. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/why-do-some-athletes-make-millions-because-fans-support-them/2017/07/26/f743ae7e-70b6-11e7-8f39-eeb7d3a2d304_story.html
- Centuro Global. 2020. The Power of Partnerships – A Nike & Michael Jordan Case Study. Retrieved on 15 November 2023. Available at https://www.centuroglobal.com/blog/the_power_of_partnerships_nike_michael_jordan/
- Daniels, T. 2023. Can creators solve the esports sponsorship drought? Esports Insider. Retrieved on 30 October 2023. Available at <https://esportsinsider.com/2023/06/content-creators-esports-sponsorships-drought>
- Deloitte. 2020. Sponsoring Sports in Today's Digital Age. A Use Case From the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. Retrieved on 13 November 2023. Available at <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/lu/Documents/sports-consulting/lu-sponsoring-sports-today-digital-age.pdf>
- Desbordes, M. & Richelieu, A. 2012. Global Sports Marketing: Contemporary Issues and Practice. Taylor & Francis Group, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Diorio, S. 2020. Providing The Financial Contribution of Sponsorships To The Business. Forbes. Retrieved on 20 October 2023. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesinsights/2020/02/09/proving-the-financial-contribution-of-sponsorships-to-the-business/?sh=3c389c123724>

Duan, Y. Hofer, C. & Aloysius, J. A. 2021. Consumers Care About Corporate Social Responsibility – And So Should You. ASCM. ASCM Insights. Retrieved on 28 October 2023. Available at <https://www.ascm.org/ascm-insights/consumers-care-about-corporate-social-responsibility--and-so-should-you/>

Esports Guides. 2023. Is E-sports a Sport? Countries Where E-sports Considered a Sport? Retrieved on 23 November 2023. Available at <https://www.esports.net/wiki/guides/is-esports-a-sport/>

Esports Charts. 2023. Popular Esports Games by Viewership. Retrieved on 23 November 2023. Available at <https://escharts.com/top-games?year=2022&order=peak>

F1 Esports Series. 2023. Red Bull Racing Esports. Retrieved on 15 November 2023. Available at <https://f1esports.com/pro-championship/teams/red-bull>

FIFA 2023. Football Unites the World. Annual Report 2022. Retrieved on 12 October 2023. Available at <https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/>

Financial Times. 2019. Olympics Takes Gold with \$3bn Mengniu Dairy – Coca-Cola Deal. Retrieved on 8 November 2023. Limited available at <https://www.ft.com/content/11568a4a-95a7-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36>

Football History. The History of FIFA World Cup. Retrieved on 27 November 2023. Available at <https://www.footballhistory.org/world-cup/index.html>

Forbes. 2010. Super Bowl: A Missed Opportunity for Pepsi. Retrieved on 21 October 2023. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/2010/02/09/pepsi-super-bowl-social-media-cmo-network-jeremiah-owyang.html?sh=741b8eae1bd7>

Fox, P. 2023. Analysis: Aviation and the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Cirium. Retrieved on 19 October 2023. Available at <https://www.cirium.com/thoughtcloud/analysis-aviation-fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022/>

Garcia, A. 2021. Cristiano Ronaldo snub sees Coca-Cola market value fall by \$4bn. ESPN. Retrieved on 20 October 2023. Available at https://www.espn.co.uk/football/story/_/id/37618171/cristiano-ronaldo-snub-sees-coca-cola-share-price-fall-4bn

Global Data. 2023. Report Store. FIFA World Cup 2022 – Post Event Analysis. Retrieved on 27 October 2023. Available at <https://www.globaldata.com/store/report/fifa-world-cup-event-analysis/#:~:text=The%202022%20FIFA%20World%20Cup%20had%2032%20official%20sponsors%20which,Kia%2C%20McDonald%2C%20and%20others>

Goal. 2021. What does RB stand for in RB Leipzig? Retrieved on 22 November 2023. Available at <https://www.goal.com/en/news/what-does-rb-stand-for-in-rb-leipzig/14oix4vcuo8361p5zcv0i701zf>

Google Trends a. Qatar. Interest Over Time. Retrieved on 22 November 2023. Available at <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2022-10-23%202022-12-31&q=Qatar&hl=en>

Google Trends b. Esports Games. Interest Over Time. Retrieved on 24 November 2023. Available at <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&q=%2Fm%2F04n3w2r,%2Fm%2F0dlkwn1,%2Fm%2F0h3pv2z&hl=en>

Green, A. 2018. Nike Ignite a Firestorm of Furry With its New Collin Kaepernick Ad, But It's Still a Brilliant Strategy. Business Insider. Retrieved on 17 October 2023. Available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/nike-colin-kaepernick-deal-strategy-2018-9?r=US&IR=T>

Heaton, H. 1946. EM 39: Shall I Go into Business for Myself? Retrieved on 15 November 2023. Available at [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-39-shall-i-go-into-business-for-myself-\(1946\)](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-39-shall-i-go-into-business-for-myself-(1946))

IEG. 2017. IEG Guide to Sponsorship. Retrieved on 19 October 2023. Available at <https://www.sponsorship.com/ieg/files/59/59ada496-cd2c-4ac2-9382-060d86fcbdc4.pdf>

IOC. 2020a. IOC Marketing Report Tokyo 2020. International Olympic Committee. Retrieved on 10 October 2023. Available at <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/International-Olympic-Committee/IOC-Marketing-And-Broadcasting/IOC-Marketing-report-Tokyo-2020.pdf>

IOC. 2020b. Coca-Cola's Placard Bearers help to promote diversity and inclusion at Tokyo 2020 Opening Ceremony. International Olympic Committee. Retrieved on 20 November 2023. Available at <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/coca-cola-s-placard-bearers-help-to-promote-diversity-and-inclusion-at-tokyo-2020-opening-ceremony>

IWorkinSport. 2023. Interview with Brad Ross, VP Global Sports & Entertainment Marketing and Partnerships at The Coca-Cola Company. Retrieved on 8 November 2023. Available at https://www.iworkinsport.com/insights-detail?id_insight=78

Joseph, S. 2012. Man Utd Names Chevrolet as Shift Sponsor. Marketing Week. Retrieved on 18 October 2023. Available at <https://www.marketingweek.com/man-utd-names-chevrolet-as-shirt-sponsor/>

Keller, K. L. & Swaminathan, V. 2020. Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity. Fifth edition. Harlow, England: Pearson. VleBooks.

Keenan, M. 2023. The Best Sports Sponsorship Examples in 2023. Retrieved on 22 November 2023. Available at <https://www.jerseywatch.com/blog/sports-sponsorship-examples>

Keshkar, S. & Karegar, G. A. 2022. Effect of The COVID-19 Pandemic on The Sports Industry. Retrieved on 22 October 2023. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9335069/#:~:text=The%20sudden%20emergence%20of%20the,shock%20for%20the%20sports%20industry.>

Leigh, S. 2022. The Evolution of Marketing & How It Can Help Your Company's Marketing Strategy. Jack & Bean. Retrieved on 21 October 2023. Available at <https://jackandbean.com/blog/evolution-of-marketing/>

Macrotrends. Coca-cola Revenue 2020-2023. Retrieved on 22 November 2023. Available at <https://www.macrotrends.net/stocks/charts/KO/cocacola/revenue>

Marigold. 2023. 2023 European Brand Loyalty Report. Retrieved on 11 October 2023. Available at <https://go.meetmarigold.com/report/european-brand-loyalty-report>

Morning Consult. 2023. Nike, Coca-Cola Are the Brands Most Associated with the Olympics. Retrieved on 22 November 2023. Limited available at <https://pro.morningconsult.com/articles/olympic-brands-association-poll>

Mullin, B. J. Hardy, S. & Sutton, W. A. 2007. Sport Marketing. 3rd ed. Champaign: Human Kinetics.

Myler, L. 2017. 7 Ways to Make Your Business Stand Out In a Crowd of Competitors. Forbes. Retrieved on 20 October 2023. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/larry-myler/2017/02/23/7-ways-to-make-your-business-stand-out-in-a-crowd-of-competitors/?sh=5c4c811562fa>

Nielsen. 2023. Annual Marketing Report – The Need for Consistent Measurement in a Digital-First Landscape. Retrieved on 15 October 2023. Available at <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2023/need-for-consistent-measurement-2023-nielsen-annual-marketing-report/>

Nielsen Sports. 2023. Fans are Changing the Game: 2022 Global Sports Marketing Report. Retrieved on 13 October 2023. Available at <https://niensports.com/fans-are-changing-the-game-2022-global-sports-marketing-report/>

Nike. 2022. Impacts. Matching Our Employees' Impact. Retrieved on 26 October 2023. Available at <https://about.nike.com/en/impact/initiatives/matching-our-employees-impact>

Olenski, S. 2012. Are Brands Wielding More Influence In Social Media Than We Thought? Forbes. Retrieved on 28 October 2023. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/market-share/2012/05/07/are-brands-wielding-more-influence-in-social-media-than-we-thought/?sh=16f2461971e1>

Pitch. 2023. How Does Sports Sponsorship Actually Work? Retrieved on 25 October 2023. Available at <https://www.pitch.co.uk/news/how-does-sports-sponsorship-actually-work/#:~:text=Financial%20support%3A%20Sponsors%20provide%20financial,an%20athlete's%20training%20and%20development.>

Qatar Airways Group. 2023a. Annual Report Fiscal 2022/2023. Retrieved on 18 October 2023. Available at <https://www.qatarairways.com/press-releases/en-WW/228541-qatar-airways-group-annual-report-and-consolidated-financial-statement-2022-2023>

Qatar Airways Group. 2023b. Qatar Airways, the Official Airline of the Journey Celebrates the Historic Opening of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. Retrieved on 18 October 2023. Available at <https://www.qatarairways.com/press-releases/en-WW/221180-qatar-airways-the-official-airline-of-the-journey-celebrates-the-historic-opening-of-the-fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022>

Real Madrid. 2022. The New Jersey for The 2022-23 Season. Retrieved on 15 November 2023. Available at <https://www.realmadrid.com/en/news/2022/05/16/the-new-jersey-for-the-2022-23-season>

Red bull. 2023. Products. Question & Answer. Retrieved on 27 October 2023. Available at <https://www.redbull.com/int-en/energydrink/what-is-the-slogan-of-red-bull>

Ritson, M. 2017. Which Sponsors Would Trust the World Cup to Protect Their Brand in 2018? Marketing Week. Retrieved on 19 October 2023. Available at <https://www.marketingweek.com/mark-ritson-world-cup-2018/>

Rovell, D. 2015. NBA Signs Deal with Nike; Logo to Appear on Uniforms. Retrieved on 15 November 2023. Available at https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/13053413/nba-signs-8-year-apparel-deal-nike.

Schonauer, K. 2023. The Evolution of Esports Sponsorships. Shikenso Analytics. Retrieved on 25 November 2023. Available at <https://shikenso.com/blog/the-evolution-of-esports-sponsorships#:~:text=While%20esports%20events%20already%20happened,themselves%2C%20starting%20in%20the%2090s.>

Shalabi, C. 2023. Esports: What Is It and How It Benefits Marketers? Insider Intelligence. Retrieved on 21 November 2023. Available at <https://www.insiderintelligence.com/insights/esports-ecosystem-market-report/>

Shank, M. D. 2009. Sports Marketing: A Strategic Perspective. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River (NJ): Pearson Prentice Hall: Pearson Education International.

Silic, D. 2022. Is the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar profitable? SSBM Geneva. Retrieved on 12 October 2023. Available at <https://www.ssbm.ch/is-the-fifa-world-cup-2022-in-qatar-profitable/>

Stojanovic, M. 2023. 10 Biggest Esports Sponsors of 2022 and 2023. Play Today. Retrieved on 23 November 2023. Available at <https://playtoday.co/blog/guides/esports-sponsors-of-2022-and-2023/>

Šimić, I. 2023. Mercedes-Benz sponsors League of Legends Worlds for fourth consecutive year. Esports Insider. Retrieved on 22 November 2023. Available at <https://esportsinsider.com/2023/10/mercedes-benz-lol-worlds-fourth-year>

The Coca-Cola Company. 2021. "I Belong Here": Joint Coca-Cola/IOC Digital Platform Shows Why the Olympics Games Are for Everyone. Retrieved on 9 November 2023. Available at <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/media-center/tokyo-2020-olympic-campaign>

The Coca-Cola Company. 2022a. 2022 Business and Sustainability Report. Retrieved on 20 October 2023. Available at <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/content/dam/company/us/en/reports/coca-cola-business-sustainability-report-2022.pdf>

The Coca-Cola Company. 2022b. Coca-Cola Canada. Why does Coca-Cola sponsor the Olympic Games? Retrieved on 8 November 2023. Available at <https://www.coca-cola.ca/faqs/coca-cola-faqs-community/why-does-coca-cola-sponsor-the-olympic-games>

United Nations Global Compact. UN Global Compact Annual Report 2022. Retrieved on 20 October 2023. Available at <https://unglobalcompact.org/library/5221>

UPM. 2023. About us. Retrieved on 28 October 2023. Available at <https://www.upm.com/about-us/>

Vandevelde, P.J. 2021. 4 Types of Sponsorship in Sports with Their Pros and Cons. 4PSquare. Retrieved on 11 November 2023. Available at <https://4psquare.com/blog/sponsorships-sport/>

VinFast. The VinFast Story. Retrieved on 20 October 2023. Available at <https://vinfastauto.eu/en/story>

VinGroup. 2019. General Introduction. Retrieved on 20 October 2023. Available at <https://vingroup.net/en/about>

Wagner, U. & Storm, R.K. 2017. When Sport Meets Business: Capabilities, Challenges, Critiques, SAGE Publications, Limited, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Winder, R. 2020. Soft Power: The New Great Game. Great Britain: Little, Brown.

Wraxall, L. 2023. Esports Vs Virtual Sports: How Advancements in Technology Are Revolutionising The Way People Engage In Sport And Competition. Retrieved on 18 October 2023. Available at <https://www.digitalisleofman.com/news/esports-vs-virtual-sports/>

Youtube. 2022. Khaled & Jodge. C.H.A.M.P.I.O.N.S. Retrieved on 23 November 2023. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIPi8EvjVwk>

Youtube. 2023. Mercedes-Bens x League of Legends MSI 2023. Retrieved on 24 November 2023. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU3dmQplVPM>