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## Driving Brand Success through Sports Sponsorship: Strategic Insights, Challenges, and Opportunities in Emerging Markets

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE INFO
<p>Traditional methods of sports sponsorship have given way to more complex, multidimensional approaches that take advantage of media attention and appeal to the emotional bond that exists between sports and fans. Nevertheless, most previous research has concentrated on developed markets, leaving a knowledge vacuum regarding sponsorship in emerging nations. To close this gap, this study examines sponsorship management from the viewpoints of agencies, sponsees, and sponsors involved in the Turkish sports industry. The study examines how businesses can use sports sponsorship as a strategic marketing tool to increase consumer engagement, brand awareness, and visibility. Important background elements like unstable economies, underdeveloped sports infrastructures, and government intervention are discussed, along with the sponsorship opportunities and challenges they pose. Utilising a qualitative methodology, the study conducts in-depth interviews with significant stakeholders to examine decision-making procedures, crucial success elements, and the quantifiable influence of sponsorships. The results indicate that improving sponsorship effectiveness requires long-term partnerships, stakeholder alignment, and digital engagement. The study adds to the body of knowledge on sponsorship by providing insights into the intricate dynamics of sponsorship management in emerging markets, where political involvement and economic volatility play critical roles.</p> <p>© 2023 ASEAN Journal of Sport for Development and Peace</p>	<p><b>Article History:</b> <i>Submitted/Received 12 Mar 2024</i> <i>First Revised 2 April 2024</i> <i>Accepted 14 Jul 2024</i> <i>First Available online 30 Jul 2024</i> <i>Publication Date 30 Jul 2024</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Keyword:</b> <i>Bibliometrics,</i> <i>Physical Literacy,</i> <i>Indonesia,</i> <i>VOSviewer</i></p>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sports sponsorship has become an increasingly important tool in the modern marketing landscape. It enables companies to build brand awareness, enhance visibility, showcase products and services, and drive sales. Through sports sponsorship, businesses can reach vast audiences that align with their strategic objectives while fostering positive relationships with key stakeholders such as employees, customers, investors, media, politicians, and the broader community. Sponsorship not only taps into the emotional engagement that sports evoke but also offers a valuable platform for brands to connect with consumers on a deeper level.

With the advent of globalisation and the rise of new media, sports can now reach more people than ever, making sports sponsorship one of the most widely utilised marketing strategies today. Global sporting events attract billions of viewers worldwide and provide companies with unparalleled opportunities to engage with international audiences through sponsorship agreements. These sponsorships offer effective vehicles for mass marketing by leveraging media coverage, ultimately driving consumer behaviour and increasing sales. Scholars such as Otker (1988) and Meenaghan (1991) argue that the rapid expansion of sponsorship as a marketing tool is driven by two key factors. First, event organisers have become increasingly aware of the commercial potential of their events, leading to more sponsorship opportunities. Second, there is growing disillusionment with traditional mass media advertising, which is becoming less effective amidst a cluttered media landscape. Sports sponsorship, by contrast, offers a more direct and engaging means of communication, capturing consumer attention and fostering positive emotional connections with brands.

Sports sponsorship has recently evolved beyond traditional tactics such as logo placement on jerseys or stadium signage. As Radicchi (2014) observes, sponsorship has become more sophisticated and multifaceted, encompassing a range of innovative strategies aimed at deeper consumer engagement. The existing body of sponsorship literature extensively examines sponsorship objectives (Lough and Irwin, 2001; Greenhalgh and Greenwell, 2013; Schönberner et al., 2020), image transfer and fit (Gwinner et al., 2009; Boronczyk and Breuer, 2019; Han et al., 2013), and critical success factors (Ivens et al., 2020; Seguin et al., 2005; Sung et al., 2020). Furthermore, research on challenges in sponsorship management (Babiak and Thibault, 2009; Meenaghan et al., 2013) has highlighted the complexities of sponsorship in the modern sports industry.

Despite this extensive scholarship, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning sports sponsorship in emerging nations. Most studies have focused on developed markets, leaving critical questions unanswered regarding how sports sponsorship operates in structurally different contexts. This study specifically focuses on the context of Türkiye, an emerging sports market with a unique economic and cultural landscape (Tinaz et al., 2014). As a country straddles Europe and Asia, Türkiye presents an interesting case for examining sports sponsorship, especially given its rapid economic development, burgeoning consumer base, and still-evolving sports culture. Turkish sports, particularly football, basketball, and volleyball, have seen increasing commercialisation in recent years, attracting sponsorship deals from both local and international companies. However, as an emerging market, Türkiye also faces challenges such as economic volatility and underdeveloped sponsorship infrastructures compared to more mature markets. This study aims to analyse sports sponsorship within this complex environment, focusing on the perspectives of sponsors, sponsees, and agencies operating in Türkiye. Doing so provides valuable insights into the dynamics of sponsorship management in an emerging nation. It aims to fill that gap by examining the management of sports sponsorships in emerging countries, considering perspectives from various stakeholders, including sponsors, sponsees, and agencies.

This research seeks to explore the following key questions, with a focus on emerging nation contexts:

- What are the key contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of sports sponsorship management, and how do these factors interact to shape outcomes in emerging nations?
- What causal relationships exist between specific success factors in sports sponsorship management and achieving desired outcomes for sponsors, sponsees, and other stakeholders?
- What are the primary challenges in sports sponsorship management within emerging markets, and what underlying factors contribute to the persistence or resolution of these challenges?

Additionally, this study aims to analyse the decision-making processes of sponsees in selecting sponsorship opportunities and to investigate the measurable impact of these sponsorships on both sponsors and sponsees in emerging markets.

## **An Overview of the Conceptual Foundations of Sport Sponsorship in Emerging Markets**

### *Management of Sponsorships and Engagement of Stakeholders*

Sponsoring sports involves forming strategic partnerships between sponsors, sports organisations, and other stakeholders, resulting in intricate networks collaborating to accomplish shared goals (Radicchi, 2014). Sponsorship management entails effectively navigating these relationships and ensuring alignment between the corporation's goals and the values communicated to sports audiences. There is a growing emphasis on collaboration, co-branding, and shared resources to enhance the impact of sponsorship investments (Cornwell and Kwon, 2019). As a result of this emphasis, sponsorship programs are becoming more sophisticated.

As stated by Meenaghan (1991), stakeholders of sports sponsorship can encompass a wide range of entities, including athletes and sports clubs, media organisations, sports governing bodies, equipment suppliers, and even local communities. To successfully manage these relationships, one must have a comprehensive understanding of the goals of each party involved. As an illustration, sports organisations might seek financial assistance and increase popularity. In contrast, sponsors might look for brand visibility, market penetration, and a positive association with sports values like dynamism, strength, and teamwork (Seguin, Teed, and O'Reilly, 2005). According to Quester et al. (1998), effective sponsorship management incorporates these objectives into a partnership framework that capitalises on the complementary strengths of all stakeholders involved.

Regarding shaping sponsorship outcomes, the interaction between stakeholders is paramount. According to Gwinner, Larson, and Swanson (2009), businesses with successful sponsorship portfolios tend to provide direct financial support and leverage assets such as technology, marketing capabilities, and distribution channels to generate synergies. This type of partnership is frequently made possible through establishing long-term collaborations, which contribute to developing long-lasting relationships between brands and sports organisations (Radicchi, 2014).

### *Contextual Factors in Sport Sponsorship*

Several contextual factors impact commercial sponsorship of sports, particularly in emerging markets. The socio-economic conditions, the political stability, the level of maturity observed in the sports market, and the established sporting infrastructure are all factors that fall under

this category. Emerging nations, for instance, frequently face challenges associated with limited infrastructure and smaller sports audiences compared to developed countries (Knott and Tinaz, 2022). These factors influence how sponsorship deals are structured and carried out.

In emerging countries, the cultural and political environment also plays a role in shaping the decisions regarding sponsorship. The governments of many emerging countries play a significant role in the promotion of sports, typically through state-sponsored programs or partnerships with multinational corporations. This involvement on the part of the state can bring about both opportunities and challenges. As an illustration, in certain countries, state-owned enterprises might be the ones to drive sponsorship deals as a component of more significant economic development initiatives (Radicchi, 2014).

In addition, sponsorship is impacted by the economic climate of the nation hosting the event. According to Cornwell and Kwon (2019), during economic expansion, businesses are more likely to invest in sports sponsorship as a component of their marketing strategy. This is because they view sports as a means of connecting with consumer bases that are becoming increasingly wealthy. On the other hand, when the economy is entering a recession, there is a possibility that there will be a reduction in the amount of money spent on sponsorships. This is especially true for smaller-scale sporting events, which have difficulty attracting the same level of investment as larger global events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup (Radicchi, 2014).

#### *Success Factors of Sport Sponsorship*

In sport sponsorship, several critically essential success factors have been identified. Effective brand fit, stakeholder engagement, and strategic alignment between the sponsor and the sports entity are frequently the focal points of these factors. According to Gwinner and Bennett (2008), one of the most critical factors determining whether or not a sponsorship is successful is the degree to which the values of the particular sport or athlete being sponsored are aligned with the sponsor's brand. According to Han et al. (2013), consumers are more likely to have a favourable perception of a sponsorship when there is a strong image fit between the sponsor and the sports entity. This, in turn, leads to increased brand equity and loyalty.

The ability of the sponsor to leverage the sponsorship across multiple channels, such as traditional media, social media, and experiential marketing, is another factor that contributes to the event's success. It is becoming increasingly important to emphasise "sponsorship-linked marketing," highlighting sponsors' need to develop integrated marketing campaigns beyond simple logo exposure. According to Cornwell and Kwon (2019), businesses can generate brand experiences that are more memorable and impactful when they align their sponsorship efforts with broader marketing strategies or initiatives.

Another factor that has emerged as a success factor is technology's role. Sponsors who incorporate cutting-edge technologies into their sponsorship programs, such as by engaging with social media or utilising advanced analytics, can measure the efficacy of their sponsorship with greater precision and adjust their strategies in real-time (Weeks et al., 2008). For instance, digital platforms make it possible for sponsors to collect comprehensive data on the level of fan engagement and to monitor how sponsorships influence the behaviour of consumers (Sung et al., 2020).

#### *Challenges in the Field of Sport Sponsorship*

Although it has the potential to result in favourable outcomes, sports sponsorship is not devoid of difficulties. Measuring the return on investment (ROI) is one of the most challenging aspects. The effects of sponsorship are frequently more diffuse and difficult to track (Meenaghan et al., 2013). This contrasts with the impact of traditional forms of advertising, which can be quantified through sales metrics or media impressions. According to Boronczyk and Breuer (2019), the success of a sponsorship can be contingent on several intangible factors, including the brand's perception, the consumers' loyalty, and the long-term association between the sponsor and the sports entity.

The complexity of managing relationships with multiple stakeholders is another challenge that must be overcome. Sponsors must navigate a highly complex landscape to ensure that all parties involved in the sponsorship ecosystem are satisfied and that the sponsorship objectives are met (Meenaghan et al., 2013). This is because the sponsorship ecosystem comprises various actors, ranging from athletes and teams to broadcasters, regulatory bodies, and local governments. It is even more complicated in emerging markets, where political and economic instability can create additional risks for sponsors (Radicchi, 2014).

As sponsorship has become a more widespread marketing tool, the competition among sponsors has increased with its rising prevalence. As a result of this competition, sponsorship costs have increased, particularly for individuals and events that receive much media attention. This may create barriers to entry for smaller companies or those operating in emerging markets, limiting their ability to engage in sports sponsorship on the same scale as larger multinational corporations (Chadwick and Thwaites, 2005).

### *Sponsorship in Sports in Emerging Countries*

There are distinct opportunities and challenges present in sports sponsorship in emerging nations. It is common for these markets to have sports infrastructures that are not fully developed, which can restrict the reach of sponsorship campaigns and reduce their effectiveness. However, Companies interested in expanding their global presence can take advantage of the significant growth opportunities these markets offer (Kim and Heere, 2012).

Many emerging countries have governments that play a significant role in facilitating sports sponsorship. As part of broader strategies to promote national sports and economic development, sponsorship deals are frequently driven by state-owned enterprises or initiatives backed by the government (Radicchi, 2014). Compared to more mature markets, where private corporations tend to dominate the sponsorship landscape, this presents a unique and distinctive dynamic.

Additionally, emerging markets provide sponsors with the opportunity to tap into consumer bases that are expanding at a rapid rate. As the incomes of countries such as India, China, and Brazil continue to rise, a growing demand for sports entertainment creates a fertile ground for sponsorship deals. On the other hand, the sponsors need to be aware of the cultural and political nuances in these markets. According to Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2004), to achieve success in sports sponsorship, it is necessary not only to make a financial investment but also to have a profound understanding of the local consumer behaviour, regulatory environments, and market conditions.

## **2. METHODS**

### *Research Design and Approach*

This study takes a qualitative approach, investigating the dynamics of sports sponsorship management in the context of an emerging nation through semi-structured, in-depth

interviews. According to [Miles, Huberman, and Saldana \(2014\)](#), the qualitative method is especially useful for comprehending intricate social processes, such as how sponsorship management functions from the viewpoints of sponsors, sponsees, and agencies. The flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews allowed for the exploration of predetermined themes and the natural emergence of new themes throughout the interviews.

### *Interview Sample and Participants*

The sample for this study consisted of 18 individuals representing key stakeholders in the sports sponsorship ecosystem, including sponsors, sponsees, and agencies. Participants were purposefully selected based on their organisation roles and involvement in sponsorship decision-making processes. This selection strategy allowed the study to capture various perspectives across different types of organisations involved in sponsorship management. Participants were drawn from three stakeholder groups:

1. Sponsors: Senior representatives from major companies involved in sports sponsorship were interviewed, focusing on their strategies and challenges. These companies spanned a variety of sectors, including electronics, finance, beverage, telecommunications, and consumer goods.
2. Sponsees (Sports Organisations): Participants included key executives from leading professional sports teams and national federations. This group represented organisations across multiple sports, including basketball, football, and volleyball, each managing significant sponsorship portfolios.
3. Agencies: Key personnel from marketing, Sponsorship, and event management agencies shared their insights into facilitating sponsorship relationships. These agencies ranged from creative agencies to specialised sports marketing firms, offering services in sponsorship management, brand partnerships, and event coordination.

### *Data Collection*

Each interview lasted between 25 and 120 minutes and was done in 2022 over six months. Depending on the participants' preferences and availability, the interviews were conducted in-person, over the phone, or via online platforms like Skype. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim with the participants' permission.

An interview guide was created in order to guarantee the comprehensiveness of the data gathered. It was formulated by analysing extant literature and archival materials concerning sports sponsorship, sponsorship management, and the obstacles related to sponsorship in developing economies ([Radicchi, 2014](#); [Cornwell and Kwon, 2019](#)). New themes surfaced during the data collection process led to updates to this guide, allowing for flexibility and adaptation based on insights from interviews ([Miles et al., 2014](#)).

The interviews covered various subjects, such as decision-making procedures for sponsorships, strategies for managing sponsorships, obstacles encountered, and the unique dynamics of the sports sponsorship ecosystem in developing countries. Interviews continued until data saturation was achieved, which indicated the absence of any new themes ([Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006](#)).

### *Data Analysis*

After transcription, the information was entered into the qualitative data analysis program Maxqda 2020, which made it easier to code and arrange the interview material. An organised methodology was used for the data analysis, incorporating deductive and inductive coding

(Miles et al., 2014). The analysis process began with open coding, during which emergent themes were identified across the interviews. This stage involved the creation of broad descriptive codes that captured the key topics discussed by participants, such as sponsorship motivations, challenges in sponsorship management, and critical success factors. Following this initial coding phase, axial coding was conducted to examine the relationships between the codes identified during open coding. This stage allowed to uncover patterns and interactions among factors influencing sports sponsorship. Axial coding facilitated grouping the codes into more cohesive and meaningful categories. The final phase of the analysis involved selective coding. The researchers revisited the data during this stage to identify illustrative examples and insights aligned with the key themes identified in the earlier coding stages. This process allowed for integrating the theoretical framework with the empirical findings and highlighted specific instances where sponsorship success or failure could be explored in greater detail (Jones, 2015).

### *Limitations*

The study is based on a critical realist epistemology and a constructivist ontological paradigm, meaning the participants' unique contexts and social realities influenced the research's conclusions (Baert, 2005). As a result, the knowledge generated depends on the context and might not be broadly applicable outside the particular contexts under study.

The study focuses exclusively on Türkiye, an emerging nation, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. While Türkiye presents a unique case for examining sports sponsorship dynamics in an emerging market, the insights gained may not fully apply to countries with different economic, cultural, or regulatory environments. Although data saturation was reached within the sample, incorporating examples from a broader range of industries and smaller sports organisations could have provided additional depth to the analysis. Furthermore, some of the data were collected retrospectively, introducing the potential for recall bias as participants may frame their past actions and decisions to align with their current perspectives or justifications (Meenaghan, McLoughlin, and McCormack, 2013).

Ultimately, the interviews and documents utilised in the analysis are frequently sifted by the subjective viewpoints of the participants, who may be more likely to emphasise the advantages of their sponsorship involvement while downplaying the drawbacks. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the iterative coding process and source triangulation ensured that the results accurately reflect a complex and reliable examination of sports sponsorship management in the context of emerging markets.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

The findings from the interviews are categorised into three core sections: the perspectives of agencies, sponsors, and sponsees within the sports sponsorship ecosystem. This approach allows for a nuanced analysis of each stakeholder group's varying roles and motivations while addressing the specific dynamics at play in Türkiye as an emerging market. The analysis delves into the complex relationships between these stakeholders, highlighting how agencies act as critical intermediaries who manage the often-divergent goals of sponsors and sports organisations. Agencies also emphasise the need for creativity and customisation in sponsorship activations to remain competitive and relevant in a rapidly evolving market. Additionally, they navigate unique challenges, such as economic instability and regulatory constraints, that are characteristic of emerging markets like Türkiye.

From the sponsors' perspective, sports sponsorship is viewed as a strategic investment that requires measurable returns, particularly regarding brand visibility, consumer engagement, and alignment with brand values. Sponsors in Türkiye emphasise the importance of long-term relationships with sports organisations, recognising the need for flexibility and adaptability in an environment marked by economic volatility and shifting consumer behaviours.

On the other hand, sponsees—comprising sports organisations and federations—rely heavily on sponsorship as a crucial source of financial support. They prioritise partnerships that offer financial stability and alignment with their organisational values and fan base. Sponsees also recognise the importance of sponsorships beyond traditional models, seeking activations that engage fans meaningfully and foster long-term brand loyalty. Ultimately, these findings reveal both the challenges and the significant potential for growth in Türkiye's sports sponsorship landscape, providing insights into the strategies used to navigate this emerging market.

### *The Perspectives of Agencies in Sports Sponsorship*

#### 1. Strategic Intermediaries

Agencies play a pivotal role as strategic intermediaries in the sports sponsorship landscape, effectively bridging the gap between sponsors and sports organisations. Their involvement goes beyond simply facilitating transactions; they work to align the objectives of both parties to create mutually beneficial partnerships. One agency representative emphasised:

"Our job is to ensure that the sponsor's message integrates seamlessly with the sports entity's brand. It's not just about exposure; it's about creating a deeper connection that resonates with the fans and the community."

Agencies must also navigate the distinct needs and expectations of both sides. For sponsors, the focus is often on brand visibility, audience engagement, and return on investment, while sports organisations prioritise maintaining their brand integrity and fulfilling contractual obligations. Agencies manage this balance by acting as mediators who align both parties' goals throughout the sponsorship lifecycle. One participant shared:

"Sponsors want their brand to be everywhere, but we have to make sure it doesn't compromise the integrity of the sports organisation's identity. It's about finding that sweet spot where both parties win."

#### 2. Creativity and Customisation

Creativity and customisation are critical to the agency's approach to ensuring that each sponsorship stands out. Agencies reported that cookie-cutter sponsorship deals are no longer sufficient to capture the attention of modern consumers, particularly in saturated markets. One agency executive explained:

"We can't rely on the same old formula anymore. Every brand is different, and so is every sports entity. Our goal is to craft sponsorship activations that feel unique, innovative, and genuinely impactful for the audience."

This often involves designing highly personalised activations that align with the sponsor's brand ethos while enhancing the fan experience. Agencies strive to push the boundaries of traditional sponsorship models by incorporating creative elements such as storytelling, community engagement, and digital content. Another participant noted,



"It's about crafting memorable experiences, whether through on-site activations, digital content, or even engaging fans on social media. Every element must reflect both the sponsor and the sports entity authentically."

This approach not only boosts visibility but also enhances the emotional connection between the brand and the fans, ultimately driving brand loyalty and retention.

### 3. Data-Driven Decision Making

The use of data and analytics has transformed how agencies approach sponsorship strategy. Data-driven insights now play a crucial role in helping agencies and sponsors measure the effectiveness of sponsorship campaigns and adjust their strategies to optimise impact. One participant noted:

"We've moved far beyond simply counting impressions. Now, we're looking at fan engagement metrics, social media analytics, and behavioural data to see how audiences interact with the sponsorship. It allows us to make informed decisions and tweak campaigns in real-time."

Agencies increasingly rely on sophisticated tools to track audience demographics, media consumption habits, and digital engagement, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how sponsorship campaigns perform. These insights allow agencies to fine-tune sponsorship activations, ensuring they are both relevant and effective in reaching target audiences. A respondent elaborated:

"It's no longer enough to just be seen. We need to know how fans are engaging with the brand, how long they're engaging, and what they're saying about the Sponsorship online. This data helps us create more targeted, impactful campaigns."

Furthermore, agencies reported that integrating real-time data has made sponsorship more dynamic. By closely monitoring fan interactions, agencies can make immediate adjustments to enhance the effectiveness of activations. As one participant explained:

"Data allows us to be agile. If something isn't working, we can pivot quickly and optimise our strategy to ensure that the sponsor gets the best return on their investment."

### 4. Relationship Management

Effective relationship management emerged as a crucial function of agencies in the sponsorship ecosystem. The multifaceted nature of sponsorships, involving various stakeholders with differing goals, necessitates that agencies play an ongoing role in maintaining harmony between sponsors and sponsees. One agency professional remarked:

"We act as the glue that holds these relationships together. From the initial contract negotiations to the final execution, we're there to ensure that everything runs smoothly and both sides are satisfied."

Agencies also emphasised the importance of setting clear expectations early in the partnership. Misaligned expectations were noted as a common cause of friction between sponsors and sports organisations, but agencies work to mitigate these issues by clearly defining objectives and success metrics from the outset. As one participant shared:

"Transparency is key. We ensure everyone is on the same page about what the sponsorship entails, the goals, and how success will be measured. This helps prevent misunderstandings down the road."

In addition to managing the day-to-day logistics of sponsorship agreements, agencies often mediate disputes that arise during the partnership. Whether the issue involves contract fulfilment, branding conflicts, or the execution of sponsorship activations, agencies are tasked with finding solutions that keep both parties focused on their shared objectives. One respondent noted, "There are always challenges, especially in long-term partnerships. Our role is to find common ground and keep the relationship moving forward."

## 5. Adaptability

In the context of emerging markets such as Türkiye, adaptability is a crucial theme in how agencies operate. The rapid economic and cultural changes in these markets present opportunities and challenges for sports sponsorship. One participant remarked:

"Emerging markets are dynamic. The landscape is constantly shifting, so we need to be flexible and responsive to whatever comes our way—whether it's new regulations, changing consumer behaviours, or economic fluctuations."

The agencies operating in Türkiye reported having to tailor their approaches to meet the market's unique conditions, often facing barriers such as regulatory constraints, less mature sports infrastructure, and economic instability. Despite these challenges, the growing popularity of sports and the increasing interest from both local and international companies in sponsorship present significant opportunities. One respondent commented:

"Türkiye is still an emerging market in sponsorship, but there's immense potential here. The key is being able to navigate the complexities while seizing the opportunities."

Agencies have learned to leverage their local knowledge and connections to overcome these barriers. They work closely with local governments, sports organisations, and other stakeholders to implement sponsorships effectively. As one agency executive shared:

"It's all about building strong relationships on the ground. We know the landscape and stakeholders, which allows us to execute sponsorships more effectively in these markets."

## 6. Innovation in Sponsorship Activations

Finally, innovation in sponsorship activations was highlighted as a critical factor in maintaining relevance and engagement, particularly in a world increasingly dominated by digital media. Agencies reported that sponsors demand more innovative, tech-driven activations that offer immersive experiences for fans. One agency professional explained:

"We can't just stick a logo on a banner and call it a day. Fans expect more now—they want experiences, they want interaction, they want to feel like they are part of something."

This drive for innovation has led agencies to explore new ways to engage with audiences through digital platforms, social media, and influencer collaborations. For example, one respondent shared:

"We've been integrating augmented reality experiences into our sponsorship activations, giving fans the ability to interact with the brand in ways that were never possible before."

Agencies are also experimenting with live-streaming, gamification, and virtual fan events as a means of driving engagement and enhancing the fan experience. Innovation is particularly critical in emerging markets where digital engagement is proliferating, and fans are eager to engage with sports in new ways. One agency executive concluded:

"Digital is where the future of sponsorship is heading, especially in emerging markets like Türkiye. We're constantly looking for new ways to innovate and keep fans excited about the sponsorships we're involved in."

### *The Perspectives of Sponsors in Sports Sponsorship*

#### 1. Sponsorship as a Strategic Investment

Sponsors consistently emphasised that sports sponsorship is viewed not merely as a marketing expense but a strategic investment. Many sponsors expressed the importance of aligning their sponsorships with broader business goals, such as enhancing brand recognition, building loyalty, and increasing market share. One participant from a multinational company noted:

"We don't just look at sponsorship as a brand visibility tool; it's about long-term relationship building. We want to be seen as partners in the sports community, not just logos on the sidelines."

This strategic view also includes leveraging sponsorships to enter new markets and deepen engagement with specific consumer demographics. Another participant explained:

"Sponsorship allows us to connect with fans in ways that traditional advertising simply can't. It's emotional, it's real, and it's a way for us to show that we care about the same things our consumers do."

Sponsors consistently spoke of sports as a powerful platform for fostering a connection between the brand and its target audience.

#### 2. Emphasis on Return on Investment (ROI)

A key concern for sponsors is the ability to measure return on investment (ROI) effectively. Sponsors frequently highlighted the need for clear metrics and data that demonstrate the value they are deriving from their sponsorship deals. One sponsor stated:

"We have to justify every dollar we spend. Sponsorships are no different. We need to know how it impacts brand awareness, sales, and consumer engagement."

Sponsors are increasingly demanding that agencies and sports organisations provide tangible data to support the effectiveness of sponsorships. This shift toward accountability reflects a growing trend in the sponsorship industry, where sponsors seek more concrete evidence of the impact of their investments. As another participant explained,

"It's no longer enough to say, 'Look how many people saw our logo.' We need to see data on engagement, on brand lift, on actual sales generated by the sponsorship."

#### 3. Alignment with Brand Values

Another theme that emerged from the sponsors' perspective is the critical importance of alignment between the sponsor's brand values and the sports organisation or event being sponsored. Many sponsors emphasised that they are selective about their partnerships, ensuring that the values of the sports entity reflect their brand's ethos. One participant mentioned:

"We have a strict policy of only partnering with organisations that share our values. If the sport or team doesn't align with who we are as a company, it's not a good fit, no matter how big the audience might be."

This alignment is not only important for the brand image but also for creating authentic sponsorship activations that resonate with consumers. As one sponsor pointed out:

"Fans can tell when a sponsorship feels forced or inauthentic. We want to create partnerships that feel genuine and that make sense to our consumers."

Sponsors believe that when the brand values and the sports entity are well-aligned, the sponsorship has a far greater chance of success in creating meaningful connections with the audience.

#### 4. Flexibility and Adaptability

Sponsors also noted the need for flexibility and adaptability in their sponsorship agreements, particularly in the rapidly changing media landscape. As digital platforms and social media become increasingly important in reaching younger audiences, sponsors have expressed the need for sponsorships to be dynamic and adaptable to new technologies and trends. One participant shared:

"We're constantly looking for ways to integrate digital strategies into our sponsorships—whether that's through social media engagement, influencer partnerships, or digital content creation."

Sponsors want sponsorship deals that allow for flexibility in how their brand is activated across different channels. Traditional sponsorship models that focus solely on in-stadium signage or logo placement are becoming less attractive to sponsors who seek more integrated and interactive experiences for consumers. "We're not just looking for our logo on a jersey anymore. We want to create experiences—things that people will talk about and share online," one sponsor said, highlighting the shift towards more immersive and engaging sponsorship strategies.

#### 5. Challenges in Emerging Markets

In the context of emerging markets like Türkiye, sponsors reported facing unique challenges, such as navigating economic instability and less developed sports infrastructures. However, sponsors also recognised the immense potential these markets offer. One sponsor remarked:

"Emerging markets can be unpredictable, but they're also where the growth is happening. The key is to be patient and adaptable to the local environment."

Sponsors see emerging markets as opportunities for expanding their global footprint, especially as the popularity of sports grows in these regions. However, challenges such as fluctuating exchange rates, varying levels of sports governance, and differing consumer behaviours require sponsors to adopt a more nuanced approach. "You have to be willing to adjust your strategy to fit the local market. What works in Europe or the U.S. won't necessarily

work here, and that's something we've learned through experience," explained one participant.

Despite these challenges, sponsors are optimistic about the potential for long-term growth in emerging markets, particularly as infrastructure improves and consumer engagement with sports deepens. Sponsors are increasingly looking to agencies and local partners for guidance on how to navigate these complex environments effectively.

## 6. Long-Term Relationships Over Short-Term Gains

Many sponsors expressed a preference for building long-term relationships with sports organisations, rather than focusing solely on short-term gains. These sponsors view sponsorships as long-term partnerships that should evolve over time, offering mutual benefits to both the sponsor and the sports entity. One participant shared:

"We're not interested in one-off deals. We want to build something that lasts—something that fans can grow to expect and appreciate over time."

Long-term sponsorships were seen as more effective in creating sustained brand awareness and loyalty, compared to short-term activations that may provide an initial burst of exposure but lack lasting impact. "When we commit to a sponsorship, we're in it for the long haul. We want to see that partnership grow and evolve, and we want fans to associate our brand with the team or event over time," said another sponsor. This long-term perspective was seen as crucial for building deeper relationships with both the sports organisation and its fanbase.

### *The Perspectives of Sponsees in Sports Sponsorship*

#### 1. Financial Stability and Support

One of the primary reasons cited by sponsees for engaging in sponsorship agreements is the financial stability and support that sponsorships provide. Many sponsees highlighted the importance of sponsorship revenue in sustaining their operations, particularly in sports where traditional revenue streams such as ticket sales or merchandise may be insufficient. As one sponsee remarked:

"Sponsorship is critical for us. It allows us to keep investing in talent, infrastructure, and community programs. Without it, we'd be significantly more limited in what we can achieve."

This sentiment was echoed across various sports organisations, especially in emerging markets where Sponsorship often constitutes a large portion of their overall funding. Sponsees rely heavily on these partnerships to cover operational costs, enhance training facilities, and maintain their competitiveness on the field or court.

#### 2. Long-Term Partnerships Over Short-Term Gains

Sponsees also expressed a strong preference for long-term sponsorship deals over short-term engagements. Long-term partnerships were seen as more beneficial, providing stability and allowing both the sports organisation and the sponsor to build a deeper, more meaningful relationship. One sponsee shared:

"We're not just looking for a one-off deal. We want to work with sponsors who are committed to us over the long haul, so we can build something substantial together."

Long-term agreements are viewed as mutually beneficial because they allow both parties to evolve their strategies, learn from each other, and refine their approach to ensure success. A sponsee emphasised:

"A long-term sponsor gives us the confidence to plan ahead. We can set goals, work towards them, and develop programs that will benefit both the team and the sponsor over time."

This long-term vision is seen as essential for maintaining a stable and successful sponsorship relationship.

### 3. Alignment with Brand Values and Identity

Just as sponsors are selective about aligning with sports organisations that reflect their values, sponsees similarly seek partnerships with brands that match their identity and ethos. Many sponsees expressed the importance of partnering with companies that resonate with their fan base and enhance the image of the team or sport. One sponsee explained:

"The brand has to fit with who we are and what we represent. Our fans care about that, and so do we."

Sponsees also noted that aligning with the right brand can enhance their reputation and attract more fans or participants. As another sponsee mentioned:

"When we partner with a brand that shares our values, it elevates us. It shows that we're more than just a sports team—we're an organisation with a clear vision and purpose."

The right sponsorships help reinforce the team's image, fostering deeper connections with their supporters and enhancing their marketability.

### 4. Activation and Engagement with Fans

Sponsees highlighted the importance of sponsorship activations that go beyond traditional advertising. They are increasingly looking for sponsors who are willing to engage with fans in meaningful and interactive ways. One sponsee noted:

"It's not just about putting a logo on a jersey anymore. We want sponsors who are going to come in and actually engage with our fans—whether that's through events, social media campaigns, or community outreach."

Sponsors that take a more active role in fan engagement are seen as more valuable partners. These activations create memorable experiences for fans and strengthen the bond between the sports organisation and its audience. Another sponsee stated:

"The best sponsorships are the ones that feel like they're part of the fan experience. They add something special to the game day atmosphere, and that's what keeps fans coming back."

Sponsees recognise that fan engagement is a key factor in the success of their partnerships, and they prioritise sponsors who are willing to invest in creative and meaningful activations.

### 5. Challenges in Emerging Markets

In the context of emerging markets like Türkiye, sponsees face unique challenges in securing and maintaining sponsorships. One of the primary issues mentioned was the economic instability that can affect the willingness of companies to commit to sponsorship deals. A sponsee commented:

"Emerging markets are tough. Sponsors are sometimes hesitant to commit because the economy can be unpredictable. We have to work harder to show them the value of investing in us."

Sponsees also pointed out that there is often less corporate interest in sports sponsorship in emerging markets compared to more developed regions, which can make it difficult to secure long-term partnerships. As one sponsee explained:

"In markets like Türkiye, there's a lot of potential, but also risks. We're trying to convince companies that investing in sports here is worth it, but it's a challenging process."

Despite these challenges, sponsees remain optimistic about the future of sports sponsorship in emerging markets. Many believe that as sports continue to grow in popularity, and as infrastructure improves, more companies will recognise the opportunities presented by sponsorship deals. "The market is evolving, and we're confident that sponsors will come on board as they see the growth potential here," one sponsee concluded.

## 6. Measuring Success Beyond Exposure

Finally, sponsees expressed a desire to measure the success of their sponsorships beyond simple brand exposure. Many sponsees mentioned the need to evaluate the effectiveness of sponsorships based on their impact on the organisation and its fans, not just on the visibility of the sponsor's logo. One participant explained:

"It's not just about how many times people see the sponsor's logo. It's about how the Sponsorship benefits our team and our community—whether that's through funding, fan engagement, or community outreach."

Sponsees are increasingly looking for ways to demonstrate the broader value of sponsorships, such as their contributions to the community, their impact on fan loyalty, and their role in supporting the organisation's long-term growth. As one sponsee put it:

"We want to be able to show that the sponsorship is making a real difference, not just in terms of brand awareness but in how it helps us grow and succeed as an organisation."

This shift reflects a broader trend towards evaluating sponsorships based on their holistic impact, rather than just their advertising value.

## Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate the complex and multifaceted nature of sports sponsorship management in Türkiye, an emerging market with its own unique challenges and opportunities. This section addresses the special characteristics of sports sponsorship in Türkiye, where economic instability and governmental involvement are key factors shaping sponsorship outcomes.

### *Agencies as Strategic Intermediaries*

Globally, agencies play a crucial role as intermediaries, aligning the objectives of sponsors with those of sponsees. This is consistent with global literature, such as the work of [Cliffe and Motion \(2005\)](#), [Farrelly and Quester \(2005\)](#), [Khan et al. \(2013\)](#) which suggests that sponsoring is often thought of as a marketing alliance between two brands, aimed at delivering a cohesive message to the audience. Agencies in Türkiye face the added challenge of operating in a

volatile economic environment, which requires them to be more adaptable and flexible in crafting sponsorship deals that meet the needs of both sponsors and sponsees.

Cornwell and Kwon (2019) argue that there is a research surplus regarding audience responses to sponsorship-linked marketing but a shortage of studies that focus on the management of the sponsorship process. This gap in research is evident in Türkiye, where agencies must navigate a fragmented market with limited data on sponsorship effectiveness. The reliance on real-time data and innovative activation strategies, such as those highlighted by Chanavat et al. (2009, 2010), demonstrates that Turkish agencies are adopting global best practices but with additional constraints posed by the local market.

#### *Sponsors' Strategic Investments and Decision-Making*

Sponsors in Türkiye view sports sponsorship as a long-term strategic investment, echoing the findings of Cornwell and Kwon (2019) and Cunningham et al. (2009). Sponsorship is seen not only as a way to increase brand visibility but also as a method for fostering long-term relationships with consumers. However, unlike more developed markets, sponsors in Türkiye must carefully balance their investments due to the country's economic volatility. The concerns raised by Cornwell and Kwon (2019) regarding the overemphasis on audience responses, rather than the management of sponsorship processes, are reflected in Turkish sponsors' focus on immediate ROI rather than strategic, long-term outcomes.

This issue is further complicated by the fact that sponsorship decision-making in Türkiye often involves multiple individuals and external partners, as described by Schönberner et al., (2020). This aligns with global trends identified by O'Reilly and Madill (2012), who emphasise the importance of external partners in the sponsorship decision-making process. In Türkiye, the sponsorship ecosystem is highly collaborative, with decisions often influenced by the relationship between sponsors and the sports entities they support, as noted by Clark et al. (2002, 2009) and Long et al. (2004).

#### *Sponsees' Financial Reliance and Market-Specific Challenges*

In Türkiye, sports organisations (sponsees) are heavily reliant on sponsorship as a crucial source of funding, especially given the country's underdeveloped sports infrastructure. This finding is consistent with Papadimitriou et al. (2008), who emphasise that in emerging markets, sponsees often have fewer revenue streams and thus rely more heavily on sponsorship agreements. However, Turkish sponsees must also contend with political and economic instability, which can make it difficult to secure long-term sponsorship deals.

The role of government in driving sponsorship agreements in Türkiye is a unique aspect of the market that sets it apart from more developed regions. This involvement introduces a political dimension to Sponsorship that is less prevalent in more mature markets, where private corporations dominate the sponsorship landscape. This finding aligns with Cornwell and Kwon's (2019) observations that sponsorship decisions are shaped by the specific ecosystem within which they occur. For sponsees in Türkiye, the ecosystem is heavily influenced by government policies and economic conditions, which add an additional layer of complexity to sponsorship management.

#### *Contextual Factors and Sponsorship Management in Türkiye*

Several contextual factors shape the sponsorship landscape in Türkiye, including economic volatility, government involvement, and the growing importance of digital engagement. Economic instability requires both sponsors and sponsees to be adaptable, while government involvement introduces political risks that are not typically seen in more mature markets. This



echoes the findings of [Lee and Ross \(2012\)](#), who examined the impact of country-specific factors on sponsorship decision-making.

Additionally, digital engagement is becoming increasingly important in the Turkish market, as it helps sponsors and sponsees overcome the limitations posed by underdeveloped physical infrastructure. This trend is consistent with the global shift towards digital platforms as a key component of sponsorship-linked marketing, as highlighted by [Jensen and Cornwell \(2017\)](#) and [Cornwell \(2008\)](#). In Türkiye, digital platforms provide an avenue for sponsors to engage with younger, tech-savvy audiences, while also compensating for the limited reach of traditional media

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the broader understanding of sports sponsorship by examining the specific characteristics of sponsorship management in Türkiye, an emerging market with unique economic and political challenges. While many of the findings align with global trends, such as the strategic importance of sponsorship for brand building and the growing role of digital engagement, the Turkish market is distinguished by its reliance on government involvement and its need for flexibility in the face of economic volatility.

As Türkiye's sports market continues to develop, there is significant potential for sponsors and sports organisations to build stronger, more sustainable relationships. However, this will require both parties to adopt more sophisticated sponsorship management practices, as called for by [Cornwell and Kwon \(2019\)](#), who note the need for more research into the sponsorship process itself, rather than simply focusing on audience outcomes. Further research is also needed to explore the role of government in shaping sponsorship outcomes in emerging markets and to identify best practices for managing sponsorship in politically and economically unstable environments.

#### 5. AUTHOR'S NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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