Building Workers' Brand Behavior through Corporate Sponsorship

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Abstract: **Over the period, corporate sponsorship has evolved as a critical aspect of marketing communication. Currently, the "sponsorship-associated internal marketing" element has obtained interest from academia, considering how sponsorship can enhance a firm's identity and create worker involvement. However, present literature about the influence of sponsorship is still rare, despite the position that workers' sponsorship activity may affect workers' perception of their firm and their behavior within the firm. This study is a response to requests to look into the strategic administration of sponsorship within a company. Founded in the Signaling theory and previous sponsorship studies, we created and empirically tested a sponsorship potency framework among workers in consumer goods companies. Our results postulate that greater levels of environmental, sports, and cultural sponsorship quality and a greater level of environmental, sports, and cultural quantity positively influence workers' brand commitment and behavior via their viewpoint of the brand image and understanding. Additionally, the influence of sponsorship quantity is relatively stronger than sponsorship quality. Management is called upon to consider and involve employees when designing sponsorship deals.**

Keywords: **brand image, brand behavior, brand commitment, corporate sponsorship, sponsorship-associated internal marketing.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Corporate sponsorship has developed over the years to be a multibillion-dollar component in the communication mix of marketers (Jensen & Bettina Cornwell, 2021; Morgan, 2019). Per Close Scheinbaum et al. (2019), business sponsorship is a globally recognized communication tool and a recurring consumer experience aspect that has evolved into an indirect marketing strategy. The long-lasting appeal of sponsorships can be dated directly to the efficacy of sponsorships in advertising brands (Hofer & Grohs, 2018; Melovic et al., 2019). According to International Events Group (2015), global spending on sponsorship moved from $37.7 in 2006 to USD 57.5 billion by 2015 and USD 65 billion in 2018 (Morgan, 2019). In the recently ended FIFA World Cup hosted in Qatar, large conglomerates spent a whopping $220 billion to sponsor and partner with the association to make their presence felt at the tournament QatarXpert, (2022). According to Aziz (2021), the Covid-19 pandemic's emergence greatly affected the world sponsorship market, revealing a $10 billion difference in value with 120000 sponsorship contracts and 5000 brands on the shoulders of entertainment, sports, and other event closures. Among all sponsorship categories, sports sponsorship appears to be the most sponsored market, recording two-thirds of the global sponsorship market. Batt et al. (2021) predicted that industry sponsorship is expected to reach $90 billion by 2027. On the contrary, arts sponsorship is counted to be the least, reaching up to $1 billion in 2018 (International Events Group, 2015).

The target of sponsorship is consumers who are regarded as external stakeholders (Batt et al., 2021). Therefore, countless research unravels the influence of sponsorship on how customers perceive brands. For instance, enough literature shows that sponsorship establishes brand images (Trivedi, 2020); customer brand awareness (Hopper, 2021); corporate reputation & goodwill (Gracia, 2018); brand recognition & acceptance (Karjaluoto & Paakkonen, 2019); and brand attitude (Jensen &

Bettina Cornwell, 2021). Additionally, studies indicate that sponsorship promotes positive brand behavior, e.g. brand trust & loyalty (Maanda et al., 2020), brand ambassadors, and positive word-of-mouth (Tsordia et al., 2018a).

Cognizance of attaining external goals, and sponsorship influences internal stakeholders, e.g. present company's workforce (Batt et al., 2021). Sponsorship programs and events aid businesses in creating a positive working atmosphere and culture and promote their entity and staff images from the workers' viewpoint (Karjaluoto & Paakkonen, 2019). Studies have determined the positive association between sponsorship activities and company identity and culture (e.g. (Karjaluoto & Paakkonen, 2019; Meenaghan et al., 2013). On the contrary, the influence of sponsorship on employees is very rare in literature. It is asserted that sponsorship has the most untapped opportunity, considering how it affects internal company stakeholders (Batt et al., 2021; Cornwell, 2019). Literature indicates that workers-associated brand-related habits significantly influence the brand success (Pappu & Cornwell, 2014). Employee participation in their firm's branding initiatives is called brand behavior (Batt et al., 2021). Workers' demonstration of positive behavior towards customers affects how consumers perceive an entity's brand (Lee & Jin, 2019). Simultaneously, workers build up the company's brand and its offerings; and represent their companies as ambassadors (Karjaluoto & Paakkonen, 2019). Hence, it is necessary to recognize the impact of sponsorship on internal stakeholders such as workers. This study reacts to the suggestion to explore the influence of sponsorship within a business entity (Cornwell, 2019; Karjaluoto & Paakkonen, 2019; Walraven, 2012).

This research adds to practice and theory. Firstly, the study adds to "sponsorship-associated internal marketing" (SAIM) empirical information (Batt et al., 2021; Karjaluoto & Paakkonen, 2019) by evaluating a model empirically to determine the influence of sponsorship on workers' brand behavior. Precisely, the research determines the effect of distinct forms of sponsorship (sports, cultural, and environmental) on the behavior and commitment of the internal stakeholders. Furthermore, the study adds to the rising interest in mediation studies in internal branding (Ngo et al., 2020), by researching the rationale underpinning sponsorship influence on employee brand behavior. From the managerial viewpoint, we provide marketers and industry players the potential to manage SAIM programs. For instance, we assert that sponsorship quality and quantity are critical constructs for enhancing employee brand behavior. Consequently, employers should ensure employees have favorable opinions about the company's sponsored events and initiatives.

In addition, the remaining sections are separated as follows: First, we provided sponsorship literature associated with internal marketing, the underpinning theory, and developed the conceptual framework. Additionally, we present the research method, present the results, and undertake analysis. Next, we provided the discussion and contribution to theory and practice. We conclude, indicate the limitations, and offer ideas for future studies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate sponsorship has gained prominence in marketing and management literature (Walraven, 2012). According to KOŃCZAK (2020), a business sponsorship is an organization's support of an event, usually through a cash contribution or in-kind in exchange for commercializing their offerings during the event. Previously, empirical evidence on sponsorship centered on evaluating the influence of sponsorship on external stakeholders (e.g. (Melovic et al., 2019; Tsordia et al., 2018b). On the contrary, companies have initiated to evaluate sponsorship as an internal marketing tool to engage their workers (Hofer & Grohs, 2018; Karjaluoto & Paakkonen, 2019).

Batt et al. (2021); Paruzel et al. (2021) assessed sponsorship impact on workers. Inferring to the Social Identity Theory, the writers ascertained that workers with a strong rapport with clubs that their company sponsors demonstrate greater identification and dedication to their organization and are ever ready to serve the company's customers to the latter. Their studies did not, however, unravel the sponsorship effect on brand-related constructs. Moreover, more attention was given to sports sponsorship—other forms of sponsorships, such as cultural and environmental, were not addressed.

Demirel et al. (2018) assessed how affiliation with teams and sponsorship-associated elements affect workers' commitment to their firm. The study's setting posits sports sponsoring, i.e. entities that sponsor national football teams. The study discovered that workers with higher identification believe their firm benefits more from the sponsorship. Wagner et al. (2019) evaluated how workers think and assess sponsorship crafted to enhance consumer services. Relying on sports sponsorship in Denmark, the study revealed that the program positively influenced teamwork, performance, and communication. Additionally, manager involvement in the program was strongly correlated with employee engagement.

The technical usage of sponsorship-associated internal marketing – SAIM, has obtained attention from researchers. SAIM can be evaluated as "every event associated with the formulation and anchoring on sponsorship to satisfy worker's

appropriate needs to prepare them to serve consumers more effectively and efficiently (Batt et al., 2021). Cognizance to SAIM, two research pieces have explored sponsorship in this regard. Farrelly et al. (2012) instigated a study on 22 firms to evaluate the deployment of sponsorship as an internal marketing strategy to enhance workers' company identity and productivity. The study indicates three stages at which firms use sponsorships to engross workers: corporate, team, and personal. Moreover, the outcome showed that the technical usage of SAIM covers four areas: strategy formulation, communication, implementation, and assessment. Even though the study was designed to assist in a better appreciation of sponsorship as a marketing tool internally, it does not quantify its impact on workers' behavior. The study summed up that at the personal level, more could be done to investigate the effect of sports sponsorship influence. Inoue et al. (2016) employed the internal marketing lens while focusing extensively on cause-related sports sponsorship. The researchers explored the significance of employee participation with (1) the sponsored sports and (2) the sponsored cause. The research outcomes showed that workers assess cause-associated sports sponsorship distinctively from regular sports sponsorship without cause affiliation, differing from past studies on SAIM.

Some empirical evidence explains how advertising affects workers (Batt et al., 2021). In this sense, they considered workers' reactions to some advertising features. Elements such as advertising correctness, value consonance (consonance between workers' principles and those expressed in the ad), ad promise magnification, and workers' behavior depicted in an ad were taken into account in this regard (Brown & Peterson, 1994; Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 1998; Hickman et al., 2005; Inoue et al., 2016). These researches show specific features of advertising indicated above affect constructs such as favorable company behavior (company identification, trust, and consumer focus) and workers' pride. Various studies also considered a broad approach to themes in advertising. They highlight perceived quality ads, workers' attitudes towards ads, and perceived ad quantity (Hughes, 2013; Vance et al., 2016). The element of quality connotes the general assessment of the brand's ad activities, and the quantity connotes workers' perception of the number of brands' ads airing on the market. Hughes (2013) asserts that advert quality and quantity positively affect salesperson brand association and the result expectancy associated with promoting the brand.

Conclusively, previous studies on the effect of external communications on workers provide enough information that communications events that target customers also influence workers. Moreover, empirical evidence shows, except that of (Hughes, 2013), brand-associated constructs, for instance, the effects of external communication programs, are still at the infantile stage. Additionally, the only research that considered the influence of sponsorship on workers uniquely worked on sports sponsorship.

Drawing on the back of understanding obtained from the literature, we situate to employ the present position of SAIM beyond its concentration on sports sponsorship. The study sees SAIM as the encompassing sponsorship-associated programs that affect workers' brand behavior. We created and evaluated a proposed framework empirically (figure 1). Inferring to past studies, we fuse quality and quantity as predictors in the framework (e.g. Batt et al., 2021). This aids us in appreciating the evaluation of workers' sponsorship perceptions. Aside from sports sponsorship, the study adds the element of cultural and environmental to assist in a broader appreciation of the firm's sponsorship activities (International Events Group, 2015). According to market analysis, arts and culture are essential to society. Based on the initial European cultural sponsorship market research, three-quarters of their cultural centers recognize sponsorship's growing influence (Batt et al., 2021). According to the latest studies, charitable arts corporate sponsor (e.g., expenditure on museums and art galleries, theatre arts venues, etc.) provides distinct advantages over revenue-driven sports sponsorship. Theurer et al. (2018); Toscani & Prendergast (2019) assert that charitable arts sponsorship can palliate the constraints of a traditional revenue-driven sponsorship regarding market targets, audience commitment, and high interaction level. Moreover, the discussions of sustainable practices and environmental issues have attained more prominence among the general public, and institutions' budgets for environmental sponsorship have multiplied. E.g., Coco-Cola has recently revealed that it will be a primary sponsor of National Recycling Week (Page, 2019).

A. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Our research aims to create and validate a sponsorship efficacy framework to investigate the associations between sponsorship quantity and quality and worker brand commitment and behavior. The subsequent discussions cover our theoretical framework and assumptions.
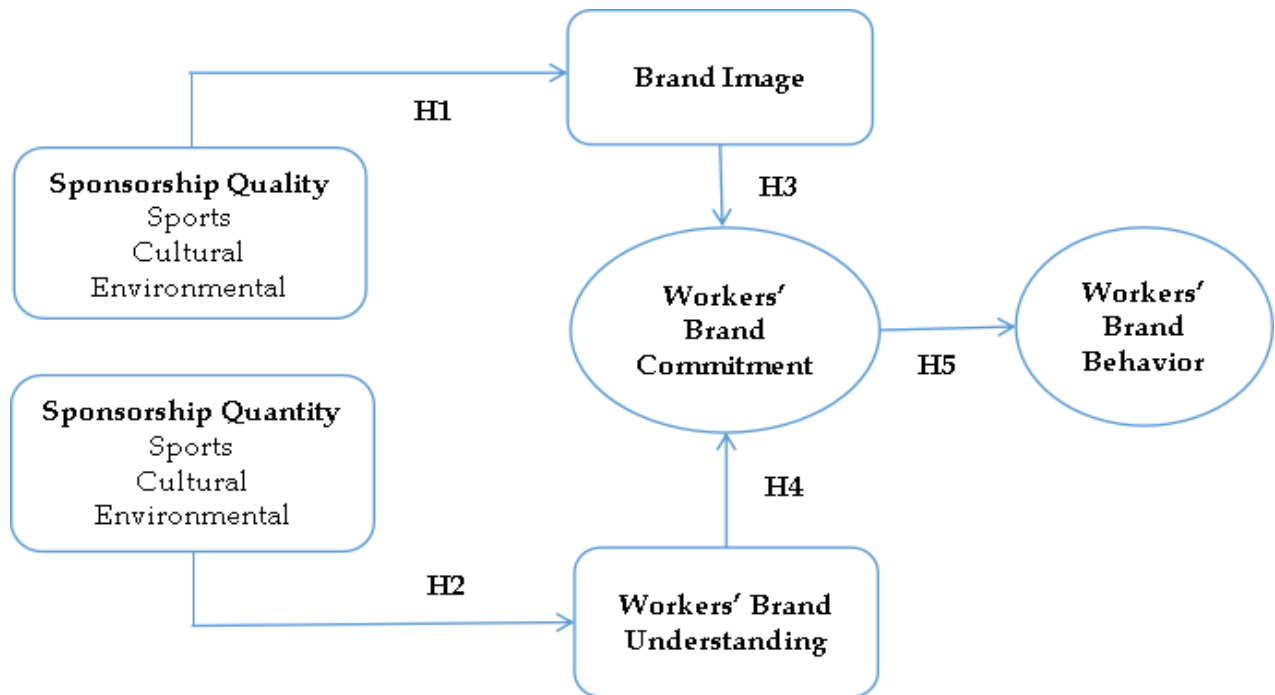
FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK WITH HYPOTHESIZED LINKS

B. The Signaling Theory

This study argues on the tangent of the Signaling theory. According to Spence (1973), the Signaling view is essential when considering behavior involving two elements (individuals or companies) who have access to specific information. Hitherto to knowledge in management, signalers could be a company, an offering, a product, and a person (e.g. employers, managers) (Taj, 2016). In justifying branding studies, some have used Signaling to justify their assertions. Batt et al. (2021) and Connelly et al. (2011) described brand managers as signalers and customers as receivers after researching Signaling among chains of hotels (i.e. brands). The studies uncovered that the more signals, the more effective. With our study, we classify brand managers, public relations leaders, and communication directors as signals deemed "insiders" with enough information about the brand. Our study considers workers as the receivers deemed to be "outsiders". To provide clarity, we indicate that workers' brand judgement is situated on the acts of insiders to express positive and unarguable traits of the "insider practically".

A study has revealed two aspects of information where inequality is critically relevant: information on quality and behavioral intention. Connelly et al. (2011) stressed that prevailing signaling frameworks incorporate quality as a distinct factor. For instance, research undertaken by Inoue et al. (2016); Vance et al. (2016) explored the influence of brands' consumer-directed advertising on an entity. The main proposal of the current study is that advertising perceptions (quality and quantity evaluated) affect the performance and efforts of salespersons in two ways (1) by enhancing outcome expectancies and (2) by strengthening identification with a brand.

Our research sees sponsorship quality as workers evaluating the likeability and prominence of the brand's sponsorship programs. Moreover, the Signaling principle uncovered in management literature is the degree to which outsiders can identify with a signal (e.g. Taj, 2016). Signaling efficiency could be advanced by maximizing the rate of detectable signals, e.g., the number of ads airing in the market or the numerous media engagements (Connelly et al., 2011). Taking a note from Hughes (2013), we see sponsorship quantity as workers assessing the number and frequency of brand sponsorship activities and media arrangements on a brand's sponsorship programs. Subsequently, we consider the associations between the variables in detail.

C. Sponsorship Quality and Workers' Brand Image

Brand image is a popular marketing concept. Trivedi (2020) explains brand image as "a collection of associations, mostly organized in a meaningful manner". Batt et al. (2021) indicate in the same vein that brand image postulates the acknowledgment of a brand, as shown by the brand associations printed in customers' memories. The two positions suggest that the buyer may have many hypothetical attributes of the brand in their thoughts. Cognizance to the setting of this

research, we dwell on the associations that workers make with a brand. This study looks at workers' behavior toward the brand, distinct from their perceptions about their firm, indicated as employer image. According to the literature, a good and distinctive brand association translates into a strong brand image. Sponsorship calls have been determined to positively affect brand image (Theurer et al., 2018a; van Nguyen et al., 2019).

The effects of information quality on several outcomes, including image, can be seen in studies from different academic and practical areas (Piehler et al., 2016). For example, travelers' destination image was determined to be affected by the information quality provided by tourist guards on social media (Kim et al., 2019). In essence, the availability of high-quality content to travelers through well-structured social media is an appropriate destination marketing strategy to influence visitors' facets of destination image (Kang & Matsuoka, 2021; Kim et al., 2019). In the same vein, the information provided by bloggers on sponsorship indicates that brand behavior is affected by solid arguments depending on purported blogger believability (Batt et al., 2021). Our study assumes that higher sponsorship quality will result in more workers evaluating the likeability of the brand's sponsorship activities. Given this, we propose that:

H1 - Perceived sports (H2a), cultural (H2b), and environmental (H2c) sponsorship quality significantly affect workers' brand image

D. Sponsorship quantity and workers' brand understanding

The consequences of branding practices within a firm on workers have been supported by empirical evidence in marketing. Researchers have shown the effect of branding on brand understanding (van Nguyen et al., 2019), brand knowledge (Piehler et al., 2016), brand commitment (Ngo et al., 2020), brand identification (Piehler, 2018), and brand-supporting conduct (Batt et al., 2021). With the issues of brand promise in mind, firms find ways to transfer knowledge on the brand to actualize a meaning (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2021). Internal brand knowledge constitutes the mental position upon which workers appreciate, recognize, make choices, and perform based on available knowledge of a brand. Workers' information on the brand directly affects their understanding of it (Theurer et al., 2018). The current research viewpoint correlates with the above literature, such that knowledge circulation assists workers in appreciating a firm's brand programs and the reasons behind internal and external firm resolutions while minimizing workers' role ambiguity. According to Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, (2021), internal brand communication is deduced as the source of workers' brand knowledge and comprehension. Cognizance of this study, we indicate that a firm can enhance workers' understanding of a brand by maximizing the rate of detectable signals (i.e., internal and external brand communications, e.g. sponsorship). Our study conceptualizes that greater levels of sponsorship enhance workers' brand understanding. Given this, we suggest that:

H2 - Perceived sports (H1a), cultural (H1b), and environmental (H1c) sponsorship quantity significantly affect workers' brand understanding

E. Workers' brand commitment

Commitment is a person's cognitive bonding to a brand(Hopper, 2021). Previous research in the internal marketing literature suggests that workers who assimilate their firm's brand are best suited to fulfil the brand's direct and indirect promises (Chiang et al., 2018). When employees are given the proper brand-related knowledge, they ascend to the top of the employee brand commitment ladder as they develop a strong loyalty to the brand (Batt et al., 2021). Likewise, investigation suggests that having a good grasp of the firm's brand positively affects the brand's commitment (Egeler et al., 2022; Piehler, 2018). Individuals who lack brand insight cannot conduct their brand-related responsibilities (Kang & Matsuoka, 2021). Increased levels of role conflict will reduce their commitment (Kim et al., 2019). Given this, we propose that:

H3 – workers' brand image significantly affects workers' brand commitment

According to Piehler (2018), people decide to work for brands with goodwill, well-recognized, and favorable brand images. Once they become involved with such a brand, employees begin to internalize, relate more to it, and subsequently commit themselves to it(Chiang et al., 2018; Egeler et al., 2022). Drawing from these assertions, we propose that:

H4 – workers' brand understanding significantly affects workers' brand commitment

F. Workers' brand behavior

Workers' on and off-work contributions and behavior towards their firms' branding initiatives that align with the brand promise and identity are deemed as workers' brand behavior (Chiang et al., 2018). Literature reveals three ways of expressing brand behaviors: retention, extra-role and in-role behavior (Batt et al., 2021). Retention represents workers'

resolve to demonstrate an excellent relationship with the brand (Egeler et al., 2022). Workers' extra-role behavior represents voluntary actions not stipulated in their formal job descriptions and assists the firm's branding initiatives (Kang & Matsuoka, 2021). Workers' voluntary brand behavior comes from their involvement in enhancing the brand through strengthening off-the-job word-of-mouth for the brand (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2021). Workers' in-role behavior comes in the form of roles and standards defined formally by a firm to meet the demands of the brand. Workers suffer from their inability to meet these standards and thresholds (Batt et al., 2021). This research postulates that extra and in-role behavior, involvement, and good word-of-mouth (WOM) are elements of workers' brand behavior. We also consider WOM an extra-role performed by workers, hence, considered in the lens of extra-role.

Contrary to that, to regard brand commitment as a construct, we have identified workers associated with a brand in the framework. For this reason, we do not consider retention as part of workers' brand behavior element. To construct an appropriate framework and contrast (Morhart et al., 2009), we synergized in-role behavior, involvement, and favorable WOM as distinct elements of their study; we consider them as components of workers' brand behavior construct.

As depicted by the social identity model, workers who commit and dedicate themselves to their brand posit to obtain social recognition from the brand (Batt et al., 2021). Workers who commit themselves to a particular brand want it to be efficient (Chiang et al., 2018). They promote the brand to securitize its social recognition (Egeler et al., 2022). Brand commitment has been determined as a determinant of brand-related worker behavior (Piehler, 2018). We, therefore, assume that:

H5 – Workers' brand commitment will positively affect workers' brand behavior

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research design, instrument, and sample

A quantitative survey method was deployed to collate responses. We gathered data from workers of the three largest consumer goods companies (Unilever Ghana, Fan Milk Ghana, and Ghana Breweries) with the highest market share in Ghana. These companies contribute to many sponsorships in Ghana, hence, suit our study. The study's participants comprise operational heads, supervisors, marketing and HR managers, and junior staff, the majority being sales attendants. The top officials of the companies were engaged because they were at the decision table regarding brand policy administration through the ranks and files of the companies. Data was gathered from November to March 2024. The research team personally visited the companies to obtain permission from the authorities. The questionnaire survey was distributed online (by sharing a link via WhatsApp and Emails). Random sampling was used to collate information from participants taking into consideration those who are most in touch with customers. 635 questionnaires were shared with the research population. We ensured anonymity to encourage participants to fill out the survey and gave them GHS1 worth MTN or Vodafone credit through a mobile transfer after completing. 526 completed and same used as a sample (82.8% response rate). However, 109 were discarded, consisting of incomplete questionnaires. The sample of 526 satisfies the structural equation model (SEM) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) conditions (Hair, 2021).

Additionally, most participants (78.7%, 414) very often interacted with customers' business interested parties (clients, suppliers, and media) regularly. 20.7% (109), 0.2% (1), and 0.4% (2) often, rarely, and very rarely had contact with company stakeholders, respectively.

The sample's demographic features are stipulated in Table 1.

TABLE I: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS (N=526)

	Items	frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Males	377	71.7%
	Females	149	28.3%
Age	18-30 years	168	31.9%
	26-35 years	270	51.3%
	36-45 years	52	9.9%
	46 + years	36	6.8%
Education	HND	182	34.6%
	Bachelor	209	39.7%
	Master	115	21.9%
	PhD.	15	2.9%

	Others	5	1%
Work status	Full-time	494	93.9%
	Part-time	32	6.1%
Organizational tenure	1-5 years	166	36.6%
	6-10 years	271	51.5%
	11years and above	89	16.9%

B. *Measurement Scale Assessment*

The measurement model contained six variables and was evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were called upon to tick appropriately using the provided scale. Table 2 highlights the items used to assess the variables. All the items were expunged from existing literature used to measure the constructs. Items used to measure sponsorship quality and quantity were taken from (Batt et al., 2021; Hughes, 2013) and crafted to suit the study. Elements from Piehler (2018) were deployed to evaluate workers' brand understanding. Items from Trivedi (2020) were employed to assess brand image. Moreover, workers' brand commitment was evaluated with items from (Piehler et al., 2016). Lastly, we evaluated brand behavior with items from (Batt et al., 2021; Egeler et al., 2022). Items used to measure brand behavior comprised items relating to in-role and extra-role of workers towards promoting a brand. Table 2 gives comprehensive information on the constructs and the number of elements used to evaluate each construct.

TABLE 2: MEASUREMENT ITEMS AND MODEL OUTCOME

Items	Loadings (λ)
Sports sponsorship quality (α=0.794, CR=0.851, AVE=0.708)	
SSQ1- I like the sports sponsorship programs (e.g. football, beach soccer, cross-country athletics, inter-schools and zonal games, and basketball) of my company	0.925
SSQ2 - I feel good about sports sponsorship activities (e.g. football, beach soccer, cross-country athletics, inter-schools and zonal games, and basketball) of my company	0.799
SSQ3 - My company's sports sponsorship activities (e.g. football, beach soccer, cross-country athletics, inter-school and zonal games, and basketball) appeal to people like me	0.794
Cultural sponsorship quality (α=0.730, CR=0.740, AVE=0.649)	
CSQ1- I appreciate the cultural sponsorship programs (e.g. musical concerts, community festivals, and comedy shows) of my organization	0.800
CSQ2 - I feel good about my company's cultural sponsorship programs (e.g. musical concerts, community festivals, and comedy shows)	0.769
CSQ3 - My company's cultural sponsorship programs (e.g. musical concerts, community festivals, and comedy shows) appeal to people like me	0.845
Environmental sponsorship quality (α=0.791, CR=0.794, AVE=0.705)	
ESQ1 - I like my company's environmentally sponsored activities (e.g. sustainability trade shows and greenhouse museums)	0.848
ESQ2 - I feel good about my organization's environmentally sponsored activities (e.g. sustainability trade shows and greenhouse museums)	0.855
ESQ3 - My company's environmentally sponsored programs (e.g. sustainability trade shows and greenhouse museums) appeal to individuals like me	0.861
Sports sponsorship quantity (α=0.816, CR=0.891, AVE=0.731)	
SST1 - There seem to be several sports sponsorship programs (e.g. football, beach soccer, cross-country athletics, inter-schools and zonal games, and basketball) airing in the market	0.848
SST2 - My company frequently promotes sports activities (e.g. football, beach soccer, cross-country athletics, inter-school and zonal games, and basketball)	0.855
SST3 - There is a heavy media arrangement promoting sports sponsorship programs (e.g. football, beach soccer, cross-country athletics, inter-school and zonal games, and basketball)	0.861

Cultural sponsorship quantity (α=0.814, CR=0.889, AVE=0.728)	
CST - There seem to be several cultural sponsorship programs (e.g. musical concerts, community festivals, and comedy shows) of my company airing in the market	0.862
CST2 - My organization frequently promotes cultural programs (e.g. musical concerts, community festivals, and comedy shows)	0.850
CST3 -There are lots of media arrangements promoting culturally sponsored programs (e.g. musical concerts, community festivals, and comedy shows) by my company	0.848
Environmental sponsorship quantity (α=0.803, CR=0.884, AVE=0.718)	
EST1 - There are several environmentally sponsored programs (e.g. sustainability trade shows and greenhouse museums) of my company airing in the market	0.857
EST2 - My company usually promotes environmental events (e.g. sustainability trade shows and greenhouse museums)	0.832
EST3 - There are lots of media arrangements promoting environmentally sponsored events (e.g. sustainability trade shows and greenhouse museums) of my company	0.851
Brand image (α=0.856, CR=0.903, AVE=0.699)	
BI1- I perceive the brand (my company) to be dynamic	0.836
BI2- I perceive the brand (my company) to be delightful	0.825
BI3- I perceive the brand (my company) to be sustainable	0.853
BI4 -I perceived the brand (my company) to relate to consumers	0.830
Workers brand understanding (α=804, CR=0.884, AVE=0.719)	
WBU1 - I know the brand (my company) well	0.835
WBU2 - The brand (my company) has a distinctive & memorable logo	0.851
WBU3 - I know what the brand (my company) stands for	0.857
Workers brand commitment (α=0.804, CR=0.885, AVE=0.719)	
WBC1 - If the values of this company were different, I would not be as attached (my company)	0.854
WBC2 - My company has a great deal of personal meaning for me	0.850
WBC3 - I am proud to tell others what the brand (my company) stands for	0.839
Workers' Brand behavior (in-role and extra-role) (α=0.918, CR=0.932, AVE=0.604)	
WBB1- I am an individual who is alert for failure to meet standards for brand-consistent behavior	0.756
WBB2- I am an individual who follows brand-related rules & instructions to the extreme	0.760
WIRB3- I am an individual who respects our standards for brand-congruent behavior	0.789
WBB4- I am a person who speaks favorably about my company in social situations	0.790
WBB5- I am a person who actively promotes my company's products & services to people I know	0.788
WBB6- I am a person who keeps informed about the brand and tells others	0.784
WBB7- I am a person who asks co-workers for feedback about my work for the brand	0.782
WBB8- I am a person who makes constructive suggestions on how to enhance consumers' brand experience	0.776
WBB9- I am a person who mostly suggests to colleagues how to strengthen our brand	0.770

***p<0.01; α: Cronbach alpha; AVE: average variance explained; CR: composite reliability

C. Common method bias

In our study, we used a questionnaire to collect data on both exogenous and endogenous variables. However, this could lead to a potential issue known as common method bias (CMB), where changes in the data may be due to the measurement approach rather than the variables of interest. To address this, we employed Herman's single-factor method, a commonly used approach to estimate CMB (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Podsakoff et al., 2012). The underlying principle of this method is that if CMB is present, a single factor will emerge from the factor analysis, or one general factor will account for the

majority of the covariance among the measures. Our results from this test indicate that CMB is not a significant issue in our research, as the first factor only accounted for 31.86% of the changes observed.

D. Data analysis approach

The study employed SmartPLS 4.0 software to process the information to undertake the EFA to determine the reliability and validity of the model. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model was used to evaluate relationships in the model. Hair et al. (2011) indicate that the SmartPLS is an appropriate mathematical tool that produces the best estimates when dealing with complex models and large sample sizes. This will provide the basis for making conclusions on the study's assumptions. The study deployed SPSS version 26, relying on the online Sobel test and the Sobel equation to produce results of the indirect effects of the predictors through mediators (Hayes, 2017). The first aspect of the research considered the models' reliability and discriminant validity of the constructs under investigation. Secondly, the study evaluated the structural aspect of the model and made decisions based on the assumptions suggested. The mediation analysis followed this.

IV. RESULTS PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

A. Evaluation of measurement model

The related constructs Cronbach alpha (α), the composite reliability (CR), the average variance extracted (AVE), and the factor loadings exceeded the recommended minimum thresholds (Hair et al., 2011; Hair, 2021) (see Tables 2 and 3). These evaluations form part of the initial test to ascertain the dependability of the measurement model.

TABLE 3: RULES OF THUMB AND SOURCES

Factor loading (λ)	>0.60	(Hair et al., 2011)
Cronbach Alpha (α)	>0.70	(Hooper et al., 2008)
Composite reliability (CR)	>0.70	(Hair et al., 2011)
Average Variance Explained (AVE)	>0.50	(Hair et al., 2019)

Furthermore, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was deployed to determine the discriminant legitimacy of the model (table 4). It was discovered that the square root of the AVEs on the diagonals is higher than the correlations, insinuating a significant relationship between constructs and their unique indicators compared to other variables in the model (Hair et al., 2019). Hair (2017) states there is high-level discriminant appropriateness when the correlation is below 0.85.

TABLE 4: DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY (FORNELL-LARCKER CRITERION)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
BI	**0.836**									
CSQ	0.330	**0.706**								
CST	0.541	0.477	**0.753**							
ESQ	0.440	0.538	0.400	**0.820**						
EST	0.235	0.319	0.508	0.302	**0.747**					
SSQ	0.271	0.230	0.419	0.366	0.438	**0.832**				
SST	0.335	0.384	0.515	0.488	0.299	0.340	**0.815**			
WBU	0.246	0.407	0.311	0.224	0.330	0.400	0.410	**0.748**		
WBB	0.447	0.197	0.212	0.441	0.434	0.296	0.358	0.305	**0.731**	
WBC	0.127	0.221	0.390	0.385	0.199	0.597	0.284	0.319	0.146	**0.838**

*Note: **Diagonals describe the square root of the AVE, and the remaining values represent the correlations. Abbreviations: BI = brand image; CSQ = cultural sponsorship quality; CST = Cultural sponsorship quantity; ESQ = Environmental sponsorship quality; EST = Environmental sponsorship quantity; SSQ = Sports sponsorship quality; SST = Sports sponsorship quantity; WBU = Workers' brand understanding; WBB = Workers' brand behavior; WBC = Workers' brand commitment.*

B. Structural model assessment

The SmartPLS model (figure 2) is confirmed by the endogenous latent constructs and the goodness of fit (GoF). The measurement model is adequately fit (NFI=0.842, SRMR=0.047, Chi-square=2379.169, d_G=0.856, d_ULS=1.571, R-square=0.696). The values satisfy the thresholds. Relying on a bootstrapping approach using a resample of 5,000, the structural model was evaluated by calculating beta (β), R^2, and the related t-values (Shmueli et al., 2019). The path coefficient assessment depicting the relationships among the constructs is presented in Table 5 and Figure 3. All the hypotheses were supported.

TABLE 5: PATH COEFFICIENT

Path	Original sample (0)	Sample mean(M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (lO/stdev)	Decision	P values
SSQ->BI	0.245	0.246	0.047	5.239	Supported	0.000
CSQ->BI	0.098	0.100	0.046	2.149	Supported	0.032
ESQ->BI	0.580	0.578	0.039	14.895	Supported	0.000
SST->WBU	0.288	0.289	0.041	6.985	Supported	0.000
CST->WBU	0.263	0.261	0.044	5.932	Supported	0.000
EST->WBU	0.388	0.388	0.041	9.379	Supported	0.000
BI->WBC	0.507	0.507	0.044	11.499	Supported	0.000
WBU->WBC	0.378	0.378	0.044	8.507	Supported	0.000
WBC->WBU	0.834	0.834	0.017	48.796	Supported	0.000

***Path coefficient bootstrapping. T Statistic > 1.96 for 5%; p< .005
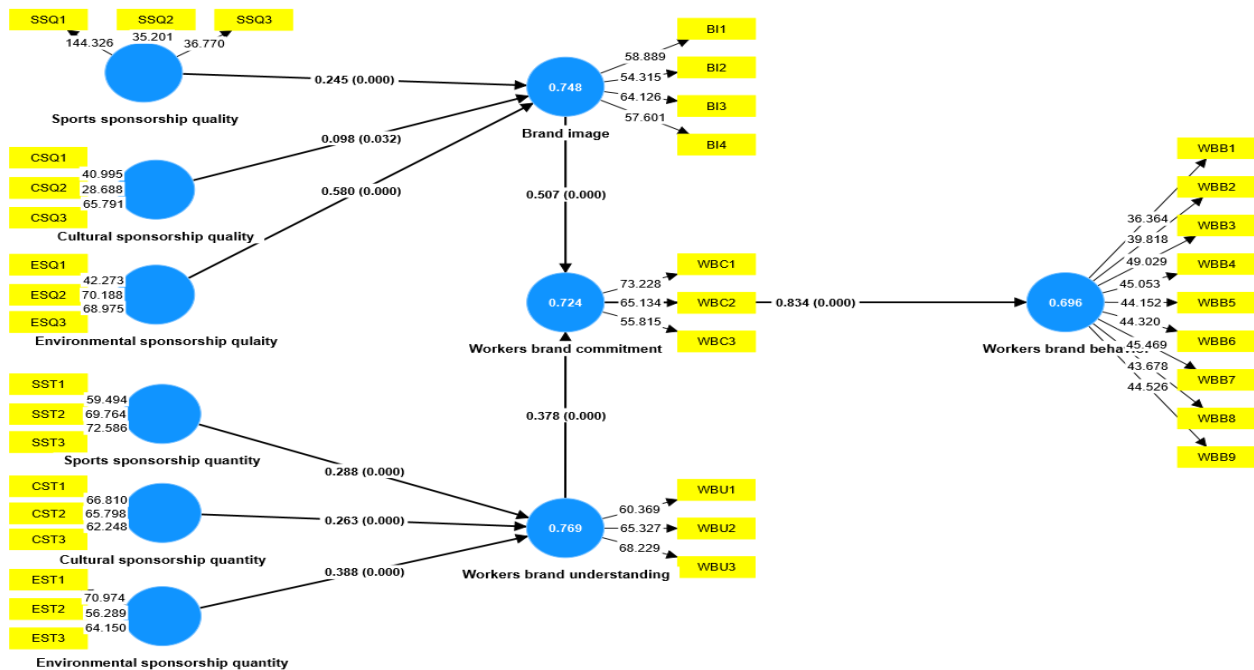
FIGURE 2: PLS ANALYSIS.

C. Post-hoc mediation analysis

In cognizance of the suggested direct influence between the latent constructs, the study also determined the indirect effects of sponsorship quality and quantity on workers' brand commitment and behavior. We undertook the mediation using multiple regression in SPSS and relied on the online Sobel test and equation to determine the existence of the indirect effect. The outcome indicates all the indirect effects are significant. The decision was made after estimating the test statistics (z-values, standard error, and p-values) using the Sobel test equations below. The outcome posits that sponsorship constructs (quality & quantity) directly affect workers' brand image and understanding and indirectly affect workers' brand commitment and behavior through brand image and understanding (see Table 6).

TABLE 6: THE OUTCOME OF THE MEDIATION ANALYSIS

Predictors (IVs)	Mediator (s)	DVs	IVs to mediators (path a)	Mediator(s) to DV (path b)	An indirect effect of IV on DV (a*b)
SSQ	BI	WBC	β =.199, SD=.039	β =.460, SD=.044	.092*
CSQ	BI	WBC	β =.114, SD=.041	"	.052*
ESQ	BI	WBC	β =.605, SD=.035	"	.280*
SST	WBU	WBC	β =.287, SD=.040	β =.293, SD=.047	.084*
CST	WBU	WBC	β =.261, SD=.040	"	.076*
EST	WBU	WBC	β =.386, SD=.039	"	.113*
SSQ	WBC	WBB	β =.261, SD=.044	β =.112, SD=.030	.029*
CSQ	WBC	WBB	β =.146, SD=.046	"	.016*
ESQ	WBC	WBB	β =.476, SD=.039	"	.053*
SST	WBC	WBB	β =.206, SD=.044	β =.112, SD=.030	.023*
CST	WBC	WBB	β =.306, SD=.045	"	.034*
EST	WBC	WBB	β =.374, SD=.043	"	.042*

*Note: *p<0.05, (SSQ: sports sponsorship quality, CSQ: cultural sponsorship quality, ESQ: environmental sponsorship quality, SST: sports sponsorship quantity, CST: sports sponsorship quantity, EST: environmental sponsorship quantity, BI: brand image, WBU: workers' brand understanding, WBC: workers' brand commitment, WBB: workers' brand behavior)*

The Sobel test is a mathematical model designed to help test the significance of an indirect effect of a predictor on an outcome variable via a mediator (Sobel, 1982). Preacher & Hayes (2004) states that the Sobel test works with large data samples. The equation designed to undertake the test is indicated below:

$$Z = \frac{a*b}{\sqrt{(b^2)(s_a^2)+(a^2*s_b^2)}}$$ …………………….… (Equation 1)

Where "a" = unstandardized regression coefficient for the relationship between the predictor and the mediator; "b"= the unstandardized coefficient between the mediator and the dependent construct when the IV is a predictor; and "s_a"= standard error of "a", "s_b"= standard error of "b". Determining a mediation effect is based on the Z-value (test statistics), the standard error, and the p-value. The study estimated the mediation effects with the above equation and results presented below using the online Sobel Test calculator. The significance of the z-values is positioned at **p<.001, *p<.05.

(1) The indirect effect of sponsorship quality on workers' brand commitment through brand image

Sports quality sponsorship>commitment>image:

$$Z = \frac{.199*.460}{\sqrt{(.460^2)(.039^2)+(.199^2)(.044^2)}}$$ = Z=4.589**, P= 0.000, SD=0.020

Cultural quality sponsorship>commitment>image:

$$Z = \frac{.114*.460}{\sqrt{(.460^2)(.041^2)+(.114^2)(.044^2)}}$$ = Z=2.687*, P=0.007, SD=0.019

Environmental quality sponsorship>commitment>image:

$$Z = \frac{.605*.460}{\sqrt{(.460^2)(.035^2)+(.605)(.044^2)}}$$ = Z=8.946**, P= 0.000, SD= 0.031

(2) The indirect effect of sports quantity on workers' brand commitment through workers' brand understanding

Sports quantity sponsorship>understanding>commitment:

$$Z = \frac{.287 * .293}{\sqrt{(.293^2)(.050^2) + (.287^2)(.047^2)}}$$ = Z=4.223*, P=0.000, SD=0.020

Cultural quantity sponsorship>understanding>commitment:

$$Z = \frac{.261 * .293}{\sqrt{(.293^2)(.040^2) + (.261^2)(.047^2)}}$$ = Z=4.508**, P=0.000, SD=0.017

Environmental quantity sponsorship>understanding>commitment:

$$Z = \frac{.386 * .293}{\sqrt{(.293^2)(.039^2) + (.386^2)(.047^2)}}$$ = Z=5.275**, P=0.000, SD= 0.021

(3) The indirect influence of sponsorship quality on workers' brand behavior through worker brand commitment

Sports quality sponsorship>commitment>brand behavior:

$$Z = \frac{.261 * .112}{\sqrt{(.112^2)(.044^2) + (.261^2)(.030^2)}}$$ = Z=3.160*, P= 0.002, SD= 0.009

Cultural quality sponsorship>commitment>brand behavior

$$Z = \frac{.146 * .112}{\sqrt{(.112^2)(.046^2) + (.146^2)(.030^2)}}$$ = Z= 2.418*, P= 0.016, SD= 0.007

Environmental quality sponsorship>commitment>brand behavior

$$Z = \frac{476 * .112}{\sqrt{(.112^2)(.039^2) + (476^2)(.030^2)}}$$ = Z= 3.570**, P= 0.000, SD= 0.015

(4) The indirect influence of sponsorship quantity on workers' brand behavior through workers' brand commitment

Sports quantity sponsorship>commitment>brand behavior:

$$Z = \frac{.206 * .112}{\sqrt{(.112^2)(.044^2) + (.206^2)(.030^2)}}$$ = Z= 2.920*, P= 0.004, SD= 0.008

Cultural quantity sponsorship>commitment>brand behavior:

$$Z = \frac{.306 * .112}{\sqrt{(.112^2)(.045^2) + (.306^2)(.030^2)}}$$ = Z= 3.273*, P= 0.001, SD= 0.010

Environmental quantity sponsorship>commitment>brand behavior:

$$Z = \frac{.374 * .112}{\sqrt{(.112^2)(.043^2) + (.374^2)(.030^2)}}$$ = Z= 3.431*, P= 0.000, SD= 0.012

V.   CONCLUSION

A.   Discussions and Implications

Regarding communication mix issues in marketing, sponsorship is said to have gained ground as one important marketing tool globally and a deeply ingrained facet of the consumer experience that emerges from indirect marketing (Vance et al., 2016). In addition to engaging external clientele, sponsorship is becoming extremely relevant in engaging a firm's internal stakeholders (Walraven, 2012). Workers, especially Generation Y, and millennials, intend to work for an employer that cares about and gives back to society. However, they want a voice in what induces their entity support and how they spend their time volunteering (Pappu & Cornwell, 2014). Companies must evaluate their staff, develop relationships and be ready to invest in areas workers are enthusiastic about. Such areas include sports, music, environment, education, culture, and arts.

Our research evaluates how sports, cultural, and environmental sponsorship enhance workers' brand behavior. Given that, we framed and tested a model to assess the impact of sponsorship on workers' brand behavior. Our results support the assumption that sponsorship has an impact on workers. Employee brand behavior is influenced by sponsorship quality and quantity via brand image, understanding, and commitment (Table 5 and Figure 3). The measurement model fit indicators affirm that the model is reliable in prognosticating brand behavior, commitment, image, and understanding. Additionally, the outcomes indicate the impact of sponsorship quantity constructs on brand behavior is relatively higher than the sponsorship quality constructs on the back of their total effects (β =.188, SD=.016, t=11.758, p<.005) and (β =.181, SD=.016, t=11.022, p<.005), respectively. The relatively strong influence of sponsorship quantity may be based on the numerous sponsorship programs undertaken by the firms that workers preview or participate in.

The outcome shows that brand image is usually influenced by environmental sponsorship quality (58%), followed by sports sponsorship quality (24.5%), and cultural sponsorship quality (9.8%) (See Figure 3). The differences in the percentage influence seem seemingly huge. A reason for the lesser impact of cultural sponsorship programs may be attributed to perceptions that these programs do not sufficiently match the brand compared to the environmental and sports sponsorship programs. As a result, transitioning behaviors from cultural sponsorship quality to workers' brand image may be challenging to enhance.

Environmental sponsorship quantity had the highest impact on brand understanding (38.8%), followed by sports (28.8%) and cultural sponsorship quantity (26.3%). We observed reasonable marginal differences relative to the path coefficients. Environmental sponsorship quantity continues to be identified to have a more significant impact due to workers' attachment to the environment they live. A commitment from their firms towards environmental events could enhance their understanding of the brand compared to investment in cultural sponsorship programs. Less influence of cultural sponsorship quantity may be because cultural programs are not continuous in nature. For instance, a sponsored festival concert only happens once a year compared to a greenhouse museum (environmental sponsorship) usually open daily. Perceptions of workers on culturally sponsored events may have been affected due to their infrequency. This may be why culturally sponsored events enhance workers' brand understanding less.

B.   Theoretical and practical implications

The outcome of the study introduces some theoretical implications. Firstly, the research contributes to studies on internal marketing, corporate sponsorship, and workers' brand behavior. Available literature indicates that prevailing knowledge on the influence of sponsorship is still infantile despite the position that programs and events sponsored by a firm impact how workers perceive their company and behave within the setup. With this study, we developed and evaluated a sponsorship efficacy framework, showing proof of how three kinds of sponsorship (sports, cultural, and environmental) affect the image, commitment, understanding, and behavior of company stakeholders (in this case, workers). We also add to the unexplored cultural and environmental sponsorship area, which has attracted moderate sponsorship growth. Most of the studies on sponsorship centered on sports sponsorship, its focus being customers, achievable goals, and marketing approaches (Cork, 2017; Cornwell, 2019; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022; Maanda et al., 2020; Morgan, 2019; Trivedi, 2020). This study indicates that sponsored cultural programs may be judged less fit for the brand (company) than environmental programs or activities. In this regard, the research contributes to the sponsorship-associated internal marketing (SAIM) literature.

Under the umbrella of the Signaling theory, we considered sponsorship quality as how employees would evaluate the popularity and likeability of a brand's (company) sponsored activities. We also considered sponsorship quantity as workers' exposure to the number and frequency of brand (company) sponsored activities aired in the media. This study adds to the

literature on signaling theory by indicating environmental and sports-sponsored events are a good fit to be used as signals by signalers (firms, employers) to influence the brand image, understanding, commitment, and behavior of receivers (employees) with cultural sponsored events being less fit.

Relevant managerial implications could be deduced from the study based on the outcome. The outcome highlights that sponsorship quantity is a significant determinant for enhancing the brand behavior of workers. Workers content with the company's sponsorship initiatives have an elevated brand image and superior brand commitment, adding value to the brand's efficiency via their behavior. As a result, top management must ensure that employees favorably and enthusiastically assess the firm's sponsorship activities.

We suggest managers frequently investigate their workers' behaviors toward established sponsorship commitments. The employee survey, for example, can facilitate this. Top management will be compelled to respond if workers convey resentments about the brand's sponsorship activities. One way to improve sponsorship assessment is to furnish the workforce with more sponsorship documentation, such as background information on the sponsorship's goals or accomplishments. According to Kim et al. (2015); Maanda et al. (2020); Tsordia et al. (2018), companies should first broadcast their sponsorship events within the firm to get workers' buy-in and involvement in sponsorship actions. This could enhance workers' understanding of the necessity of sponsorship deals and activities. Additionally, because top managers serve as father figures, corporate executives should demonstrate an optimistic viewpoint toward sponsorship events to foster a favorable outlook toward sponsorship among staff.

If new sponsorship deals are designed, it is critical to understand workers' outlooks and preferences. Considering workers' behaviors and positions will ensure their participation and involvement in the sponsorship activities and deals. Moreover, we contend that a sponsorship element (for example, a football club) that satisfies workers' expectations will generate a favorable assessment of the sponsorship engagement.

Even though the influence of sponsorship quality is weaker than quantity based on the outcome, the research's findings indicate that sponsorship quality is another determinant of brand behavior. Workers who like and positively perceive their firm's sponsorship programs enhance their image towards the brand, are more committed to the brand and demonstrate favorable brand behavior. As brand image significantly affects brand commitment, we suggest that management strives for high levels of sponsorship quality as they posit to sustain the high levels of sponsorship quality to maintain brand understanding. Companies can do that by unraveling the interest of workers in events they desire and channeling their sponsoring deals with such events since these events trigger workers' emotions. This is by way of enhancing external communications. For instance, employees seeing their company sponsor an event they like on television and social media gives them a spike of affection for their brand. Moreover, internal communications elements, e.g., newsletters, workers' magazines, and the intranet, can enhance sponsorship image, understanding, and commitment.

C. Limitations and Future Research

Our research ensures a further appreciation of the influence of corporate sponsorship on workers' behavior. On the contrary, some limitations ought to be acknowledged, which simultaneously provides suggestions for future studies. Firstly, the survey only centered on workers within three large consumer goods companies. Given that, the deductions from this research only hold for the present study sample at a particular period. They may not be generalized to a greater population and in distinct circumstantial settings. For example, future studies may explore a model with workers from other firms to highlight differences between organizations.

Additionally, the current research is bound to the area of sponsorship. An essential area subsequent studies could investigate is the effects of different external communication events on workers, for instance, posters, magazines, TV spots, and social media events. Given these researches, future studies can determine which external communications events influence brand commitment and behavior most and which external communication events firms should contemplate the most. Regarding the moderating roles, factors such as individual interests or general affinity toward sponsorships could be intriguing tasks to undertake in the future.

Even though our outcome had strong reliability and validity, a critical limitation we should admit is the discriminant validity between cultural sponsorship quantity and sports sponsorship quantity. The evaluation of these two variables was employed from existing literature. Our findings indicate that additional modification or the generation of different scales for these study variables for various contexts may be necessary. Future research could benefit from developing a refinement of these variables evaluation to increase their discriminant validity.

Lastly, it may be a creative direction for future studies to explore the "overshadow effect" of maximizing sponsorship quantity. This study demonstrated a favorable influence of sponsorship quantity on brand understanding and commitment. On the contrary, the positive impact on brand commitment could become negative when there is too much communication pressure because of excessive repetitions. As a result, research that examines the intensity of the pressure on communication in the area of sponsorship under various circumstances may constitute a vital contributor to this study.

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