

Louvain School of Management

To what extent does spectators' identification with athletes and teams during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games influence sponsor-related consumption behaviours?

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Academic year 2025 - 2026

Dissertation for the master of Management with major in "International Finance" – June 2026

Daytime schedule

Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of artificial intelligence tools was used at times in the preparation of this master's thesis for various aspects, such as rewording and correcting certain sentences, summarizing some scientific articles to find relevant information, translating the text into another language, and generating ideas to help structure certain parts of the thesis.

I then systematically reviewed, verified, and revised all generated material to ensure that everything was academically apt and relevant, coherent.

I accept full responsibility for the final version of this thesis, and I confirm that the content of this work is entirely my own and has been completed through the responsible, critical and mindful use of artificial intelligence tools.

1 Abstract and Keywords

This study aims to analyse the influence of spectators' identification with athletes and national teams on sponsorship-related purchasing behaviour during the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. Using a quantitative methodology, an online questionnaire was administered to 245 respondents. The results show that spectator identification is positively correlated with attitudes toward sponsors but does not directly predict purchase intention. Attitude toward the sponsor emerges as the primary predictor of purchase intention. These results highlight the importance of developing sponsorship strategies that establish authentic emotional connections and foster positive brand perceptions.

Keywords: Purchasing behaviour, sponsorship, the 2024 Paris Olympics, attitudes toward sponsors, sports marketing

2 Acknowledgement

This thesis marks the end of my academic journey and represents several months of work. It is important to me, not only because of the effort I put into it, but also because of the enriching experience I gained while working on it.

I would like to thank my advisor, Mr. Vincenzo Verardi, for his guidance, advice, and support throughout this project. I am very grateful to him for his availability and prompt feedback, which were of great help to my thinking.

I would also like to express my gratitude to everyone around me who helped me, whether through their advice or by proofreading my work. Their support was invaluable during the writing process.

I would also like to thank my family, my friends, my classmates and my lecturers, who have supported me throughout these five years at university and helped shape me into the person I am today.

Finally, I thank myself for the perseverance and dedication I put into this thesis. This experience has allowed me to grow both academically and personally.

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3 Introduction

Over the last few decades, sport sponsorship has evolved into one of the dominant communication and branding tools used by companies. In an increasingly competitive and overcrowded advertising context, customary communication formats are perceived by consumers as intrusively interruptive and less effective. Consequently, manufacturers are increasingly forced to develop and communicate emotional brand images. Sport sponsorship is an important tool for advertisers and manufacturers in that sense, as they can associate their brand with sporting events, teams and athletes that involve the public's emotions often to a great extent.

As a major sporting event, the Olympic Games represent one of the most powerful opportunities within the sponsorship ecosystem for brands to gain exposure and engage consumers around the world. The international visibility, the emotional involvement and the symbolic representation of national values as well as the media attention make the Olympic Games a highly valuable platform for sponsoring companies.

The Olympics attracts a wide variety of sponsors. Ranging from multinational companies to small local companies wanting to take advantage of the power and scale of the Olympic Games. These sponsors may include worldwide Olympic partners within the International Olympic Committee's commercial program, like Coca-Cola, Toyota and Visa, as well as national and regional companies aiming to engage local consumers through the excitement generated by the games. These sponsors also run meaningful marketing activation campaigns to promote their sponsorship through social media, events and grassroots marketing¹ efforts. Olympic sponsorships are broad and multifaceted, allowing companies to build stronger emotional connections with consumers by associating their brands with the values of excellence, unity, and inspiration embodied by the Olympic movement. This offers brands considerably higher visibility, and an increase in prestige, because consumers see them as associating with elite athletes and sporting events. These benefits allow sponsors to expect a return on investment in terms of influencing consumer behaviour both in the home market and abroad.

Paradoxically, though, sport consumption is not passive. The literature on sport consumer behaviour claims that fans will often find psychological attachment to athletes, teams, or national representatives. Social Identity Theory holds that people derive part of their self-concept from their identification with a social group. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that this process of social identification is particularly impactful in sport because fans identify with the social groups represented by the players and teams which they support. Such identification may influence not only emotional responses to sport performances, but also cognitions regarding entities associated with these sport properties, such as sponsoring brands.

Prior research has found that fans' identification with the sport team contributes positively to sponsor evaluations and the consumption of sponsors' products: sport spectators who identified strongly with the sport team had a more positive evaluation of the sponsors and purchased their

¹ Grassroots marketing, also known as guerrilla marketing, is a unique marketing strategy that brands and companies employ to design content for a niche audience. (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023)

products more often. Apart from identification, the effectiveness of sponsorship is influenced by emotional attachment, sponsorship fit, image transfer, and the credibility of the sponsor. While there is a large academic focus on the relationship between sport identification and sponsor-related outcomes, the literature suffers from several important limitations.

First, existing the sport team literature has examined only professional sports teams (e.g., American football, basketball, or baseball), and has not yet focused on major sporting events such as the Olympic Games, where fans, athletes, and stakeholders experience several overlapping forms of identification at the same time. Although spectators may identify with athletes and national teams or countries, the majority of studies have not considered the two forms of identification together. Furthermore, few researches compare the effects of athlete identification and national team identification on sponsor attitudes and purchase intentions. Despite many studies on sponsor-related attitudes as a strong antecedent of purchase intention in sponsorship, the specific indirect effects through which identification affects consumption behaviour remain poorly understood. The rationale behind this research is to investigate how spectator identification relates to sponsor-based consumption behaviours in the context of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. More specifically, the study seeks to examine the impact of spectators' identification with athletes and national teams on their attitudes towards sponsor brands and purchase intentions towards sponsor products. It examines whether sponsor attitudes serve as mediators between identification and behaviours such as consumption.

The central research question of this thesis is as follows.

To what extent does spectators' identification with athletes and teams during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games influence sponsor-related consumption behaviours?

Additionally, it tries to answer questions such as “what are the consequences of spectator identification for attitudes towards sponsoring brands?” and “what are the consequences of sponsor attitudes for purchase intention?”. Third, the study investigates whether identification impacts the intention to buy indirectly through sponsor attitudes. Finally, it studies the role of athlete and team identification in the Olympic context.

To achieve the above objectives, the present study adopted a quantitative research methodology. Data was collected using an online questionnaire distributed to the public after the conclusion of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. The online questionnaire was designed to assess the following: spectator identity, sponsor attitude, purchase intention, and sport involvement. The survey was done with continuous scale items, the data collected was cleaned, and the data set was analysed using RStudio for descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis for hypothesis testing.

4 Literature Review

4.1 Social Identity theory

4.1.1 Definition of Social Identity

According to the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), social identity is defined as that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his or her knowledge of his or her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional importance attached to that membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) gave a refined definition of social identity as the perception of oneness with a social group. They proposed two dimensions of social identity: the subjective dimension, which is related to a person's subjective sense of belonging to a group, and the relational dimension, which refers to identity in relation to other social groups.

Ultimately, the study finds that social identity is not category-specific but rather shapes people's self-definition and positioning in relation to other people across multiple social categories.

4.1.2 Social Categorization as a Foundational Mechanism

A central component of Tajfel and Turner (1979) theory is social categorization, which can be defined as a cognitive process of conceptually dividing and classifying one's own social environment into different categories (such as in-groups and out-groups) through grouping entities within one's environment (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Categorization thus serves not only to classify people, but also - by allowing people to identify themselves with a category - to locate people in a system of intergroup relations and comparisons.

This tendency to form groups and maximize differences is present regardless of the type of group being formed. According to data on the Minimal Group Model, categorization alone is sufficient to create a preference for in-group members and is not dependent on prior interpersonal interactions or shared similarities or the existence of objective conflict of interests (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Categorizing people into groups ("us" and "them") does more than just highlight differences. It also causes people to behave differently toward other groups, especially when they can compare themselves to one another.

4.1.3 In-group / Out-group Dynamics and Behavioural Implications

Social categorization directly produces in-group and out-group distinctions, and these have well-established correlations in behaviour such as in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. Individuals generally favour their own groups over others and respond differently to individuals of different groups.

These behaviours can be explained by social comparison theory. When individuals are afforded a positive social identity by their group membership, their self-esteem is increased. When

individuals belong to a negatively evaluated group, they are more likely to engage in individual mobility or change their standard of comparison to restore a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

However, the overall pattern must be treated with caution: there is experimental evidence that these intergroup phenomena are not driven by material interests or objective conflicts of interest but rather by symbolic matters, the individual's attempts to achieve positive distinctiveness with respect to relevant out-groups.

In this regard, Ashforth and Mael (1989) argue that not only do cognitive processes occur, but social identification also tends to have behavioural consequences, such that individuals are more likely to behave and think in accordance with the norms and values characteristic of the relevant social category (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

However, the authors would also separate identification per se from its effects on behaviour, with identification itself remaining a perceptual phenomenon sensitive to contextual conditions.

4.1.4 Extension of the Theory and Relevance for the Sport Context

Although social identity theory (SIT) was originally approached in a laboratory setting, it has also been subject to field study, particularly in an organizational context. In fact, Blake Ashforth and Fred Mael (1989) went so far as to suggest that people identify with an organization or institution in the same way that they identify with more customary social categories such as class or ethnicity. Therefore, this approach also extends SIT to show that the sense of belonging can also be created towards collective structures, such as those of companies, institutions or sports organizations.

This extension further implies that the processes described for these groups may also occur in any context where social categories are significant and meaningful.

The sport context may be especially helpful for the activation of these mechanisms, because categories (e.g. teams, athletes, nations) are well-defined, and symbolic meaning and an explicit comparison between groups are usually present.

It therefore seems reasonable to assume that spectators may develop forms of identification like those seen in other collective phenomena, and that identification shapes spectators' relationship to sport by improving emotional involvement, shaping beliefs, and influencing attitudes and behaviours.

This suggests that the social identity perspective is a relevant theory for understanding spectator behaviour in sport contexts.

4.2 Fan Identification in Sport

4.2.1 Concept and Definition of Fan Identification

Fan identification is based on the theoretical assumption that, in the case of sports spectators, the self-concept is to a large extent structured by the attachment to a sport team such that the team becomes a central part of the person's self-definition (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). In this perspective, being a fan is not a leisure activity, but a process of identity construction, in which the person includes the team in his or her self-concept.

In line with this, SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that at least some of an individual's self-esteem comes from being a member of a relevant social group. In the case of sport, the team can therefore be seen as a social category within which more general identification processes take place just as in more traditional social groups. It makes sense to view fan identification as an example of social identity. However, this relationship with social identity can depend on different personal and contextual factors.

4.2.2 Intensity and Multidimensional Nature of Fan Identification

Fan identification is not a binary, but a dimensional phenomenon that varies in its strength across fans. Fans identified at a higher level have a stronger and more stable team attachment than fans identified at a lower level (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). This pattern is shown as much on the attitudinal as on the behavioural level. This would support the idea that identification may vary in terms of weak psychological association or strongly internalized attachment.

Furthermore, the study of sport consumption motivation has found that sport is followed for a number of reasons. The sport fan motivation scale identified five factors: eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, and group affiliation that, together, construct the reasons that an individual may follow sport (Wann, 1995). Further, the identification factor was not independent from these dimensions, with greater levels of identification associated with stronger motivational profiles.

This suggests that fan identification should not be understood as a unique attitudinal construct, but as part of a psychological system where fan motivations, fan identity, and fan behaviour are mutually reinforcing. It should be noted that this result should not be over-interpreted, as there are some inconsistencies in the literature on whether fan motivation comes before or after fan identification.

4.2.3 Development of Fan Identification

In addition to varying intensity, fan identification may also be conceived as a process with progressive phases that cumulatively lead to an improved and increasingly stronger psychological bond with a sport or team (Funk & James, 2001). Stages along the continuum include: awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance (Funk & James, 2006).

In other words, identification does not happen in a discrete moment. Rather, it depends on the accumulation and combination of experiences, meanings and associations. As an individual moves along such a continuum, the strength of their identification with the team tends to

become more stable, less susceptible to change and more core to self-concept. At higher levels of identification, attitudes tend to exhibit a more systematic influence on behaviour, as the object becomes more integrated into an individual's identity structure.

Thus, although the psychological continuum model is useful for conceptualizing the transitions that occur between the different stages, there is little empirical evidence to support the movement from one stage to another as presented in the model and the dividing lines between stages may not be as clear.

4.2.4 Behavioural Consequences of Fan Identification

Another theme of the literature is that fan identification is associated with emotional and behavioural consequences. They are often more emotionally stimulated by sport events and respond with greater pride in their teams when they win and with greater feelings of distress when they lose (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Another potential explanation for these responses is that the team becomes part of the self-concept and sport outcomes become self-relevant.

Identification is also associated with behavioural engagement. People with high levels of identification are more likely to attend more games, spend more money on their team, and spend more time following it. Identified fans are also more likely to interact with other fans and arrange their daily lives around sport-related content. Identification is thus a mechanism by which psychological attachment is associated with a host of specific forms of sport-related engagement. These are correlational findings and, although the relationship may be causal, it could also be that identification leads to behavioural engagement, or that behavioural engagement leads to later identification. Some hypotheses suggest the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between identification and behavioural engagement.

4.2.5 Implications for Sport Consumption and Marketing

The behaviour of sport consumers is especially relevant to sport experience and fan identification. Research has suggested that spectator motives (related to achievement, aesthetics, escape, and social interaction) are associated with sport consumption behaviours' such as attending games, consuming sport media, and purchasing sport products (Trail & James, 2001). In this case, identification would seem to strengthen the power of these motivations by increasing the probability that they will lead to behaviour.

More specifically, the effect of identification was found to be stronger with respect to increased loyalty, greater likelihood of paying for squad-related items, and stronger intention to behave consistently in various consumption locations. This observation indicates that identification may be an intermediary mechanism inviting psychological motives to manifest into marketplace behaviour.

From a marketing point of view, sport organizations and associated brands should aim to develop high levels of identification where feasible. However, it would be misleading to assume that identification will systematically translate into consumption outcomes, as this link is likely to be moderated by contextual factors, or individual and situational constraints.

Overall, the evidence suggests that fan identification constitutes a relevant mechanism linking psychological attachment and affective and consumption outcomes in the context of sports.

This observation also provides a basis to analyse whether and, if so, to what extent such identification processes take place beyond the sport object and spill over to attitudes and behaviours towards affiliated brands and sponsorship.

4.3 Sport Branding and Spectators

4.3.1 Brand Image as a Driver of Fan Loyalty

Brand image includes all perceptual and cognitive associations (e.g. thoughts and feelings) related to a brand and stored in memory (Bauer et al. 2008). In the case of professional sport brands, product-related brand associations such as team performance and player quality must be supplemented by more enduring associations including tradition, stadium, logo, culture and behaviour of the fanbase.

In the next step, Bauer et al. (2008) postulate that these associations are transformed into symbolic and experiential brand benefits, along which the final overall affective evaluation of the team is formed. This overall evaluation is called brand attitude. This attitudinal dimension then appears to influence fan loyalty, defined as the psychological commitment of the fan, and their behaviour, including attendance, media consumption, and merchandise purchase.

One of this model's most interesting findings is that the influence of attribute types is different: it appears that non-product-related attributes such as tradition or supporter culture have a stronger relationship with benefits than performance. This suggests that loyalty is based less on a rational, utilitarian evaluation of sport-related performance than on the symbolic and identity-related attributes of the sporting event, leading more often to affect-laden ties, and less to contingent and instrumental forms of loyalty.

4.3.2 Brand Equity from a Spectator Perspective

Although Bauer et al. (2008) had already focused on the transformation of brand image into loyalty, the spectator-based brand equity framework goes a step further by considering the organization of brand value from the fans' perspective (Biscaia et al., 2013). In particular, brand equity is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct based on the two main underlying phenomena of internalization and brand associations.

Internalization is the extent to which a fan is incorporating the team into the self-concept. It is, therefore, a concept related to fan identification. Brand associations, on the other hand, are a broad set of attributes that the fan attributes to the brand, including aspects like organization, competition, sociability, and history. These four dimensions come together to define how the fan thinks and feels about the team as a brand.

The findings of Biscaia et al. (2013) show that brand associations have a strong influence on spectator satisfaction, and further that brand associations and internalization have a strong influence on behavioural intentions, such as the intention to attend games, the intention to recommend games and the intention to buy game-related merchandise which are all proximal

indicators of fan loyalty. Such findings support the conceptualization of brand equity as an intermediary mechanism between perceptions and behaviour.

On the other hand, self-reported intentions show an inevitable discrepancy between stated intentions and behaviour and suggest that brand equity is only one of the many factors that influences the consumer behaviour. Accordingly, it is wise to be cautious in concluding based on stated intentions as reflected in these results.

4.3.3 Motivational Foundations of Sport Consumption

One way to strengthen the understanding of any effect of brand-related perceptions on behaviour is to consider what motivates people to participate in the sport initially (Funk & al., 2001). The sport interest inventory is used to identify the structure of spectator motives and interests.

These include socializing, emotion regulation, entertainment, team/national identification, and meaning/values. Such a range of potential sport consumption motives suggests sport-related consumption is influenced by experiential, relational, and identity processes that are not dominated by any one of these motives at the exclusion of the others.

From the branding domain, the motivations could be seen as antecedents to experiential benefits as illustrated by the motivation to socialize leading to the social activeness associated with the team, and the motivation for stimulation leading to experienced emotions in the sports experience. Likewise, an individual identification with a soccer team or nation may lead to symbolic benefits, which are factored into the brand's value.

This then implies that brand image is not created independent of the motivations of the people, but is instead shaped by the degree to which the sport experience satisfies those motivations. Thus, motivations may be a predictor of the perceptions and attitudes associated with brand image.

4.3.4 Integrating Branding, Identification and Consumer Behaviour

Overall, these contributions suggest that the fan-sport entity relationship is a multi-stage process where motivations influence spectator's expectations and experiences, and subsequently brand associations and brand-related brand benefits for the sporting goods brand occur. These brand-related outcomes influence overall brand attitude, which in turn seems to influence behavioural outcomes, such as loyalty, consumption behaviours' and brand engagement.

Fan identification may therefore have a structuring effect, with identification influencing the way sport-related stimuli are selectively attended to, and interpreted. Highly identified fans may therefore be more positively predisposed to symbolic and experiential benefits than less identified fans, which may result in more positive brand attitudes and brand loyalty.

These relationships are probably not linear, as feedback loops keep the process circular. This means that identification can become branded, and branded associations become identified, through continual consumption. This provides a more subtle view of the relationship between brand and consumer.

Overall, the literature suggests that sport branding is the result of a combination of consumer motives, identity, perceived benefit, and attitudes resulting in their behavioural intentions.

It may further help to understand how, besides the team, stakeholders perceive other entities surrounding the team such as sponsors, whose effectiveness depends on their ability to integrate into this network of meanings and attachments.

4.4 Sponsorship effectiveness

4.4.1 Sponsorship as a Strategic Communication Tool

Sponsorship has progressively become a central pillar of marketing communication strategy, gradually replacing customary advertising as the premier option (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). Rather than attempting to directly induce change, sponsorship is an indirect form of communication whereby sponsors associate their brands with an event, team or person to leverage the meanings associated with it.

This distinction has resulted in academic debate as to whether the communication characteristics of sponsorship are fundamentally different from advertising. Meenaghan (2001) argues that sponsorship is different from this customary communication model, as it is less focused on persuading consumers with evident messages, and more focused on creating an association and perceived sponsorship of an event or activity that consumers value.

Thus, when considering sponsorship as a relational form of communication, it transcends simple exposure; the quality of the relationship between the sponsoring brand, the sponsored property and the audience become equally, if not more, important.

4.4.2 Affective Mechanisms: Goodwill and Emotional Engagement

One of the most important contributions of the sponsorship literature is in identifying goodwill as a key antecedent for consumer response to sponsoring brands (Meenaghan, 2001). Whereas advertising is a perceived act of commercialization, sponsorship is considered as a contribution to the sponsored event. This has a positive effect on attitudes towards the sponsor.

This is particularly true in the context of sport, as it is an emotional environment for consumers, who may become attached to specific teams or events in the course of supporting them. Meenaghan (2001) defines sponsorship the provision of financial or in-kind support to an activity by a commercial organization with the aim of generating commercial and economic benefits for the sponsor. Such an action has a halo effect on attitudes and behaviours towards the sponsor.

The goodwill generated by sponsorship is heterogeneous, depending on the degree to which people are involved with the sponsored object (i.e., the extent to which they are a fan for the sponsored object). Consistent with the broader literature on fan identification, emotional attachment was found to be an important mechanism through which sponsorship works.

4.4.3 Image Transfer and Perceived Fit

Besides affective mechanisms, sponsorship effects can also be attributed to cognitive mechanisms, such as image transfer, which describes the transfer of symbolic meanings and associations from a sponsored object to the sponsoring brand (Meenaghan, 2001).

An important aspect of the success of transfer is the fit between sponsor and sponsored activity (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008). It is concluded that when sponsors and their sponsored sport context have a strong fit on the consumer's point of view, the transfer of image is likely to occur, leading to positive brand reactions.

Another concept related to brand fit is brand cohesiveness, which reflects the degree to which sponsorships are perceived to have a logical connection. A high degree of brand fit leads to easier processing of the sponsorship, making the sponsorship more readily recalled and evaluated positively. Contrastingly, poorly matched sponsorships can become confusing to consumers, limiting their effectiveness.

The question of sponsorship effectiveness often rests on whether a calculated fit exists between the sponsoring brand and the property being sponsored.

4.4.4 Determinants of Sponsorship Effectiveness

Developing these mechanisms further, Speed and Thompson (2000) also identify several factors that affect consumer response to sponsorship: prior attitude toward the sponsor, event involvement, perceived sincerity of the sponsor and perceived fit between the sponsor and event.

Among these, participation in the event is especially important as it conditions the relationship between attention to the sponsorship, the affective response and the centrality of identification to sponsorship outcomes.

Perceived sincerity may also be important. Consumer attitudes toward sponsorship are more favourable when they believe the sponsor is acting in good faith and does not intend to profit from the activity. This is in line with Meenaghan's (2001) concept of "contingent goodwill", whereby consumers' attitudes depend on how sponsors regard their sponsorship partners.

These determinants illustrate how sponsorship effectiveness is a multidimensional construct, influenced by the interaction of cognitive evaluations, emotional responses, and contextual factors.

4.4.5 From Sponsorship to Consumer Behaviour

The main goal of sponsorship is to influence brand attitude, purchase intention and brand loyalty towards the sponsoring brand. There is evidence that sponsorship can have a positive effect on attitudinal and behavioural outcomes, but particularly when consumers have a high level of involvement with the sponsored property (Speed & Thompson, 2000; Gwinner & Bennett, 2008).

The relationship between sponsorship and behaviour is not direct but rather a multi-stage process of awareness, affective response, image transfer and intention for behavioural response (Meenaghan, 2001).

Further, it seems that this is product-specific; sponsorship effects are likely more influential for low-involvement products where affective responses have a direct impact on purchase. Contrarily, effects for sponsorship on high-involvement products are limited to attitude change, but not purchase. Thus, sponsorship is more effective when the product is low involvement.

These nuances suggest that sponsorship should be understood as a part of a communication ecosystem rather than a separate driver of consumer behaviour.

The literature suggests that the effectiveness of sponsorship is determined by emotional (e.g., goodwill), cognitive (e.g., image transfer) and contextual (e.g., fit and involvement) mechanisms. Within this framework, the role of fan identification in determining how sponsorship is perceived and what impact it has may be pivotal. This leads to a more specific question of what effects identification has on consumers' responses towards sponsors, which is explored in the next section.

4.5 Sponsor Purchase Behaviour

4.5.1 Identification and Sponsor Attitudes

Fan identification appears to be a relevant theoretical construct that can be used to better understand consumer responses to sponsorship from a consumer perspective. Because of the Social Identity Theory, high identification with a team or event can lead to this being highly relevant to consumers' self-concept and can influence perceptions of actors in the sponsorship context.

From an attachment perspective, sponsors are not seen as commercial outsiders, but as supporters and enablers of the sport entity. Thus, according to Madrigal (2001), it is expected that individuals will tend to have a more positive attitude towards sponsors, because individuals tend to positively evaluate those entities that are associated with a valued social group. It can be understood as a natural extension of social identity, whereby people apply positive evaluations to aspects of their in-group.

However, the relationship is not necessarily direct. Ko et al. (2008) also found that sport involvement, which appears to conceptually overlap with identification, exerts effects on consumer response largely through the mediation of corporate image. In particular, the more involved the individual, the more the sponsor's image would be likely to influence the individual's attitude toward the sponsor's brand.

This suggests that identification is perhaps less a cause of attitudes and more an example of how that sponsorship is interpreted. As Ko et al. (2008) highlight, sponsor awareness has little direct effect on consumer responses, and they push back on approaches that highlight exposure and awareness above all else. It therefore seems that whether sponsorship is effective or not depends more on the quality of the associations formed than on recognition.

Taken together, these studies suggest that identification is indirectly related to sponsor attitudes through its effect on consumption-based brand perception and evaluation.

4.5.2 Identification and Sponsor-Related Consumption

Identification has an influence on sponsor-related consumption behaviours beyond attitude. The extent to which consumers are willing to purchase products of a sponsoring brand appears to depend on their identification with the sport entity.

Support for the role of social identity processes on purchase intention comes from Madrigal (2001) who proposes a belief-attitude-intention hierarchy whereby identification is shown to affect the beliefs about sponsors and subsequently the attitudes toward sponsors and intentions to purchase. These studies suggest that consumption is not only the result of evaluating the product on its instrumentally functional dimensions but also on the basis of its symbolic meaning. Supporting a sponsor may thus be a way of expressing and enforcing one's loyalty to a highly valued social group.

The relationship between identification and purchase behaviour is thought to be mediated. Although sport involvement has a positive relationship with purchase intention, Ko et al. (2008) suggest that corporate image, rather than awareness, drives this relationship. Their findings reveals that a positive image of the sponsoring brand may be more important than recognition for predicting purchase intention.

Nonetheless, a difference can be observed: Perceptual and evaluative processes appear to play an important role in consumer behaviour as sponsor recognition has only a weak influence on purchase intention, although recognition itself may be a necessary condition. Instead, consumers are more influenced by how they perceive and evaluate the sponsor.

Thus, the identification-sponsor consumption link could be seen as a multi-component model, whereby identification influences beliefs and brand perception, which in turn forms attitudes and behavioural intention. Sponsorship is more likely to be understood in terms of the relationship between identity processes and brand judgment rather than through mere exposure to sponsorship stimuli.

4.6 The Olympic Games Context

4.6.1 Major Sporting Events

Major sporting events provide a context where sport marketing research is relevant given their combination of high rates of audience exposure with symbolic and emotional importance. The Olympic Games represent a unique major event characterized by a high level of audience exposure with a strong identity-based structure.

Though these events have an advantage of being international and therefore of high exposure for the sponsoring brands, mere visibility cannot explain the success of the sponsorship. Evidence shows that sponsorship effects are driven by the complex cognitive and affective processes of attention, memory, and judgment (Cornwell et al., 2005). Therefore, the Olympic Games are considered not only as a communication channel, but also as a context rich in symbols that can be appropriated by sponsoring brands.

Conversely, the Olympic Games seem to be particularly effective at triggering social identity processes, with spectators adopting the sporting performance as their own and feeling a collective identity. This supports social identity theory, which posits that much of our self-image is derived from our social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, in the context of the Olympics, the social groups are of a different nature than in normal sport contexts, because they are based on social identities such as nationality rather than clubs or franchises based on local communities.

In contrast to league-based competitions, major sporting events such as the Olympic Games tend to focus on the individual athletes, their effort and struggles, and their achievement (excellence). Such stories help constructing the narrative of the event's symbolism, which can then be transferred to the sponsoring brands. Previous studies suggest that such associations are translocated to the sponsoring brand through a process known as image transfer (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999).

These considerations suggest that the Olympic Games might provide an especially interesting context for investigating sponsorship effects, because of their high intensity, emotional appeal, and symbolic meaning. However, the effects of these contextual factors on identification and on potential sponsor-related consequences have, to date, not been well researched in depth.

4.6.2 Athlete vs. Team Identification

Processes of identification within the Olympic Games in particular, and perhaps in other sporting events, appear to operate not only at the level of individual athletes, but also at the level of collective entities.

Identification with an athlete is predominantly defined as a process that occurs at the individual level. Perceived similar athlete biographies and admiration for athletes by friends moderate this process. An athlete is an important figure, to whom a fan assigns meaning and with whom they form an emotional attachment. These findings are consistent with previous work on sport spectatorship, which indicates that attachment to sport actors can predict attitudes and behavioural responses (Wann & Branscombe, 1993).

Identification with a team, as a form of social identification, is particularly notable in the context of the Olympic Games. Individuals want to see an athlete succeed because he is an individual, because he represents a group they identify with. Thus, this form of identity is very similar to the account of social identity described by SIT, which is social categorisation and intergroup comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Even with this overlap, research on the two types of identification is generally conducted separately; research on sport identification has mainly focused around teams (e.g. teams of professional leagues) while research on individual athletes has generally focused on celebrity endorsement. As a result, the overlap between these identification processes has received limited scholarly attention.

The dualism of individual and collective identification, present in the Olympic model, where the viewer can individually identify with individual athletes as well as identify with the nation, may explain why identification has an impact on sponsor-related constructs.

That distinction may be important from a sponsorship perspective if identification can be generalized to have an important role in more general attitudes and responses towards sponsors (Madrigal, 2001), perhaps differing between involved and non-involved identifications. For example, identification with an athlete may create more personal and affective emotional responses, while national identification may create more general but less intense responses.

However, the current research does not shed light on which identification process may influence consumer behaviour more or less, and few studies juxtaposed the effects of athlete and team identification in a sponsorship context. Therefore, more research on the roles of these forms of identification in shaping consumer behaviour in the context of the Olympic Games is needed.

4.7 Research Gap and Hypotheses

4.7.1 Research Gap

Thus, there is empirical support for the notion that identification is an important factor influencing consumer behaviour in the sport context. For example, sport spectators who have a strong identification with a sport team or sport entity tend to have a more positive attitude towards the sport sponsor or sport brand (Madrigal, 2001). It has also been suggested that sponsorship effectiveness is about cognitive and affective processes beyond mere exposure, such as the image of the brand and the brand-sponsor fit (Cornwell et al., 2005; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999).

Additionally, sport consumption research consistently points to identification influencing behavioural outcomes through mediators such as beliefs, attitudes and corporate image (Ko et al., 2008). Therefore, sponsorship effectiveness is dependent on a chain of psychological processes linking identification and consumer behaviour.

However, there are further limitations to the literature at hand.

While most of the studies mentioned above have investigated identification in the context of professional team sport, less attention has been devoted to contexts in which multiple levels of identification are activated simultaneously. Major sporting events like the Olympic Games are a specific example in this vein, as they activate both individual level identification with athletes and collective level identification with national teams.

Second, although identification is believed to play a role when reacting to sponsors, little to no research has compared team identification to an identification with an individual athlete(s) and no research has compared the effects of team and athlete identification on the same sample of fans to date.

Third, although the influence of indirect identification on purchase behaviour has been demonstrated, the effects of different targets of identification on sponsor-related outcomes are not well understood. For instance, it is not known whether identification with an athlete and with the national team produce similar or different effects in attitude towards sponsors and purchase intentions.

The above gaps highlighted the need for a better understanding of how those forms of identification work in the Olympic context and how they influence consumer responses towards sponsors.

4.7.2 Hypotheses Development

Considering the theory developed above, it is reasonable to expect that identification will play an important role in the way consumers respond to sponsoring.

First, based on the principles of social identity theory and previous research, persons who strongly identify psychologically with a sport entity will have a positive evaluation of sponsors of that sport entity. This is based on transference which states that people transfer positive feelings of the in-group to the out-groups (Madrigal, 2001). It follows that those who are more identified should favour the sponsors more than those who are less identified.

H1: *Identification is positively related to attitudes toward sponsors.*

Second, there is general agreement that attitudes are important antecedents of purchase intentions. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that positive sponsor attitudes lead to positive purchase intentions. Accordingly, these attitudes (in particular, corporate image and brand image) are major antecedents of purchase intentions in the marketing literature (Ko et al., 2008).

H2: *Attitudes toward sponsors are positively related to purchase intention.*

Third, while identification can influence purchase intentions, several studies have showed that the relationship is indirect, with identification mainly influencing beliefs and attitudes, which in turn affects behavioural intentions. This indicates that it might be appropriate to consider attitudes as a mediating variable in the identification-purchase intention relationship.

H3: *The relationship between identification and purchase intention is mediated by attitudes toward sponsors.*

Within the specific context of the Olympic Games, it also may be useful to distinguish between athlete identification and national team identification. As has already been established, spectators may identify with athletes, identify with national teams, or engage in both: effects may differ between the two.

Athletic identification may lead to emotional and personal responses, while national identification may lead to collective and group responses. The literature does not discuss the strength of these effects.

H4: *Identification, towards an athlete or national team, is positively correlated with favourable attitudes towards sponsors of the identified athlete or sports team.*

These findings underscore the need for further research into the effects of complex identification in multi-level sports contexts.

Also, this review highlights the importance of understanding the dynamic relationship between identification, consumer behaviour, and sports marketing, particularly in contexts such as the Olympic Games, where identity dimensions are particularly amplified.

5 Empirical study

5.1 Methodology

At the beginning of the present research work, it was planned to consider a wider field of sports marketing in consumer behaviour with different types of sports events. However, as the reflection progressed, it became necessary to narrow the research to one specific event in order to obtain a more concrete and coherent vision of the study area. As such, this choice provides a more structured analysis and also better conforms to the quantitative approach used. The scope of the research question also became sharper: here the identification of the spectators with the athletes or the teams was also a factor in their relationship with sponsors.

5.1.1 Choice of the Topic

An interest in the area of sports marketing has also motivated this research, particularly the role which brands play in affecting consumer behaviour through sport. As brands in sport are often very creative, this leads to questions about how brands can affect consumers. This reflection is as much about the sports industry as it is about my own consumption: “how much do these strategies affect what I buy?”

The Paris 2024 Olympic Games were chosen as the subject partly because, while niche sporting events have only a small and specialized audience, the larger audience, and particularly large exposure of sponsors, makes the Olympic Games an especially valuable object of study to understand the above-mentioned mechanisms in detail.

In general, the research program investigates the processes and consequences of identifying with an athlete or a team. A key idea of this research program is that people compare and identify with sports figures and do things that help them become more like the athlete or team with respect to consumption-based behaviours’ among other things.

5.1.2 Research Approach

Applying a quantitative approach, this study examines how spectators' identification with an athlete or a team can affect their reactions to sponsors in the context of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

This eased testing of the relationships between variables in the theoretical research and the hypotheses developed in the literature review. This was to determine if level of identification had a positive or negative effect on attitude towards a sponsor brand which, in turn, affected purchase intention of the sponsor brand.

The quantitative method is appropriate for this study because it provides standardized data across a large number of participants and allows statistical analyses to examine relationships between variables.

5.1.3 Instrument and Variables

The data were collected using a questionnaire based on the framework given in the literature review to ensure that there was consistency between the theory and the data.

These three concepts are identification, attitude toward the sponsoring brand, and purchase intention. With several items, these constructs can be measured more reliably.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire, using a slider scale from 0 to 100, allowing the agreement response to be more sensitive than a more conventional 5-point Likert scale.

5.1.4 Construction of the Analytical Model

Underlying the model is the assumption that spectators' identification with athletes or teams positively influences attitudes toward sponsors, resulting in purchase intentions. Accordingly, identification is the independent variable in the model. In contrast, attitudes toward sponsors and purchase intentions are the dependent variables in the model. This helps to test the relationships between these different dimensions consistent with the hypotheses defined in the literature review, which will be tested in the following sections using the data collected.

The empirical analysis is based on the following regression models.

$$\begin{aligned} & \textbf{SponsorAttitude}_i \\ &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Identification}_i + \beta_2 \text{SportInvolvement}_i + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} & \textbf{PurchaseIntention}_i \\ &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Identification}_i + \beta_2 \text{SponsorAttitude}_i + \beta_3 \text{SportInvolvement}_i + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

Where:

- Identification_i represents the level of identification with the athlete or team
- SponsorAttitude_i represents the mediator variable capturing respondents' attitudes toward sponsor brands
- SportInvolvement_i represents the respondent's general involvement and interest in sport PurchaseIntention_i represents purchase intention
- ε_i is the error term

To further investigate the indirect mechanism linking identification and purchase intention, a mediation analysis using bootstrap estimation was conducted in the empirical analysis section.

5.2 Research Context

5.2.1 Data Collection Procedure

Respondents were then asked a screening question about whether they had followed the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Only respondents who said that they had followed the Paris Olympic Games were included in the sample for this research study. Therefore, respondents who answered the screening question negatively, which means that they did not follow the Paris Olympic Games, were excluded from the remaining questions.

The questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms between 20 April and 10 May 2026, after the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous.

Out of a total of 245 responses, after the screening process and deletion of incompletely filled questionnaires, a valid sample of 119 respondents was obtained. This sample size represents 51% of the original data. This loss, which is due to the filtering process and the exclusion of incomplete questionnaires, is not random.

Sample and limitations

In addition to the screening questions, respondents were asked about their general behaviour toward the consumption of their sponsor, purchase intentions, sponsorship preferences, interest in sport and the Olympic Games, and their demographics. Each variable item was measured on a 0 to 100 scale, with answer options ranging accordingly.

This research was conducted via a convenience sample², where participants were found and recruited via the researcher's networks. Therefore these findings are not generalizable to the wider population and cannot be assumed to be representative of the spectator population of the Olympic Games. Consequently, many variables can be explored and tested or otherwise inferred to determine if they relate to one another.

² A convenience sample is a type of non-probability sampling method where participants are selected based on their proximity, availability, and ease of access to the researcher. (Qualtrics, "Convenience Sampling", n.d.)

6 Analysis of the Collected Data and Findings

This chapter aims to analyze the results of the questionnaire administered to the sample group during the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. The goal is to assess the influence of spectators' identification with athletes or national teams on their attitudes toward sponsors and their consumer behaviour.

The analysis was structured quantitatively in RStudio after processing the data to improve the validity and reliability of the observations that would be kept for the analysis. After that, descriptive statistics were calculated to stress the characteristics of the sample and to articulate the information related to the variables of the study. Third, reliability analyses were computed to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales used to form the main variables.

This chapter discusses the descriptive statistics, reliability analyses, correlations, regression analyses, and mediation analyses conducted to test the research hypotheses stated in the literature review. Finally, the results of the present study are discussed in terms of the former studies and theoretical framework.

6.1 Data Preparation and Cleaning

We followed data preparation procedures before the statistical analysis. Data cleaning is commonly practiced in quantitative research. It helps to reduce errors and other potential issues, as well as to decrease the possibility of biases to achieve the most credible and trustworthy results possible in research. A special focus was given on ensuring that responses were comprehensive and relevant, because this is best practice in empirical research.

An online questionnaire using Qualtrics was used to gather data. Responses from a total of 245 people were collected, but not all were used. The first filter was the question: "Did you follow the Paris 2024 Olympic Games?". The reason for this filter is that the current study focuses on the role of spectator identification during the Olympic Games. Consequently, data from individuals who did not attend the Games was excluded.

Because of this reason, only respondents who indicated a positive response to this question were included in the final model. Therefore, the dataset was reduced from 245 to 160 observations since these respondents had at least a minimum level of exposure to the event, and were therefore able to make responses on that basis.

In the second analysis, only questionnaires without missing responses were used and those with missing responses were excluded. Missing data were not imputed as this would have reduced the quality of statistical tests due to the nature of the missing data. These filters further reduced the sample to 119 observations from an original 160.

In the present study, the constructs of athlete identification, team identification, attitude toward sponsors, and intention to purchase were measured using continuous slider scales, which ranged from 0 to 100. This type of measurement allows for more subtle observations of participants' levels of endorsement than customary Likert-type scales, which could result in a ceiling effect. Furthermore, such scales allow the same variables to be treated as quasi-

continuous measures, thereby allowing the use of parametric analyses³ such as correlation and regression.

The data set included continuous variables, such as slider scales, and categorical variables, such as participant gender, age group and whether respondents had made a purchase. Some of these variables were not collected for all respondents because they had been screened out.

The main constructs of the study were all measured with multiple items, including spectator identification with four items and sponsor attitude, purchase intention, and sport involvement with multiple items to create a scale. Composite score were computed by calculating the averages of scores for the items.

In this way, the final sample consisted of 119 valid and complete answers used for all the analyses presented in the paper. This data preparation decision is one of the factors ensuring the results are trustworthy and allowing the descriptive statistics, reliability analyses and inferential analyses to be carried out.

6.2 Description of the Sample

The second step consists of a descriptive analysis of the profile of the respondents with the objective of presenting the composition of the sample and putting the results of the statistical analysis into proper context.

From the sample, 119 respondents who reported following the Paris 2024 Olympic Games were included in the analysis, ensuring that all respondents included in the analysis had a minimum exposure to the event, allowing for them to respond.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Age	Under 18	3	2.6%
	18–24	41	35.0%
	25–34	21	17.9%
	35–44	10	8.5%
	45–54	17	14.5%
	55–64	20	17.1%
	65+	5	4.3%
Gender	Male	53	45.3%
	Female	64	54.7%
Country	Belgium	94	80.3%
	France	6	5.1%
	Luxembourg	10	8.5%
	Other	7	6.0%

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

³ Parametric analyses refer to statistical techniques that assume variables are measured on continuous scales and generally rely on assumptions such as normality and linearity.

Demographics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Most participants were relatively younger, with a majority of them being aged between 18 to 34 years old. However this sample was likely biased by the fact that the questionnaire was an online study posted on social media sites, and so cannot be considered a representative sample of the population of Olympic viewers and must be treated with caution.

The proportions of female and male respondents were equal, with other identity options also available.

Each participant reported their consumption of a number of media types (e.g., television, streaming channels, social media, or going to the Olympic Games) which we will convert into several binary variables, since the media consumption of the Olympic Games is multi-channel. In addition, respondents were asked whether they felt like an athlete, a national team, or both while watching the Olympic Games. These responses were later transformed into binary variables for further exploration of differences in athlete and team identification.

Respondents of the survey may or may not have purchased any product(s) from the official Olympic sponsors, and thus, the factors can be differentiated in terms of whether they could be applied to respondents who have purchased the products.

The sample, which includes fans with different identification levels, media exposure and consumption behaviour, can therefore be used to investigate the role of spectator identification and sponsorship measures in the context of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

6.3 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Descriptive statistics are provided below in Table 2, the key variables of this research, identification, sponsor attitude, purchase intention and sport involvement.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Identification	63.08	24.10
Sponsor attitude	42.36	28.46
Purchase Intention	19.82	18.99
Sport involvement	66.15	23.59

Table 2: Means and Standard deviation of the main study variables

Descriptive analyses reveal that participants were highly involved in sport ($M = 66.15$, $SD = 23.59$), and in the athlete or team they were mainly supporting ($M = 63.08$, $SD = 24.10$). Therefore, the final sample could be said to largely consist of sport spectators highly involved with the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

For the sponsorship effects on the other two constructs: 42.36 ($SD = 28.46$) attitude toward the sponsor brand and 19.82 ($SD = 18.99$) purchase intention with respect to the sponsor brand. Indeed, the respondents are interested in and identify more with the Olympic Games as well as Olympic athletes or teams, this does not necessarily extend to sponsor-related purchase intentions.

6.4 Reliability Analysis of the Scales

All items of the different constructs were Cronbach's alpha tested for internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha test is used to measure internal consistency, which is a measure of the quality and reliability of the items included in a scale. It is a critical step in quantitative research to ensure the reliability of constructs.

Construct	Cronbach's alpha
Identification	0.87
Sponsor attitude	0.96
Purchase intention	0.88
Sport Involvement	0.84

Table 3: Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the measurement scales

Table 3 shows that all scales had acceptable levels of internal consistency. The identification scale (four items measuring the emotional attachment to the supported athlete or team) had a high level of internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$). Likewise, the sponsor attitude scale had high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.96$), showing that the items of the individual's attitude toward the sponsor brands are positively correlated.

The purchase intention scale was also found to have good reliability ($\alpha = 0.88$), and the sport involvement scale had good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.84$).

Overall, all Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, confirming that the scales used in this study are reliable and suitable for subsequent statistical analyses.

6.5 Correlation Analysis

A correlation analysis was conducted to see if the main variables in the study, i.e., identification, sponsor attitude, purchase intention and sport involvement, were correlated to each other. The purpose of the correlation analysis is not to establish causal relationships between the variables, but rather to examine whether they tend to evolve together and to identify the strength and direction of their associations before conducting regression analyses.

The correlation coefficients are visible in Table 4.

Variables	1	2	3	4
1	1			
2	0.31	1		
3	0.18	0.44	1	
4	0.42	0.13	0.02	1

Table 4 : Correlation matrix of the main study variables

Note: 1= Identification, 2= Sponsor attitude, 3= Purchase Intention, 4= Sport Involvement

To sum up, there was a positive relationship between the identification and the attitude towards the sponsor ($r = 0.31$). This means that if spectators identify better with the athlete or team, the attitude towards the sponsor brand would be more positive. However, the relationship between identification and purchase intention was weaker ($r = 0.18$).

Furthermore, participants' identification was only moderately correlated with their involvement in sport ($r = 0.42$), such that those who were generally interested and involved with sport were more likely to identify with athletes and teams during the Olympic Games.

The strongest relationship was sponsoring attitude and purchase intention ($r = 0.44$), suggesting that positive attitude toward a sponsor brand will increase the likelihood of an individual making a purchase from that brand.

Finally, sport involvement was not related to purchase intention ($r = 0.02$). Thus general sport interest did not affect sponsor-driven purchasing behaviour. But identification was positively related to sponsor attitude and had a weak correlation with purchase intention. It also indicates that sponsor attitude may have a mediator effect on the relationship between spectator identification and purchase intention, and this was tested via mediation analysis.

After determining if the main variables are correlated, the following hypothesis assesses to what extent the variables lead to sponsor-related purchase intention, analysed through regression analysis.

6.6 Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which identification, sponsor attitude, and sport involvement predict sponsor-related purchase intention.

Variable	Beta coefficient	P-value	Interpretation
Identification	0.058	0.447	Not significant
Sponsor attitude	0.287	< 0.001	Significant positive effect
Sport Involvement	-0.059	0.432	Not significant

Table 5 : Multiple regression analysis predicting purchase intention

Model statistics:

- $R^2 = 0.203$
- $F = 9.613$
- $p < 0.001$

The overall fit of the regression was statistically meaningful, $F(2,247) = 9.613$, $p < 0.001$, meaning that the model was a good predictor of purchase intention towards sponsor brands. The model explains 20.3% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.203$). In practice, this means that buying behaviour also depends on factors like price, habits, personal preferences, and so on.

As shown in the table above, sponsor attitude has a meaningful positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$). Respondents who express a more favourable attitude towards a sponsor brand are more likely to show purchase intentions towards that brand.

Identification with athletes or teams ($\beta = 0.058$, $p = 0.447$) and sport involvement ($\beta = -0.059$, $p = 0.432$) did not have a statistically important direct effect on purchase intention.

These findings indicate that spectator identification is not a direct antecedent of sponsor-related purchase behaviour, but has an indirect influence through attitudes towards sponsor brands. The indirect relationships have been verified with the help of a bootstrap mediation analysis.

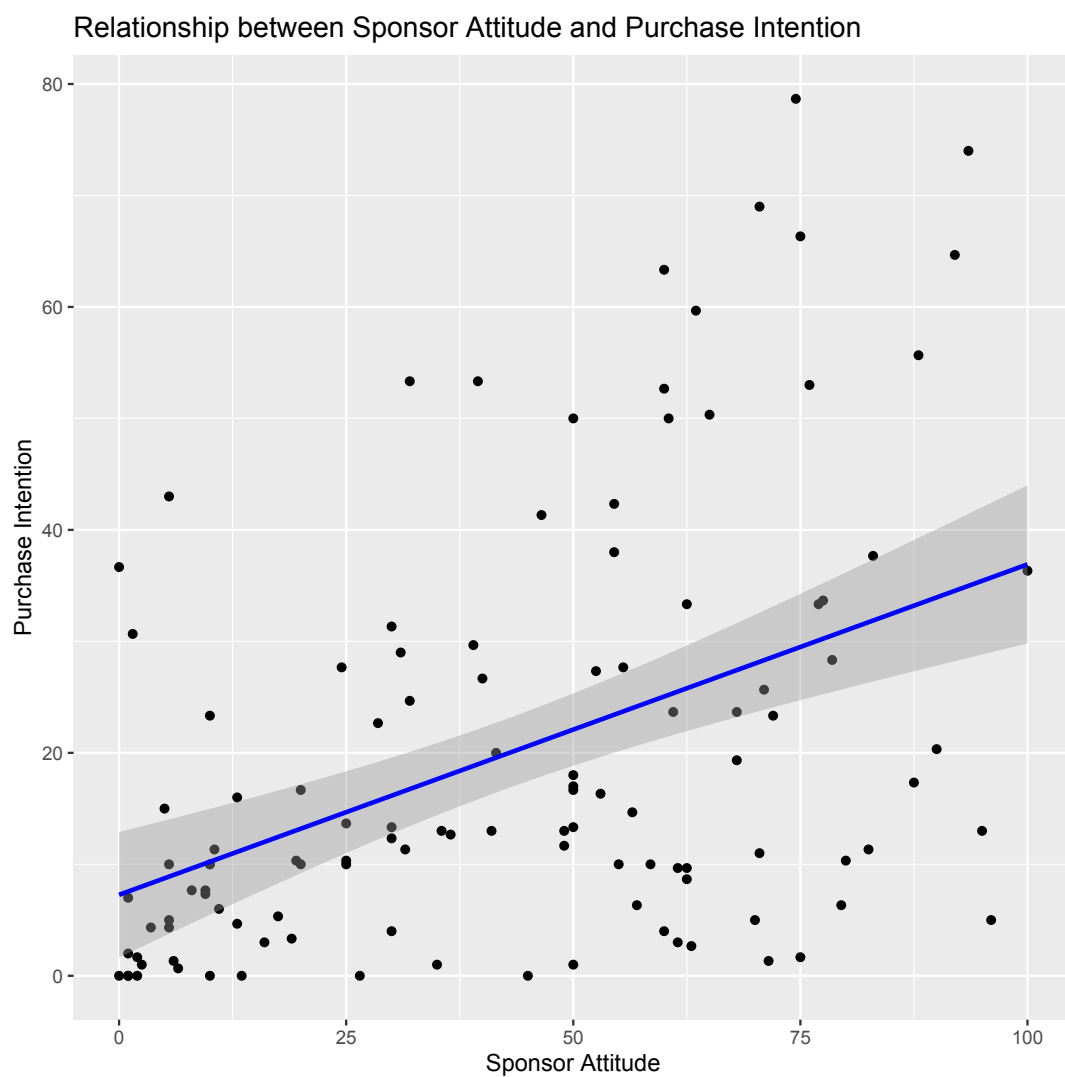


Figure 1 : Relationship between sponsor attitude and purchase intention

Figure 1 illustrates the positive relationship between sponsor attitude and purchase intention. The upward regression line suggests that respondents with more favourable attitudes toward sponsor brands tend to report higher purchase intentions. However, the dispersion of observations also indicates that additional factors may influence sponsor-related purchasing behaviour.

6.7 Mediation Analysis

To further determine the underlying mechanism, we conducted a mediation analysis to examine whether sponsor attitude mediated the relationship between spectator identification and purchase intention. Additionally, to test H4, we investigated whether this mediation effect differed across three groups based on spectators' identification targets: those who identified with an athlete only ($n=42$), those who identified with a national team only ($n=99$), and those who identified with both ($n=24$). For the overall sample mediation analysis, the mediation model was analysed using the bootstrap method with 5,000 simulations in RStudio. Two regression models were examined: the mediator model (identification predicting sponsor attitude) and the outcome model (purchase intention as a function of identification and sponsor attitude). This approach allows us to measure the indirect effect of identification on purchase intention through sponsor attitude separately from the direct effect. For the group-specific mediation analyses (H4), we used the same bootstrap approach with 5,000 simulations, stratified by identification target group. Sport involvement was excluded from the H4 analyses due to missing data in the Athlete and National Team groups and because it does not represent a theoretical component of the mediation pathway tested by H4.

Table 6 presents the overall mediation results for the total sample.

Effect	Estimate	P-Value	Interpretation
ACME (indirect effect)	0.106	0.005	Significant
ADE (direct effect)	0.058	0.400	Not Significant
Proportion mediated	64,6%	0.035	Significant

Table 6: Mediation analysis results

The overall mediation analysis results provide strong support for the mediation hypothesis, demonstrating that spectators' attitudes toward sponsors mediate the effects of spectator identification on purchase intention. The indirect effect on purchase intention through sponsor attitude was statistically significant ($ACME = 0.106$, $p = 0.005$), while the direct effect of spectator identification on purchase intention was not significant ($ADE = 0.058$, $p = 0.400$). Notably, sponsor attitude mediated 64.6% of the effect of identification on purchase intention.

The mediation analysis results provide support for the mediation hypothesis, which predicts that spectators' attitude toward a sponsor mediates the effects of spectator identification on purchase intention. The indirect effect on purchase intention via a sponsor's attitude was statistically important ($ACME = 0.106$, $p = 0.005$), while the direct effect of spectator identification on purchase intention was not. Moreover, sponsor attitude mediated 64.6% of the effect of identification on purchase intention.

Results indicate that the effect of spectators' identification on purchase intention is mediated by favourable brand attitude toward the sponsor brand. However, the results did not reveal that spectators' identification with athletes or national teams has a direct effect on their purchase intention. Spectators who identified with athletes or national teams had a more favourable attitude toward the sponsor brand.

Figure 2 shows the mediation mechanism identified in our analyses.

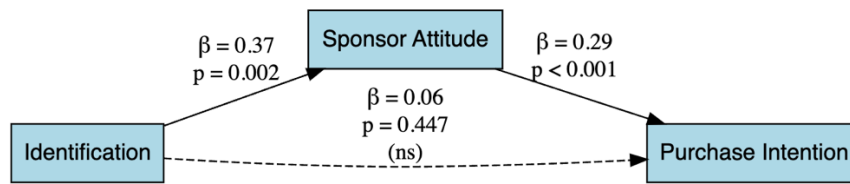


Figure 2: Mediation model of the identification-sponsor attitude-purchase intention relationship

Figure 2 summarizes the following mediation: the findings showed that identification predicted sponsor attitude, while sponsor attitude predicted purchase intention. Additionally, the presence of no important direct relation between identification and purchase intention suggested that the relation between them is an indirect mediation effect via sponsor attitude.

6.8 Hypothesis Testing

The statistical analyses conducted in this study allow the proposed hypotheses to be evaluated.

H1: Identification is positively related to attitudes toward sponsors.

Positive correlation was found between identification and sponsor attitude. Specifically, in the current study, the correlation of the two variables was $r = 0.31$. This meant that as respondents identified more with the athletes or national teams, they also had a more positive attitude toward the sponsor brands. Therefore, H1 is supported.

H2: Attitudes toward sponsors are positively related to purchase intention.

The result of the regression analyses indicated that attitude toward sponsor had a meaningful positive influence on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$). This shows that participants who have a more positive attitude toward the sponsor brand are more likely to purchase the products of the sponsor brand. All the above factors favour H2.

H3: The relationship between identification and purchase intention is mediated by attitudes toward sponsors.

Moreover, a bootstrap mediation analysis was performed to test whether sponsor attitude mediated the relationship between spectator identification and purchase intention. The results found an important indirect effect through sponsor attitude (ACME = 0.106, $p = 0.005$) and a non-important direct effect through spectator identification and purchase intention (ADE = 0.058, $p = 0.400$). The results suggest that spectator identification influences purchase intention through more positive attitudes towards sponsor brands. Thus, H3 is entirely supported.

H4: Identification toward an athlete or national team is positively correlated with favourable attitudes toward sponsors of the identified athlete or sports team.

Next, under stratified mediation analysis, given the three comparison groups (Athlete only $n=42$, National Team only $n=99$ and Both $n=24$), found that the sponsor attitude had a meaningful and substantial mediation effect only for the National Team group with a statistically meaningful ACME of 0.122 ($p = 0.0015$) and a proportion mediated of 46.3%. Therefore, H4 was supported.

In contrast, full mediation is not found in the Athlete only group (ACME = 0.181, $p = 0.178$, percentage of mediation = -26.6%). The reason for the mediation in this subgroup not to be important could be the relatively small group size ($n=42$) in this subgroup. For both groups, the mediation effect is low (ACME = 0.117, $p = 0.096$), as the direct effect of identification on purchase intention is dominant (ADE = 0.716, $p = 0.0001$). This indicates that for spectators identified with athletes and national teams, the direct effect is more important than the mediation.

H4: Results provide partial support for H4 as H4 was fully supported when comparing the National Team identification group as the indirect effect of identification for the sponsor's attitudes was strongest for this group. However, this effect was not replicated in groups who

identified with other social groups. In sum, these results suggest that the relationship between identification and attitudes toward sponsors depends on whether the social identity would be considered individual or collective.

6.9 Interpretation of Findings

This research has implications for spectator identification and sponsor-related consumption behaviour at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

The first study also demonstrated the effect of identification on attitudes toward the sponsoring brands, as the more the spectators identified with the athletes (or the national teams), the more positive the attitude toward the sponsoring brands. These results revalidate the Social Identity Theory and the results from previous sports sponsorship research that the consumer's attitudes about the sports property are transferred to the sponsoring brands (Madrigal, 2001) as well as the role the consumer's emotional involvement with the athlete and with the team plays in sponsorship effectiveness.

Identification does not have a strong effect on purchase intention because the results of the study only found a slight positive correlation between the two factors, which was confirmed by regression analysis. Thus, being strongly attached emotionally to a player or team does not lead to consumption intentions for the sponsor's brand.

In contrast, sponsor attitude was the strongest determinant of purchase intention in the model, and the results showed that respondents who held a positive attitude towards sponsor brands were more likely to express their purchase intentions towards sponsor products. This finding is consistent with the mainstay marketing literature on the effect of brand attitude and corporate image on consumer behaviour (Ko et al., 2008). More specifically, in relation to the Olympic Games, sponsorship is most likely to influence consumer behaviour when it results in positive attitudes towards the sponsor brand.

The mediation analysis provided support for the indirect effect of spectator identification on purchase intention through sponsor attitude, such that spectator identification positively influenced sponsor attitude, which, in turn, positively influenced purchase intention toward the sponsoring brands. The analysis also showed that the direct effect of identification on purchase intention was non-meaningful even after controlling for the indirect effect.

The results do not support the impact of emotional identification with the players or national teams on sponsor-related consumption behaviours. Instead, emotional identification seems to have an impact through attitudes towards the sponsor brand. Thus, sponsor attitude is suggested to mediate the effect of emotional identification on sponsor-related consumption behaviour.

Further sport involvement itself was not an important contributor to the purchase intention. That means sport involvement does not drive consumption behaviour with regards to sponsorship. Instead it is the emotional involvement with certain sportsmen or sports teams and the positive image of the sponsoring brand which drive purchase intention.

In general terms the results of the current study suggest that psychological and attitudinal processes that take place between spectators and sponsors are an important determinant of sponsorship effectiveness. A spectator's sponsorship effectiveness is likely to be improved when the spectator identifies with the sponsoring brand on an emotional basis and has a favourable attitude towards the sponsoring brand. In major sporting events including the Olympic Games such identification can be used to foster sponsorship outcomes through brand attitudes.

For H4, the mediation analysis split by group shows that the National Team identification group had the strongest mediation effect. Within this group, 46.3% of the identification effect on purchase intention occurred through the sponsor attitude. This is consistent with Social Identity Theory in that national team identification is a collective social identity through which positive in-group evaluations extend to the sponsors of the group. The mediation effects in the Athlete identification group are small or not important, implying that the athlete identification in this group may be mediated by different psychological processes. This underlines the need for specificity in targeting the identification objects in the field of sponsorship research.

6.10 Partial Conclusion

The chapter examines spectator identification, sponsor attitudes, sport involvement, and purchase intention at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games.

In conjunction, the scales used to measure athlete and national team identification, as well as sports consumption involvement, were both relatively high, as reported by the respondents. Reliability analysis also found the scales used in the present study to exhibit appropriate levels of internal consistency.

These data build on previous results which show that in the context of sports sponsorship, the higher the spectators' identification with the athletes or the national teams, the better they evaluate the sponsor brands. However, identification has no meaningful effect on their intention to purchase.

In terms of the relative importance of independent constructs for predicting purchase intention, sponsor attitude is the strongest predictor of purchase intention because it has a greater effect on purchase intention than other variables. This means that respondents who had a favourable attitude to sponsoring brands were more likely to buy the products. These findings imply that for a sponsorship strategy to be effective, the transfer of affect from the sponsored object to the sponsor brand must encourage a positive attitude in the consumer.

Following this, a mediation analysis confirmed that sponsor attitude was an important mediator of identification and purchase intention. Furthermore, identification did not predict purchase intention, but was related to sponsor consumption intention through more positive sponsor attitude. This finding may help us better understand the impact of sponsorship at major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games.

The findings of this study are of importance to scholars and practitioners. Emotional and attitude-related factors such as sponsor image and consumer perceptions will become critical

in the understanding of how firms use sponsorship as a marketing tool in major sporting events and the effects of these sponsorship initiatives on consumer behaviour.

7 Discussion and General Conclusion

7.1 Discussion of Findings

This study examined the relationship between spectator identification, attitudes toward sponsors, sport involvement, and purchase intention in the context of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. More specifically, the objective was to understand to what extent identification with athletes and national teams influences sponsor-related consumption behaviours.

Overall, the findings confirm that psychological identification plays an important role in shaping spectators' perceptions of sponsoring brands. However, the results also suggest that identification alone is not sufficient to directly generate sponsor-related purchasing behaviours. Instead, sponsor attitude emerged as the central mechanism explaining purchase intention.

7.1.1 Identification and Sponsor Attitudes

This finding is consistent with earlier research that spectators with high levels of self-categorizations as sports fans or national supporters more positively evaluate sponsoring brands (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) postulates that individuals transfer positive self-esteem linked to a relevant group (such as a sports fan or national supporter) onto related entities.

However, the group-specific analyses for H4 reveal important heterogeneity in this relationship. The mediation effect was strongest for spectators identifying with national teams (46.3% mediated, $p = 0.0015$), moderate and non-significant for those identifying with both athletes and teams (14.0% mediated, $p = 0.096$), and weak for those identifying with athletes alone (-26.6%, $p = 0.178$). This variation suggests that the Social Identity Theory explanation is particularly relevant for collective identities (national teams) but may not fully explain the mechanism for individual athlete identification or combined identifications.

This appears to not apply to the Olympic Games, where, unlike regular professional sport competitions, all levels of identification are simultaneously activated. Fans may also identify with individual and national athletes and teams, national values, and collective emotions, thus improving the processes by which symbolic meaning is transferred from events to sponsors, as discussed in the sponsorship literature.

The results therefore support the proposition that consumers generalise their positive affective responses to a sport entity to the brands that sponsor the entity (Madrighal 2001). This suggests that the effectiveness of the sponsorship is more than just a function of the amount of brand exposure, as the emotional meaning of the sporting context should be considered too.

7.1.2 Sponsor Attitude as the Main Driver of Purchase Intention

The most important predictor of purchase intention of the sponsor brand was the known attitude towards the sponsor. Those respondents with a more favourable attitude towards the sponsor brand also tended to report a higher purchase intention for the sponsor brand.

The results confirm previous findings regarding the importance of brand image and corporate image for sponsorship effectiveness (Ko et al., 2008). Attitudes towards sponsors were to a

much greater extent than identification responsible for predicting consumers' behavioural intentions in the present study.

It suggests that emotional attachment to athletes or teams does not automatically translate into commercial behaviour. Spectators enjoy providing emotional support to athletes, taking pride in national teams, and being part of the Olympic experience. So, identification may not be commercially relevant unless it contributes to the establishment of positive sponsor associations.

These findings also add some subtlety to the sport sponsorship literature which has predominantly suggested a positive and direct relationship between identification and consumption outcomes where attitudinal mediators have been disregarded and where identification has been assumed to play a more direct role in mediating the identified relationships.

7.1.3 The Mediating Role of Sponsor Attitude

The second mediation analysis further supported that sponsor attitude mediated the identification-purchase intention effect in the model whereby identification was positively related to sponsor attitude which was then positively related to purchase intention. However, the identification-purchase intention effect was not statistically important.

This leads to the conclusion that the identification-sponsor consumption behaviour relationship mainly functions through a positive influence on sponsor brand evaluations. Sponsor attitude was a partial mediator on identification and purchase intention (64.6%). Such results further stress the role of attitudinal processes in sponsorship.

Identification was positively related to sponsor attitude, which was positively related to purchase intention, though direct effects of identification on purchase intention were not statistically important. Together, these findings support the idea that identification influences consumer behaviour indirectly, by way of psychological evaluations of the sponsor brand rather than through direct behaviour.

It has been found that sponsorship does not necessarily work better when it is more easily recalled, or liked by consumers. Rather, sponsorship works better when the sponsorship-audience emotional bond is higher, leaving more positive foci on how the brand is evaluated.

In this sense, sponsor attitude is the psychological mechanism that relates emotional identification to marketplace behaviour.

7.1.4 The Limited Role of Sport Involvement

Another interesting finding was that general sport involvement was not considerably correlated with intention to buy from sponsors, contradicting assumptions in the sport marketing literature.

Specifically, results suggest that sport consumption alone may not influence sponsor-related consumption behaviour, and consumer attachment and positive product assessments are

responsible for influencing purchase intentions more strongly than sport consumption behaviour.

The results underscore the importance of emotional specificity in sponsorship. Consumers are motivated to respond to the sponsorship because they form emotional bonds with specific athletes/teams or specific symbolic aspects of the event rather than through general affinity to sport.

7.2 Strategic Recommendations for Sponsors

7.2.1 Managerial Implications

This study's findings have several implications for sport marketers and sponsoring brands.

Investigations of sponsorship agreements at major sporting events such as the Olympic Games should not only focus on visibility and exposure of the sponsor, but also consider the emotional connection and attitude that the spectators have towards the sponsor.

Second, sponsoring brands could build meaningful emotional brand associations with athletes and national teams. Activation campaigns that build upon storytelling, shared values, authenticity, and emotional connection with the brand are likely to be more effective than the customary logo visibility approach.

Third, brands could strive to present a consistent brand image, and show sincerity in their sponsorship, because sponsor attitude has the largest effect on purchase intention. Consumers may respond positively to brands involved in sponsorship when they believe the sponsorship is legitimate and consistent with the Olympic Games' image.

Thus, the results suggest that the Olympic sponsorship is likely to be more successful as a long-term brand-building strategy rather than as a short-term sales-generating strategy, and that its primary effect is to build brands and indirectly influence consumption behaviours.

7.2.2 Recommendations

The following are implications of these findings for sponsoring brands of major sport events such as the Olympic Games.

These results suggest that whether the brand itself will be seen or noticed while sponsorship exists is not a key factor. Indeed, it may be that identification with the brand is not sufficient on its own. This suggests that simply increasing logo exposure or media presence during the Olympic Games may not create sponsor-related consumption behaviours.

It may be more helpful to utilise strategies that trigger an emotional response to create positive attitudes toward the sponsoring brand, as sponsor attitude was found to have a stronger predictive effect on purchase intention than sponsor exposure. Strategies that create emotional involvement, authenticity, and positive brand image should be prioritised.

Second, the findings suggest that athlete-centred storytelling may be an effective communication strategy in Olympic sponsorship situations where sponsorship attitudes are influenced positively by athlete and national team identification. Hence, brands may want to

launch storytelling campaigns using athletes' stories, values, feelings, and accomplishments to leverage their sponsorships. As proxies for values such as resilience, determination, success, and national pride, Olympic athletes allow consumers to bond with sponsoring brands at an emotional level.

Activation processes must differentiate themselves from customary advertising approaches and instead provide narrative-based communication that can create emotional meaning for consumers.

Third, our results support that Olympic sponsorship might be more effective as a brand positioning strategy than as a marketing activation strategy to drive short-term sales. Empirical evidence that identification does not predict purchase intention provides an argument to evaluate sponsorship effects more broadly than by direct short-term sales effects. Instead, sponsoring brands too can be characterised in terms of image, emotional positioning, how they're perceived by consumers, brand equity, etc.

This is particularly important considering the potential influence of symbolism and attitudinal effects on major sporting events, as opposed to merely the customary understanding of sponsorship as a transactional exchange.

The current study, too, suggests the importance of authenticity and sponsor-event fit. In line with earlier research, it can be assumed that consumers are in favour of sponsors who fit with the values and identity of an event. Thus, brands that activate the values of togetherness, respect, excellence and inspiration are likely evaluated more positively as sponsors of the Olympics.

Sponsors should thus adapt their communication strategies to respect the symbolic nature of the Olympic Games, as this will increase the sponsors' perceived sincerity and emotional credibility.

Finally, research indicates that digital and interactive sponsorship activation strategies will play an increasingly important role in the future. Since many respondents watch Olympic Games through social media, streaming services and other digital channels, brands could use more online interactive content to strengthen emotional connections during the event.

Examples may include athlete partnerships, going behind the scenes, consumer engagement programs, stories on social media, and customised digital experiences that seeks to deepen consumer ties to the event and sponsor brands.

In summary, the findings suggest that to be successful, Olympic sponsorships must also incorporate factors such as emotional consumer engagement, perceived fit, symbolic congruence and brand relationship building.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

This study nevertheless has some limitations.

First, since this study used a convenience sample that was largely recruited through the researcher's personal networks and social media, its results cannot be generalised to the entire population of Olympic spectators.

Second, the relatively small sample size with a bias towards young respondents was another drawback to the generalizability of results.

Third, while a stratified mediation analysis was conducted for H4 to examine athlete, national team, and combined identification groups separately, the overall regression analyses (H1-H3) used a combined identification variable. This approach may mask group-specific effects. The H4 results reveal that the mediation mechanism operates significantly only for the National Team group, suggesting that future research should conduct separate regression analyses for each identification target.

Self-reported purchase intention does not always translate into consumption behaviour, which remains a further limitation of this study.

Although a mediation analysis was performed, this is a cross-sectional study, and therefore causality cannot be fully established between identification, sponsor attitude, and purchase intention.

7.4 Future Research Perspectives

Future work could separate athlete identification from national team identification in the context of the Olympics.

Isolating other possible mediating or moderating variables of the relationship between spectator identification and sponsor-related consumer behaviour could be of future research interest.

Longitudinal studies, conducted before, during, and after major sporting events, may help researchers better understand how sponsorship effects evolve through time.

Future research may wish to explore how Olympic sponsorship is different from sponsorship in sports league professional sports, and whether major sporting events provide a unique sponsorship environment.

Finally, qualitative techniques, such as interviews or focus groups, could be conducted to investigate spectators' emotional attachment to sponsoring brands in greater detail.

7.5 General Conclusion

The study examined the results of athlete and national team identification on sponsorship-related consumption behaviours of spectators of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Results in total imply that identification positively affects the attitude towards sponsors. Therefore, the more favourable the attitude is towards sponsors, the more purchase intention increases.

However, this is not true for all types of identification: the group-stratified analysis of H4 shows that the mediation effect is strongest for the national team identification (46.3% mediated, $p = 0.0015$) and weaker or absent for the athlete-only identification. The study also highlights the relevance of Social Identity Theory for sponsorship contexts in relation to collective types of identity like national teams and that individual athlete identification might differ.

This mediation analysis implies that identification has an indirect effect on purchase intention through more positive attitudes toward sponsor brands.

Overall, their results suggest that studies of the effect of sponsorship should focus on psychological processes and that the mechanism for Olympic sponsorship is unlikely to be exposure, but is more likely to work via emotion and positive brand associations.

The discoveries add to the sport marketing and sponsorship literature by improving the understanding of the identification processes of stakeholders at major sporting events with high emotional and symbolic value.

This means that in an environment of increasing competition with other forms of communication, a brand associated with a prominent sporting event needs to establish deeper emotional connections to be positively received by viewers.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A - Survey Questionnaire

This appendix presents the questionnaire administered through Qualtrics for the purpose of this study. The survey was distributed online to participants and included questions related to spectator identification, sponsor attitude, purchase intention, and sport involvement.

Start of Block: Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted as part of a master's thesis. The purpose of this study is to examine spectators' identification with athletes and teams during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games and its influence on sponsor-related consumption behaviours. Your participation is entirely voluntary. The questionnaire is anonymous and no personally identifiable information will be collected. The survey will take approximately 5–7 minutes to complete. The collected data will be used solely for academic purposes. By clicking “Yes”, you confirm that you agree to participate in this study.

I have read and understood the information above and agree to participate in this study.

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If = No

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Eligibility and Screening

Q1 Did you follow the Paris 2024 Olympic Games?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q1 = No

Display this question:

If Q1 = Yes

Q2 How did you mainly follow the Paris 2024 Olympic Games?

- ☐ On-site (in person) (1)
- ☐ TV (2)
- ☐ Streaming platforms (3)
- ☐ Social media highlights only (4)

End of Block: Eligibility and Screening

Start of Block: Athlete and/or Team Supported

Q3 During the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, which athlete and/or team did you support the most?

- ☐ An athlete (1) _____
- ☐ A national team (2) _____
- ☐ Both (3) _____

Important: Please answer the following questions by thinking about the athlete and/or team you mentioned above.

End of Block: Athlete and/or Team Supported

Start of Block: Athlete and Team Identification

Q4 Thinking about the athlete and/or team you supported the most during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

I feel a strong sense of connection with this athlete/team. (1)	
When this athlete/team performs well, I feel proud. (2)	
I feel emotionally involved in this athlete's/team's performances. (3)	
Supporting this athlete/team is important to me. (4)	

End of Block: Athlete and Team Identification

Start of Block: Athlete and Team Identification

Q5 Thinking about the athlete and/or team you supported the most during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

I feel more favorable toward brands that sponsor the athlete/team I support. (1)	
Brands that sponsor the athlete/team I support have a better image in my opinion. (2)	

End of Block: Athlete and Team Identification

Start of Block: Sponsor-related consumption

Q6 During or after the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, did you purchase any product from an official Olympic sponsor because of the event? Official Olympic sponsors are companies that partner with the Olympic Games (e.g., Coca-Cola, Visa, Samsung, Airbnb).

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ I don't know / Not sure (3)

Display this question:

If Q6 = Yes

Q7 Which type of sponsor-related product did you purchase?

- ☐ Food & beverages (1)
- ☐ Sportswear / equipment (2)
- ☐ Technology / electronics (3)
- ☐ Other (4) _____

End of Block: Sponsor-related consumption

Start of Block: Sponsor-related Purchase Intention

Q8 Thinking about the official sponsors of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Official Olympic sponsors are companies that partner with the Olympic Games (e.g., Coca-Cola, Visa, Samsung, Airbnb).

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

I am more likely to buy products from brands that were official sponsors of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. (1)	
I would prefer a sponsor brand over a non-sponsor brand when making a purchase. (2)	
The Paris 2024 Olympic Games positively influenced my intention to purchase sponsor brands. (3)	

End of Block: Sponsor-related Purchase Intention

Start of Block: Sport and Olympic Involvement

Q9 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding your general interest in sports and the Olympic Games.

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

I am generally very interested in sports. (1)	
I usually follow major international sporting events. (2)	
The Olympic Games are important to me. (3)	

End of Block: Sport and Olympic Involvement

Start of Block: Demographic Information

Q10 How old are you?

- ☐ Under 18 (1)
- ☐ 18-24 years old (2)
- ☐ 25-34 years old (3)
- ☐ 35-44 years old (4)
- ☐ 45-54 years old (5)
- ☐ 55-64 years old (6)
- ☐ 65+ years old (7)

Q11 How do you describe yourself?

- ☐ Male (1)
 - ☐ Female (2)
 - ☐ Non-binary / third gender (3)
 - ☐ Prefer to self-describe (4)
-

- ☐ Prefer not to say (5)

Q12 In which country do you currently reside?

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (1357)

End of Block: Demographic Information

8.2 Appendix B – Variable definitions and Dataset Overview

8.2.1 Variable Dictionary

This appendix presents the variables used in the empirical analysis, including their definitions and coding structure.

N°	NOM. VARIABLES	DESCRIPTION	VALUES
Q1	FOLLOW	Whether the respondent followed the Paris 2024 Olympic Games	1=Yes, 2=No
Q2	MEDIA	Media channels used to follow the Olympic Games (multiple respo	Transformed into binary variables (see MEDIA_* variables)
Q2a	MEDIA_ONSITE	Followed the Olympic Games on-site	0=No, 1=Yes
Q2b	MEDIA_TV	Followed via TV	0=No, 1=Yes
Q2c	MEDIA_STREAMING	Followed via streaming platforms	0=No, 1=Yes
Q2d	MEDIA_SOCIAL	Followed via social media	0=No, 1=Yes
Q3	SUPPORT_TYPE	Type of entity supported during the Olympic Games	1=Athlete, 2=National team, 3=Both
Q4	IDENTIFICATION	Level of identification with the supported athlete/team	Continuous variable (0–100)
Q5	ATTITUDE_SPONSOR	Attitude toward brands sponsoring the supported athlete/team	Continuous variable (0–100)
Q6	PURCHASE	Bought sponsor product	1=Yes, 2=No, 3=Not sure
Q7	PRODUCT_TYPE	Type of sponsor-related product purchased	1=Food & beverages, 2=Sportswear/equipment, 3=Technology/electronics, 4=Other, N/A=No purchase
Q8	PURCHASE_INTENTION	Intention to purchase sponsor brands	Continuous variable (0–100)
Q9	SPORT INVOLVEMENT	General interest in sports and Olympic Games	Continuous variable (0–100)
Q10	AGE	Age group	1=Under 18, 2=18–24, 3=25–34, 4=35–44, 5=45–54, 6=55–64, 7=65+
Q11	GENDER	Respondent gender	1=Male, 2=Female, 3=Non-binary, 4=Self-described, 5=Prefer not to say
Q12	COUNTRY	Country of residence	Categorical variable coded numerically based on predefined country list
AB	IDENTIFICATION_SCORE	Average of ID1–ID4 items	Continuous variable (0–100)
AC	SPONSOR_ATTITUDE_SCORE	Average of ATT1–ATT2 items	Continuous variable (0–100)
AD	PURCHASE_INTENTION_SCORE	Average of PI1–PI3 items	Continuous variable (0–100)
AE	SPORT_INVOLVEMENT_SCORE	Average of SPORT1–SPORT3 items	Continuous variable (0–100)

8.2.2 Constructed Variables

IDENTIFICATION	SPONSOR_ATTITUDE	PURCHASE_INTENTION	SPORT_INVOLVEMENT
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615
63,08119658	42,35897436	19,82051282	66,15384615

The variables used in the regression analysis were constructed as aggregated scores based on multiple questionnaire items.

- **IDENTIFICATION** corresponds to the average score of ID1–ID4 items.
- **SPONSOR_ATTITUDE** corresponds to the average score of ATT1–ATT2 items.
- **PURCHASE_INTENTION** corresponds to the average score of PI1–PI3 items.
- **SPORT_INVOLVEMENT** corresponds to the average score of SPORT1–SPORT3 items.

All scores were transformed to a 0–100 scale.

8.3 Appendix C – Regression Outputs

8.3.1 Multiple Regression Model Predicting Purchase Intention

Dependent variable: Purchase Intention Score

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	7.866	5.492	1.432	0.155
Identification Score	0.058	0.076	0.764	0.447
Sponsor Attitude Score	0.287	0.059	4.871	< 0.001
Sport Involvement Score	-0.059	0.075	-0.789	0.432

Model statistics:

- $R^2 = 0.203$
- Adjusted $R^2 = 0.182$
- F-statistic = 9.613
- $p < 0.001$

8.3.2 Mediator Regression Model

Dependent variable: Sponsor Attitude Score

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	18.990	8.534	2.226	0.028
Identification Score	0.370	0.116	3.193	0.002
Sport Involvement Score	0.001	0.118	0.007	0.994

Model statistics:

- $R^2 = 0.098$
- Adjusted $R^2 = 0.082$
- F-statistic = 6.204
- $p = 0.003$

8.3.3 Bootstrap Mediation Analysis

Bootstrap mediation analysis conducted with 5000 simulations.

Effect	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME (Indirect Effect)	0.106	0.027	0.207	0.005
ADE (Direct Effect)	0.058	-0.073	0.206	0.400
Total Effect	0.164	0.016	0.335	0.032
Proportion Mediated	0.646	0.152	2.390	0.035

The mediation analysis confirms that sponsor attitude significantly mediates the relationship between identification and purchase intention.

8.3.4 Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Identification	0.87
Sponsor Attitude	0.96
Purchase Intention	0.88
Sport Involvement	0.84

All scales exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency.

8.4 R Code

Link to the RStudio code:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1lZXwNxDbD7BqP_XmgwhuIGSkVC0YudN6?usp=share_link

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