

**Sponsorship in International Sports Events: A Study of Sponsors' Perceptions of
Congruence, Sincerity and Brand Exposure****Kautsar At-Thariq Prastijo^{1✉}, Mohammad Arif Ali², Tandiyo Rahayu³, Gustiana Mega
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Sponsorship is an important part of global brands looking to increase participation and acceptance, especially through international sporting events such as the Tour de Borobudur 2023. This study aims to add to the limited literature on sponsorship perspectives and offers practical implications for sports marketers, event organisers, and brand strategists looking to build meaningful and sustainable sponsorship partnerships, while addressing a gap in existing literature that has largely overlooked sponsor perspectives. This study employed a descriptive quantitative research focused on the sponsors' perceptions of event-brand congruence, brand sincerity and brand exposure. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to sponsoring organisations and analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that sponsors perceive a strong event-brand congruence, both in function and image, which enhances credibility and facilitates brand recall. Sincerity and brand authenticity are viewed as essential attributes that foster trust and shape stakeholders' positive attitudes. Sponsors also place strong emphasis on sincerity, viewing authenticity and value alignment as essential for building trust and fostering emotional connections with audiences. Although brand exposure was perceived as moderate, sponsors expressed intentions to leverage future sponsorships to enhance visibility and reach. The results of this study showed a strong perception of functional and image congruence, indicating that consistency between sponsor and event can increase strategic value. Additionally, sponsors value honesty, seeking cooperation that reflects their brand's genuine values and helps build an emotional connection with the audience. Although current brand exposure levels were considered moderate, sponsors clearly intend to leverage future sponsorships to increase exposure, reflecting the principle of brand ubiquity.

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INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship plays a key role in a brand's marketing strategy by helping to increase consumer engagement and brand recognition, particularly at major international sporting events. The growing number of major events, such as the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA Champions League, provides brands with a valuable opportunity to connect with different types of consumers. In an increasingly crowded market where competition for consumers' attention is intense, organisations are investing heavily in sports sponsorship. They want to increase their visibility and build strong brand relationships that have a significant impact (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020a; Papadimitriou et al., 2018; Weeks et al., 2018). Consequently, sports sponsorship has become an integral component of global marketing strategies, particularly for brands aiming to expand their presence in international markets.

The fact that many companies are willing to spend billions of dollars sponsoring international sporting events demonstrates the growing financial and strategic importance of sports sponsorship. These investments demonstrate companies' commitment to strengthening customer engagement, which is an important part of their growth strategy, and are not just ordinary transactions. Using sponsorship as a tool enables brands to enhance their image, build deeper relationships with customers and create memorable experiences (Loureiro et al., 2021; Popp et al., 2021). Unlike regular advertising, sponsorship leverages the emotions and culture of sport to forge a stronger bond between brand and customer (Biscaia et al., 2016; Yoshida & Gordon, 2015).

Key theories such as the Congruence Theory (Pradhan et al., 2020; Rifon et al., 2016) and the Meaning Transfer Theory (Fitouri et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2018), can help us to understand how sponsorship can be made more effective. According to the Fit Theory, sponsorship is more impactful when there is a strong fit or similarity between the sponsor and the sponsored event. This makes it easier for audiences to remember and process information, as they are more likely to favour a brand when the sponsorship seems plausible and consistent with the brand image (Mazodier & Quester, 2016; Olson & Thjømmøe, 2016).

Similarly, meaning transfer theory suggests that value flows from the cultural context of an event to the brand sponsoring it, enabling the brand to borrow the event's symbolic value. In the context of sporting events, the prestige, exci-

tement and emotional engagement that sports generate can be transferred to the sponsoring brand, thereby enhancing its image and appeal (Koenigstorfer & Groeppel-Klein, 2019; Walraven et al., 2015). These theories provide an explanation for how factors such as fit, sincerity and brand exposure influence the effectiveness of sponsorship, particularly in emotionally charged settings like international sporting events.

Although sponsorship is becoming increasingly important in international sport, most academic literature focuses on its impact from the spectator's perspective. Various studies have examined how audiences perceive sponsorship, its effect on consumer attitudes, and the factors that make sponsorship effective in the eyes of fans (Biscaia et al., 2016; Demirel et al., 2023; Heere et al., 2018). Although these insights are valuable, they only represent one perspective on sponsorship. The perspectives of the sponsors themselves have received little attention, such as how they value their involvement, what they expect from their investment and how they determine whether a sponsorship has achieved its desired goals (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020a; Loureiro et al., 2021).

The 2023 Tour de Borobudur XXIII provided valuable observational data on the scale and impact of international sports events in Indonesia. Around 1,200 participants took part in the event, which attracted both racing and leisure cyclists. The route passed through various tourist and cultural attractions in Central Java. The long course showcased the richness of local culture, increasing media attention and community participation in the various host cities. Sponsors were clearly visible through banners, event merchandise, social media coverage, and branded checkpoints, providing high-visibility branding and a memorable experience. On-the-ground observations showed that sponsors were strategically positioned to promote tourism and increase community engagement, suggesting that the main focus was on brand relevance and local presence. These observations support the idea that sponsors of events such as this one are positioning their brand and also incorporating experiential marketing and a community presence — elements that are increasingly valued by sponsors seeking authenticity (Close et al., 2021).

Understanding how sponsors view international sporting events is crucial, as mismanaging them can result in lost customers and damage to their brand name and value. Sponsors must consider a variety of complex factors, such as the compatibility of the brand with the event, audience expectations, media coverage and changing at-

titudes towards sports (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020a; Papadimitriou et al., 2018; Yoshida & Gordon, 2015). Analysing the internal evaluations and strategic priorities of sponsors involved in such events can provide researchers with a clearer insight into the decision-making processes involve

This study examines how sponsors of international sporting events, particularly the Tour de Borobudur, evaluate the concepts of brand fit, sincerity, and exposure. It also analyses the experiences and expectations of sponsors to provide a more balanced and complete understanding of the effectiveness of sponsorship partnerships. The results are expected to be useful for experts in sports marketing, brand management and communication strategy.

Despite the growing importance of sponsorship in the realm of international sport, the majority of academic literature has concentrated on its impact from the perspective of the spectator. Various studies have explored how spectators perceive sponsorships, their influence on consumer attitudes, as well as the factors that make sponsorships an effective strategy in the view of fans. This study addresses a limited gap where this research remains difficult. By examining the strategic considerations and expectations of sponsors, this study provides a new perspective and adds new insights to the literature on the effectiveness of sports sponsorships beyond audience perception.

METHODS

This study employs descriptive quantitative research methods to analyse sponsors' perceptions of their involvement in international sporting events, with a particular focus on the Tour de Borobudur XXIII. In this study, the independent variable is the Tour de Borobudur, while the dependent variables are the information sources of the sponsor owners and their perspective on the compatibility of the sport event with their brand, sponsor's personal preferences, sponsor's perceived ubiquity and sincerity, and the event's status. This study used a snowball sampling technique. A total of (n=8) respondents actively participated in the study.

This approach is designed to systematically collect and analyse numerical data reflecting how sponsors evaluate their experiences and outcomes. Data will be collected via a structured survey made on google form, which will be distributed to marketing managers and corporate sponsors who recently took part in the Tour de Borobudur XXIII. The survey will include closed

questions with Likert scale responses to measure respondents' attitudes, perceptions and evaluations relating to their sponsorship activities. The responses will be categorized to strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

The study followed a structured sequence of five main stages to ensure accurate and reliable results. The first stage was preparation, which included obtaining research permits, gaining participants' consent, and providing a detailed explanation of how the research would work. The second stage involved a coordination meeting between the research team and the data collectors, during which their respective tasks were determined and an effective work system was established. The third stage involved the actual data collection, during which trained team members conducted surveys and collected information from selected respondents in the field. The fourth stage involved a group evaluation of the data collection process to identify bottlenecks and make improvements where necessary. The final stage involved analysing the data in depth, interpreting the results and compiling a comprehensive research report. This step-by-step approach demonstrates a rigorous scientific method designed to maintain a high level of reliability and validity throughout the research process.

This study will use descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, to identify patterns and trends in sponsors' opinions. A thorough descriptive analysis will also be conducted to explain the characteristics of each variable in the collected data. Tables will be used to organise the data, making it easier for readers to understand the results. The findings are enriched by additional data from direct observations and interviews with respondents, providing deeper, more meaningful explanations. This method is particularly well-suited to providing a clear, objective overview of sponsor perspectives. It allows generalisations to be made within the target population and offers insight into how sponsorship is understood and assessed strategically by corporate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Characteristic of Respondent

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n)	(%)
Gender	Male	7	87.5%
	Female	1	12.5%
Types of Products	Goods	4	50%
	Service	4	50%

Age	Late teenager (18-25)	1	12.5%
	Early Adult (26-35)	5	62.5%
	Late Adult (36-45)	1	12.5%
	Early Elderly (46-55)	1	12.5%
	Late Elderly (56-65)	0	0
Position in the Company	Board of Commissioners	0	0
	Directors	1	12.5%
	Manager	5	62.5%
Educational Background	Staff	2	25%
	Elementary	0	0
	Junior High School	0	0
	High School	2	25%
	Diploma	0	0
	Bachelors	5	62.5%
	Magistrate	1	12.5%
	Doctorates	0	0
Respondent Role on Sports	Sport Fans	3	37.5%
	Sport Player	0	0
	Both	5	62.5%
	Not Both	0	0
Source of Information	Social media	4	50%
	Friends	4	50%
	Committee	0	
	Partnership	0	
Social Media Used by Respondent	Instagram	8	26.67
	Facebook	5	16.67
	Twitter	4	13.33
	Tiktok	5	16.67
	Youtube	6	20
	Line	2	6.67

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic and professional attributes of the respondents included in this study. Majority of respondent gender are male. The data indicates that this segment of the industry is characterized by a predominance of male participants. Regarding age group majority of respondents were in the early adult category (26-35). This finding suggests that younger professionals are actively engaging in sponsorship-related roles in international sporting events. In terms of professional background, the majority of respondents hold managerial positions, particularly

in the fields of advertising and sponsorship management. This finding suggests that insights from decision-makers exert a direct influence on brand partnerships. In regard to respondents' educational background, a significant proportion have attained a bachelor's degree. Types of products represented are evenly distributed. Suggesting that the participation of industries sponsoring sporting events is balanced. A notable finding was that the majority of respondents self-identified as sports enthusiasts and active sportspeople, suggesting a profound personal connection to the sporting realm that extended beyond their professional commitments. The predominant sources of information regarding the event for the respondents were social media and friends. Among social media platforms, Instagram is the frequently used by the respondents, thus emphasising the importance of visual content and engagement-driven communication in sponsorship strategies.

The findings on **Table 2** reveal a generally positive perception of sponsor–event fit between companies and the Tour de Borobudur. The respondents expressed a largely unanimous consensus that their involvement was logical, with equal responses registered from both the "agree" and "strongly agree" categories. This is indicative of the concept of functional fit, which is defined as the relevance of the event to the sponsor's business objectives (Parganas et al., 2017). The majority of sponsors concurred that the event's image is congruent with their brand, indicating a strong image-based congruence. According to congruity theory, the perceived similarity between the sponsor and the event is conducive to the enhancement of sponsorship effectiveness by means of improving brand attitudes and recall (Deitz et al., 2018; Kwon et al., 2020).

Table 2. Sponsor fit with Tour de Borobudur activities

Variable	Categories	Frequencies (n)	(%)
My company's involvement in the Tour de Borobudur activities is logical.	Strongly Agree	4	50%
	Agree	4	50%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
The image of the Tour de Borobudur activity is similar to the image of my company.	Strongly Agree	3	37.5%
	Agree	5	62.5%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0

The Tour de Borobudur activity is a perfect match for my company.	Strongly Agree	5	62.5%
	Agree	3	37.5%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
The common goal of my company and the Tour de Borobudur activity is the same.	Strongly Agree	4	50%
	Agree	4	50%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
Sponsoring the Tour de Borobudur activity comes naturally to my company.	Strongly Agree	3	37.5%
	Agree	5	62.5%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0

The strongest endorsement was expressed in the statement that the event is a "perfect match," with the majority of sponsors selecting strongly agree. This lends further credence to the hypothesis that a strong perceived fit has a significant impact on the enhancement of credibility and the elicitation of emotional resonance among stakeholders. Responses to the shared goals item were split between agree and strongly agree, suggesting sponsors see strategic alignment but differ in intensity. Lastly, most sponsors agreed that sponsoring the event "comes naturally," indicating intuitive compatibility, though less emphatically than image or goal congruence. The results of **Table 2** highlight that both functional and image congruence are perceived to be high, supporting prior literature that a strong sponsor–event fit contributes to more effective sponsorship outcomes (Kunkel et al., 2022; Papadimitriou et al., 2018)

The results of **Table 3** indicate that the majority of sponsors expressed agreement with all four preference statements. The majority of participants regard the Tour de Borobudur as a primary focus, are eager to sponsor, regularly participate, and attach great importance to the event. This consistent pattern underscores a robust alignment between the event and the sponsors' strategic priorities (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020b; Popp et al., 2016).

This finding lends support to congruence theory, which posits that sponsorships are more efficacious when there is a perceived congruence between the sponsor and the event. When sponsors perceive an event as relevant to their brand

values and objectives, they are more likely to engage consistently and meaningfully (Popp et al., 2016; Speed & Thompson, 2015). The positive perception is consistent with relationship marketing theory, which posits that long-term engagement is preferable to short-term exposure. This theory emphasises commitment, trust and mutual benefit (Gwinner et al., 2018; Morgan & Summers, 2019).

Table 3. Sponsor personal preferences for Tour de Borobudur Activities.

Variable	Categories	Frequencies (n)	(%)
The Tour de Borobudur is a major focus for my company.	Strongly Agree	0	0
	Agree	5	62.5%
	Disagree	3	37.5%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
My company is always keen to sponsor the Tour de Borobudur.	Strongly Agree	2	25%
	Agree	6	75%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
The Tour de Borobudur are always participated in by my company.	Strongly Agree	2	25%
	Agree	6	75%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
My company places great importance on the Tour de Borobudur.	Strongly Agree	2	25%
	Agree	6	75%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
Sponsoring the Tour de Borobudur activity comes naturally to my company.	Strongly Agree	3	37.5%
	Agree	5	62.5%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0

Consequently, the robust consensus across items signifies not only satisfaction but also a deliberate strategic decision by sponsors to align with an event that aligns with their identity and marketing objectives. This provides a solid foundation for future collaboration and deeper integration between sponsors and event organisers.

Table 4. Perceived Ubiquity

Variable	Categories	Frequencies (n)	(%)
My company has sponsored a variety of sporting events.	Strongly Agree	2	25%
	Agree	2	25%
	Disagree	4	50
My company is often involved in sponsoring sporting events.	Strongly Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Agree	1	12.5%
	Agree	4	50%
I'm hopeful that my company will be able to sponsor larger sporting events in the future.	Disagree	3	37.5%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Agree	4	50%
The common goal of my company and the Tour de Borobudur activity is the same.	Agree	3	37.5%
	Disagree	1	12.5%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
Sponsoring the Tour de Borobudur activity comes naturally to my company.	Strongly Agree	4	50%
	Agree	4	50%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Agree	3	37.5%
	Agree	5	62.5%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0

The **Table 4** It illustrates the diverse views on sponsorship in various places. The majority of respondents disagreed with the statement that their company has sponsored various sporting events in the past, suggesting limited exposure. However, most respondents also indicated that their company is involved on a regular basis, suggesting regular, albeit not yet extensive, participation. Notably, the majority of respondents expressed strong agreement with the expectation of engaging in larger event sponsorships in the future, suggesting strategic ambition. This finding is consistent with the concept of brand ubiquity, whereby frequent and widespread brand presence increases consumer familiarity and recall (Grohs et al., 2016; Olson, 2016). Although the current level of popularity is considered moderate, the high level of optimism suggests a desire

to increase brand visibility through sponsorship in the future.

Table 5. Perceived Sincerity

Variable	Categories	Frequencies (n)	(%)
The primary reason my company is involved in the Tour de Borobudur activity is because this event merits support.	Strongly Agree	6	75%
	Agree	2	25%
	Disagree	0	0
Sport is something my company is passionate about supporting.	Strongly Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Agree	3	37.5%
	Agree	5	62.5%
My company will continue to support sporting events, even if they are not major events.	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Agree	2	25%
The common goal of my company and the Tour de Borobudur activity is the same.	Agree	6	75%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
Sponsoring the Tour de Borobudur activity comes naturally to my company.	Strongly Agree	4	50%
	Agree	4	50%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Agree	3	37.5%
	Agree	5	62.5%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0

The **Table 5** indicates a sense of authenticity in the company's relationship with the Tour de Borobudur event. Most respondents stated that the company's support for this event was driven by altruism rather than commercial interests. This is consistent with the notion of sponsorship sincerity, whereby the sponsor's intentions are perceived as genuine (Rifon et al., 2016; Zdravkovic et al., 2019). A company's commitment to supporting sports events, including non-major ones, demonstrates a long-term strategic outlook and value congruence (Mazodier et al., 2021). This perception has been shown to increase sponsor

credibility and build trust. The more sincere a brand is perceived to be, the greater the impact on consumer attitudes towards it, making sincerity an important factor in successful sponsorship.

Table 6. Status of Event

Variable	Categories	Frequencies (n)	(%)
My company sponsored the Tour de Borobudur event because it is well known.	Strongly Agree	3	37.5%
	Agree	5	62.5%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
My company is proud to sponsor the Tour de Borobudur, a major sporting event.	Strongly Agree	3	37.5%
	Agree	5	62.5%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
The city considers the Tour de Borobudur to be of great importance, and as a result my company has decided to sponsor the event.	Strongly Agree	2	25%
	Agree	6	75%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
The common goal of my company and the Tour de Borobudur activity is the same.	Strongly Agree	4	50%
	Agree	4	50%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0
Sponsoring the Tour de Borobudur activity comes naturally to my company.	Strongly Agree	3	37.5%
	Agree	5	62.5%
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly Disagree	0	0

The majority of respondents in **Table 6** concurred that their company sponsored the Tour de Borobudur because it is well known, regarded as a major event, and valued by the city. This phenomenon is indicative of the role of event prestige in shaping sponsorship decisions (Mazodier et al., 2021; Olson, 2016).

In accordance with the principles of event status theory, prominent and esteemed events are conducive to the establishment of robust brand

associations, thereby augmenting credibility and visibility. The sponsorship of such events enables companies to benefit from the halo effect, whereby the event's positive image is transferred to the brand. Furthermore, there is a demonstrable correlation between alignment with events recognised by local authorities and the reinforcement of institutional legitimacy, which in turn serves to enhance the company's public image and community relevance (Zdravkovic et al., 2019).

The results of this findings emphasise the strategic importance of the fit between sponsors and events in determining the effectiveness of sponsorship. In accordance with the key tenets of the Theory of Congruence, the sponsors felt that the event was a functional and image match. This theory states that a strong fit can enhance brand recognition and audience acceptance (Speed & Thompson, 2015; Zdravkovic et al., 2019). This dual alignment suggests that the sponsors deliberately chose an event that reflects their brand identity to help build long-term brand positioning.

In addition to congruence, perceived honesty is also an important factor. Sponsors value partnerships that feel authentic and consistent with their brand values. Previous research suggests that honesty is linked to trust and favourable consumer attitudes. Authenticity in sponsorships appears to influence audience perception and sponsor satisfaction greatly (Mazodier et al., 2021). Although current brand exposure is moderate, sponsors have expressed their intention to increase visibility through future engagements. This supports the idea of brand presence across multiple venues, suggesting that a consistent and meaningful brand presence will gradually strengthen consumer recall (Olson, 2016).

Event credibility also played an important role in the sponsors' decision-making process. Being associated with a well-respected event is thought to enhance brand credibility, suggesting that sponsors are also motivated by the symbolic value of cooperation (Mazodier et al., 2021). Sponsors generally take a multidimensional approach to selecting events to cooperate with, balancing suitability, authenticity, visibility, and symbolic association. This suggests that the effectiveness of sponsorship is not only dependent on exposure metrics, but is also rooted in strategic considerations and good relationships.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated how sponsors evaluate international sporting events based on event-brand congruence, sincerity, and exposure.

The results showed a strong perception of functional and image congruence, indicating that consistency between sponsor and event can increase strategic value, in line with theories such as Congruence Theory and Meaning Transfer Theory. Additionally, sponsors value honesty, seeking cooperation that reflects their brand's genuine values and helps build an emotional connection with the audience. Although current brand exposure levels were considered moderate, sponsors clearly intend to leverage future sponsorships to increase exposure, reflecting the principle of brand ubiquity. By focusing on sponsors' evaluations and expectations, this study addresses a gap in the existing literature, which has largely concentrated on audience perspectives. These insights provide a more balanced understanding of sponsorship effectiveness and offer practical implications for event organisers and brand managers seeking to establish meaningful, strategically aligned partnerships.

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