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Sports sponsorship, brand image, and purchase intentions toward sponsors' products

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper examines the relationship between sports sponsorship and brand image concerning soccer fans' purchase intentions, focusing on how various elements of sponsorship and brand image influence fans' purchasing behaviour.

Design/methodology/approach: Data was collected from 398 soccer fans in the Greater Accra Region and the Ashanti Region of Ghana and analysed using structural equation modeling tools derived from Structural Modeling Analysis Using Partial Least Squares (SMARTPLS).

Findings: The study demonstrates that sports sponsorship positively and significantly impacts both brand image (coefficient = 0.722; p -value = 0.001 < 0.05) and purchase intention (coefficient = 0.296; p -value = 0.001 < 0.05). Furthermore, brand image not only has direct positive influences on purchase intention (B = 0.372; p -value = 0.000 < 0.05) but also mediates the relationship between sponsorship and purchase intention (B = 0.268; t = 4.098; p -value = 0.000 < 0.05). Overall, these findings confirm all four study hypotheses.

Practical Implication: Sponsors can apply these findings when selecting sports events or teams to partner with, ensuring alignment with the brand's identity. Strategic partnerships may enhance the perceived brand image among the audience, thereby increasing the likelihood of influencing purchase decisions.

Research Contribution: This study suggests that favourable purchase intentions are more likely when soccer fans hold a positive image of the sponsoring companies and a strong affinity for the sport. These findings underscore the importance of well-planned sports sponsorship strategies in shaping brand perception and driving consumer behaviour among soccer enthusiasts.

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Introduction

Sponsorship remains a proven marketing tool embraced by organisations across various industry sectors, maintaining its relevance even in the modern era. Its primary goal is to influence

consumers' preferences for sponsors' products (Li et al., 2022). As the sponsorship industry flourishes into a billion-dollar enterprise with ongoing expansion (Thomas et al., 2022), it stands as a cornerstone of modern marketing

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strategies. However, despite the global growth and commercialisation of sports sponsorship, challenges persist within Ghana's Premier League (GPL), hindering its ability to secure consistent headline sponsors. Despite its rich history and widespread fan support, recent years have seen the league struggle to maintain visibility in media channels, exemplified by the 2018 season marking the second consecutive year without a headline sponsor.

Previous sponsorship endeavours, including those by ABC Golden Lager, Kinapharma, Ghana Telecom, Globacom, and First Capital Bank, have yielded mixed results (Kwaw, 2021; Yeboah, 2019). While research by Aboagye and Rocha (2018) extensively documents issues surrounding sports sponsorship in Ghana, focusing on the impact of organisational management on sponsorship contracts, academic exploration of Ghanaian consumers' purchasing behaviour towards sponsor products remains limited (Akowuah, 2020). Moreover, existing sponsorship research predominantly examines the sponsor's perspective, overlooking the viewpoint of fans (Cho et al., 2021).

Although sports sponsorship has gained significant importance in developing countries like Ghana, a knowledge gap remains regarding the influence on consumers' purchasing behaviour and brand image from the perspective of fans. Notably, there is limited empirical evidence on how sports sponsorship affects purchase intentions among Ghanaian soccer fans and on the mediating role of brand image. This study seeks to address this research gap by examining the influence of sports sponsorship on purchase intention and analysing the mediating role of a brand image between sports sponsorship and purchase intention. By doing so, the research aims to provide insights into how sports sponsorship influences both brand image and purchase intention, highlighting the role of brand image as a critical mediator among Ghanaian soccer fans. In the next sections, we will delve deeper into the concepts of sports sponsorships, purchase intentions, and brand image.

Review of literature

Sports sponsorship

Sponsorship, a concept defined by scholars and researchers, encompasses a diverse range of investments and relationships aimed at achieving corporate or marketing objectives (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Kolah, 1999; Meenaghan, 1983; Seo, 2022; Venturoli, 2022). The use of sports sponsorship as a marketing communication tool support a firm in reaching its business goals (such as enhancing brand image and increasing sales) has been steadily rising (Koronios et al., 2023). Through financial support to in-kind assistance, commercial organisations engage in sponsorship activities to gain association with events, causes, or entities. In the dynamic sports sector, especially in regions like Ghana with a fervent soccer fan base, sponsorship assumes a central role. The interplay between sponsorship and fan attitudes significantly influences purchase intention, shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours toward sponsored brands.

Various studies have explored indicators of sponsorship effectiveness, ranging from product sales to attitudinal elements such as media exposure and brand awareness (Trivedi & Yadav, 2020). Understanding the correlation between sponsorship and consumer behaviour is essential, especially as businesses seek to leverage the emotional connection between fans and sponsored brands. This connection is particularly evident in soccer, where sponsorship plays a crucial role in reinforcing brand values and enhancing brand visibility. In the context of sports sponsorship, the purchase concept focuses on leveraging sponsorship activities to stimulate demand for a brand's products or services (Wakefield et al., 2020).

Purchase intention

Scholars from various disciplines have noted the diverse nature of consumer decision-making processes. Hasena and Sakapunama (2021) highlight that purchase intention is influenced by

individual behaviours and attitudes. This assertion is further supported by Peña-García et al. (2020), who emphasise that purchase intentions serve as indicators of consumers' willingness to engage in specific behaviours. Consequently, businesses are encouraged to focus their marketing and sales strategies on stimulating demand for their products or services, rather than relying solely on passive sales techniques (Hermanda et al., 2019). By understanding the complex interplay between consumer behaviour and purchase intentions, businesses can better tailor their approaches to meet consumer needs and preferences.

Based on customer insights, businesses develop communication strategies that offer unique benefits or solutions to address specific customer needs. The goal is to create a space that provides superior communication value compared to other competitors (Parvinen et al., 2020). Effective communication is essential for informing potential customers about the benefits of the product or service and persuading them to make a purchase (Muhammad et al., 2020). Businesses use various marketing channels, such as advertising, public relations, sales promotions, and sports sponsorship, to reach and influence their target audience (Parvinen et al., 2020). Haapalainen (2022) posits that brands need to identify their target audience within the sports fanbase. This involves analyzing demographic data, fans' behaviours, and preferences related to sports consumption. This is crucial for effective sponsorship activation Koronios et al. (2023). Gülay (2023) concurs that once the target fans are identified, brands align their sponsorship activities with the passion points of sports fans which involve sponsoring popular sports teams, athletes, events, or venues that resonate strongly with the target audience. By associating with beloved sports entities, brands can tap into fans' emotional connections and loyalty Koronios et al. (2023).

Hsiao et al. (2021) explain that sponsoring companies strategically integrate their products

or services into the sports sponsorship activation. This includes product placement during sporting events, branding on jerseys or equipment, or sponsorship of specific game elements such as halftime shows or player interviews.

Furthermore, Mahajan et al. (2023) suggest that hosting fan engagement activities, organising meet-and-greet sessions with athletes, or sponsoring interactive fan zones at sporting events offers unique and immersive experiences, that deepen brands' connection with fans and drive brand affinity and loyalty. This helps to maximise brand visibility within the sports context and ensures that the sponsorship investment directly contributes to brand awareness and exposure and, provides opportunities for brands to create memorable and engaging experiences in the long-term memories of fans de Almeida Nunes (2022).

Just like any marketing operations, sponsor brands are used to measure the return on investment (ROI) of sports sponsorship activities Nickell and Johnston (2020). Hence there is a need to track key performance indicators such as brand image, purchase intention, and sales metrics Crompton (2004). By quantifying the impact of sponsorship efforts, brands can assess the effectiveness of their strategies and optimise future sponsorship investments Almainan et al. (2024). Based on what was discussed above, it has been hypothesised that.

Brand image

Brand image, as defined by Guliyev (2023), is consumers' perceptions and impressions of a brand, including their feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and associations (Patoding & Muzammil, 2023). Jin et al. (2019) further elaborate on this definition, highlighting the various factors that shape brand images, such as visual identity (e.g. logo, colours, packaging), messaging (e.g. advertising, slogans, brand storytelling), product quality, customer service, and overall brand reputation. Foroudi (2019) emphasises that a robust brand image is characterised by positive associations

like trustworthiness, reliability, quality, innovation, and differentiation from competitors, which contribute to building brand equity (Kegoro & Justus, 2020). Moreover, Jin et al. (2019) argue that brand image significantly influences consumer behaviour, impacting purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and advocacy. To manage and enhance brand image, companies invest in various strategies such as marketing initiatives, product innovation, customer engagement, and corporate social responsibility efforts (Foroudi, 2019). Chandramohan (2024) concludes that brand image plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences, thereby influencing their attitudes and behaviours towards a brand, and ultimately impacting its success in the marketplace. Maintaining a positive brand image is paramount in sponsorship strategies, as it influences consumer perceptions and purchase intent (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). The relationship between the sponsor and the event further enhances brand perception among fans, leading to higher purchase intent (Cho, 2016; Huettermann et al., 2020). By investing in sponsorship activities that resonate with their target audience, businesses can effectively influence consumer behaviour and drive revenue growth.

In summary, the hypotheses derived from the literature reviewed are as follows:

H1: Sports Sponsorship positively influences purchase intention

H2: Sports Sponsorship positively influences brand image.

H3: Brand image positively influences purchase intention.

H4: Brand image mediates the relationship between sports sponsorship and purchase intention.

Proposed conceptual framework

The conceptual framework outlined above illustrates the relationships between the independent variable, sports sponsorship, the mediating variable, brand image, and the dependent

variable, purchase intention. In this study, we propose the following hypotheses: H1 Sports Sponsorship positively influences purchase intention; H2 Sports Sponsorship positively influences brand image; H3 Brand image positively influences purchase intention; and H4 Brand image mediates the relationship between Sports sponsorship and purchase intention. These hypotheses form the basis for investigating the impact of Sports sponsorship on brand image and purchase intention in our study.

Methodology

Research context

The methodology of this study utilised both primary and secondary data to examine the influence of sports sponsorship on fan purchase intention. The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed electronically to registered fans of both Kumasi Asante Kotoko and Accra Hearts of Oak football clubs via the official WhatsApp platforms. This e-survey system ensured participant anonymity and data security by generating unique identification numbers for each respondent and preventing duplicate submissions. It also facilitated the compilation of data into Excel and Word reports for analysis.

Data collection & instrument

Initially, the researchers met with the leaders of both groups to introduce the study and explain its rationale, leading to high-level meetings that ensured a significant response rate and thorough data collection. The questionnaire items were carefully designed to capture data on sports sponsorship, brand image, and purchase intention toward sponsors' products. A 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree," was utilised to measure responses. The study's measurement items were revised from earlier research and evaluated according to the standards for scale

development. The questionnaire was structured to effectively address the research problem and objectives, with questions tailored to measure each construct of interest.

Pre-Test

The instrument was pretested on a sample of 120 respondents and reviewed by three experts in the field (two practitioners and one researcher with relevant expertise). This pre-test clarified several items and yielded favourable Cronbach Alphas (Sports sponsorship = 0.88; Brand image = 0.81; and Purchase intention = 0.75).

Sampling method used and data analysis

A non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling was employed to select 398 registered fans from the two clubs within a 50-kilometer radius of their home bases.

For data analysis, Descriptive statistics, correlations, and regression analysis techniques were employed to analyse the collected data. Reliability measures including Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to ensure the validity of the instrument variables.

In conclusion, this study's methodology combined rigorous instrument design, efficient data collection methods, and advanced statistical analysis techniques to effectively investigate the relationship between sports sponsorship and fan purchase intention. [Figure 1](#) summaries the flowchart of this of this study methodology.

Results

There are two distinct stages of data analysis in the research. The first stage is the measurement of the model, which was accomplished using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The second step used the structural equation model to assess the hypotheses (SEM). Partial least squares-structural equation modeling was

used in both stages of the investigations. The data did not satisfy all the multivariate assumptions (i.e. normality) needed in parametric analyses, thus PLS-SEM was used instead because of its adaptability in terms of sample distributional features and sample size (Hair et al., 2017).

Demographic information

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in the table below.

The data presented in [Table 1](#) indicates that out of the 398 responses received, 216 (54.3%) were from female participants, while 182 (45.7%) were from male participants. This demonstrates a predominance of female respondents in the sample.

The marital status distribution among the study participants, as presented in [Table 2](#), reveals that the majority of respondents (372 individuals, 93.5%) identified as single, while a smaller proportion (26 individuals, 6.5%) reported being married. This distribution highlights a significant prevalence of single individuals within the sampled population. The high percentage of single participants suggests a demographic skew toward unmarried individuals. Understanding these insights into marital status is crucial for comprehending the demographic composition of the study's target audience.

The age distribution among the study participants, as shown in [Figure 2](#), offers valuable insights into the demographic composition of the sampled population. It's notable that a significant majority of respondents, 71%, fall within the younger age brackets of 20–29 years. while 21.4% are in the 18–19 age group. This underscores a substantial representation of youth in the study. Conversely, the older age categories (30–39 years, representing 4%; however, the combined percentage for categories 40–49 years and 50–59 years also amounts to 4%) collectively constitute a smaller proportion, accounting for only 8% of participants ([Figure 3](#)).

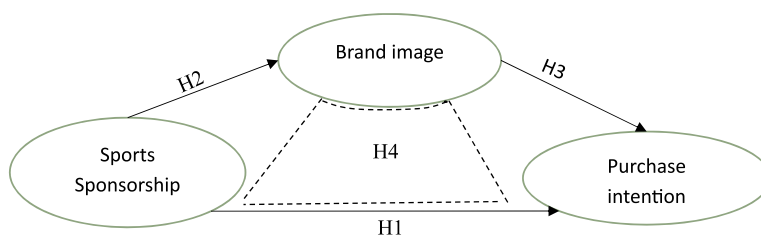


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

The results presented in [Table 3](#) show a detailed breakdown of the participant's level of education, offering valuable insights into the educational background of the sampled population. The results reveal a significant dominance of individuals with tertiary education, constituting 384 participants (96.5%). This suggests a highly educated study sample, with the majority having pursued education beyond the secondary level. Specifically, only a small proportion of 11 participants (2.8%) reported having completed Senior High School, emphasizing the prevalence of higher educational attainment among the respondents. Additionally, only 3 participants, representing 0.8%, reported having finished vocational/technical level education.

[Table 4](#) offers valuable insights into the occupational diversity among the study participants. It reveals a significant prevalence of unemployment, with 304 individuals (76.4%) identifying as unemployed. This highlights the socioeconomic challenges faced by a considerable portion of the participants. Among the employed participants, a balanced distribution is observed across various sectors. Self-employed individuals, numbering 53 (13.3% of the sample), reflect entrepreneurial activities within the population. Additionally, 21 individuals (5.3%) work in the private sector, while

another 20 (5.0%) are employed in the public sector.

KMO and Bartlett's test

The study's findings are underpinned by strong point tests, including the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, Bartlett's test (BT), and total variance explained (TVE). The KMO test, a measure of sample adequacy, returned values above the recommended threshold of 0.6 (Levine, 2016; Maïke, 2017; Traynor & Andrews, 2015), indicating a sufficient sample size for analysis. Bartlett's test demonstrated statistically significant probability values, confirming the absence of identity matrices. Additionally, TVE showed a substantial explanation of total variance by the selected factors, with ideal factor loadings explaining more than half of the variance in relevant constructs. Consequently, an index was derived for each construct using the indicators. The KMO and Bartlett's Test results are presented in [Table 5](#).

The above [Table 5](#) presents the results of the KMO and Bartlett's Test, which yielded an approximate chi-square value of 7154.211 with 253 degrees of freedom and a p -value of 0.000. These findings, as depicted in [Table 8](#), strongly suggest that the dataset is highly suitable for factor analysis. The high KMO value

Table 1. Participant gender categories.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	216	54.3
Male	182	45.7

Table 2. Participant marital status.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Marital status		
Married	26	6.5
Single	372	93.5

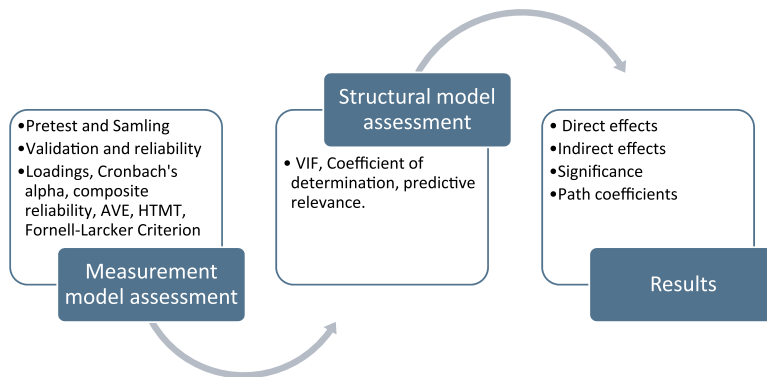


Figure 2. Flowchart of methodology.

suggests a strong correlation among variables, while Bartlett's test confirms significant correlations among the variables, thus supporting the validity of conducting factor analysis on the dataset.

Confirmatory factor analysis and measurement model

The analysis continued with a smart PLS-SEM version 4.0 evaluation of the model measurement. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to evaluate the model's consistency and validity. The constructs' reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha and a composite reliability test, while the model's validity was examined using indicator loadings, AVE, Fornell and Larcker, and HTMT. Table 6 shows that both the Cronbach alpha and composite reliability indices were high enough to give evidence of internal consistency and construct reliability, as suggested by (Hair et al. 2017). All indicator loadings for used items are over the minimum threshold of 0.7, as shown in the table. Table 6 also presents AVE values, which were found to be above the 0.5 threshold, showing the existence of convergence validity.

The factor loadings for all indicators of Brand Image, ranging from 0.739 to 0.867, suggest strong relationships between the observed variables and the latent construct as shown in the

above Table 6. Additionally, the VIF values were below 5, indicating no significant multicollinearity issues among the indicators. Furthermore, both Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) exceeded the threshold of 0.70, demonstrating good internal consistency reliability. Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) met the criterion of above 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. These findings collectively suggest that the Brand Image scale exhibits robust validity and reliability, with its indicators effectively capturing the underlying construct.

The below Table 7 will present confirmatory factor analysis based on purchasing intention.

In the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results for purchasing intentions loading, all factor loadings ranged from 0.747 to 0.831, indicating strong relationships between the observed variables (PI1 to PI7) and the latent construct (purchasing intention). Additionally, statistically significant t-values ranging from 20.654 to 46.897 further support the robustness of these relationships. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, ranging from 2.276 to 2.667, were all below 5 as shown in Table 7, suggesting no severe multicollinearity issues among the observed variables. Furthermore, both Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency reliability. The

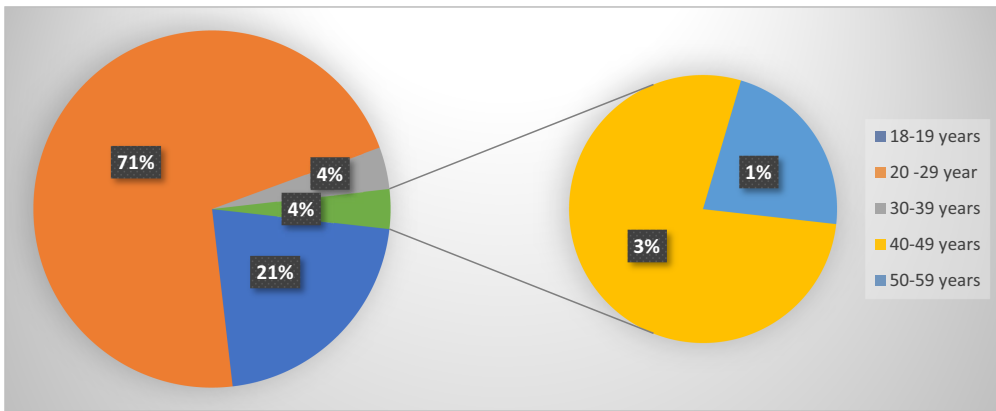


Figure 3. Participants' age group categories.

average variance extracted (AVE) value of 0.629 exceeded the criterion of 0.50, demonstrating satisfactory convergent validity. These results collectively suggest that the Purchasing Intention scale exhibits good validity and reliability. The strong factor loadings, low VIF values, and reliability measures further support the robustness of the measurement model. Overall, these findings provide confidence in the validity of the Purchasing Intention scale in the context of sponsorship evaluation.

The below [Table 8](#) focus more on the confirmatory factor analysis based on Sports sponsorship.

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the Sponsorship scale. The results revealed high factor loadings ranging from 0.714 to 0.794, indicating strong relationships between the observed variables (Sponsorship1 to Sponsorship10) and the latent construct (Sponsorship). Additionally, statistically significant *t*-values (e.g. 18.824 to 39.602) further supported

the robustness of these relationships. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values, ranging from 2.101 to 3.315, indicated no severe multicollinearity issues among the observed variables, supporting the validity of the CFA model. Moreover, both Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) value of 0.587 exceeded the criterion of 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Overall, the results suggest that the Sponsorship scale demonstrates good validity and reliability, with strong factor loadings, low VIF values, and reliable reliability measures. These findings provide confidence in the validity of the scale in measuring the underlying construct.

Discriminant validity was also assessed using a mixture of the Fornell and Larcker methods and the HTMT. [Tables 6–8](#) reveal that the square root of the AVE was higher than the within correlations, as predicted by the Fornell

Table 3. Participant level of education.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Level of Education		
Senior High School	11	2.8
Tertiary	384	96.5
Vocational/Technical	3	0.8

Table 4. Participant occupation.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Occupation		
Private Sector Worker	21	5.3
Public sector worker	20	5.0
Self Employed	53	13.3
Unemployed	304	76.4

Table 5. KMO and Bartlett's Test.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		
		0.901
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square df	7154.211 253.000
	Sig.	0.000

and Larcker criteria, providing more evidence of convergent validity.

Table 9 below shows that the ratios of heterotraits to monotraits (HTMT) are all less than 0.85, showing discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion results, presented in Table 9, offer valuable insights into the discriminant validity of the constructs in our model. Brand Image demonstrates a high AVE value of 0.806, indicating that its indicators capture more variance than the squared correlations with other constructs. This suggests

Table 6. Confirmatory factor analysis: brand image (bi) scale.

	Factor Loadings (t-values)	VIF
<i>Brand Image (CA = 0.909; CR = 0.928; AVE = 0.650)</i>		
BI1 – This sponsor's presence during football broadcasts enhances my perception of their brand image	0.739 (23.147)	2.070
BI2 – This sponsor's distinctive presence sets them apart, and positively influences their brand image.	0.746 (25.812)	1.985
BI3 – The sponsor's message is memorable, contributing to a positive brand image in my mind.	0.824 (43.313)	2.674
BI4 – The sponsorship methods employed by this sponsor add value to their brand image.	0.867 (70.403)	3.041
BI5 – My engagement with this event from start to finish positively influences my perception of the sponsor's brand image.	0.838 (54.412)	3.181
BI6 – The sponsor's prominent visibility throughout the event positively shapes my perception of their brand image.	0.805 (42.157)	2.326
BI7 – Following this sponsorship, my interest in the sponsor has increased, indicating a positive impact on their brand image.	0.814 (36.949)	2.321

Table 7. Confirmatory factor analysis: purchasing intention scale.

	Factor Loadings (t-values)	VIF
Purchasing Intention (CA = 0.902; CR = 0.922; CR = 0.934; AVE = 0.629)		
PI1 – In general, the fact that a firm is a sponsor of this event heavily influences on my purchase decision	0.747 (20.654)	2.276
PI2 – I will actively seek out products and services offered by this sponsor	0.805 (36.309)	2.599
PI3 –All else being equal, I am more likely to purchase products/ services from this sponsor than from non-sponsors.	0.815 (46.897)	2.305
PI4 – I will try to purchase products from this sponsor because their sponsorship had a positive effect.	0.831 (46.641)	2.667
PI5 – I always purchase the sponsor's products/ service to show support for this event	0.814 (38.296)	2.410
PI6 – I intend to purchase the sponsor's product/ service to show support for the sponsor	0.765 (25.904)	2.390
PI7 – In the future, I aim to increase my purchases of products/ services from this sponsor.	0.771 (27.737)	2.500

Table 8. Confirmatory factor analysis: sports sponsorship scale.

	Factor Loadings (t-values)	VIF
Sponsorship (CA = 0.922; CR = 0.934; AVE = 0.587)		
Sponsorship 1: The sponsor offers products to my favourite club (players).	0.783 (39.602)	2.520
Sponsorship 10: The sponsor offers a cash bonus when my team wins a trophy.	0.780 (30.123)	3.033
Sponsorship 2: The sponsor helps deliver campaign programmes for my team.	0.772 (32.646)	2.508
Sponsorship 3: The sponsor provides the logistics that my football team needs.	0.756 (34.707)	2.378
Sponsorship 4: This sponsorship significantly enhances the publicity of my team.	0.766 (33.551)	2.410
Sponsorship 5: The sponsor supports the communities where my team is based.	0.757 (37.490)	2.101
Sponsorship 6: The sponsor provides financial support each season.	0.714 (18.824)	2.405
Sponsorship 7: The cash sponsorship for each season is sufficient.	0.794 (38.301)	3.135
Sponsorship 8: My club receives the highest sponsorship value	0.756 (31.296)	2.597
Sponsorship 9: The sponsor organises awards schemes for outstanding players in the season.	0.780 (33.698)	2.657

Table 9. Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion			
Constructs	1	2	3
Brand Image	0.806		
Purchasing Intention	0.585	0.793	
Sports Sponsorship	0.722	0.564	0.766

clear differentiation from the other constructs and confirms its discriminant validity. Conversely, Purchasing Intention exhibits an AVE value of 0.585, surpassing the squared correlation with Sports Sponsorship ($0.564^2 = 0.318$) but falling short of that with Brand Image ($0.793^2 = 0.629$). This discrepancy suggests some overlap between Purchasing Intention and Brand Image, necessitating further examination of their distinctiveness. In contrast, Sports Sponsorship boasts a strong AVE value of 0.766, surpassing the squared correlations with both Brand Image ($0.806^2 = 0.649$) and Purchasing Intention ($0.585^2 = 0.342$), indicating clear discriminant validity for Sponsorship, distinct from both Brand Image and Purchasing Intention.

Furthermore, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of this study reveals noteworthy findings as shown in below [Table 10](#).

The HTMT ratio for the pair of constructs 1 and 2 (Brand Image and Purchasing Intention) is 0.644, while for pairs 1 and 3 (Brand Image and Sports Sponsorship), it stands at 0.770. The HTMT ratio for the pair of constructs 2 and 3 (Purchasing Intention and Sports Sponsorship) is 0.817 as shown in [Table 10](#). Notably, all HTMT ratios were below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.85, indicating good discriminant validity between the constructs. Thus, the HTMT ratios suggest that the constructs in the model are distinct from each other, underscoring adequate discriminant validity between Brand

Table 10. Heterotrait-monotrait ratiion (HTMT) – Matrix.

Constructs	1	2	3
Brand Image			
Purchasing Intention	0.644	0.799	0.532
Sports Sponsorship	0.770	0.752	0.817

Table 11. Coefficient of determination and predictive relevance.

Endogenous Constructs	R-square	Q ² predict
Brand Image	0.521	0.515
Purchasing Intention	0.384	0.309

Image, Purchasing Intention, and Sports Sponsorship in the model. The Standardised path coefficients were used to examine the hypothesis and construct a connection. The significance level of the path was determined using the bootstrap resampling approach (Henseler et al., 2009), with 500 resampling repetitions (Chin, 1998).

[Table 11](#) below displays the outcome of the structural model assessment.

The study envisaged examining whether there was a connection between sports sponsorship and purchase intention. Sports Sponsorship is significantly and positively connected with purchase intention ($B = 0.296$; $t = 3.396$; p -value = 0.001 < 0.05) as shown in [Table 12](#). Findings from this research provide support to the hypothesis (H1: Sports Sponsorship will positively influence purchase intention) that the two constructs are related. This means that Sports sponsorship explained 29.6% of the variation in purchase intention. This also implies that an increase in Sports sponsorship will lead to a corresponding improvement in the purchase intention of Ghanaian football fans.

The results of this study also revealed that sports sponsorship is significantly and positively connected with brand image ($B = 0.722$; $t = 21.571$; p -value = 0.000 < 0.05) as shown in above [Table 12](#). This result proves that the hypothesis (H2: sports Sponsorship will positively influence the brand image) that the two constructs are related. This study found that sports sponsorship explained 72.2% of the variation in brand image. This implies that an increase in sports sponsorship will also improve brand image.

The study again envisaged examining whether there was a connection between brand image and purchase intention. As can be shown in [Table 12](#), brand image is

Table 12. Hypotheses for direct and indirect relationship.

Hypotheses	Original sample	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Decision
Sports Sponsorship → Purchasing Intention	0.296	3.396	0.001	Supported
Sports Sponsorship → Brand Image	0.722	21.571	0.000	Supported
Brand Image → Purchasing Intention	0.372	4.041	0.000	Supported
Sports Sponsorship → Brand Image → Purchasing Intention	0.268	4.098	0.000	Supported

significantly and positively connected with purchase intention ($B = 0.372$; $t = 4.041$; p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$). Findings from this research provide credence to the hypothesis (H3: The brand image will positively influence purchase intention) that the two constructs are related. This study found that brand image explained 37.2% of the variation in purchase intention. This implies that an increase in the brand image will lead to an improvement in the purchase intention of Ghanaian football fans.

The study proposes to look at how brand image mediated the connection between sponsorship and purchase intention. Table 12 also shows that between sports sponsorship and purchase intention, brand image plays a significant mediating role ($B = 0.268$; $t = 4.098$; p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$). Findings from this study are in line with those from other studies, which provides support for the existence of the hypothesised connection (H4). Brand image contributes 26.8% to the positive effect of sponsorship on purchase intention. The results imply that brand image positively improves the effect of sponsorship on purchase intention.

Discussion

This study provides compelling evidence supporting the widely-held belief that sponsorship significantly influences soccer fans' intentions to purchase sports-related products. With a specific focus on Kumasi Asante Kotoko and Accra Hearts of Oak fanbase in Ghana, the research delves into the extent to which sponsorship affects the tendency of fans to buy products from sponsors.

In addition to that, the research included the concept of brand image as a mediating

variable. The study sampled 398 participants from the Ghanaian football fans fraternity and employed the partial least squares structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses of the study.

Theoretic contribution

The effect of sports sponsorship on purchase intention

In testing the first hypothesis of this study, we examined the influence of sports sponsorship on purchase intention. The analysis, conducted through a standardised path coefficients model, revealed a significant positive connection between sports sponsorship and purchase intention ($B = 0.296$; $t = 3.396$; p -value = $0.001 < 0.05$). These findings provide strong support for hypothesis (H1), indicating a clear relationship between the two constructs. Specifically, sports sponsorship accounted for 29.6% of the variation in purchase intention, suggesting that increased sports sponsorship corresponds to improved purchase intention among Ghanaian football fans. This aligns with previous research by Tomalieh (2016), who highlights sports sponsorship as a cost-effective means of targeting audiences and delivering unique messages. Furthermore, Koronios et al. (2024b) found that sponsorship has a significant effect on spectators' purchase intention. However, Silva's (2024) study also confirmed that the intention to purchase the sponsor's products is influenced by the level of behavioural loyalty expressed by the sports teams' fans. Madrigal (2000) underlines how sports sponsorship fosters personal connections with consumers through the support of sports teams, influencing purchase behaviour.

Further reinforcement of these findings comes from Meenaghan (1983) study, who underscore the role of fan commitment and positive sponsor impression in diving purchasing decisions. Recent research by Almaman et al. (2024) corroborates these insights, confirming the significant impact of sports sponsorship on fan purchase intentions. Moreover, a team's performance can further influence how sports sponsorship affects fan purchase intention, potentially impacting fans' decisions regarding the sponsor's products and services (Dzoolkarniain et al., 2023). This highlights the necessity of fostering strong relationships between teams and sponsors to maximise potential benefits for both parties, as suggested by Dzoolkarniain et al. (2023).

The impact of sponsorship on brand image

This study tested the hypothesis that sports sponsorship positively influences brand image. The analysis utilised a standardised path coefficients model, revealing a significant positive relationship between sponsorship and brand image ($B = 0.722$; $t = 21.571$; p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$). These findings strongly support hypothesis (H2), indicating that sponsorship accounts for 72.2% of the variation in brand image. This implies that an increase in sponsorship will also improve brand image. Sponsorship can boost a company's reputation by associating it with a popular or important group or cause. With this connection, the sponsor gains a favorable "halo effect" that is associated favorably with the sponsored event and its recipient. These findings corroborate (Jones's, 2014) claim that a brand's sponsorship of an event signals to the target audience that the brand shares the target audience's values and is enthusiastic about the same causes. One may increase their standing in the community by sponsoring an event, whether it's a charity event or a networking event for professionals. The findings also resonate with Koo, Quarterman, & Flynn (2006)

research, which highlighted that consumers' emotional and rational responses to sporting event advertisements significantly influence their purchasing decisions. Similarly, Maanda et al. (2020) demonstrated the importance of event-to-sponsor compatibility in shaping consumer perceptions, underscoring sponsorship's role in enhancing brand recognition and image. Freitas et al. (2020) found that esports sponsorships positively impact sponsors' brand perceptions. However, Cobbs and Groza (2022) noted that associations between sports brands and sponsors are not always asymmetrical; this indicates that brands considering future sponsorships should evaluate sports properties based on the equity of their current sponsors.

The impact of brand image on purchase intention

Hypothesis three of the study was: The brand image will positively influence purchase intention the study, therefore, proposed that there was a connection between brand image and purchasing intention. Using a standardised path coefficients model, the study found that brand image is significantly and positively connected with purchase intention ($B = 0.372$; $t = 4.041$; p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$). Findings from this research provide credence to the hypothesis (H3) that the two constructs are related. This study found that brand image explained 37.2% of the variation in purchase intention. This implies that an increase in the brand image will lead to an improvement in the purchase intention of Ghanaian football fans. The findings correspond with (Aaker, 1996), who argued that having a consistent brand image allows for the cultivation of customer perceptions. This means that perceptions about a company's brand may also predict whether a consumer will make a purchase. Long-term brand loyalty may develop when people use the same items repeatedly. The findings also corroborate the research of (Koronios et al., 2016), who focus on the effect of sponsor

image on a key behavioural outcome (buying intent). The results confirmed the hypothesis that purchaser intent is significantly influenced by the sponsor's image. Brand image, according to (Hsieh & Setiono, 2004), not only aids consumers in identifying their demands and levels of satisfaction with a certain brand but also serves to set that brand apart from its rivals. Consumers' ability to learn about a brand, identify that brand, and be persuaded to buy that brand all stem from the brand's image. Developing a strong brand identity is critical to a successful positioning strategy, and it may also improve the efficacy of marketing communications (Keller, 1993).

Brand image mediates the relationship between sports sponsorship and purchase intention

Hypothesis four was: Brand image mediates the relationship between sports sponsorship and purchase intention. The study, therefore, proposed that brand image mediated the connection between sports sponsorship and purchasing intention. Using a standardised path coefficients model, the study found that between sports sponsorship and purchase intention, brand image plays a significant mediating role ($B = 0.268$; $t = 4.098$; p -value = $0.000 < 0.05$). Findings from this study are in line with those from other studies, which provides support for the existence of the hypothesised connection (H4). Brand image contributes 26.8% to the positive effect of sports sponsorship on purchase intention. The results imply that brand image positively improves the effect of sponsorship on purchase intention. The findings corroborate the work of (Khuong & Chau, 2017), who looked at the effects of event sports sponsorship on customers' purchase intent both immediately and via the means of brand image. The data demonstrated that brand image meaningfully mediated the connection between event sponsorship and buyer intent. The findings presented here also agree with those of (Bachleda et al., 2016). These results also

corroborate those of research by (Tomalieh, 2016) that looked at how sponsored events affected participants' propensity to buy (through brand image as a mediator) and found that attendees' brand recognition, attitudes towards the event, and purchase intentions were all found to be influenced by the brands' respective images. The findings also provide credence to the claim that a company's brand image is an indication that encourages current or future consumers to engage with it (Mazzarol, et al.1998). Findings are also consistent with those of (Bachleda et al., 2016), who also investigated the mediating role of sponsor image between sports participation and purchasing intention. They concluded that sponsor image is an effective mediator of the relationship between sports participation and purchasing intention.

Practical implications of business practices

According to our study findings, we derive various practical implications for companies as outlined. Firstly, companies often do not align their sponsorship engagement with the changed objectives of a growing brand. Consequently, managers should seriously evaluate whether the firm's current sponsorship activities are aligned with its brand image objectives. Secondly, it is advisable to continuously measure any branding outcomes of sports sponsorships and test whether they lead to increased purchase intentions over time. Furthermore, it would be beneficial if a firm collaborated closely with the sponsorship property to translate branding success stories into sales stories; for example, happy fans in the stadiums tend to spend more money on their match-day experiences.

Thirdly, collaboration among the marketing, sales, and sponsorship departments seems to be crucial to understanding and measuring if a specific brand activation is successful in ultimately increasing the respective sales outcome. Fourthly, retaining and continuously

engaging with the firm's potential consumers is essential to keep the brand and its image in the minds of existing and future consumers. Although such communication strategies enhance a company's objectives, firms need to act sensibly and with complete transparency toward consumers. Corporate managers must monitor the changing preferences across different markets and the acceptance of the sports property that the company is aligning itself with. Often, sports sponsorships result in mixed feelings among consumers, and corporate managers should find ways to mitigate the negative aspects of fans who are not in favor of these marketing efforts. Finally, a firm's sponsorship strategy changes should be a proactive measure derived from empirical insights and not merely a result of an unsatisfactory deal with the rights holders.

Conclusion

The paper examines the relationships between sports sponsorship and brand image on soccer fans' purchase intention. The study used inferential statistics to examine a representative sample from the general population to conclude its characteristics. An explanatory research design was used to get more insight into the research problem. The target population includes the official supporter group of Kumasi Asante Kotoko SC (Circles) and Accra Hearts of Oak SC (Chapters). The study data was acquired through convenience sampling. 398 official supporter groups were selected at random for the research. The data were examined using a structural equation model (SmartPLS 4). Descriptive statistics were employed to summarise the data. The results showed that Sponsorship has a significant and positive effect on purchasing intention and brand image.

The findings also demonstrated that the link between sponsorship and purchasing intention is mediated by brand image. The findings imply that sports sponsorship significantly improves the purchasing intention of football fans, and

that brand image will help strengthen the impact of sponsorship on purchasing intention.

The outcome of this research sufficiently addresses all four objectives set out from the research's onset by examining the key factors that impact tax compliance. Just as the study's implication is important for discussion, it is also pertinent to deliberate on this research's practical and theoretical contributions.

The findings of this research may be used by clubs to improve their appeal to potential sponsors and by sponsors in making decisions about which sporting assets to invest in. This study's findings have important consequences for the future negotiation of sponsorship arrangements, and they contribute to the building of connections between sponsors and sports bodies. The findings underline the significance of the sponsorship-consumer intention link. So, event marketers and managers should put more effort into strategies that increase positive feelings toward the sponsoring brands, since this may have a positive impact on consumers' opinions of the brands and their propensity to make purchases of those brands.

This result lends credibility to the theory that customers' intangible feelings about a brand play a significant role in determining their purchasing decisions. As a bonus, this discovery may serve as the cornerstone for creating the distinctive identity (or image) of a company that might evoke favorable sensations (like happiness). Companies may evoke feelings in consumers by placing merchandise in aesthetically pleasing settings and providing a corresponding soundtrack. Brand image may be used by marketers as a time and money-saving strategy for promoting new goods or sites to current customers across different media channels. It will aid businesses and brand ambassadors in shifting focus away from certain issues and onto others.

Sports Sponsorship and consumer desire to buy sponsored products are linked in complex ways, although the brand image is cited as a

key mediator in these relationships. At last, this research combined sponsorship and consumer participation theory to provide a theoretical framework applicable to the study of brand image. This research lends credence to the ideas of “response participation,” “communication involvement,” and “commitment involvement” from the field of consumer involvement theory, all of which point to a beneficial effect of sponsorship on customers’ purchase intentions and brand image. It enhances and expands the brand image literature by connecting sponsorship with consumer intent to buy sponsor products. The research also aims to revise and verify the sponsorship, brand image, and consumer spending scale. This research recommends that the sponsorship follow-up procedures be based on a framework that has been subjected to empirical testing. The study’s authors contend that the framework they’ve developed may serve as the basis for future studies on consumer intent to buy. The findings would inform scholars about how sponsorship can improve consumers’ intention to purchase sponsor products, opening a new topic for future study.

Limitations & future directions

This study’s focus on soccer fans may limit the generalizability of the findings to fans of other sports and regions. Furthermore, convenience sampling and online questionnaires could introduce biases, such as self-selection bias. To address these limitations, future researchers should broaden their investigations to include fans of various sports and conduct comparative analyses to identify potential differences and similarities across different sporting contexts. This approach would enhance the understanding of the relationships between sports sponsorship and purchase intentions.

Additionally, the findings may not apply to other contexts involving sports sponsorship, as they are likely influenced by the specific details

of this study. Future research should gather data from a wider range of professional sports to further refine the concept of sports sponsorship. Sample selectivity may also pose a challenge due to the web survey methodology, particularly regarding demographic factors like gender. Therefore, employing alternative research methods, such as in-stadium interviews, could improve fan representativeness and allow for a more thorough examination of sponsorship efficacy across diverse target groups, as suggested by prior studies. Moreover, exploring other moderating variables – such as fan loyalty, team performance, and socioeconomic status, could provide valuable insights into the dynamics of sports sponsorship, brand image, and purchase intention.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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