

Effectiveness of sponsorship type, sport team identification, team support and congruence

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to investigate the interaction effect that sponsor-team congruence and team fan (home/rival team) have on the influence of different types of sports sponsorship (joint, corporate social responsibility [CSR]-linked and conventional sponsorship) on fans' attitudes and purchase intentions toward the sponsor.

Design/methodology/approach – Two experimental studies were conducted on 391 and 297 participants. The data gathered underwent analysis through five multivariate general linear model analyses.

Findings – The study found that CSR-linked sponsorship had the strongest positive impact and the weakest negative impact on the attitude and purchase intention of home team supporters and the attitude of rival team supporters. Nonetheless, the sponsor-team congruence did not significantly moderate the relationship. Additionally, the research demonstrated that the fan identity of both home and rival teams moderates the impact of sports sponsorships on attitude and purchase intention.

Originality/value – Previous research has studied the effectiveness of sponsorship format types independently. This is the first research comparing sponsorship formats regarding fan type and congruence.

Keywords Sports sponsorship, Sport team identification, Congruence, Sponsorship type, Home team

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The effectiveness of sports sponsorship is very important for sponsors. Sponsors are looking for valuable benefits by sponsoring sports teams. However, there is confusion regarding the effectiveness of sports sponsorship. For example: Do the fans of Manchester United and AC Milan react positively to the sponsors of Manchester City and Inter Milan? On the other hand, several years ago, "Iran Furniture Market" and "Hamrahe Aval" companies, respectively, sponsored the two most popular teams of Esteghlal and Persepolis in Iran. But these sponsorships stopped after a few years. The managers of these two companies implicitly expressed their dissatisfaction with this type of sponsorship. These are examples of sports sponsorship challenges. It seems to be necessary to determine an optimal strategy to maximize the benefits of sports sponsorship for sponsoring companies. In addition, forecasts indicate a significant increase in sports sponsorships globally, with estimates suggesting that it will increase to \$90 bn by 2027 (Batt *et al.*, 2021). In other words, the market will be saturated with competitors. In the current study, we explored this type of phenomenon in depth, by examining interaction effect of sponsor-team congruence and team fan (home/rival team) on the different types of sports sponsorship (joint, corporate social responsibility [CSR]-linked and conventional sponsorship) on fans' responses.



Conventional sponsorship of athletes, teams and events has demonstrated its capacity to enhance fan attitudes and purchase intentions (Koronios *et al.*, 2016; Kwon *et al.*, 2016; Tsordia *et al.*, 2018). In an effort to intertwine sports sponsorship with CSR initiatives, certain sponsors have adopted CSR-linked sponsorship practices (Flöter *et al.*, 2016). This approach has yielded favorable outcomes, such as heightened brand credibility, positive attitudes toward the sponsor (Flöter *et al.*, 2016; Urich *et al.*, 2014), improved attitudes resulting from an understanding of the humanitarian motives behind such endeavors (Habitzeuter and Koenigstorfer, 2021) and intentions to repurchase (Kim *et al.*, 2020).

Simultaneous and joint sponsorship of two rival teams by companies represents an intriguing communication strategy aimed at engaging broader fan bases (hereinafter referred to as joint sponsorship). Joint sponsorship is a term used in the context of sponsorship and funding of events, programmers or activities. It refers to a situation where two or more organizations or entities collaborate to jointly sponsor or fund an event or initiative. Joint sports sponsorship serves as a domain where teams have the potential to polarize opinions (Angell *et al.*, 2016) and negative sentiments harbored by fans toward the rival team can translate into adverse attitudes and unfavorable intentions toward the sponsors associated with that team (Angell *et al.*, 2016; Bee *et al.*, 2021; Boecker, 2021; Cobbs *et al.*, 2017; Dalakas and Phillips Melancon, 2012; Kim and Kim, 2018). It is of the utmost importance for sponsors to carefully select a sponsorship strategy that minimizes negative impacts on fans of rival teams. However, research in this domain remains limited, particularly when examining the reactions of fans supporting the rival property being sponsored.

While researchers have explored the three types of sponsorships (conventional, CSR-linked and joint) and the perceived congruence between the sponsor property and the sponsor, the effectiveness of each strategy has been studied individually (e.g. Bee *et al.*, 2022; Flöter *et al.*, 2016; Habitzeuter and Koenigstorfer, 2021; Tsordia *et al.*, 2018). In this study, we proposed a comparative analysis of these three sponsorship strategies, considering their influence on the perception of sponsorship among fans of the rival team in relation to the sponsored property. Drawing upon the attribution theory (Kelley and Michela, 1980), which suggests that fan attributions regarding sponsor motivations vary across different sponsorship strategies, we seek to make three theoretical contributions: (1) documenting the most effective sponsorship strategy in terms of fan perception, encompassing joint, CSR-linked and conventional sponsorships; (2) exploring the impact of the sponsorship strategy on both the fan base of the sponsored property and the rival fan base and (3) examining the moderating effect of identity (rival versus local sponsored property), team identity and congruence on the influence of the sponsorship strategy on consumer perception.

From a practical standpoint, this research will aid companies in selecting the optimal sports sponsorship approach to captivate potential buyers. Choosing the wrong or less effective options can lead to wasted marketing expenditures, with no tangible customer response to the sponsor's efforts.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1 *The effect of sponsorships on the attitude and purchase intention*

While engaging in team sponsorship can engender more favorable attitudes and purchase intentions among fans, the utilization of CSR-linked sports sponsorship presents an opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of such sponsorships, as exemplified by the studies conducted by Urich *et al.* (2014) and Habitzeuter and Koenigstorfer (2021). Urich *et al.* discovered that CSR-linked sponsorship contributed to

increased brand credibility and fostered a positive attitude toward the sponsor, while Habitzreuter and Koenigstorfer observed that sponsorship tied to environmental causes improved participants' attitudes toward the sponsor. These findings find support in the attribution theory (Kelley and Michela, 1980), which posits that attributing sponsor motivations to charitable-advertising goals can yield greater efficacy compared to purely advertising-centric goals.

However, it is noteworthy that sponsorship can also inadvertently reinforce unfavorable perceptions of the sponsor's motives, thereby leading to negative repercussions. According to the compensatory heuristic theory (Chernev and Hamilton, 2008), fans may perceive that allocating more resources toward social objectives implies a diversion of financial resources from the team, potentially impacting team performance. Consequently, fans may not favor CSR-linked sponsorship for team sponsors (Chang and Kwak, 2023). Nevertheless, we hypothesize that, in general, CSR-linked sponsorships are more effective than conventional (non-CSR) sponsorships.

Conversely, joint sponsorship has been found to generate ambivalence, thereby negatively affecting attitudes and intentions toward the sponsor's brand, as elucidated by Bee *et al.* (2022) and Davies *et al.* (2006). Joint sponsorship has been associated with a sense of ambiguity regarding the sponsoring company, and fans have exhibited the lowest acceptance of this type of sponsorship, with no anticipated positive relationship between club sponsorship and sponsor brand preference (Davies *et al.*, 2006). Building upon these premises, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1a.* The attitude toward the home team sponsor differs significantly between the three types of sponsorship (conventional, CSR-linked and joint). CSR-linked, conventional and joint, respectively, have the most positive effect on fans' attitude toward their home team's sponsor.
- H1b.* Purchase intention toward the home team sponsor differs significantly between the three types of sponsorship (conventional, CSR-linked and joint). CSR-linked, conventional and joint, respectively, have the most positive effect on fans' attitude toward their home team's sponsor.

2.2 The moderating role of sponsor-team congruence

Sponsor-team congruence stands as a frequently referenced factor in sponsorship research, with empirical examinations conducted to assess its impact on sponsorship effectiveness (Alonso Dos Santos *et al.*, 2023; Woisetschläger *et al.*, 2010). The conformity theory asserts that the perceived similarity between the sponsor and the cause holds paramount importance in facilitating effective information retrieval and conveying meaning (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, a high level of perceived congruence engenders a more coherent relationship between the sponsor and the cause (Angell *et al.*, 2016).

Prior studies have consistently demonstrated the positive influence of sponsor-team congruence on various sponsorship outcomes, including favorable attitudes toward the sponsor and intentions to purchase sponsor-related products (Kamath *et al.*, 2020; Oikarainen, 2020; Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2016). However, it is important to note that exposure to diverse stimuli may also foster cognitive development, leading to improved recall, enhanced cognitive processes and more desirable attitudes and behaviors (Angell *et al.*, 2016). While the existing literature on CSR-related and joint sponsorships are limited, the prevailing perspective acknowledges the benefits of high sponsor-team congruence, which positively influences fan responses. Consequently, we posit the following hypothesis:

- H2a.* Attitude toward the home team sponsor differs as a function of sponsor type (conventional, CSR-linked and joint) and congruence type (high and low). The high

congruence between sponsor-team in all three types of sponsorship leads to the more positive attitude of the fans toward the sponsor of the home team.

- H2b.* Purchase intention toward the home teams sponsor differs as a function of sponsor type (conventional, CSR-linked and joint) and congruence type (high and low). The high congruence between sponsor-team in all three types of sponsorship leads to an increase in the purchase intention of the fans toward the sponsor of the home team.

2.3 The moderating role of rival team fans

The meta-contrast principle, as postulated by [Abrams and Hogg \(2010\)](#), posits that individuals tend to accentuate the favorable characteristics of their own group while emphasizing the negative attributes of their rivals. This principle gives rise to GORFing (Grinning Over the Rival's Failure), an intra-group bias that engenders feelings of satisfaction when a rival group or team experiences defeat ([Havard, 2014](#); [Harker and Jensen, 2020](#)). The concept of *schadenfreude*, which denotes the enjoyment derived from others' misfortunes, encapsulates this sense of joy in the failures of competitors ([Cobbs et al., 2017](#); [Havard, 2014](#); [Nichols et al., 2020](#)). Notably, this feeling of *schadenfreude* can extend beyond rival teams and encompass their sponsors as well ([Dalakas and Phillips Melancon, 2012](#)).

In the realm of traditional sponsorship, *schadenfreude* has been identified as a reliable predictor of the emotional and behavioral response exhibited by rival team fans toward sponsors' advertising messages ([Angell et al., 2016](#)). Furthermore, studies have revealed that rival team fans harbor negative attitudes toward the sponsors associated with their adversaries ([Bergkvist, 2012](#); [Olson, 2018](#)). However, in the context of CSR-related sponsorship, rival fans encounter a cognitive inconsistency wherein they may appreciate the charitable contributions but hold animosity toward the team or sponsor linked to it. This inconsistency in cognitive evaluations undermines the efficacy of CSR-linked sports sponsorship. Nevertheless, joint sponsorship appears to be less susceptible to the negative reactions of rival fans, as the sponsor supports both their favorite team and the rival team simultaneously.

Conducting research in this domain holds significant value as it can provide insights into how sponsors can strategically sponsor a team to attract a maximal number of home team fans while minimizing the alienation of rival team fans. Based on the theoretical arguments and the literature presented, the third hypothesis is formulated as follows:

- H3a.* Attitude toward the sponsor differs as a function of sponsor type (conventional, CSR-linked and joint) and team fan (home and rival). The attitude of the fans of the rival team in the sponsorship (conventional and CSR-linked) will be more negative than that of the fans of the home team. But in joint sponsorship, the attitude toward the sponsor is the same for home and rival teams.
- H3b.* Purchase intention toward the sponsor differs as a function of sponsor type (conventional, CSR-linked and joint) and team fan (home and rival). The purchase intention of the fans of the rival team in the sponsorship (conventional and CSR-linked) will be lower than that of the fans of the home team. But in joint sponsorship, the purchase intention is the same for home and rival teams.

2.4 The moderating role of sport team identification

In accordance with the social identity theory ([Turner, 2010](#)), individuals construct their sense of self through their membership and affiliation with various social groups. Consequently, identification with a sports team assumes a pivotal role in shaping one's personal identity, rendering the team an integral component of an individual's self-concept ([Dalakas and](#)

Phillips Melancon, 2012). Within the domain of sponsorship research, team identity has been established as a robust predictor of fans' responses toward sponsors associated with their favorite team. Fans with a strong sense of team identity tend to exhibit more positive reactions, characterized by heightened sponsor awareness (Tsordia *et al.*, 2018), favorable attitudes toward the sponsor (Gwinner and Swanson, 2003), increased purchase intentions of sponsor products (Lings and Owen, 2007; Madrigal, 2000) and greater loyalty towards the sponsor (Levin *et al.*, 2004). However, there may also be negative consequences, as fans' more negative attitudes toward rival teams can translate into unfavorable attitudes and intentions toward the sponsors affiliated with those teams (Bee *et al.*, 2022).

Bee *et al.* (2022) uncovered that joint sponsorship can undermine the relationship between team identity and attitudes as well as behavioral intentions toward sponsors. Additionally, Davies *et al.* (2006) demonstrated that fans with strong team identities are more inclined to reject joint sponsorship. Consequently, joint sponsorship, where the sponsor supports both the rival team and their own team, encounters less favorable reception among high-identity fans in comparison to low-identity fans, leading to more negative attitudes and intentions toward the sponsor. Hence, joint sponsorship exerts a more pronounced adverse effect on the attitudes and purchase intentions of high-identity fans when compared to low-identity fans.

Presently, there exists a paucity of research examining the association between team identity and CSR-linked sponsorship. Nevertheless, we contend that in the case of CSR-linked and conventional sponsorships, where the sponsor solely supports the home team (unlike joint sponsorship), it is probable that high-identity fans will exhibit more favorable attitudes and higher purchase intentions compared to low-identity fans. Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H4a.* Attitudes toward the sponsor differ according to the type of sponsor (conventional, CSR-linked and joint) and sport team identification (high/low). High-identity fans have a more favorable attitude toward two sponsors (conventional and CSR-linked) than low-identity fans. But high-identity fans have a more negative attitude toward joint sponsor than low-identity fans.
- H4b.* Purchase intention differ according to the type of sponsor (conventional, CSR-linked and joint) and sport team identification (high/low). High-identity fans have a higher purchase intention toward two sponsors (conventional and CSR-linked) than low-identity fans. But high-identity fans have a less purchase intention toward joint sponsor than low-identity fans.

The social identity theory, as posited by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995), suggests that group membership not only fosters relationships but also gives rise to prejudice toward out-group members, leading to discriminatory behaviors. Extensive research has demonstrated that sport team identification significantly influences perceptions of rival teams and their sponsors, particularly among highly identified fans (Grohs *et al.*, 2015). High-identity fans tend to perceive rival sponsors as threats, resulting in anger, negative attitudes toward the sponsor and diminished purchase intention (Bee *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, Cobbs *et al.* (2017) have identified that fans with strong team identity display more negative reactions toward competitors in professional sports leagues. Building upon these insights, we posit the following hypotheses:

- H5a.* Attitudes toward the sponsor differ according to the type of sponsor (conventional, CSR-linked and joint), team fan (home/rival) and sport team identification (high/low).
- H5b.* Purchase intention differ according to the type of sponsor (conventional, CSR-linked and joint), team fan (home/rival) and sport team identification (high/low).

3. Study 1

The objective of this first study is to prove that congruence and rival team moderate the relationship between sponsorship type and attitude and purchase intention (hypotheses H1a, b; H2a, b; H3a, b).

3.1 Pre-tests

First pre-test was performed to ensure that the congruence manipulation in the two dummy brands was successful. We recruited 94 participants (male: 51, female: 43) were aged 19–38 years ($M = 23.3$). Participants were divided into two groups. One group was given a brief description of the home appliance brand and the other group was given a brief description of the sporting goods brand. Based on this information, participants answered sponsor-team congruence questions.

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of congruence on perceived congruence. Perceived congruence for the congruent sponsor ($M = 5.96$; $SD = 0.382$) was significantly higher than perceived congruence for the noncongruent sponsor ($M = 2.75$; $SD = 0.324$) at the $p < 0.05$ level [$F(1,38) = 820, p < 0.001$]. The results of manipulating the high-congruence and low-congruence of the two dummy brands were confirmed. In addition, we conducted a control analysis to verify that there are no differences in perceived congruence, attitude and purchase intention according to gender. All three analyses showed that there are no significant differences between the groups.

3.2 Design and procedure

The study utilized a $3 \times 2 \times 2$ research design. Three sports sponsorship (conventional vs CSR-linked vs joint), two sponsor-team congruence (high-congruence vs low-congruence) and two fans (home vs rival). There were a total of 12 experimental groups with random assignment of each participant to one of the 12 groups. The groups were sex and age-balanced to assign subjects equally to the groups. Initially, two sponsors were identified as dummy brands. Home appliance sponsor and sporting goods sponsor were selected as low-congruence and high-congruence sponsors, respectively. Scenarios were created with sponsor information for each team to test.

Participants were then asked to read the relevant scenario. Scenarios included conventional sports sponsorships, CSR-linked sports sponsorships and joint sports sponsorships for two fictitious sponsors of the home appliance and sporting goods brands, which were offered to fans of both home teams (Persepolis F.C) and rival (Esteghlal F.C). Conventional sponsorship emphasizes sponsorship of the team, CSR-linked sports sponsorship emphasizes sponsorship of the team and helps the development of sports in the country in the direction of corporate social responsibility and joint sponsorship emphasizes sponsorship of two teams at the same time. All scenarios had the same font and typography. After reading the scenario, participants answered a questionnaire containing demographic questions, attitudes toward the sponsor brand and intention to purchase of sponsor products.

3.3 Participants

The research data were collected in one of Iran's public universities and in from among all students who are fans of the two rival teams of Persepolis F.C and Esteghlal F.C. We used a public announcement to collect data. A total of 198 Persepolis F.C fans (96 females, 102 males) aged 18–42 years ($M = 24.6$) and 193 Esteghlal F.C fans (92 females, 101 males) aged 19–40 years ($M = 23.8$) participated in the study. All participants filled out their informed consent form to participate in the study and were fully explained at the end of the study.

There were no differences in sample characteristics (age and gender) between any of the 12 experimental groups. Additionally, we controlled for identity with the team by eliminating participants from both the Persepolis F.C and Esteghlal F.C teams whose average answers on the sport team identification questionnaire fell between three and five, based on the seven questions. Participants outside of this range were excluded from further research. Finally, outlier multivariate data were carried out and erase only two participants in the final dataset.

3.4 Measures

The scale items used in the study were adapted and modified from previous research. Three items measuring attitude toward the sponsor were adapted from [Speed and Thompson \(2000\)](#), while three questions regarding purchase intention came from [Lacey and Close \(2013\)](#) and sponsor-team congruence was assessed using four items from [Gwinner and Bennett \(2008\)](#). The final version of the measurement scale was translated into Persian by two bilingual researchers in the field of sports marketing. After translation, minor changes were made to the Persian version by carefully considering possible cross-cultural differences. Then, the scale was translated back into English by the authors. Finally, four bilingual sports management researchers compared the two versions of the measurement items and confirmed that the translations had the same meaning. All scales were seven-point Likert-type scales.

3.5 Data analysis

The researchers utilized various statistical methods to validate the measurement model and test the hypothesis. The CFA was conducted using AMOS software while Cronbach's alpha and multivariate general linear model (GLM) were analyzed with SPSS. To further support the results, G*Power was used to examine the power, which was found to be above 0.95 for all analyses conducted.

4. Study 1 results

4.1 Measurement model validation

We assessed the measurement model, convergent and discriminant validity and construct reliability via CFA. The absolute fit indices, incremental fit indices and parsimony-adjusted indices exceeded suggested thresholds to indicate a satisfactory measurement model fit ([Hair et al., 2019](#)). Specifically, $\chi^2/df = 1.35$; CFI = 0.926; TLI = 0.912; RMSEA = 0.061 and SRMR = 0.074. Cronbach's α of study constructs ranged from 0.77 to 0.83, exceeding the conventional 0.70 threshold, indicating acceptable internal reliability ([Nunnally, 1967](#)). Measurement model reliability was assessed using composite reliability (CR). The CR values in this study ranged from 0.83 to 0.90, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 ([Hair et al., 2019](#)); thus, the measurement model's reliability was confirmed. The convergence validity of each measure of every construct was estimated using the mean-variance extracted. The average variance extracted (AVE) greater than or equal to 0.5 is recommended ([Fornell and Larcker, 1981](#)). In this study, AVE values ranged from 0.611 to 0.70. Collectively, these tests provided evidence of CR and convergent validity ([Table 1](#)). Regarding discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE of each construct was found to be higher than its correlation with any other construct. Finally, we calculated the power of each analysis. The current power for all analyses is above 0.95.

H1. The effect of type of sponsorships on the attitude and purchase intention

A multivariate GLM was performed to test the impact of the type of sponsorship (CSR-linked sponsorship, conventional sponsorship and joint sponsorship) on attitude and purchase

intention for the home team (Perspolis). We used age, gender, education and marital status as covariable. There was a statistically significant difference in type of sponsorship on attitude [$F(2, 179) = 27.994, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.245$] and purchase intention [$F(2, 179) = 12.969, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.130$] between at least two groups (Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.75, p < 0.001$). None of the covariates significantly affected attitude or purchase intention (Table 2). Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of joint sponsorship was significantly different from conventional and CSR sponsorship for attitude and purchase intention (Table 3 and Figure 1). The partial eta squared effect size (η^2_p) was large in both analyses (Cohen, 1988). Accordingly, the first hypotheses, H1a, and H1b, are partially supported.

H2. The moderating role of sponsor-team congruence

Factors and items		λ	CR	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
Study 1	Attitude toward sponsor	0.751–0.811***	0.830	0.614	0.771
	Purchase intention	0.821–0.849***	0.875	0.703	0.812
	Sponsor-team fit	0.762–0.858***	0.878	0.645	0.831
Study 2	Sports team identification	0.741–0.831***	0.904	0.611	0.780

Note(s): λ means factor loadings, CR means composite reliability and AVE means average variance extracted. *** $p < 0.001$
Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 1. Factor loadings, validity and reliability of the measurement model for Study 1 and 2

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig	η^2_p	Observed power ^c
Corrected model	Attitude	49.394 ^a	6	8.232	9.500	<0.001	0.248	1
	PurInt	44.854 ^b	6	7.476	4.452	<0.001	0.134	0.983
Intercept	Attitude	165.293	1	165.293	190.745	<0.001	0.524	1
	PurInt	113.787	1	113.787	67.757	<0.001	0.281	1
<i>Covariate</i>								
Gender	Attitude	0.379	1	0.379	0.438	0.509	0.003	0.101
	PurInt	0.565	1	0.565	0.336	0.563	0.002	0.089
Age	Attitude	0.418	1	0.418	0.482	0.488	0.003	0.106
	PurInt	0.006	1	0.006	0.004	0.951	0.000	0.050
Education	Attitude	0.067	1	0.067	0.078	0.781	0.000	0.059
	PurInt	0.205	1	0.205	0.122	0.727	0.001	0.064
Marital	Attitude	0.035	1	0.035	0.041	0.841	0.000	0.055
	PurInt	0.698	1	0.698	0.415	0.520	0.002	0.098
<i>Main effect</i>								
Sponsorship	Attitude	48.517	2	24.258	27.994	<0.001	0.245	1
	PurInt	43.558	2	21.779	12.969	<0.001	0.130	0.997
Error	Attitude	149.916	173	0.867				
	PurInt	290.529	173	1.679				
Total	Attitude	4557.938	180					
	PurInt	3432.667	180					
Corrected total	Attitude	199.309	179					
	PurInt	335.383	179					

Note(s): ^a $R^2 = 0.248$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.222$); ^b $R^2 = 0.134$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.104$) and ^c $p < 0.05$
Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 2. GLM on type of sponsorship of Study 1

A multivariate GLM was performed to compare the effect of congruence and type of sponsorship (CSR-linked sponsorship, conventional sponsorship and joint sponsorship) on attitude and purchase intention for the home team (Persepolis). We used age, gender, education and marital status as covariable. Attitude toward the sponsor did not differ as a function of congruence [$F(1,179) = 0.012, p > 0.05$], but purchase intention did [$F(1,179) = 4.749, p = 0.031$]. There was no statistically significant interaction effect of congruence and sponsor type on attitude [$F(2,179) = 2.412, p > 0.05$] and no effect on purchase intention [$F(2,179) = 1.137, p > 0.05$] (Wilk's $\Lambda = 1.247, p = 0.292$). None of the covariates significantly affected attitude or purchase intention (Table 4 and Figure 2). The partial eta squared effect size (η^2) was small in both analyses (Cohen, 1988). Table 5 reports the information about means and standard deviations. Therefore, the second hypothesis is partially supported.

H3. The moderating role of team fan

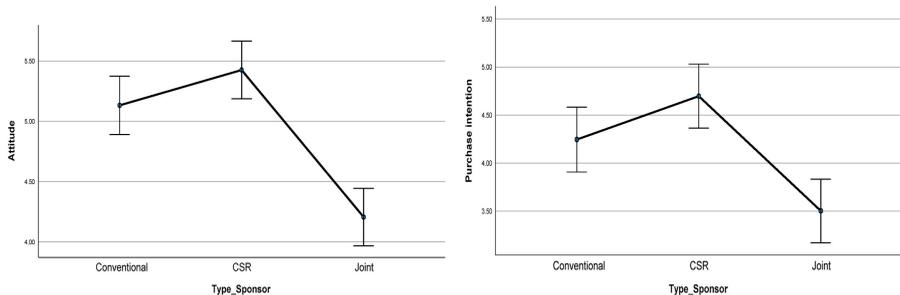
Hypothesis 3 examines whether the attitude toward sponsorship is equal between fans of the rival and home team depending on the type of sponsorship. Multivariate GLM was performed to compare the effect of the type of sponsorship (CSR-linked sponsorship, conventional sponsorship and joint sponsorship) on attitude and purchase intention for the home team (Persepolis) and rival team (Esteghlal). We used age, gender, education and marital status as covariable. There was a statistically significant effect of the interaction of team fan and sponsor type on attitude [$F(2,359) = 18.679, p < 0.001$] and on purchase intention [$F(2,359) = 17.980, p < 0.001$] (Wilk's $\Lambda = 14.016, p < 0.001$). None of the covariates significantly affected attitude or purchase intention (Table 6). The partial eta squared effect size (η^2) was small for the interaction effect (Cohen, 1988). Test for multiple comparisons found that the CSR sponsorship is significantly different between join and conventional. But joint and conventional are not significantly different. This result occurs in both cases, with the dependent variable being attitude and purchase intention (Table 7 and Figure 3). As a result, hypotheses H3a and H3b are supported.

Table 3.
Means and standard deviations of attitude and purchase intention (PurInt) for home team Persepolis

Measure	CSR		Conventional		Joint	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Attitude ^{b,c}	5.43	1.09	5.12	0.81	4.21	0.81
PurInt ^{b,c}	4.71	1.39	4.22	1.39	3.51	1.01

Note(s): ^aDifferences between CSR and conventional; ^bDifferences between CSR and joint and ^cDifferences between conventional and joint
Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 1.
Estimated marginal means of attitude and purchase intention for conventional, joint and CSR sponsorship

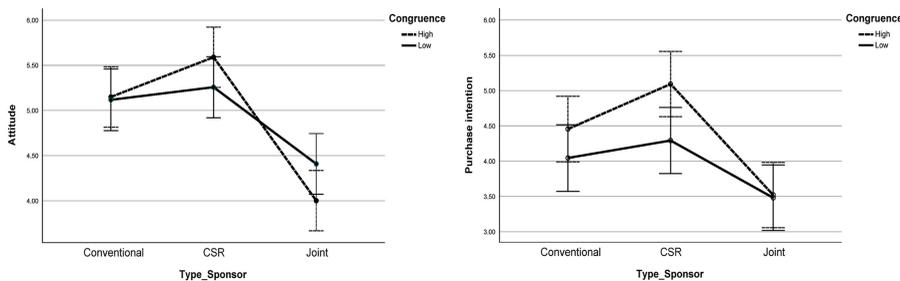


Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	η^2_p	Observed power ^c
Corrected model	Attitude	53.541 ^a	9	5.949	6.938	<0.001	0.269	1
	PurInt	56.916 ^b	9	6.324	3.861	<0.001	0.170	0.993
Intercept	Attitude	161.492	1	161.492	188.337	<0.001	0.526	1
	PurInt	109.396	1	109.396	66.785	<0.001	0.282	1
<i>Covariate</i>								
Gender	Attitude	0.429	1	0.429	0.500	0.480	0.003	0.108
	PurInt	0.492	1	0.492	0.300	0.584	0.002	0.085
Age	Attitude	0.304	1	0.304	0.354	0.553	0.002	0.091
	PurInt	0.012	1	0.012	0.007	0.933	0.000	0.051
Education	Attitude	0.029	1	0.029	0.034	0.853	0.000	0.054
	PurInt	0.267	1	0.267	0.163	0.687	0.001	0.069
Marital	Attitude	0.047	1	0.047	0.055	0.815	0.000	0.056
	PurInt	1.119	1	1.119	0.683	0.410	0.004	0.130
<i>Main effect</i>								
Congruence	Attitude	0.010	1	0.010	0.012	0.914	0.000	0.051
	PurInt	7.779	1	7.779	4.749	0.031	0.027	0.582
Type of sponsorship	Attitude	48.528	2	24.264	28.297	<0.001	0.250	1
	PurInt	43.552	2	21.776	13.294	<0.001	0.135	0.997
<i>Two-way interactions</i>								
Congruence * Type of sponsorship	Attitude	4.137	2	2.068	2.412	0.093	0.028	0.481
Error	PurInt	4.314	2	2.157	1.317	0.271	0.015	0.282
	Attitude	145.768	170	0.857				
Total	PurInt	278.467	170	1.638				
	Attitude	4557.938	180					
Corrected total	PurInt	3432.667	180					
	Attitude	199.309	179					
	PurInt	335.383	179					

Note(s): ^a $R^2 = 0.269$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.230$); ^b $R^2 = 0.170$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.126$) and ^c $p < 0.05$

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 4. GLM on type of sponsorship and type of sponsorship of Study 1



Source(s): Authors own creation

Figure 2. Estimated marginal means of attitude and purchase intention for conventional, joint and CSR sponsorship as a function of congruence type

5. Study 2

5.1 Measurement model validation

Sport team identification was measured using Likert six-item scale adapted from Gwinner and Swanson (2003). The linguistic adaptation system was identical to studio 1. The fit

summary is: $\chi^2/df = 24.1$; CFI = 0.989; TLI = 0.984; RMSEA = 0.049; and SRMR = 0.057. The validation indicators of the scale are listed in Table 1.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations of attitude and purchase intention (PurInt) for home team Persepolis

Measure	Congruence	CSR		Conventional		Joint	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Attitude	High ^{c,b}	5.59	1.03	5.15	0.82	4.00	0.78
Attitude	Low ^{c,b}	5.27	1.13	5.10	0.89	4.42	0.78
PurInt	High ^{c,b}	5.09	1.23	4.44	1.31	3.52	1.24
PurInt	Low ^b	4.32	1.44	4.01	1.51	3.50	0.72

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$
^aDifferences between CSR and conventional at $p < 0.05$; ^bDifferences between CSR and joint at $p < 0.05$ and ^cDifferences between conventional and joint at $p < 0.05$
Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 6. GLM on type of sponsorship and team fan of Study 1

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig	η^2_p	Observed power ^c
Corrected model	Attitude	179.015 ^a	9	19.891	24.158	<0.001	0.383	1
	PurInt	146.922 ^b	9	16.325	14.298	<0.001	0.269	1
Intercept	Attitude	223.520	1	223.520	271.476	<0.001	0.437	1
	PurInt	151.648	1	151.648	132.818	<0.001	0.275	1
<i>Covariate</i>								
Gender	Attitude	0.306	1	0.306	0.372	0.542	0.001	0.093
	PurInt	0.074	1	0.074	0.064	0.800	0.000	0.057
Age	Attitude	0.006	1	0.006	0.007	0.934	0.000	0.051
	PurInt	0.071	1	0.071	0.062	0.804	0.000	0.057
Education	Attitude	<0.001	1	<0.001	0.000	0.992	0.000	0.050
	PurInt	0.137	1	0.137	0.120	0.729	0.000	0.064
Marital	Attitude	0.356	1	0.356	0.433	0.511	0.001	0.101
	PurInt	1.505	1	1.505	1.318	0.252	0.004	0.209
<i>Main effect</i>								
Team fan	Attitude	77.101	1	77.101	93.642	<0.001	0.211	1
	PurInt	76.946	1	76.946	67.392	<0.001	0.161	1
Type of sponsorship	Attitude	67.800	2	33.900	41.173	<0.001	0.190	1
	PurInt	26.822	2	13.411	11.746	<0.001	0.063	0.994
<i>Two-way interactions</i>								
Team fan *	Attitude	30.759	2	15.379	18.679	<0.001	0.096	1
	PurInt	41.057	2	20.529	17.980	<0.001	0.093	1
Error	Attitude	288.173	350	0.823				
	PurInt	399.622	350	1.142				
Total	Attitude	7598.313	360					
	PurInt	5435.556	360					
Corrected total	Attitude	467.187	359					
	PurInt	546.543	359					

Note(s): ^a $R^2 = 0.383$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.367$); ^b $R^2 = 0.269$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.250$) and ^c $p < 0.05$
Source(s): Authors' own creation

5.2 Participants

The research data of Study 2 will be collected among the fans of Esteghlal F.C and Persepolis F.C to predict attitudes and behavioral reactions of the fans to the sponsors (hypotheses H4a, b and H5a, b). As in the first study, the research samples were selected from among all the students who are fans of one of the two rival teams, Esteghlal F.C and Persepolis F.C, using a convenience sampling method. Around 151 Persepolis F.C fans (72 females and 79 males) aged 19–38 years ($M = 23.1$) and 146 Esteghlal F.C fans (68 females and 78 males) aged 20–36 years ($M = 23.5$) participated in the study. All participants expressed their informed consent to participate in the study and were fully explained at the end of the study.

5.3 Design and procedure

The study utilized a $3 \times 2 \times 2$ research design. Three type of sports sponsorship (conventional vs CSR-linked vs joint), two fans (home vs rival) and two sport team identification (high vs low). Participants were randomly assigned to each of the 12 experimental conditions. Both Persepolis F.C and Esteghlal F.C fans filled out the sport team identification questionnaire, however, only those who had a high (between five and seven) and low (between one and three) were used in the analysis according to the seven-item questionnaire. Unlike the first study, in which a dummy brand with two types of high-congruence and low-congruence was examined, in this study, the congruence was removed and only one brand was used in the scenarios, regardless of the congruence. The remaining procedures were the same as in Study 1. Regarding control test, no differences in team identification, attitude and purchase intention according to gender. All three analyses showed that there are no significant differences between the groups.

Measure	Team fan	CSR		Conventional		Joint	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Attitude	Home	5.43	1.09	5.13	0.85	4.21	0.81
Attitude	Rival	4.67	1.19	3.40	0.62	3.87	0.72
PurInt	Home	4.71	1.39	4.23	1.42	3.51	1.01
PurInt	Rival	3.44	1.12	2.71	0.61	3.52	0.49

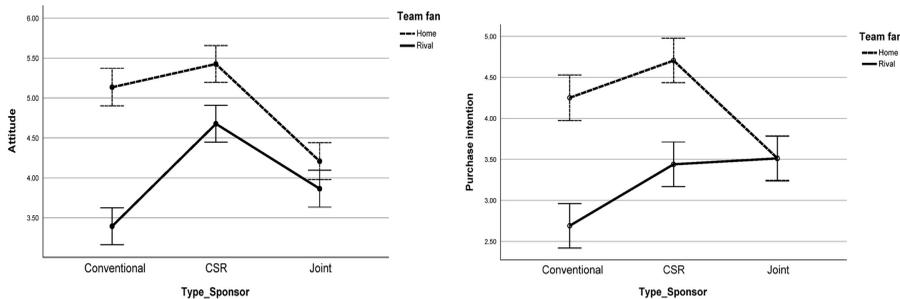
Note(s): *** $p < 0.001$

^aDifferences between CSR and conventional at $p < 0.05$; ^bDifferences between CSR and joint at $p < 0.05$ and

^cDifferences between conventional and joint at $p < 0.05$

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 7. Means and standard deviations of attitude and purchase intention (PurInt) for home team Persepolis



Source(s): Authors own creation

Figure 3. Estimated marginal means of attitude and purchase intention for conventional, joint and CSR sponsorship as a function of team fan

6. Study 2 results

H4. Effectiveness of the type of sponsorship and sport team identification (home)

Hypothesis 4 examines the effect of sponsor type and sports team identification on attitude and purchase intention. Multivariate GLM shows a statistically significant interaction effect of sports home team identification (Persepolis F.C.) and sponsor type on attitude [$F(2,150) = 35.275, p < 0.001$] and purchase intention [$F(2,150) = 22.735, p < 0.01$] (Wilk's $\Lambda = 3.198, p < 0.05$). We used age, gender, education and marital status as covariable. The partial eta squared effect size (η^2) was small for the interaction effect and medium for fixed factors (Cohen, 1988). None of the covariates significantly affected attitude or purchase intention (Table 8). Test for multiple comparisons found that conventional and CSR sponsorship has better attitudes and purchase intention scores than joint sponsorship regarding identification. Based on this, hypothesis H4a and H4b was confirmed (see Table 9 and Figure 4).

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig	η^2_p	Observed power ^c
Corrected model	Attitude	76.470 ^a	9	8.497	10.797	<0.001	0.408	1
	Purchase	91.941 ^b	9	10.216	7.382	<0.001	0.320	1
Intercept	Attitude	67.602	1	67.602	85.901	<0.001	0.379	1
	Purchase	35.571	1	35.571	25.705	<0.001	0.154	0.999
<i>Covariate</i>								
Gender	Attitude	0.547	1	0.547	0.695	0.406	0.005	0.132
	Purchase	0.407	1	0.407	0.294	0.588	0.002	0.084
Age	Attitude	4.669	1	4.669	5.933	0.016	0.040	0.677
	Purchase	6.075	1	6.075	4.390	0.038	0.030	0.548
Education	Attitude	5.445	1	5.445	6.919	0.009	0.047	0.743
	Purchase	1.976	1	1.976	1.428	0.234	0.010	0.221
Marital	Attitude	0.011	1	0.011	0.013	0.908	0.000	0.052
	Purchase	0.027	1	0.027	0.019	0.889	0.000	1
<i>Main effect</i>								
Type of sponsorship	Attitude	55.522	2	27.761	35.275	<0.001	0.333	1
	Purchase	62.921	2	31.461	22.735	<0.001	0.244	0.116
Identification	Attitude	0.448	1	0.448	0.569	0.452	0.004	0.567
	Purchase	6.364	1	6.364	4.599	0.034	0.032	0.867
<i>Two-way interactions</i>								
Type of sponsorship * Identification	Attitude	9.208	2	4.604	5.850	0.004	0.077	0.749
	Purchase	12.125	2	6.062	4.381	0.014	0.059	
Error	Attitude	110.964	141	0.787				
	Purchase	195.117	141	1.384				
Total	Attitude	3954.938	151					
	Purchase	3047.889	151					
Corrected total	Attitude	187.434	150					
	Purchase	287.058	150					

Table 8. GLM on type of sponsorship and sport home team identification of Study 2

Note(s): ^a $R^2 = 0.408$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.370$); ^b $R^2 = 0.320$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.277$) and ^c $p < 0.05$
Source(s): Authors' own creation

6.1 Interaction effect between sponsorship, sport team identification and home and rival teams

Multivariate GLM identified a significant interaction effect between sponsorship type, sports team identification and team fan, for attitude ($F(2,284) = 6.88, p < 0.01; \eta^2 = 0.021$) and purchase intention ($F(2,284) = 5.36, p < 0.01; \eta^2 = 0.023$) (Table 10 and Figure 5). The covariate age had no significant effect [$F(1,284) = 0.87, p = 0.351$ and $F(2,284) = 2.71, p = 0.101$]. The partial eta squared effect size (η^2) was small for the interaction effect (Cohen, 1988). The attitude toward conventional and CSR-linked sponsorships is higher in the home team than in the rival team. It is observed that CSR-linked sponsorship leads to higher attitude scores in both fans, but identification moderates the value, being higher in the opposing team because identification is low. There are significant differences between high and low identification in joint sponsorship for the home team; however, there are no differences between the attitudes of joint sponsorship of the home team when identification is high with the attitude in the rival team regardless of the combination of factors. The attitude toward the brand is the same among rival fans as among home fans, with high identification when the sponsorship is joint. We obtained the same conclusion for the purchase intention indicator. However, in the case of purchase intention, the scores are higher when the sponsorship is joint in the case of the rival team (Table 11).

7. Discussion

The results of the main effects support the general concept that the impact of different types of sports sponsorships on the attitude and purchase intention of fans is different (Hypothesis H1a and H1b). The results of this hypothesis showed that CSR-linked sponsorship, conventional sponsorship and joint sponsorship, respectively, have the greatest impact on

Measure	Identification	CSR		Conventional		Joint	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Attitude	High	5.78	0.95	5.33	0.83	3.69	0.77
Attitude	Low	5.36	1.13	5.18	0.87	4.57	0.77
PurInt	High	5.47	0.99	4.71	1.23	3.19	0.99
PurInt	Low	4.56	1.29	4.04	1.57	3.63	0.79

Table 9. Means, standard deviations of attitude and purchase intention (PurInt) for home team Persepolis by type of sponsorship and identification

Note(s): ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

^aDifferences between CSR and conventional at $p < 0.05$; ^bDifferences between CSR and joint at $p < 0.05$ and

^cDifferences between conventional and joint at $p < 0.05$

Source(s): Authors' own creation

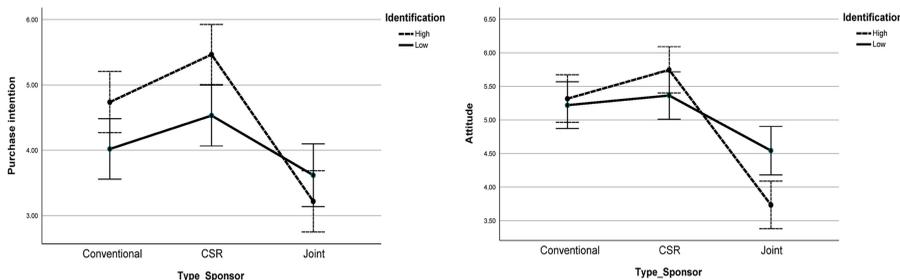


Figure 4. Estimated marginal means of attitude and purchase intention for conventional, joint and CSR sponsorship as a function of fan identification

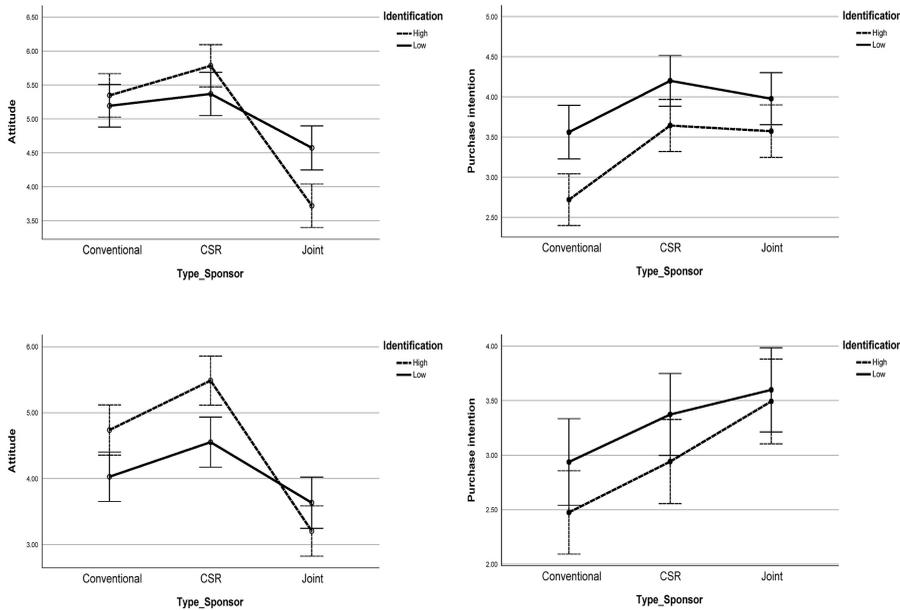
Source(s): Authors own creation

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig	η^2p	Observed power ^c
Corrected model	Attitude	242.470 ^a	15	16.165	24.821	<0.001	0.570	1
	PurInt	205.818b	15	13.721	14.881	<0.001	0.443	1
Intercept	Attitude	107.571	1	107.571	165.177	<0.001	0.370	1
	PurInt	69.968	1	69.968	75.883	<0.001	0.213	1
<i>Covariate</i>								
Gender	Attitude	0.146	1	0.146	0.224	0.637	0.001	0.076
	PurInt	0.060	1	0.060	0.065	0.799	0.000	0.057
Age	Attitude	1.658	1	1.658	2.546	0.112	0.009	0.356
	PurInt	2.074	1	2.074	2.250	0.135	0.008	0.321
Education	Attitude	1.158	1	1.158	1.777	0.184	0.006	0.264
	PurInt	0.223	1	0.223	0.242	0.623	0.001	0.078
Marital	Attitude	0.234	1	0.234	0.359	0.550	0.001	0.092
	PurInt	0.101	1	0.101	0.109	0.741	0.000	0.063
<i>Main effect</i>								
Identification	Attitude	8.856	1	8.856	13.599	<0.001	0.046	0.957
	PurInt	0.092	1	0.092	0.100	0.752	0.000	0.061
Sponsorship	Attitude	32.176	2	16.088	24.704	<0.001	0.150	1
	PurInt	21.996	2	10.998	11.927	<0.001	0.078	0.995
Team fan	Attitude	138.377	1	138.377	212.482	<0.001	0.431	1
	PurInt	93.447	1	93.447	101.346	<0.001	0.265	1
<i>Two-way interactions</i>								
Identification * Type of sponsorship	Attitude	3.822	2	1.911	2.934	0.055	0.020	0.569
	PurInt	3.554	2	1.777	1.927	0.147	0.014	0.398
Identification * Team fan	Attitude	4.714	1	4.714	7.238	0.008	0.025	0.765
	PurInt	10.027	1	10.027	10.875	0.001	0.037	0.908
Type of sponsorship * Team fan	Attitude	40.345	2	20.172	30.975	<0.001	0.181	1
	PurInt	58.866	2	29.433	31.921	<0.001	0.185	1
<i>Three-way interactions</i>								
Identification * Type of sponsorship * Team fan	Attitude	8.181	2	4.090	6.281	0.002	0.043	0.894
	PurInt	10.224	2	5.112	5.544	0.004	0.038	0.852
Error	Attitude	183.000	281	0.651				
	PurInt	259.098	281	0.922				
Total	Attitude	5976.500	297					
	PurInt	4576.111	297					
Corrected total	Attitude	425.470	296					
	PurInt	464.916	296					

Table 10.
GLM on type of
sponsorship, sports
team identification and
team fan of Study 2

Note(s): ^a $R^2 = 0.570$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.547$); ^b $R^2 = 0.443$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.413$) and ^c $p < 0.05$
Source(s): Authors' own creation

fans' attitudes and purchase intention. These results were in line with the attribution theory and research of Uhrich *et al.* (2014) and Habitzreuter and Koenigstorfer (2021), who found CSR-linked sponsorship to be more effective than conventional sponsorship in increasing brand credibility and a positive attitude toward the sponsor. It was also consistent with research by Bee *et al.* (2022), Davies *et al.* (2006), which concluded that joint sponsorship has a negative effect on attitudes and intentions toward the sponsor.



Source(s): Authors own creation

Figure 5. Estimated marginal means of attitude and purchase intention for conventional, joint and CSR sponsorship as a function of fan team and team identification

Type of sponsorship	Fan identification	Team fan	Attitude	PurInt
Conventional	Low	Home	5.33 (0.83)	4.71 (1.23)
		Rival	2.76 (0.58)	2.51 (0.53)
	High	Home	5.18 (0.87)	4.04 (1.57)
		Rival	3.53 (0.61)	2.90 (0.59)
CSR	Low	Home	5.78 (0.95)	5.47 (0.99)
		Rival	3.64 (0.81)	2.93 (0.59)
	High	Home	5.36 (1.13)	4.56 (1.31)
		Rival	4.24 (0.89)	3.42 (0.96)
Joint	Low	Home	3.69 (0.77)	3.19 (0.99)
		Rival	3.59 (0.58)	3.50 (0.55)
	High	Home	4.57 (0.77)	3.63 (0.81)
		Rival	3.99 (0.61)	3.61 (0.55)

Note(s): Significant differences in white cells at $p < 0.05$; There are no significant differences in the brown cells
 Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 11. Means (standard deviations) of attitude and purchase intention (PurInt) for home team or rival team fan and fan identification by type of sponsorship

Then, to examine the effectiveness of sponsorship in more detail, the moderating role of sponsor-team congruence was examined (Hypothesis 2a, b). The results showed that the sponsor-team congruence did not moderate the impact of sponsorship types (conventional, CSR-linked and joint) on attitudes and purchase intentions. In such a way that the high-congruence and low-congruence of the sponsor-team do not change the effectiveness of the three types of sponsorship. The result of this finding contradicts the conformity theory. Also was inconsistent with the results of Papadimitriou *et al.* (2016), Oikarainen (2020), Kamath *et al.* (2020) that concluded the effect of high sponsor-team congruence on creating a positive attitude toward the sponsor and purchase intention of sponsor products. The result of this

finding needs further investigation. However, it can be concluded that the support of any company from favorite team is valuable to the fans, and although the support of a company with a low congruence of the popular team can cause ill will in the fans, such ill will will be ignored beyond the company's sponsorship. This challenge can also be explored by considering the difference between sponsor-event congruence and sponsor-team congruence. Fans react to their favorite team sponsor more fanatically than the sponsor of an event. As a result, they seem to ignore the low congruence of the sponsor and welcome this sponsorship.

In the first study, we also examined the effectiveness of each sponsorship on rival team fans (*Hypothesis 3a, b*). The results showed that the effect of different types of sponsorship on the attitude and purchase intention of sponsor products in the fans of the rival team is reduced. Conventional sponsorship, joint sponsorship and CSR-linked sponsorship had the most negative impact on their attitude toward the sponsor, respectively, and conventional sponsorship, CSR-linked sponsorship and joint sponsorship had the most negative impact on their purchase intention. This result is generally in line with the results of [Olson \(2018\)](#), [Bergkvist \(2012\)](#), which found that fans' attitudes toward rival sponsors is negative. It is also consistent with the balance theory ([Heider, 1958](#)). This theory states that the relationship between a perceiver and a person or group is balanced when a misfortune or misfortune befalls that person or group whom she does not like. The results of the present study once again showed that the fans do not evaluate the sponsors of the rival team positively, although, mere sponsorship of a team (conventional support) can have the greatest negative impact on the attitude and purchase intention of rival fans; however, if this sponsorship is related to social goals (CSR-linked sponsorship), it will lead to a less negative attitude of the fans toward the sponsor (not the purchase intention them). Although, joint sponsorship can have less of a negative impact on rival team fans (compared to conventional sponsorship), it does have a lesser positive impact on home fans and therefore, sponsors seem to be more cautious when using this strategy.

In Study 1, the effectiveness of various sponsorships in home and rival team fans were evaluated with the role of moderator of the sponsor-team congruence. However, fan identity was controlled. In the second study, we examined this structure and the high and low identity of the fans of home and rival teams was examined in this study. The results confirmed the moderating role of fan identity (*Hypothesis 4a, b*). CSR-linked and conventional sponsorships have a stronger positive effect on the attitudes and intentions of high-identity fans than low-identity fans, but joint sponsorship has a stronger negative impact on high-identity fans than low-identity fans. Such a result was in line with our predictions. [Gwinner and Swanson \(2003\)](#), [Lings and Owen \(2007\)](#) and [Madrigal \(2000\)](#) showed that a more favorable attitude toward the sponsor and purchase intention of sponsor products in fans with high identity. [Davies et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Bee et al. \(2022\)](#) also found that high-identity fans were more likely to reject joint sponsorship. Regarding the interactive effect of three factors, the results showed that there was a significant difference in the reaction to the sponsor between fans with high and low identity of the rival team. Such a result is in line with the results of research by [Bee et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Cobbs et al. \(2017\)](#). They concluded that fans with high identity react more negatively to competitors' sponsors.

8. General discussion

8.1 Theoretical implications

As the cost of sports sponsorship in the world has grown steadily in recent years ([IEG, 2018](#)), sponsorship companies are determined to choose the appropriate and effective strategy for their sponsorship of sports. In response to these market conditions, several researchers ([Angell et al., 2016](#); [Bee et al., 2022](#); [Flöter et al., 2016](#); [Habitzeuter and Koenigstorfer, 2021](#); [Tsordia et al., 2018](#)) have made significant leaps in this area, in discovering the factors that

affect the success of sponsorship. A common conclusion from existing studies is that if a sponsor, in addition to supporting a team, spends resources on socially responsible sports initiatives, fan responses are likely to be more favorable. Also, high sponsor-team congruence can be beneficial in sponsorship effectiveness (Oikarainen, 2020; Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2016); although it may be perceived as a pessimistic or calculating act (Angell *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, given the breadth of the concept of sports sponsorship, it is not easy to provide a general conclusion on this concept, especially when the reaction of the fans of the rival team is also important.

This study contributes to the existing sponsorship literature in three ways. First, this study shows the difference between the three types of sports sponsorship strategies in the two groups of home and rival fans. Relying on the attribution theory and previous research such as Urich *et al.* (2014) and Habitzreuter and Koenigstorfer (2021), we provided CSR-related sponsorship, in addition to a wide range of research (Koronios *et al.*, 2016; Kwon *et al.*, 2016; Tsordia *et al.*, 2018). We introduced the conventional sponsorship along with the joint sponsorship (Bee *et al.*, 2022; Davies *et al.*, 2006). As a result, we examined the effectiveness of these three types of sponsorships in home team fans and relying on the meta-contrast principle and schadenfreude in rival team fans. Accordingly, the content that the sports management literature lacked so far, the present study relied on the sponsorship literature to link these documents together.

Second, by examining the sponsor-team congruence in three types of sponsorships, we opened a new perspective in the sponsorship literature. Based on our studies, the literature in this construct (Henseler *et al.*, 2007; Kamath *et al.*, 2020; Pappu and Cornwell, 2014) was devoted to conventional sponsorship. The present study, based on the conformity theory and with the help of designed scenarios, investigated the interaction between sponsor and team in three types of sponsorship. The exploration of this variable has the potential to bring new insights to the field of sports sponsorship research, especially in relation to the strategy of congruence.

Third, the present study provides evidence of moderating role of the sport team identification of home and rival, and adds to previous evidence about the structure, which focused more on conventional sponsorship (not CSR). Because the nature of CSR-linked and conventional sponsorships differs from that of joint sponsorship, it was important to examine sport team identification in these three types of sponsorships.

8.2 Managerial implications

The escalating costs associated with sports sponsorship in recent years necessitate the need for sponsors to adopt appropriate and effective strategies. By doing so, sponsors can attain significant congruence and achieve a more enduring and impactful presence in the sports industry. In light to this, the findings of this study offer valuable insights for sponsor marketing managers seeking guidance on supporting sports endeavors.

Firstly, employing social responsibility initiatives as part of sponsorship strategy appears to foster congruence with both home and rival team fans. Since in any country in the world, charitable organizations are active in various fields (sports and non-sports), it is suggested to marketing managers of sponsors, while identifying prominent and popular organizations, to combine their sponsorship motives with charitable donations, including financial and material assistance to these types of institutions, helping to develop sports in deprived areas, etc. Also, sponsors can communicate their commitment to advertising-charitable goals to fans of both teams. Media platforms can play a pivotal role in showcasing these charitable donations, reaching not only home team fans but also rival team fans, thereby expanding awareness of the sponsors' philanthropic efforts. On the other hand, sponsors face challenges when adopting joint sponsorship as a strategy. The study suggests that sponsoring

companies should limit the utilization of this approach to support teams. Although this strategy has gained some popularity among sponsors in Iran in recent years, the findings of this research underscore its limited effectiveness.

Interestingly, the study reveals that sponsor-team congruence does not significantly impact the effectiveness of the three types of sponsorship. Hence, marketing managers of companies that have a low congruence with sports are also advised to consider the use of sports sponsorship in their marketing strategies and by choosing CSR-linked sponsorship, in line with their social responsibility to support one from the most popular teams in their country. Lastly, the study highlights the significant influence of home and rival team fans' identities. Regardless of fan identity, CSR-linked sponsorship demonstrates the strongest impact on fans' attitudes and purchase intentions. To mitigate the adverse effects of rival team fans' identities, sponsors should prioritize and emphasize social responsibility, thereby fostering positive associations and support even from rival fan groups. Besides this, sponsored clubs can focus on the identification of their fans and try to increase their team identification.

In conclusion, the insights provided by this study offer valuable guidance for sponsors in selecting appropriate sponsorship strategies. By considering the dynamics of fan identities, adopting CSR-linked sponsorship initiatives and leveraging media platforms, sponsors can effectively enhance their presence, garner positive attitudes and generate greater support from both home and rival team fans.

8.3 Limitations and future suggestions

There are several warnings and future suggestions. First, existing studies on sponsorship show that culture can be an important frontier condition, as fans' perceptions and evaluations of organizations' sponsorship efforts can vary depending on their cultural background. As [Rim and Dong, 2018](#) suggested, culture can play an important role in shaping consumers' perceived trust in CSR designs (2018). It is suggested that this study be repeated by examining cultural boundaries in other countries and other more economically relevant markets. Although joint sponsorship exists in other markets, the results of this research in this country, market, competition and sport discipline should be extrapolated to other countries with caution due to differences.

Second, in the current research, we only examined team sponsorship, it is suggested that future studies consider sponsorship of the event/rival player alongside sponsorship of the team. Third, it seems that the repetition of the present research in a field of real sponsorship can help researchers and managers working in this field more operationally. Fourth, the present research used young students (Mostly under 30 years old) as samples. While it seems that the elderly may have different opinions. It is suggested that researchers cover this limitation in the future and examine the elderly as well. Fifth, we used a domestic dummy sponsor. It should be noted that country-of-origin effects ([Pappu et al., 2006](#); [Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999](#)) could influence the results of our study. It is suggested that researchers use two sponsors with domestic and foreign brands in the future and compare the results. Finally, in the present research we focused on attitude toward the sponsor and purchase intention. In the future, researchers can examine other reactions of fans, including favorability and interest ([Angell et al., 2016](#)), brand credibility ([Uhrich et al., 2014](#)) and brand equity ([Tsordia et al., 2018](#)).

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