



Building Brand Image Through Sports Sponsorship in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Sponsorship refers to a business relationship in which a company provides financial support, services, or resources to an individual, event, or organization. This relationship includes various rights, contractual obligations, and commercial advantages. In 2023, sports sponsorship represented 80% of sponsorship contracts globally and 87% of contracts within football, reaching a total value of \$40 billion. This research investigates the relationship between awareness of sports sponsorship and the perception of brand image among the Saudi sports audience of the Roshn League via the X platform. By 2024, the total population was 2.495 million. A purposive sampling method was employed, resulting in a sample size of 385 followers. A fully structured questionnaire was utilized, with all questionnaires distributed face-to-face at stadiums and cafes. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale to assess the levels of the independent variable (IV) and dependent variable (DV). The study found a strong positive relationship between awareness of sports sponsorship and the brand image of sponsors within the Saudi Roshan League. Furthermore, demographics did not significantly affect awareness of sports sponsorship. The study recommends continuing traditional sports sponsorship benefits, such as logo banners, jersey sponsorships, and sports facilities.

Keywords: Brand Image, Sports Sponsorship, Awareness, Sponsor Brand, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

The early 1990s was a significant period for commercial sponsorship, reflecting the rapid growth in market penetration and customer outreach over the last two decades. Before 1970, sponsorship contracts primarily involved donations and grants for sports and cultural activities, without any consideration for future returns and benefits (Gordon & Cheah, 2014). However, in 1980, the goals and expectations of sponsorship contracts began to take new forms of charities based on market situation (Al-Nsour et al., 2023). As a result, sponsorship moved from a minor activity into a large-scale industry (Walliser, 2003). During this period, there was also significant growth in the quality and quantity of research focused on sponsorship concepts, changing its nature from limited engagements to commercial rights and benefits (Meenaghan, 2002).

The modern concept of sponsorship emphasizes the relationship between sponsorship programs and consumers. This shift has transformed the traditional roles of sponsoring organizations (Xiao, Wei & Chen, 2024). Consequently, sponsorship is a multi-functional approach in the communication strategy. This concept mediates the relationship between the sponsor providing money, services, and resources to the sponsored

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individuals and events (Al-Nsour, 2022). This relationship also includes the commercial rights and benefits for the sponsor company (Al-Nsour, 2020). Sponsorship promotes the interests and attributes of a brand through events, organizations, charities, and social missions within the community (Farrelly et al., 2006).

Sponsorship has evolved into a communication that involves financial investments and is distinctive from other marketing communication tools. It has become a professional approach that relies on complex and collaborative processes among buyers, consultants, recipients, and sellers (Gordon et al., 2015). Sponsorship highlights specific benefits and functions within the community (Mason & Cochet al., 2006) and serves as an effective means to reach market segments (Al-Nsour, 2019). In addition, sponsorship ensures various strategic corporate goals (Weeks et al., 2008). As of 2023, sponsorship contracts accounted for 12% of business budgets (Statistics, 2024), resulting in an 81% increase in brand value, a 24% return on investment, and a 12% brand reach (www.doublethedonation.com; 2024).

Sponsorship is a highly effective tool in marketing communication and serves as an indirect method for promoting brands through sports events and activities to attract audiences and facilitate brand exposure (Biscaia et al., 2017). Sponsorship contracts are common across various community activities, including sports, entertainment, culture, and education (Al-Nsour, 2023). Sports represent the largest share of business spending in sponsorship agreements (Biscaia et al., 2017). In 2024, the sports sponsorship market reached \$114.4 billion, accounting for 50% to 70% of total sponsorship expenditures worldwide (Statista, 2024). In terms of financial returns, sports sponsorship generated approximately \$100 billion for sporting organizations in 2023. Regionally, Europe reported \$20.69 billion in sponsorship revenue for 2022, while North America generated \$10 billion during the same period (www.globenewswire.com, 2025). In Saudi Arabia, sponsorship revenues for clubs in the Saudi Roshan League reached one billion SAR in 2024 (<https://www.aleqt.com/2024/09/17>). This growth has been driven by increasing government interest in the sports sector, diversification of income sources, and economic growth through an increase in the quality and quantity of sporting events.

Additionally, there is a growing trend among Saudi youth to engage in sporting events, along with the rapid expansion of electronic and digital sports (www.globenewswire.com, 2025). Overall, there is an emphasis on accountability in marketing activities (Segovia & Kennett, 2021). Currently, sports sponsorship is receiving considerable academic attention, particularly in the fields of marketing and communication. There is a significant need to align sponsor brand images with major events and tournaments (Stavros et al., 2021)

Research Statement:

Applied research has examined the effectiveness of sports sponsorships and identified the success criteria in the market based on team audiences (Fortunato, 2017). This research has elaborated on differences in consumer behavior through brand awareness (Bühler & Nufer, 2010). Other studies have focused on shareholders (Deitz et al., 2013), perceived suitability, and audience engagement (Olson, 2011). Target markets turned into sponsoring brands that integrated with marketing communication elements, such as attributes, characteristics, benefits, and price information (Tomalieh, 2016). Sponsorship activities can effectively convey the image of the sponsoring brand in a way that stimulates purchases (Akwensivie, Narteh & Iden, 2014).

It is important to note that sports sponsors are entities seeking commercial returns from their sponsorship activities. Various motivations drive sports sponsorship. Some organizations have withdrawn support for harmful products like cigarettes and alcohol (Huynh et al., 2018; Meenaghan, 1991) due to low efficiency and the high costs of traditional advertising, along with increased leisure time (Kessenne, 2005). The growing global significance of sports positions sponsorship as a strategic tool for achieving a competitive edge in the market (Alhadad, 2019). This study recognizes the crucial role of sports sponsorship in fostering a positive image of the sponsoring brand within the local audience. We further assert that sports sponsorship influences the mental value of brands among sports audiences. As a result, these audiences exhibit

distinct behaviors that foster loyalty and create a psychological connection, leading to positive attitudes and behaviors toward their favorite teams. Our research investigates the relationship between sports sponsorship awareness and the perception of brand image from the perspective of the Saudi sports audience.

Research Significance:

- 1- This study is part of the evolution of sports sponsorship, which has transitioned from a small-scale activity into a significant global industry. Sports sponsorship has emerged as an important communication tool that allocates substantial financial resources, achieving various marketing and communication objectives simultaneously (Xiao, Wei & Chen, 2024; Dreisbach et al., 2021; Boronczyk & Breuer, 2021; Almainan et al., 2021).
- 2- Additionally, this study aligns with the Kingdom's strategic vision for 2030, which prioritizes sports sponsorship within investment plans. In 2024, the Public Investment Fund signed 320 sponsorship agreements across 21 different sports. Moreover, with the Kingdom's successful bid to host the World Cup in 2034, investment decisions in sports activities will likely be further facilitated.
- 3- The current study addresses a topic that sets it apart from previous research. As football continues to thrive in the Kingdom, numerous companies are eager to sponsor local sports clubs, supported by robust government backing for such activities. This context highlights the necessity of exploring the significance of sports sponsorship within the local community, among sports decision-makers, and for potential sponsors. A thorough review of a substantial number of previous studies in international sports environments and developed countries helped establish the practical research gap. This review informed the research question, which focuses on how sports sponsorship influences the brand image of sponsors within the Saudi environment. The importance of this study is underscored by the lack of prior research on this critical topic. The unique contribution of the current study lies in its findings, which underscore the role of sports sponsorship in enhancing the brand image of sponsor companies in the Kingdom. These insights enable sponsor companies to better understand the return on investment associated with sports sponsorship and connect it to the vital aspect of brand image

Literature Review:

Definition of Sports Sponsorship:

There is no consensus among academics and professionals regarding the definition of sponsorship. Theoretical definitions differ in terms of the relationship between the sponsor and the sponsorship, the methods and types of communication involved, and the marketing objectives (Walliser, 2003). Furthermore, the literature distinguishes between promotional activities and the purposes of sponsorship. For example, an award given by a company is considered part of sponsorship, but how should we interpret a TV advertisement or the company's name associated with the award event? (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2018). According to a broad definition of sponsorship, the examples above fit within the concept, while the first part of the definition is the most commonly referenced. Abratt, Clayton, and Pitt (1987) identified five methods of sponsorship: sponsorship of sports in general, sponsorship of a specific sport, sponsorship of a sports competition, sponsorship of a team, and sponsorship of an individual (Varea—Calero et al., 2025).

Sponsorship represents a business relationship in which a company provides funds, services, or resources to an individual, event, or organization. This relationship includes various rights, contractual obligations, and commercial benefits (Sleight, 1989). Brooks (1991) noted that sports sponsorship involves companies purchasing sports rights, which may include cash, products, services, logos, brand imagery, and communication efforts aimed at the target market. McCarville and Copeland (1994) added that sports sponsorship is a reciprocal process between businesses and sports organizations, providing both paid re-

sources (cash, equipment, and facilities) and free resources (employees, technology, services, and ideas) to capitalize on opportunities at sporting events (Al-Nsour, 2022). Erdogan and Kitchen (1998) described sponsorship as a strategy that promotes a company's interests and brand by connecting them with an event, organization, or charitable cause. Furthermore, Huang Shuru (1999) emphasized that sports sponsorship is built on an exchange of interests, wherein sponsoring companies provide funds and products to sports teams in return for access to their audiences. This process enhances the image of the sponsoring company and improves sales metrics (Madushani & Gunawardane, 2020).

Sports sponsorship is recognized as a way to enhance a brand's image, improve the reputation of a business and its products, and create more marketing opportunities (Biscaia et al., 2017). It involves cash or in-kind contributions made for physical assets such as events, stadiums, and sporting activities. Moreover, sponsorship is a strategic approach that companies adopt toward the physical assets of a project to meet their objectives (Bühler & Nufer, 2010). As a marketing tool, sports sponsorship promotes social participation and demonstrates good corporate citizenship. At the market level, it raises awareness and encourages consumers to purchase the sponsor's products (Fullerton, 2007). This modern marketing strategy involves one party providing financial support to another to achieve various current and future commercial or social benefits and goals (Chengshi, 2007). In 2017, the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) defined sponsorship as a cash or in-kind fee from a sponsoring company directed toward sports, arts, or entertainment to leverage commercial potential in those markets. The arrangement typically features an exchange of fees and rights between the sponsor and the sponsorship recipient to fulfill several commercial objectives.

Ultimately, sports sponsorship is viewed as a product of the evolving landscape of sports and commercial activities. While researchers may have differing definitions of sponsorship, it fundamentally represents a type of commercial agreement between the sponsoring company and the sports organizations (Alhadad, 2018). In 2020, lyad Al-Nsour, the author of this article, proposed a comprehensive definition, stating that sponsorship encompasses cash, in-kind, or logistical payments provided by a sponsoring company to a team or a comprehensive sports activity within the country. These payments are directed toward activities and events that fall outside the core function of the sponsor. Through this mutual relationship, significant commercial benefits can be gained for the sponsoring company from the payments made to the sponsored entity.

The Actual Situation of Sports Sponsorship:

Sports sponsorship accounted for 80% of sponsorship contracts worldwide and 87% of contracts in football, totaling \$40 billion in 2023. The European continent holds the largest share of sports sponsorship contracts, representing 62% of the global market (Statista, 2024). There are various forms of sports sponsorship, including team uniforms, accessories, sports facilities, training centers, equipment, and event venues (Groot & Ferwerda, 2015). In 2023, 35% of European football teams' income was generated from sports sponsorship. The competitive global environment for sponsorship contracts revolves around five major international brands: Adidas, Coca-Cola, Nike, Puma, and Emirates. The football teams with the largest sponsorship contracts include Barcelona, Manchester United, and Real Madrid. For instance, the sponsorship deal between Manchester United and Chevrolet reached \$64 million annually, totaling \$559 million over nine years. Arsenal has a five-year sponsorship agreement valued at \$63.9 million. The English Football League enjoys the highest returns from sponsorship, generating 1.2 billion euros through 440 sponsorship agreements. In comparison, the German and Spanish leagues earned 734 million euros and 678 million euros, respectively, in 2018. Additionally, sports sponsorship revenues for the 2022 World Cup amounted to \$1.7 billion (www.statista.com, Different Years).

In Saudi Arabia, sports sponsorship contracts reached \$376 million in 2022. The Saudi authorities signed over 320 deals with international institutions across 21 sports. The diversity in these contracts is

influenced by the popularity and reputation of the sponsored sports, geographical coverage, and goals related to investment and tourism promotion. Sponsorship contracts in Saudi Arabia have enhanced financial visibility, exemplified by a \$30 billion holding company managing the Indian Cricket League. Following Saudi Arabia's successful bid for the 2034 FIFA World Cup, sports sponsorship has significantly increased. Riyadh Air has a sponsorship agreement with the Spanish club Atletico Madrid to manage the Metropolitan Stadium for nine years, with a deal valued at 300 million euros (Statista, 2024).

A contract was also signed between Atletico Madrid and Riyadh Air in August 2023, making Riyadh Air the team's new carrier and shirt sponsor for 40 million euros annually. Additionally, the Riyadh Season has a sponsorship agreement with La Liga for three seasons, worth 22 million euros annually. In 2024, Saudi Aramco entered into a four-year partnership with FIFA, amounting to \$100 million annually, to sponsor events for the sporting federation, including the 2026 World Cup for men and the 2027 World Cup for women. Saudi sports sponsorship contracts also include new agreements with the Confederation of North, Central America, and Caribbean Football (CONCACAF) through the Public Investment Fund and Riyadh Air, covering new sports such as tennis, golf, and boxing. The Entertainment Authority has invested in sponsorship contracts with the American Professional Fighters League (PFL) for \$100 million and in Formula 1 competitions (www.mos.gov.sa, 2025).

Sponsor Brand Awareness:

Awareness is the ability to recognize and recall a brand in various situations. It serves as a measure of how a brand is perceived in the minds of consumers (Keller, 1993). Effective awareness indicates that a brand is a priority for consumers when making purchasing decisions (Schultz et al. 2024). In terms of marketing communication, strong brand awareness is the first step toward successful communication campaigns, which ultimately leads to deeper customer engagement and conversion to the brand (Bergkvist & Skeiseid, 2024). Additionally, brand awareness is a core objective of branding and promoting products, shaping the brand image in the minds of consumers (Grohs et al., 2024).

In the realm of sports sponsorship, brands use sponsorship agreements to enhance awareness among their target markets regarding both the sponsored brand and the sponsor itself (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). These agreements are essential tools in communication strategies as they can achieve several strategic goals, such as improving brand image and influencing purchasing intentions (Seyfi & Polat, 2024). A lack of strong awareness of sponsorship can lead to ineffective communication outcomes and serve as a negative indicator of return on sponsorship (ROS) and sponsor performance (Meenaghan & O'Sullivan, 2013). Understanding the role of awareness in sports sponsorship is crucial, as it allows us to evaluate efficiency and its impact on emotional and behavioral responses (Madushani & Gunawardane, 2020).

Sports sponsorship is fundamentally linked to the goals of the brand. Brand equity plays a vital role, encompassing cognitive responses, such as awareness and brand image, as well as behavioral responses like purchasing, commitment, and buying behavior (Alhadad & Abood, 2018). Research indicates that sponsorship awareness precedes emotional responses, such as brand attitudes. The alignment between cognitive and emotional responses transfers positive feelings from the sports team to the sponsor (Hunt & Hunt, 2022). Individualistic consumers tend to respond positively to promotions that enhance their self-image, while participatory consumers are more responsive to group promotions and participatory events (Sarpong & Zungu, 2025). In corporate cultures, such as Saudi culture, there is an emphasis on group harmony and interdependence, which is reflected in the impact on sponsorship awareness. Sports audiences in these societies are likely to transmit positive emotions, group loyalty, and interdependence (Zong, 2023). Therefore, sponsorship awareness enhances fans' attitudes toward the brand and strengthens their bond with the preferred sporting entity (Biscaia et al., 2017).

Studies in Europe and the United States have demonstrated a significant impact of sports sponsorship on brand awareness and brand image. In South Africa, sports sponsorship is crucial for building brand awareness (Maanda et al., 2020). Furthermore, sponsorship awareness positively affects consumers' intentions and purchasing behavior (Ashlee et al., 2020). This indicates that awareness is the initial stage in the audience response chain, influencing both intentions and actual purchases (Koronios et al., 2021). Additional studies have explored various factors affecting sports sponsorship, such as team affiliation, sports participation, and consumer beliefs, all of which significantly impact awareness and attitudes toward sponsors (Koronios et al., 2021). In 2017, research results suggested that sports sponsorship strongly influences cognitive aspects, primarily through brand awareness and brand equity, while the emotional aspect (brand image) and loyalty (behavioral aspect) were deemed less important (Shoaib & Sayani, 2017). Other studies have confirmed that the effectiveness of sponsorship is enhanced by brand experience in marathon sports, indicating that participation boosts brand awareness and recall for the sponsoring brand (Madushani & Gunawardane, 2020).

The Relationship between Sports Sponsorship and Sponsor Brand Image:

Image refers to consumers' perceptions and impressions of a brand (Guliyev, 2023). It encompasses feelings, attitudes, and beliefs (Patoding & Muzammil, 2023). Brand image consists of all factors that compose a brand's visual identity, such as logos, colors, and packaging, as well as messaging elements including advertising, brand stories, product quality, customer service, and reputation (Jin et al., 2019). Foroudi (2019) posits that a strong brand image correlates positively with attributes such as trustworthiness, reliability, quality, innovation, and differentiation from competitors, all of which contribute to brand equity (Kegoro & Justus, 2020). Additionally, Jin et al. (2019) state that brand image affects consumer behavior, purchasing decisions, and brand loyalty.

Companies invest in strategies to enhance their brand image through marketing, product innovation, customer engagement, and social responsibility (Boronczyk & Breuer, 2021). Chandramohan (2024) concludes that brand image plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences, subsequently influencing their attitudes and behaviors towards the brand, which is vital for market success. A positive brand image serves as an effective tool in sponsorship strategies, as it can influence consumer perceptions and purchase intentions (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Furthermore, the relationship between a sponsor and an event can reinforce consumers' perceptions of the brand and boost purchase intentions (Huettermann et al., 2020; Cho, 2016). Investing in sponsorship activities that resonate with the target audience can significantly affect consumer behavior and contribute to revenue growth. Brown and Dacin (1997) have shown that sports sponsorship activities can positively impact brand image, partially because advocates of social responsibility enhance the reputation and evaluation of sponsors (Habitzeuter & Koenigstorfer, 2021). Additionally, such activities create opportunities for connection and interaction with stakeholders and lead to increased media coverage of the events (Almaiman et al., 2024).

Research indicates that sports sponsorship has a meaningful impact on brand image, awareness, and loyalty, in addition to generating short-term sales (Shi et al., 2024). The significance of sports sponsorship has grown, particularly when combined with other marketing communication strategies (Jin et al., 2019). Brand image encompasses a set of attributes, characteristics, benefits, pricing, technical information, and packaging (Keller, 1993). Sponsorship can effectively convey the sponsoring brand's image and motivate consumers to purchase that brand (Keller, 1993). Studies confirm the effects of sports sponsorship on audience engagement during events like the 2021 World Cup in South Africa, which created awareness and improved recall for lesser-known brands (Almaiman et al., 2024). However, some well-known brands, such as Emirates Airlines, have struggled from a marketing perspective during such events (Coelho et al., 2019). A strong brand image fosters engagement opportunities with potential customers and other audiences, enhancing overall perception (Yu & Tan, 2017).

At the sports sponsorship level, sponsorship acts as a communication tool that conveys specific information about the sponsoring brand and its products (Ecker et al., 2023). Consumers use this information to build their understanding and value of the brand, thereby strengthening the sponsor's identity (Cornwell, 2020). Logos and other branding elements, previously seen in the sponsor's identity, can later be leveraged (Segovia & Kennett, 2022). The brand image also includes font styles of the brand name and the visual presentation of the image and text (Jinyoung Yoo et al., 2023). Brand image serves as a measure of the success of sports sponsorship efforts through engagement, promotion, and brand dissemination, fostering relationships, encouraging purchases, and enhancing brand value (Yin et al., 2024; Mahajan et al., 2023; Wakefield et al., 2020). Research has shown that the combination of verbal and visual elements in sports sponsorship advertisements influences brand awareness and consumer engagement (Cascio Rizzo et al., 2024; Deep & Adrija, 2023; Pezzuti & Leonhardt, 2023; Li et al., 2022; Deng et al., 2021; Moran et al., 2020; Labrecque et al., 2020; Melovic et al., 2019; Henderson et al., 2019). Based on the above, the main hypothesis can be derived as follows:

H0₁: Sports Sponsorship is Expected to Positively Impact Brand Image in Saudi Arabia.

Research Methodology:

- 1- **Research Population & Sample:** The study population consists of all followers of the Roshn League on the X platform. According to information, the total Saudi attendance for the 2024–2025 season was 2.495 million. Purposive sampling was utilized to collect the data from the research population. Calculations showed that a recommended sample size is 385 (Malhotra et al., 2020). All distributed questionnaires were returned, achieving a 100% response rate. The unit of analysis is the Saudi individuals who attend and follow Roshn League matches via the X platform.
- 2- **Research Tool & Data Collection Methods:** The researcher developed a questionnaire using Google Drive. All questionnaires were distributed face-to-face at stadiums and cafes. The research tool was informed by relevant literature, and the themes of the initial questionnaire were evaluated by a group of academics and professionals to ensure external validity and to assess whether it meets the research objectives. The final version of the questionnaire was electronically distributed to respondents as stated earlier and was also handed out face-to-face at select venues. It comprised only closed-ended questions.
- 3- **Measurement:** The study employed a five-point Likert scale to measure the latent variables of awareness of sports sponsorship and sponsor brand image. Response levels ranged from 1 to 5 to reflect the degree of agreement with the items presented. A value of 5 indicates "very high," 4 indicates "high," 3 represents "moderate," 2 stands for "low," and 1 signifies "very low." Accordingly, the relative scale determines response levels as follows: (1) 5 – 4.2 is considered "very high," (2) below 4.2 – 3.6 is rated as "high level," (3) below 3.6 – 2.4 is viewed as "moderate level," (4) below 2.4 – 1.6 is classified as "weak level," and (5) below 1.6 is referred to as "very weak level."
- 4- **Data Analysis:** Descriptive analysis tools such as arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and relative frequencies were used to evaluate the level of awareness of sports sponsorship and the perception of sponsor brand image. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed using the PLS Smart technique. The P-value was used to indicate the directional relationship between the variables. The standard Beta determined the strength and direction of this relationship. The impact factor (f^2) and the coefficient of determination (R^2) measured the strength and explanatory power of the independent variable (IV) on the dependent variable (DV). The Q^2 value assessed the predictive ability of the study variables. Finally, the Goodness of Fit (GoF) evaluated the performance of the regression model.

5- File of Respondents:

a- Independent variable:

The independent variable, "awareness of sports care", consists of six items: four high-level items and two medium-level items. The data reveals an arithmetic mean of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 1.29. This indicates that awareness of sports sponsorship in the Kingdom is perceived as high by 54.2% of the Saudi sports audience on the X platform.

b- Dependent Variable:

The dependent variable, "sponsor brand image", also consists of six items. Among these, five items received medium responses, while one item received a high score. The arithmetic mean is 3.13, with a standard deviation of 1.33. According to 34% of the Saudi sports audience on the X platform, the sponsor's brand image is considered moderate

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Item	Responses %					S. D	Mean	Application Degree
	VH	H	M	L	VL			
Aware1	45	17.1	27.1	4.3	6.4	1.21324	3.9000	High
Aware2	36.4	23.6	19.3	13.6	7.1	1.28682	3.6857	High
Aware3	32.9	19.3	25.7	15	7.1	1.28226	3.5571	High
Aware4	27.1	20	25	16.4	11.4	1.34070	3.3500	Moderated
Aware5	22.9	20	24.3	20	12.9	1.34218	3.2000	Moderated
Aware6	34.3	26.4	19.3	12.3	7.9	1.27760	3.6714	High
Sponsorship Awareness (Perception)	33.1	21.1	23.45	13.6	8.8	1.29	3.56	High
Image1	17.9	10	17.9	27.1	27.1	1.43478	2.6429	Moderated
Image2	22.1	22.9	26.4	15	13.6	1.32559	3.2500	Moderated
Image3	16.4	22.9	21.4	22.1	17.1	1.34376	2.9929	Moderated
Image4	14.3	35.7	25	10.7	14.3	1.24730	3.2500	Moderated
Image5	20	25	27.1	13.6	14.3	1.31041	3.2286	Moderated
Image6	26.4	25	23.6	13.6	11.4	1.31939	3.4143	High
Brand Image	19.52	23.58	23.57	17.017	16.3	1.33	3.13	Moderated

Validity and Reliability:

- Discriminant Validity:** This measures the level of overlap and correlation between different constructs (Hair et al., 2016). The cross-loading test indicates that the item value in the latent variable is greater than those in other variables (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). Table 2 shows that the load distribution values for each item in the latent variable are distinct and higher than those of the other variables in the matrix. This means that these items are unique and occupy a specific position within the construct.
- Convergent Validity:** This refers to the degree of agreement among several items measuring the same concept (Ringle et al., 2024). It consists of four subtests:
 - Individual Item Validity:** This assesses the consistency among several items within the same phenomenon. Each item should be related to the other items, making up the construct. The accepted statistical threshold is a value greater than 0.7. Table 2 shows that all items meet this statistical criterion.
 - Composite Alpha:** The accepted value for the latent variables (independent variable and dependent variable) must be greater than 0.7. Table 2 demonstrates that the latent variables adhere to this requirement (Hair et al., 2016).
 - Average Variance Extracted (AVE):** The minimum acceptable value is 0.5. Table 2 confirms that the test values for the latent variables exceed 0.5, making them statistically valid (Ringle et al., 2024).
 - Reliability and Validity of rho_A:** If rho_A is greater than 0.7, the construct is considered reliable and valid (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2: Results of Cross Loading, CR, AVE, CR & VIF

Construct	Items	Cross Loading	CR	AVE	Rho_A
Brand Awareness (Perception)	Aware1	0.822	0.933	0.933	0.924
	Aware2	0.864			
	Aware3	0.846			
	Aware4	0.845			
	Aware5	0.836			
	Aware6	0.800			
Brand Image	Image1	0.770	0.927	0.936	0.917
	Image2	0.867			
	Image3	0.896			
	Image4	0.860			
	Image5	0.897			
	Image6	0.756			

Research Outcomes and Discussion

$H0_1$: Sports Sponsorship is Expected to Positively Impact Brand Image in Saudi Arabia.

Table 3: Direct Effect of Path Analysis

H	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Dev.	T-Value	P-Value	f ²	Decision	R ²	Q ²
H ₁₃	Sport Sponsorship → Sponsoring brand Image	0.625	0.064	9.487	0.000	0.598	High Positive Effect	0.368	0.255

Significant at $P_0^* < 0.01$. Significant at $P_0^{**} < 0.05$.

A- Path Analysis

The findings of the path analysis indicate a direct influence of sports sponsorship awareness on the sponsoring brand image, as perceived by the Saudi sports audience. Table 3 shows that the significance value of the correlation between the variables is below the acceptable margin of error (0.05). A strong positive correlation of 0.625 has been established between sports sponsorship awareness and the sponsoring brand image, reflecting the perspective of the Saudi sports audience. The impact factor (f^2) measures the strength of this influence (Hair et al., 2020). In this study, we evaluate how sports sponsorship awareness affects the image of the sponsoring brand from the viewpoint of the Saudi sports audience. According to statistical guidelines, an (f^2) value greater than 0.35 indicates a high effect, a value between 0.15 and 0.35 indicates a moderate effect, a value below 0.15 indicates a small effect, and a value less than 0.02 indicates no effect. Table 3 confirms a high and positive statistical effect of sports sponsorship awareness on the brand image from the perspective of the Saudi sports public. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) measures the strength of the linear relationship between the two latent variables (Hair et al., 2021). Statistical guidelines suggest that an (R^2) value lower than 0.02 indicates a limited effect, a value between 0.02 and 0.13 indicates a moderate effect, and a value higher than 0.26 indicates a high effect. In this study, Table 3 reveals that the R^2 for the relationship between sports sponsorship awareness and the sponsoring brand image is 0.368. This means that sports sponsorship awareness accounts for 36.8% of the variations in the sponsoring brand image as viewed by the Saudi sports audience.

The study's results confirm a relationship between sports sponsorship awareness and the brand image of sponsors in the Saudi Roshan League. It aligns with findings from different countries, which suggest that sports sponsorship has a strong positive impact on the sponsoring brand image. Furthermore, it has been established that brand image directly influences purchase intention (Sarpong & Zungu, 2025). A study by Phiri and Chakauya (2023) concluded that sponsoring a sporting event, even for just one day, can affect the sponsoring brand's image and consumer responses to that brand. Additionally, research by Nazila (2019) supports a positive relationship between sponsorship awareness and brand image in the energy drinks sector, showing a congruence between the sponsor, the event, and attitudes towards the sponsoring brand. Moreover, there is a positive correlation between the sponsoring brand image and attitudes toward the brand (Park & Sihombing, 2020). It is worth noting that a significant portion of marketing budgets is allocated to sports sponsorship, and exposure to sponsorship activities affects the sponsor's image. Increased exposure can diminish the sponsor's image when there is a weak correlation between the event and the sponsor, coupled with high levels of event marketing. Conversely, active participation in the sponsored event enhances the sponsor's image, demonstrating a positive effect of event marketing on the sponsor's brand image (Grohs & Reisinger, 2014). Today, sports sponsorship has emerged as a prominent communication tool that links the name and image of the sponsoring brand with the significant event image in the eyes of the consumer. It allows advertising, expresses the sponsor's identity, enhances communication with consumers, and fosters emotional connections to a preferred team through the sponsored event. The study concludes that there are positive connections between sponsor brand image and sports event image (Park & Sihombing, 2020) and confirms a positive effect of sports sponsorship on the sponsoring brand image (Sarpong & Zungu, 2025; Liao, 2023).

B- Effectiveness of prediction Q^2 :

The statistical decision rule indicates that the predictive power of a model is considered satisfactory if the Q^2 value is greater than 0.00 (Joreskog & Wold, 1982). As shown in Table 3, the model demonstrates a moderate predictive power in analyzing the variance of the sponsoring brand image, with a Q^2 value of 0.255. Additionally, the calculated value of 0.598 exceeds the threshold of 0.35, confirming the predictive power of the sponsoring brand image in the regression model.

C- The Goodness of Fit (GOF):

The Goodness of Fit is defined as the geometric mean of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and R^2 , serving as a measure of the internal parameters (Tenenhaus et al., 2005). GoF is used to evaluate the predictive power of the model as well as the performance of both the Measurement Model and the Structural Model (Chin & Dibbern, 2010). According to the statistical decision-making guidelines, a GoF value lower than 0.1 indicates no fit to the model, a value between 0.1 and 0.25 suggests a little fit, a value between 0.25 and 0.36 represents a medium fit, and a value above 0.36 signifies a high fit (Odekerken-Schroder & Van Oppen, 2005). Based on the geometric mean of the Model Fit indicators, which is 0.568, we conclude that there is a high degree of fit in the research model (Ringle et al., 2024).

H₀₂: Statistically Significant Differences in Sports Sponsorship Perception Are Expected among the Saudi Public According to Age, Education, and Sex at a significance level of 0.05.

The second hypothesis posits that there are statistically significant differences in the level of sports sponsorship awareness among the Saudi audience based on age, education, and gender, with a significance level of 0.05. Testing this hypothesis was conducted using path analysis with the SmartPLS4 technique. The research considered personal factors as mediators, and a P-value was generated. According to the decision rule, the effect of the mediators is accepted if the P-value is less than 0.05 (the Probability of Error). Consequently, Table No. 4 indicates that there is no statistical effect of age, education, and gender on the level of sports sponsorship awareness from the perspective of Saudi sports fans.

Table 4: Path Analysis of the Second Hypothesis

Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Dev.	T-Value	P-Value	Decision
Age → Sponsorship	0.075	0.070	1.171	0.242	No Significant Effect
Edu → Sponsorship	-0.136	0.084	1.654	0.099	No Significant Effect
Sex → Sponsorship	0.009	0.067	0.107	0.915	No Significant Effect

Significant at $P_0^* < 0.01$. Significant at $P_0^{**} < 0.05$.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The financial success of sports teams heavily relies on their partnerships with sponsors. Therefore, sports teams and sponsors need to collaborate on marketing and communication strategies. They can incorporate elements associated with the team, as these play a crucial role in engaging fan participation. Planned sponsorships can be promoted through event websites and social media platforms. These tools help establish strong connections between the team and its fans, as well as between sponsors and fans. For instance, sponsorship promotions on the event website can feature team colors, jerseys, logos, mascots, and photos of players and coaches. On social media, sponsorship content may include images of the stadium, memorable moments for the team, and short clips of famous players and coaches. Such elements are likely to attract fans and elicit positive responses. The content shared on social media should be engaging and entertaining, fostering interactions between fans and the brand while evoking positive emotions. Additionally, sponsors should engage in brief conversations with fans to ensure that relevant brand information is effectively communicated. Motivating sports audiences to immerse themselves in the event experience enhances enjoyment, especially when shared with friends and family. Therefore, increasing audience interest by designing specific activities and providing enjoyable group experiences fosters a sense of belonging, awareness,

and value creation. Overall, relying on traditional sports sponsorship benefits, such as logo banners, jersey sponsorships, and facility naming rights, can effectively enhance brand awareness. There is an urgent need to implement and evaluate sports sponsorship programs in handball, basketball, and team sports. Additionally, the establishment of the Saudi National Center for Measuring and Evaluating Sports Sponsorship should be considered. This center would serve as part of the financial framework for the Public Investment Fund and support sports teams as well.

Limitations and Future Research:

The acceleration of the sports sector in the Kingdom has led to the development of new tools that offer innovative financial solutions aimed at enhancing the sports environment and promoting overall growth. This has prompted the current research to evaluate the impact of sports sponsorship contracts on the behavior of sports audiences toward sponsor brands. Several emerging research trends call for a deeper understanding of the effects of sponsorship on sports clubs. Various forms of sponsorship exist, including jerseys, shirts, sports uniforms, team participation coverage, sports equipment, buildings, and stadiums.

This study investigates the statistical differences in the perception of sports sponsorship based on gender, age, and education. It is essential to explore the influence of variables such as the fame of a favorite team and that team's achievements. Currently, there is an emphasis on the traditional concept of sports sponsorship, often without considering the goals of the sponsoring team or facility. Thus, there is a clear need to integrate sponsorship into an overall marketing strategy. Future studies may seek to explore the complementarity between traditional marketing communication tools and sports sponsorship. While this study concentrates on sponsorship within football, it would be beneficial to investigate other sports, as well as the impact of sponsorship on basketball, handball, team sports, and athletics. Additionally, future research could explore the competencies associated with sponsorship and uncover the motivations and justifications that encourage the use of sports sponsorship

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