

The impact of sponsorship on a football team's brand equity

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyse the way in which an example of sponsorship could influence the supporters of a team during the period of a football match and to provide directions for future research. The method adopted for this investigation consisted of direct interviews (before the matches) and telephone interviews (after the matches) with 140 supporters of FC Porto (a Portuguese football club). Sponsors' influence was estimated from the impact of sponsorship on awareness, attitude and brand loyalty. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software. The results of this study indicate that exposure to sponsorship has a positive impact on awareness (in terms of recognition and, partially, in terms of recall), leading to (albeit partially) a more favourable attitude and stronger loyalty towards the spon-



sor. Furthermore, the greater the investment made by the sponsor, the greater the impact on public awareness. The results also suggest that the level of a fan's commitment towards the team is not directly related to their awareness of, attitude towards, or loyalty to a sponsor's brand.

Keywords: *brand equity, sponsorship, commitment, brand awareness, brand loyalty*

INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship, in particular sports sponsorship, has grown in importance over recent years, becoming an important strategy in the organisation's 'marketing mix'. Nowadays, sporting events, like many others, would not survive without the investment of sponsors.¹ The sponsors in turn benefit from the high visibility offered by the sport, extensive coverage of the event by the media and the ability to attract a broad cross-section of the public as well as serving specific niches, also permitting the elimination of cultural barriers.² According to Bennett (1999), football and motorsports are areas which dominate the vast majority of expenditure.³

There are several reasons for companies to become involved with sponsorship, such as increasing awareness of the brand and raising the public image of the company.⁴ Nevertheless, according to Westberg (2004), the main reason is the consumer's increasing preference as well as their decision to purchase and re-purchase the products/services of the sponsoring company.⁵ These outputs grow dramatically when this sponsorship is connected to sporting events that reach large groups of the public or fans, as in the case of football.

This research has sought to examine the impact of sponsorship on brand equity,

principally measured through the effect that it has on the fans of a football team (actual or potential consumers of the brand's products or services). These fans are exposed to these same brands during a football match and have a greater or lesser emotional connection to the team. During the match, the various kinds of feelings invoked could make them more susceptible to being influenced.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Objectives of sponsorship

The aim of sponsorship is often (but not always) to influence the choices that consumers make as well as their decision to purchase.⁶ However, recent investigations show that the main reasons for companies to engage in sponsorship are to increase the awareness of the brand and the public image of the company,⁷ as well as the company's perceived goodwill.⁸ Therefore, sponsorship may affect decisions to purchase, creating brand-level awareness and interest that may result in perceived differences between the sponsor brand and other brands in the same category of product/service.⁹

Sponsorship effectiveness

Considering that the effectiveness of the sponsorship is intrinsically linked to the consumer's response, the way in which the sponsorship works depends on various constructs, among which a set of connections can be established. Figures 1 and 2 summarise the relationships between the constructs used in this research.

According to De Pelsmacker *et al.*, as cited by Davidson and Savolainen (2004),¹⁰ the effectiveness of sponsorship is based on the effect of exposure. In other words, exposure to a sponsor increases familiarity with the sponsoring brands in the long term, and so generates

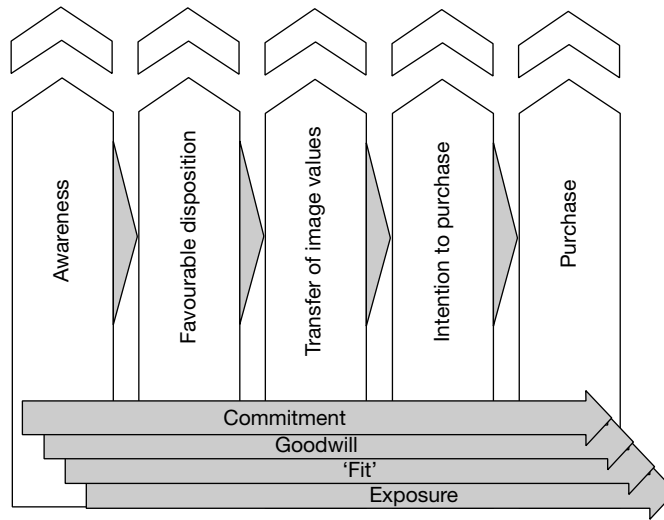


Figure 1 Football supporters' responses to sponsorship

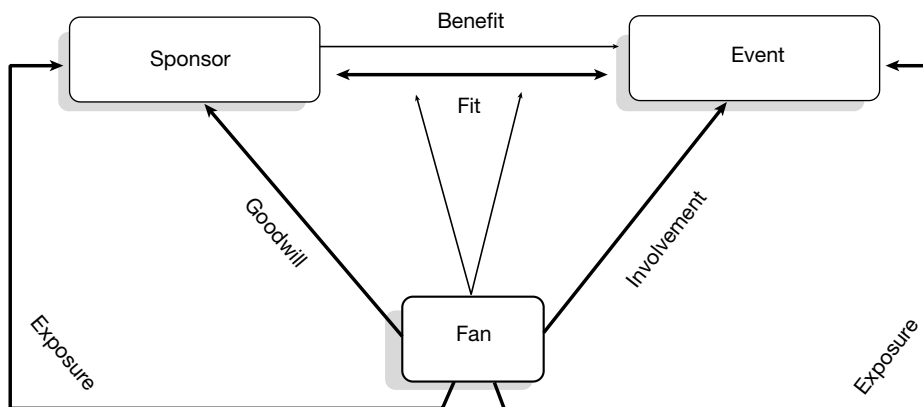


Figure 2 Effects of goodwill, fans' commitment, exposure to the sponsored activity and fit between the sponsor and the sponsored event

a preference for that brand. The emotional relationship between the consumer and the subject being sponsored is another factor which contributes to the effectiveness of sponsorship. Hence, according to Madrigal (2001),¹¹ companies must consider the level of commitment that exists between the sponsored event and its target audience. They must also determine if the sponsored subject's nuclear audience corresponds to its client base. It is also important to emphasise the impact that consumers' greater or lesser percep-

tion of the 'fit' between the company and the event can have on the effectiveness of sponsorship. Park *et al.* (1991) suggest that this perception is a result of the similarity of a product's characteristics and consistency with the original concept of the brand;¹² in other words, it is the perception by the consumer that there exists a logical association between the two organisations. Thus, according to Speed and Thompson (2000), the consumer's response is stronger when they can understand the nature of the fit between

the sponsor and the event.¹³ Therefore, it is expected that the fans who are highly involved in this process, because they are more knowledgeable, should be more sensitive to the benefits/abuse, and so are more likely to experience 'goodwill' or the opposite. Being the most knowledgeable group means that the sponsor's awareness is greater for them and, if satisfied with the sponsor's behaviour towards the activity, they tend to have a more favourable disposition towards them. Moreover, due to their greater commitment, this group is in a better position to understand the values of the image inherent in their preferred activity and, by their association, more capable of transferring these values to the sponsor. Thus, consumers who are more involved in an activity have a greater propensity for being prime sales prospects for the products/services of the sponsor.¹⁴ Furthermore, in the same way that several factors can lead to an increase in the effectiveness of the sponsorship, others might lead to a loss of efficiency, as in the case of 'ambush marketing'. According to Tripodi *et al.* (2003), a sponsorship can lose its effectiveness if the sponsor is the target of an ambush action by its competitors or if consumers assume the existence of a natural connection or fit between the event and the company that performs the ambush.¹⁵

The advertising of sponsorship through other strategies of marketing is also of great importance, which may, according to Bennett *et al.* (2002), lead to the sponsor's recognition.¹⁶ McDaniel (1999) argues that one of the keys to effective sponsorship is the additional billions spent on communicating the significance of these sponsorships to consumers.¹⁷ It is commonly thought among researchers that the sponsorship is itself a starting point (which means paying a sponsorship fee);¹⁸ in other words, the com-

panies must, according to Tripodi *et al.* (2003),¹⁹ spend additional amounts in the capitalisation of their investments beyond the direct costs (ie the starting costs) to guarantee rights over the sponsored sport.

Exposure

A lot of empirical literature supports the proposition that repeated exposure of an individual to a stimulus will, on its own, develop a familiarity between the individual and the stimulus, as well as a connection to that stimulus.²⁰ Moreover, it is suggested that the emotional reaction to the stimulus crucially depends on the context in which the exposure occurs,²¹ and therefore it is more likely that the effects of mere exposure are more relevant in sporting events than in other types of event. In the case of football, the match's atmosphere is one of excitement. Thus, due to the fans' association with their team and, perhaps, their predisposition to accept the influence, the visual images experienced during the event are more likely to be recovered from memory than those observed in less emotional environments.²² Therefore, good management of exposure can cause feelings of familiarity and, thus, positive feelings in relation to the message or organisation.²³

Fan commitment

There is considerable evidence that commitment with a sport develops or expands the effect of sponsorship.²⁴ Fan commitment refers specifically to the extent to which fans identify with and are motivated by their connection and affiliation with particular leisure activities.²⁵ In terms of sport, the authors refer to the concept of 'team identification', which, according to Wann and Branscombe and cited by Madrigal,²⁶ is an individual's connection with a sport's team or a

preoccupation with it. According to Madrigal (2001) there is a certain level of psychological risk relating to identification with a team, because the more fans identify with the successes and failures of the team, the more they see them as personal successes and failures.²⁷

According to Pitts and Slattery (2004), viewers who are highly committed (and therefore more knowledgeable about the sponsored event, such as season ticket holders), more frequently recognise the sponsors in comparison to the spectators who are less committed.²⁸ Moreover, this high commitment will allow such fans to judge the congruence of the relationship (fit), and associate the values of the event's image (team or sport) with the sponsor's brand, allowing the latter to reach the primary objectives of marketing for the creation of awareness and the construction of the brand image.²⁹

The commitment of a fan with the sponsored event is also closely connected to the extent of their loyalty towards the sponsoring brand because:

'The first attribute impacting sponsor loyalty is passion ... Excitement happens momentarily, but passion means constant involvement and interest ... Sponsors must find where the emotional linkage is and attach themselves to that.'³⁰

Goodwill

The effect of goodwill is generated between the supporters of an activity, from their belief that the sponsor's investment will benefit that activity and may trigger an emotional response from the consumer, as well as favourable behaviour, preference for the brand and, in certain circumstances, purchases. In the end goodwill is a function of the sponsor's perceived behaviour towards the activity and the intensity of the fans' commit-

ment with this activity.³¹ According to Meenaghan (2001),³² goodwill manifests itself in three different levels of aggregation, namely:

- sponsorship at a general level (such as an event), being the effect of goodwill in a more abstract sense and with less intensity than in other levels of aggregation (category and individual);
- sponsorship at a category level, such as sport, art etc;
- sponsorship at the level of individual activity (eg a football team).

Therefore, a football fan may consider the sponsorship to be generally good for the society (general level) and they can have a positive attitude towards the sports sponsor (category level). Nevertheless, it is in the individual activity level that the fan's response to the sponsor of the team with which they are closely committed will be felt more deeply, consequently generating higher levels of goodwill and gratitude towards the sponsor.³³

Awareness

To gauge the effectiveness of sponsorship, companies use confidence indicators to measure awareness of it.³⁴ However, with respect to the measurement of awareness, 'brand recall' must be distinguished from 'brand recognition'. According to Tripodi *et al.* (2003),³⁵ brand recall measures the ability of the consumer to remember the brand name when given its product group as a prompt, while brand recognition tests the ability of the consumer to demonstrate previous exposure to the brand when given the brand name as a prompt. Therefore, when an individual is required to recall a brand, they must describe the missing stimulus, while in the case of recognition they just need to identify the stimulus presented to them, as it has been seen, heard or otherwise experienced.³⁶ In

other words, studies of recognition require that the respondents choose a company from a list of potential sponsors.³⁷ 'Aided recall' can also be distinguished from 'unaided recall', as unaided recall represents a stronger effect of sponsor awareness in comparison to aided recall.³⁸ It is also important to note that recall and recognition are measures that can be partially or largely secondary; in other words, the results obtained may not directly result from an association with an event, but from marketing strategies other than sponsorship. Therefore, according to Tripodi *et al.* (2003),³⁹ evaluation of the public awareness of a sponsorship is an important additional and diagnostic measure, used to make decisions concerning sponsorship and advertising.

Intention to purchase

The primary motivation to invest in sponsorship is to gain a response from the consumer,⁴⁰ with the intention to purchase and brand loyalty being important factors in achieving positive changes in sales, in this way constituting the best evidence for the effectiveness of sponsorship.⁴¹ The intention to purchase a brand can be defined as:

'the buyer's self-instruction to purchase the brand (or take other relevant purchase-related action). It is, in fact, an anticipated, conscious planning of the action step, the final buyer response step (target audience action).'⁴²

Moreover, Oliver (1999) describes loyalty as:

'a deeply held commitment to re-buy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and

marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour.'⁴³

Image

According to Grohs *et al.* (2004),⁴⁴ the definition used by Keller (1993) to define the image of the brand can also be used to define the image of the event, in other words:

'perceptions about a brand (an event) as reflected by the brand (event) associations held in consumer memory. Brand (event) associations are informational nodes linked to the brand (event) node in memory and contain the meaning of the brand (event) for consumers.'⁴⁵

When the role of image in sponsorship is analysed, one must always bear in mind the concept of image transference. Thus, image transference in sports sponsorship is defined as the transference of associations attributed to the sponsored event and to the sponsoring brand. In other words, there is the aim to invoke positive feelings or attitudes with respect to the sponsor, connecting this sponsor to a highly-valued event, thereby ensuring that the perceived image of the event passes on to the sponsors.⁴⁶ Thus, if sponsorship can develop the reputation and the image of the sponsor,⁴⁷ it stands to reason that, in certain cases, it may damage that image.⁴⁸

Ambush marketing

Ambush marketing is a phenomenon that leads consumers to believe, incorrectly, that a company is the current sponsor of an event,⁴⁹ in other words, some companies attempt to associate themselves with an event or sport with the intention of gaining the same benefits as an official sponsor without incurring the same costs.⁵⁰ The ambush can be premeditated or not premeditated. In the

case of the latter, it can also be termed an 'incidental ambush'; in other words, according to Quester (1997), a certain degree of ambush may result from unintentional activities or even, in certain cases, from a simple misunderstanding of information on the part of the consumer.⁵¹ Thus, it becomes increasingly important to design and communicate sponsorship in a way that guarantees that visitors can correctly distinguish between sponsors and non-sponsors, in this way minimising the risk of ambush marketing.⁵²

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Quester (1997)⁵³ believes that the return a sponsor can expect from its investment in a sponsorship will depend on:

- the size of its role as a sponsor;
- the list of other sponsors;
- the expectations of the public with regard to the potential sponsors of the event or activity;
- the duration of the sponsorship;
- the visibility of the brand, as well as the ability to invest in a communicational support programme.

From the above it is suggested that:

- H_{1a} The greater the effort of sponsorship (investment), the greater the recall of the sponsoring brand.
- H_{1b} The greater the effort of sponsorship (investment), the greater the recognition of the sponsoring brand.

An important factor to determine the effectiveness of the sponsorship is the environment of the exposure. According to Quester (1997), the public understands the role of the sponsor as a result of the event itself;⁵⁴ in other words, the fact that

an individual witnesses an event will in itself contribute to an increased awareness of the sponsor, particularly by the individuals who witnessed the event in the past. Thus, it is suggested that:

- H_{2a} Exposure to sponsorship during the match will lead to an increase in recall which will benefit the sponsors.
- H_{2b} Exposure to sponsorship during the match will lead to an increase in recognition which will benefit the sponsors.

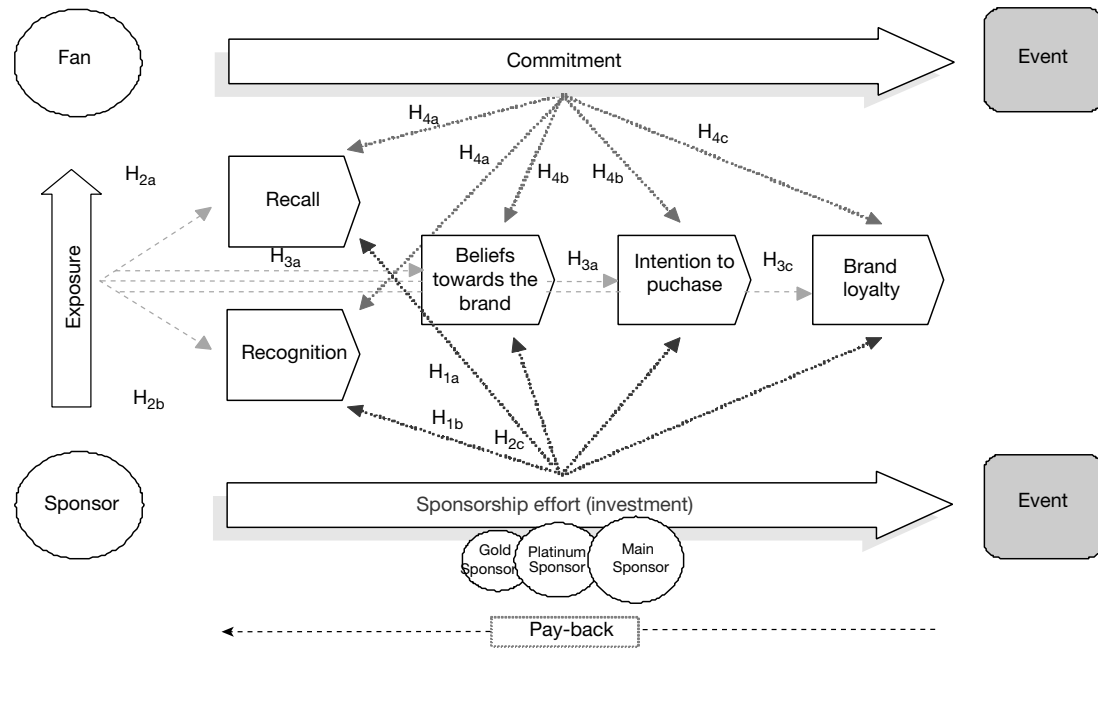
Bearing in mind that the greater the effort of sponsorship (investment), the greater the exposure of the sponsor, according to Grohs *et al.* (2004), apprehending the message increases with additional exposure.⁵⁵ Moreover, Grohs *et al.* (2004) believe that those who are aware of the sponsor prior to the event should be even more aware after the event.⁵⁶ Thus it is suggested that:

- H_{2b} The greater the effort of sponsorship (investment), the greater the increment of the awareness of the sponsoring brand during the match.

There is diverse empirical literature which supports the idea that repeated exposure of an individual to a stimulus will in itself develop the familiarity of that person, as well as their desire (predisposition) towards this stimulus.^{57,58} Thus, it is suggested that:

- H_{3a} Exposure to sponsorship will lead to an increase in the beliefs felt towards the sponsor.
- H_{3b} Exposure to sponsorship will lead to an increase of intention to purchase the products/services of the sponsor.

Figure 3 Model of the impact of sponsorship



H_{3c} Exposure to sponsorship will lead to increased loyalty towards the sponsor.

Bennett (1999) believes that the higher the frequency of times that spectators visit a stadium, the greater the likelihood that they will remember a specific sponsor.⁵⁹ Thus, it is suggested that:

H_{4a} The greater the commitment of the fan to the team ('fan commitment'), the greater the awareness of the sponsoring brand.

Meenaghan (2001) also believes that the emotional response and inherent behaviour, in terms of favouritism, brand preference and, sometimes, purchases, are initiated by goodwill.⁶⁰ Therefore, it is more likely that intentions to purchase will occur among consumers who identify strongly with a team as well as when they are seen as a group norm.⁶¹

From the above discussion it is suggested that:

H_{4b} The attitude towards the sponsoring brand will be much more favourable when the fan is more committed to their team.

The commitment of the fan is also closely linked to loyalty towards the sponsoring brand, passion being the primary attribute to have an impact on sponsor loyalty, meaning constant involvement and interest.⁶² Thus it is suggested that:

H_{4c} Loyalty to the sponsored brand will be greater when the fan is more committed to the team.

Therefore, based on a review of the literature, a model (Figure 3) was designed to show how the previously mentioned constructs interrelate in this study.

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory focus group was carried out using a convenience sample of a typological nature. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was carried out with the director of marketing for FC Porto to obtain information about the sponsors of the club, as well as the way in which FC Porto can use sponsorship as an effective strategy. In this interview the authors were informed that FC Porto ranks its sponsors according to their level of investment in the club (those rankings are, from top to bottom, main sponsors, platinum sponsors and gold sponsors) and that, among others:

- Gold sponsors have the following rights:
 - use of FC Porto's name and logo in promotional material;
 - presence in various publications (eg press releases);
 - static publicity inside the stadium (two-minute rotating advertisement panels on the ground);
 - static publicity outside the stadium (such as in the access areas, the club's site, the club's store or the club's bus);
 - co-sponsoring of one match;
 - the use of FC Porto installations for promotion and events, catering service, match tickets and other promotional material such as replicas of the official shirt with the sponsor name on it.
- Platinum sponsors have the same rights as gold sponsors plus some additions. For example, they have the right to:
 - static publicity near the ground (bigger panels);
 - three-minute rotating advertisement panels;
 - they can also be the official sponsors of one match (not co-sponsors).
- Main sponsors have access to the

aforementioned benefits, plus the fact they are shirt sponsors:

- PT and BES are shirt sponsors for national matches;
- Revigrés is a shirt sponsor for international matches only;
- Nike is the equipment manufacturer.

So, the visibility of main sponsors is higher than platinum and gold sponsors. A pilot test was carried out for the final questionnaire to assess the level of adjustment needed for the constructs used. Two equal enquiries were constructed, one to be carried out through direct interview (before the matches) and the other through a telephone interview (after the matches),⁶³ applied to a sample of 140 individuals. Out of the 140 individuals interviewed before the matches, 131 carried out the post-match enquiry. The interviews were carried out at the 6th, 8th and 10th matches of the 2007–08 season of the Portuguese football league. The opposition teams were SC Marítimo, SL Benfica and AA Coimbra, respectively. SC Marítimo was sponsored by SA and Banif Bank, S. L. Benfica by Portugal Telecom (PT) and BES Bank and AA Coimbra by Dolce Vita Shopping and Smobile. The Portuguese League was sponsored by BWin.

RESULTS

The sample included all age groups, genders, all levels of education and all the levels of commitment considered in the enquiry. Thus, the results show that 29.3 per cent of those questioned were aged between 25 and 34 years; 80 per cent were men and 55 per cent had attended or were still attending secondary school. It should also be noted that, with respect to H_{1b}, H_{2b} and H_{2c} (recognition), only

Table 1: Frequencies — recall

<i>Type of sponsor</i>	<i>Before the matches</i>		<i>After the matches</i>	
	<i>Number of sponsors recalled</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number of sponsors recalled</i>	<i>%</i>
Main sponsors	234	56.25	200	45.66
Platinum sponsors	103	24.76	155	35.39
Gold sponsors	35	8.41	41	9.36
'Dummies'	44	10.58	42	9.59
Total	416	100.00	438	100.00

the following sponsors of FC Porto were analysed:

- main sponsors: BES, Nike, PT and Revigrés;
- platinum sponsors: BPI, Amorim, TMN, Império Bonança, Coca-Cola, EDP and Carlsberg;
- gold sponsors — Sapó Adsl and Galp.

With respect to H_{3a} , H_{3b} , H_{3c} , H_{4a} (recognition), H_{4b} and H_{4c} , only the results of the four main sponsors were analysed. As to H_{1a} , H_{2a} , H_{2c} (recall) and H_{4a} (recall), effectively all of the sponsors that were cited in the enquiry were analysed. To analyse H_{1a} , the results obtained are shown in Table 1. The results suggest that, although some non-sponsoring brands were wrongly cited, the recall obtained by the sponsors before and after the matches was greater when a greater level of investment was made. A greater level of investment led to more signage and so to more exposure.

With respect to H_{1b} , the mean values were obtained from a scale of -1 to 1 .⁶⁴ Positive mean values signify that the respondents answered correctly, bearing in mind that a brand represents its sponsor (or that a 'dummy' brand does not in fact represent a sponsor but signifies a brand which, when measuring recognition, is often added to the list for the purpose

of analysing the effects and implications of ambush marketing (intentional or accidental) in events, leagues or teams⁶⁵). Negative mean values signify that individuals wrongly thought that a brand was not a sponsor, when in reality it was (and vice versa). The higher or lower the mean, the more or less the respective rate of adjustment. Both before and after the matches, there is a trend for the sponsors to be ordered according to the level of investment that they made. Thus, the data obtained suggest that recognition of the sponsoring brand will be greater when a greater effort of investment is made.

With respect to the non-sponsoring companies, TVCabo and Vodafone (dummy brands), important results were obtained as these were mistakenly considered to be the sponsors, constituting an example of incidental ambush marketing. Neither of these firms was on FC Porto's list of sponsors, although they had signage inside the stadium. Vodafone had one-minute rotating advertisement panels and TVCabo had naming rights over one stand.

To test H_{2a} the results in Table 2 show that the group of sponsors that were most effective in terms of recall was the platinum sponsors because the number of citations that this group obtained after the match was 10.63 per cent (out of the

Table 2: Frequency — recall (variation)

<i>Type of sponsor</i>	<i>Before the matches % of sponsors recalled</i>	<i>After the matches % of sponsors recalled</i>	<i>Increase/decrease (%)</i>
Main sponsors	56.25	45.66	-10.59
Platinum sponsors	24.76	35.39	+10.63
Gold sponsors	8.41	9.36	+0.95
'Dummies'	10.58	9.59	-0.99
Total	100.00	100.00	n/a

citation total), which is superior to what was obtained before the match. With regard to the main sponsors, the variation of the recall, on the whole, was negative, decreasing by 10.59 per cent. Both the gold sponsors and the non-sponsoring brands experienced a variation of almost nothing. Thus, these results partially confirm the assumption that exposing fans to the sponsorship during the match will lead to an increase in the recall of the sponsors.

In order to analyse H_{2b} , a paired-samples t -test was carried out. Here the results confirm the hypothesis. As can be seen in Table 3, these increases were significant for all sponsors.

In order to confirm H_{2c} , a separate analysis of recall and recognition was carried out. The results show that the sponsors with greater variation in terms of citations were all platinum sponsors, followed by Nike (main sponsor) and TVCabo (non-sponsor). With regard to recognition, the paired-samples t -test was

once again used to analyse whether the increase in recognition of the sponsors was greater for those who invested more, with the results as shown in Table 3. To confirm H_{3a} , H_{3b} and H_{3c} , a paired-samples t -test was also undertaken. Table 4 shows the results.

With reference to the beliefs towards the sponsors, the results obtained before and after the matches only partially confirm H_{3a} . They suggest that the beliefs of the surveyed fans in FC Porto's main sponsors increased only for BES. With regard to the intention to purchase the products/services of the sponsoring companies, similar results were obtained to the beliefs of those surveyed about the main sponsors. With respect to loyalty, there was a significant increase relating to BES, partially confirming H_{3c} . There was also an increase in loyalty for PT, although this was not of a significant size. H_{4a} was also partially confirmed when recall and recognition were analysed separately.

To analyse if greater commitment from

Table 3: Results of t -tests — recognition

	1. Main			Revigrés	2. Platinum				3. Gold				
	BES	Nike	PT		BPI	Amorim	TMN	ImpBon	Coca-Cola	EDP	Carlsberg	Galp	Sapo
Variation	+0.338	+0.077	+0.077	+0.046	+0.385	+0.400	+0.108	+0.729	+0.185	+0.729	+0.769	+0.431	+0.354
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.132	0.096	0.368	0.000	0.000	0.071	0.000	0.014	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Table 4: Results of *t*-tests — beliefs/intention to purchase/loyalty

	<i>Beliefs</i>				<i>Intention to purchase</i>				<i>Loyalty</i>			
	<i>BES</i>	<i>Nike</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>Revigrés</i>	<i>BES</i>	<i>Nike</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>Revigrés</i>	<i>BES</i>	<i>Nike</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>Revigrés</i>
Variation	+0.236	+0.100	+0.062	-0.078	+0.219	+0.092	+0.131	-0.054	+0.419	-0.008	+0.171	-0.008
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005	0.091	0.495	0.304	0.008	0.232	0.159	0.540	0.041	0.952	0.361	0.971

a fan towards their team leads to greater recognition of the sponsor, the mean values that the 13 sponsors from the study obtained before and after the matches, divided into three levels of commitment, were compared, on a scale of -1 to 1. A one-way analysis of variance (*anova*) was carried out to test the equality of the means. However, before the matches none of these differences was statistically significant, and after the matches only Sapó Adsl obtained a statistically significant difference of mean values. This difference was -0.233 to a significance of 0.021. Therefore, there were no significant mean differences and so the assumption in question is not confirmed.

To analyse H_{4b} , a one-way *anova* was used which had been previously carried out for the four main sponsors of FC Porto and mean values were obtained before and after the matches on a scale of 1 to 5. Thus, the assumption that the greater the level of an individual's commitment to a team the stronger their beliefs towards the sponsor applies to only one of the four sponsors involved before the matches. In terms of sponsor influence, this tendency was maintained after the matches. Therefore, considering the three levels of commitment, the results suggest that fans' commitment to a team does not affect the intensity of beliefs that fans felt in relation to the main sponsors of FC Porto. In spite of the assumption that the greater the

fans' commitment to their team, the greater their intention to purchase the products/services of the sponsor, the results show no relationship. Thus, H_{4b} and H_{4c} could not be confirmed.

CONCLUSIONS

The results suggest that the level of investment is related to the level of awareness. It was apparent in this research that those sponsors who made a greater investment in the sponsorship policy were more evoked (the main sponsors obtained better results than the platinum and the latter obtained better results than the gold). It must be noted that FC Porto ranks its sponsors according to their level of investment in the club and that those rankings are, from top to bottom: main, platinum and gold sponsors. The low levels of recall obtained for the gold sponsors must be highlighted, which also follows current literature in the sense that the brands that invest less in sponsorship can be surpassed at the level of recall by non-sponsoring brands, but they nevertheless are leaders in their segment.⁶⁶ The results also suggest that sponsorship when considered in isolation from other complementary communicative policies positively affects the awareness of the sponsoring brands through exposure (in terms of recognition and, partially, in terms of recall). With regard to loyalty, the results suggest in the same way, albeit partially, that the fact that individuals are exposed to sponsorship

during a football match is sufficient to increase their loyalty towards the sponsors. The results also indicate that, despite not being the sponsor of a club, a brand can obtain important benefits, in terms of awareness, if other important communicative actions are carried out by them in the stadium, such as stand naming rights.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

- Managers must consider the measures of recall and recognition as additional and diagnostic and not as the main measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the sponsorship.
- It is important that sponsors dominate the association between the vehicle of the sponsorship (the team) and their brands.

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