

The Influence of Event Sponsor Congruence with Sporting Event Involvement to Purchase Intention

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Abstract: This research examines the relationship between event sponsor congruence and purchase intention from sport event attendees' context by conceptualizing and examining the effect of event sponsor congruence to purchase intention. Sporting event involvement will act as a moderator for the variables. Recent studies emphasized that understanding the idea of congruence between the sponsor and the sporting events is employed by the sponsor as an investment for revenue generation. However, numerous interpretations exist on whether the investment in sponsorship agreements will be profitable and favourably contribute to the intention to purchase from the linked sponsors. In addition, there is still a scarcity of research on the subject. This gap would be valuable to fill as the understanding would assist sponsors and scholars in initiating effective event sponsor congruence. The phenomenon in Malaysia as the research setting will focus on the sponsors and sporting events in Malaysia.

Keywords: Sponsor, Sporting Events, Congruence, Purchase Intention

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Introduction

Globally, sporting events have become a popular sub-sector and play a prominent role in today's sports and tourism market. The world has seen phenomenal growth in sporting events, where the number of people travelling for sports was uprising (UNWTO, 2021). The sporting event industry in Malaysia has grown tremendously since the 1960s. The provision has been demonstrated through the formation of the Malaysian Sport Tourism Council (MTCB) in 1994, which focuses on developing and promoting sports tourism. It continues with the Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), an agency under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture Malaysia (MOTAC), to strengthen and position Malaysia's business tourism brand. This is where the involvement of corporate bodies plays an undeniably significant role by activating and associating their brand or company names with sports tourism events.

International Event Group (IEG, 2019) reported that global spending on sports sponsorship increased to nearly \$46 billion and is expected to reach \$49 billion by 2023. This is becoming a phenomenon that attracts sponsorships. Hutabarat & Gayatri (2014) stated that among the many forms of marketing communication, sponsorship is the most crucial component in integrated marketing communication to any firm or organization. The growth of event sponsorship as a marketing communication approach is likely attributable to the reduction in audiences for conventional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. In addition, modern

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audiences are increasingly fragmented, making it more difficult for marketers to communicate successfully with their target markets (Blonde & Roozen, 2007).

Event sponsorship is considered one primary marketing strategy implicit with all parties benefitting from the relationship with minimum risk. Previous studies empirically test how sponsorship emerged for marketing and played pivotal roles in the sporting events area (Cornwell, 2005; Eagleman & Krohn, 2012; Fullerton, 2006; Hutabarat & Gayatri, 2014; Kim, 2010; Watanabe *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the sponsorship market has reached a new level, demanding a more efficient method to attract and retain corporate sponsors. Crowther and Donlan (2011) indicate that event sponsorship has become an essential strategy for brand marketers to provide event attendees with experiences that allow them to engage with their brand fully. Furthermore, it is beneficial under situations of strong engagement, adding value to product features through sponsor-event congruence (Cunningham & Taylor, 1995; McDaniel, 1999). The concept of congruence between the sponsor and the sporting event is based on their logical link and relationship (Park & Sihombing, 2020), and it is used as an investment tool by the sponsor for revenue generation of the activity in the event (Gwinner, 2014; Tarmudi *et al.*, 2015; Tsuji, Bennet & Zhang, 2007).

In Malaysia, IRONMAN Langkawi secures Roka, Ventum, Santini, Active and Viewsport as global partners and Penang Bridge International Marathon 2020 manages to lock Brooks, Seiko and 100 Plus as its main sponsors. Besides that, Malaysia's national oil and gas company, Petronas, also stepped forward and became the title sponsor of the 25th edition of Le Tour de Langkawi in 2020 to promote sports tourism and spurs the local economy (NST, 2020). The sponsor's provision is imperative for event organizers to facilitate funding and offer exciting programs, and it shows the ever-rising marketing strategy.

Looking at the importance of sporting events in revenue generation, the Malaysian government has allocated RM299 million in the Budget 2020 for sports programmes and income tax exemption for organizers of approved international sporting events (Loheswar, 2019). The decision is further to drive sponsors for sporting events in business opportunities. Malaysia Investment Development Authority (MIDA) amounted a sports event as an important income generator with approximately RM 5 billion in annual revenue. The government has conducted ongoing initiatives in sports. The tabling of Budget 2020 reserves RM 299 million to upgrade the infrastructures and tourism services' development to drive sponsors for the sports event further to drive in business opportunities and further enhance sports tourism. It indicates that the government acknowledges the industry's remarkable capacity to expand with financial support from companies as a lifeline of sports tourism events in Malaysia. Hence, this is where the involvement of corporate bodies plays an undeniably significant role by activating and associating their brand or company names with sports events.

Sporting Tourism Event in Malaysia

Malaysia is presently developing and establishing sporting tourism events. Malaysians' progressive view toward event tourism seems to be evolving and rising. More people have begun to recognize the advantages of event tourism, and Malaysia has seen growing attentiveness and thorough government investment in sports over the past decade (Ishak, 2020). The development of event sporting tourism has driven Malaysia to host many world-class sports events (Anisah, Chiu & Johan, 2018) and is now one of the pinnacle tourist destinations in the Asia Pacific region (Watanabe *et al.*, 2018).

The 1998 Commonwealth Games (SUKOM 98) in Kuala Lumpur, which attracted 6,670 athletes, brought attention to the importance of the sector's growth for Malaysia. The momentum continued when Sepang hosted the Formula One (F1) Petronas Malaysia Grand Prix in 1999, attracting ardent fans from around the world interested in Malaysia. After its success, the Langkawi Ironman Triathlon was introduced in 2000 for athletes. Malaysia continues to host international sports events like the Motor GP Racing Series, the Monsoon Cup-Racing Yachts, the Le Tour De Langkawi, and the South East Asia-SEA Games. Malaysia held the World Football Summit Asia (WFSA) in Kuala Lumpur on April 29–30, 2019, to recognize the investment potential of sports tourism, especially football. More than 2,000 professionals and notable football club professionals from more than 50 nations attended the event, which was the first of its kind to be organized in Asia. Past researchers substantiate that

tourism involving sports activities in Malaysia can yield high economic returns to the country and encourage the involvement of domestic and international participants (Mapjabil, Marzuki, Kumalah, Tangavello & Abidin, 2017).

Problem Statement

However, whether the investment in sponsorship agreements will be rewarding and positively contribute to the intention to purchase from the associated sponsors has resulted in many interpretations (Langer, 2018; Park, Shin & Moon, 2018; Saphap, 2017). Notwithstanding the increasing sophistication of event sponsorship and rising academic interest in understanding sponsorship practice, there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of how sponsorship processes work (Abreu Novais & Arcodia, 2013; Angell *et al.*, 2016; Delia & Armstrong, 2015; Dos Santos & Moreno, 2018) in what concerns its brand outcomes. The progress of event sponsorship works of literature has changed dramatically and is always subject to constant review and redefinition as there are inconsistencies in the findings. Recently, the notion of event and sponsor engagement has undergone a fundamental transformation, and sponsorship is essential for significant events to generate revenue.

While Malaysia is known for its success in organizing sporting events, there is a paucity of discussion in empirical research (Edrak, Nor & Maamom, 2016). The issue persists regarding what approaches to escalate sponsorship interest for sporting events (Watanabe *et al.*, 2018). It concurred with an argument that the extension of beneficial opportunities to the sponsors depends on the degree to which there is a fit between the sponsor brand and the event being sponsored (Demir & Söderman, 2015; Grohs, 2016; Tsordia, Papadimitriou & Parganas, 2018). Other than that, there are inconsistencies in the data that need ongoing revaluation and redefining of the event sponsorship literature's development. Thus, it is timely for the study to be undertaken to measure the efficiency of the sponsorship market demand to attract and retain corporate sponsors.

Literature Review

Event Sponsor Congruence

In sponsorship literature, the association between event sponsors and sports event organizers is usually referred to as event sponsor congruence (i.e. fit). According to Grohs, Wagner & Vsetecka (2004), event sponsor congruence is a connection, synergy or similarity between a brand sponsor and an event. Imperatively, event sponsor congruence reflects event characteristics that match with sponsor characteristics. Even though many re-conceptions of the brand framework can be seen in the recent article, the degree of congruency between the sponsoring brand and the event remains debatable. Kahle and Homer (1985) proposed the match-up hypothesis, which suggests that a match between an endorser and an endorsed product provides a more effective endorsement, and numerous researchers have since utilized this paradigm. Numerous sponsorship researchers emphasized the weight of congruence or "fit" between the sponsor and the sponsored event (Close & Lacey, 2013; Hutabarat & Gayatri, 2014; Mazodier & Quester, 2014; Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2016; Scheinbaum, Lacey & Drumwright, 2019). The schema paradigm serves as conceptual underpinnings for the sponsor-event congruence effect (McDaniel, 1999). In this sense, sponsor-event congruence seems to be an appropriate strategy to enhance the effectiveness of sponsorship, making an associative connection in the consumers' minds.

Name of Dimension	Attributes	Sources
Congruence	It is used as “fit” in marketing research as well as “relatedness,” “relevance,” or “compatibility” in sponsorship studies.	(Ruth & Simonin, 2003).
Event Sponsor Congruence	Existing research on sponsorship in CSR events has focused on the influence of event-sponsor congruence on sponsor attitude, awareness, and behavioral intentions.	(Sirgy et al., 2008)
	The effect of sponsorship depends on the connection between the sponsor and the event since the favorable opinion of a specific event is transmitted to the brand, business, or organization supporting the event.	(Ellen et al., 2000).
Perceived Sponsor Motive	Attribution to motivations can be exemplified in two ways: individual characteristics inside	(Park et al., 2018)
	The actor (internal motivation) and situational characteristics exterior to the actor (external motivation).	

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention indicates a person’s degree of motivation to participate in a particular purchasing behaviour. A customer who views congruency between the sponsor and the event has a more favourable reaction, including the desire to purchase the sponsor’s goods or services (Tseng & Lee, 2011). Several authors have explored the effectiveness of sponsor-event congruence on consumer responses regarding brand purchase intention. Numerous studies have demonstrated that these two variables are interrelated (Cho, 2016; Close and Lacey, 2013; Hutabarat and Gayatri, 2014; Gwinner & Bennett, 2008; Lacey & Close, 2013; Tomalieh, 2016). Despite the growth of studies, there is still a relative dearth of research examining the relationship between event sponsorship congruence towards purchase intention from sport event attendees’ context (Eagleman & Krohn, 2012; Eddy & Cork, 2019; Herrmann *et al.*, 2016; Lough *et al.*, 2014). According to Yong Jae *et al.* (2008), insufficient research has been undertaken in sponsorship assessing customers’ future purchasing intentions, which is essentially the purpose of a sponsoring company.

Name of Dimension	Attributes	Sources
Purchase Behavior	The degree to which a person is driven to complete a purchase behavior, as the more motivated a person is, the more probable he/she will make a purchase.	(Dees, Bennett & Ferreira, 2010).
	Purchase intention can be impacted by variables like “attitude towards the brand”, goodwill and fan(s) involvement.	(Dees, Bennett & Villegas, 2008).
	Congruence has the power to affect one’s pursuit intention.	(De Souza, Owen & Lings, 2005).

Sporting Events Involvement

Previous research identified two distinct types of involvement: situational and enduring (Richins & Bloch, 1986). According to the researchers, situational engagement refers to product involvement only in specific situations, like a purchase, whereas enduring involvement refers to a continuing interest in a product that surpasses situational effects. For instance, utilizing a celebrity in an advertisement for consumers who are just marginally involved is beneficial. Petty *et al.* (1983) found that celebrity endorsements were more effective for those with limited product participation and little product knowledge than those with solid involvement. Although in a different context, it demonstrates that congruence between a celebrity and an endorsed product (Lee & Koo,

2016; Lee & Thorson, 2008) and event use are more effective under conditions of high participation.

Event is one of the most important industries, and companies that engage in sponsoring activities are paying increasing attention to them. Kline (2005) suggests that the usage of events as a promotional strategy is on the rise, helping to build brand awareness and revenue. Meanwhile, Allen *et al.* (2011) argued that from the standpoint of an event organizer, an event must provide advantages to its sponsors via an effective programme. While existing research focuses on managing event sponsorships (O'Reilly & Madill, 2009), the research on the role of involvement received the same amount of attention from academia. It is needed to identify the influence of fit when the consumer is most likely involved with the sponsored event (Sirgy, Lee, Johar & Tidwell, 2008; Meenaghan, 1991; Kwon, Ratneshwar & Kim, 2016). Shank and Beasley (1998) defined sports involvement as an individual's perceived interest in and personal significance of sports. Meenaghan (2001) noted that the participation of sports fans in a particular sponsorship campaign generated favourable feelings toward the sponsor.

Meanwhile, Ko *et al.* (2008) found that consumers' sport participation influences sponsorship awareness and the desire to purchase a sponsor's goods positively. Other previous studies have focused on the role of involvement as a moderator of the relationship between predictors and outcome variables. McDaniel (1999) highlighted that involvement might be a significant moderator of the connection between sponsor-event congruence and consumer reactions that lead to purchase intention. Therefore, Koo & Lee (2019) suggested that the efficacy of sporting events involvement as a moderator in the sponsorship context is equivocal, even though several studies advocate sports involvement as a moderator in sponsorship studies.

Name of Dimension	Attributes	Sources
Sport Events	A sports event act as the main attraction that influences a sports participant.	(Zarei & Ramkissoon, 2020)
	The event's entertainment and popularity effects inspired people's involvement in sports tourism. The event's popularity will serve as a draw to entice guests to attend.	(Ahmad et al., 2019)
	The event's extensive publicity and the participation of well-known personalities might raise the interest of tourists to participate in the sporting event.	(Zhang, 2018)
Sports Event Tourism	Identifying tourist motivations and preferences may assist in determining the consumption of sporting tourism events and increase the efficacy of marketing strategies.	(Fotiadis et al., 2020)
	The significant characteristics of athletic tourism events include the event's history, reputation and sports' broad appeal.	(Newland & Yoo, 2020)
Sports Tourism Event Image	Image Fit - the audience's perception of events and sponsors mirrors that of events and sponsors, influencing the audience's response to sports sponsorship.	(Hsu et al., 2020)
	Place Image - Local residents' perceptions of their community can affect their political support for tourism development and the perceptions of potential tourists.	
	This image transmission occurs between the sponsored item and the business. Evidently, an event image must be sufficiently prominent in the audience's memory to be associated with the sponsor.	(Shu, King & Chang, 2015).

Sport Event Involvement	People who are very involved in sports are more likely to perceive the strong tie between the sponsor and the sponsee and to be highly interested in sports than those who are not.	(Koo & Lee, 2019)
	Sports involvement as the extent to which a person perceives his or her connection to a sports object in terms of the hedonic and symbolic significance and importance of the sport object in their lives.	(Beaton et al., 2011)
	It is more likely to be part of persistent involvement (or intrinsic sources of personal relevance) since one's interest in sports is often consistent and does not fluctuate from moment to moment.	(Shank and Beasley, 1998)

Significance of the Study

Despite the increasing sophistication of event sponsorship and rising academic interest in understanding sponsorship practice, there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of the influence event sponsor congruence has on purchase intentions. This study proposes the role of congruence and sporting events involvement toward the intention to purchase sponsor service or product as the contribution toward understanding the societal values that will add to the body of knowledge in the event sponsorship studies. Consequently, the versatile moderating variable can provide a new solution to the industry players. The impediment of how event sponsorship processes work has prompted researchers to get the result that can satisfy both industry players and scholars, making the studies attractive for new research.

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